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Gender Equity in Physics Practice: The Indian Context & the Social Impact of Policy

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The gender gap in the physics profession that is seen world-wide has been attributed to multiple factors. The applicability of these factors is explored in the context of physics practice in India, using available empirical investigations and theoretical insights from gender studies. Indications are that girls are as interested in science as boys at the high-school level. In the profession, however, there is a significant gender gap. Data show that it is caused not only by the discriminatory familial responsibilities that women encounter in their personal lives, but also by gender-discriminatory attitudes in the scientific workplace. Although the Government of India, which is the major funder of scientific research and higher education, has acknowledged the gender disparity and initiated several measures to address it, these measures also come from a gendered perspective, and are therefore likely to be limited in their long-term effectiveness. Policy measures must address the gender discrimination in the workplace as well in order to achieve gender equity.