

WOMEN'S ISSUES MATTER: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WORKSHOP

I.B. Uwadiae, F.E. Abdul

Women's Committee, Nigerian Association of Medical Physicists

I. INTRODUCTION

The International Women's Day (IWD) is a global event marked annually on the 8th day of March to celebrate women. The first IWD was commemorated in 1911 well over a century and since then it has become a platform for shining the light on women's progress all over the world with the goal of fostering gender equality. According to the IWD, the aim of the day is to celebrate women's achievements, raise awareness on persistent issues concerning women, mobilize action for equality, donate and fundraise for women-focused charities, and foster solidarity amongst men and women [1]. The day is used as an opportunity to showcase their talents and have their voice.

Women all over the world celebrate this special day and scientists like Medical Physicists, are not left behind. Medical physics is a fast technically advancing field predominantly dominated by men and women in medical physics still form a small percentage compared to men [2, 3, 4]. Like other male dominated fields, there are challenges faced by female medical physicists. These challenges are not exclusive to female medical physicists; they are common to women building careers, particularly in male-dominated fields, as reported by some studies [5, 6, 7]. The challenges vary from region to region.

The perception of women in Africa for example, particularly those who pursue careers, has been met with diverse opinions. These opinions over the years continue to change and evolve slowly despite the resistance and traditional mindset and beliefs of the society [8]. Some examples of these mindsets even though unspoken, are that women who pursue careers like those meant for men, cannot effectively balance family life; women in high positions are only able to get the roles or opportunities they get because of their gender and so on [8, 9]. On the contrary, reports have shown that women must work as twice as the male counterparts to prove themselves and achieve those statuses. Traditionally in most African and western cultures decades ago, women's jobs were primarily home makers but in the present day, they have taken additional jobs that were traditionally meant for men [5].

One recommended way of trying to resolve these issues is to continue to create awareness, encourage more women to take up these careers to balance the male dominance and address the issues bothering career women through education. Workshops, webinars and similar events have been and are still effective tools in empowering women and imparting them.

As a way of bridging the gap, the Nigerian Association of Medical Physicists in 2025, decided to host a series of workshops to discuss these issues one after the other. It was important to showcase successful women who were at the peak of their careers who have succeeded in all areas of their lives including the family and are considered successful regardless of gender. Women who were considered to 'have it all'. This report is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the first IWD workshop organised by NAMP. The global campaign theme for the 2025 IWD was "*Accelerate Action*".

II. THE INSPIRATION

A survey was carried out in 2023 to identify the challenges facing the women in NAMP. The results of the survey revealed the following as the most common challenges:

- Not being able to balance building a successful career and being wives and mothers.
- Lack of confidence to take up leadership roles due to cultural and gender stereotypes.
- The stress of working and feeling the need to work twice as hard as the male colleagues to gain equal recognition.
- Lack of women to look up to, and mentorship opportunities; and
- Lack of women support groups

This outcome informed the decision to organize a series of workshops to address these challenges. The results of the survey only revealed that there were deeper issues facing women in science especially women in male dominated fields like physics and by extension, medical physics.

III. THE 1st WORKSHOP

The theme of the workshop was titled: "*Balancing work, life, career and family*". It was held on the 7th of March 2025 at 11 am to 1 pm GMT +1. The aim was to create an environment for women in medical physics and related fields to discuss specific issues affecting work-life balance by hearing from women who have overcome these barriers and challenges in question and have risen to attain the level of success they have attained in their careers and businesses while also winning at the home front. The women were well known leaders in their fields with global influence. The

workshop was held online via the zoom platform. 204 persons registered to attend. Even though the targeted audience were women, 11 % of the registrants were men and a few of them attended the workshop.

The workshop took the form of interactive, down-to-earth, no-holds-barred presentations mixed with conversations. The speakers spoke for 20 mins each on given topics, followed by questions from participants and a panel session. The topics were: (i) *Navigating Career Advancement while Prioritizing Family* delivered by Dr Modupe Oresegun (ii) *Managing bias and Stereotypes* delivered by Professor Soheir Korraa (iii) *Managing Cultural Expectations* delivered by Dr Zainab Shinkafi – Bagudu and (iv) *Career Advancement: Breaking the Glass Ceiling* delivered by Dr Anna Barnes.

At the end of the workshop, a feedback survey using Google forms was administered to gain perspective of the attendees' opinion of the program and to chart the course for the next set of workshops to be organized.



Fig. 1: 2025 NAMP IWD workshop poster

IV. SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATIONS

Session 1: Navigating career advancement while prioritizing family- Dr. Modupe Oresegun (Radiation Safety Specialist).

Dr Oresegun spoke passionately about her topic as one who had successfully navigated the challenges well. Her presentation highlighted several barriers and crossroads women face when considering progression in their careers. One which was worthy of mention from her personal experience was the crossroad of decision to either focus on raising a family or accepting a life-changing offer that would 'sky-rocket' her career as a physicist. She shared tips on how to navigate such crossroads without sacrificing one for the other. She pointed out that while it is a challenging task, it is possible to excel in both areas. She discussed factors that can hinder success for women, such as biological roles and

societal expectations, as well as factors that facilitate success, like prioritizing one's children and spouse. She advised participants to enjoy their womanhood, be less ambitious when necessary, and use their success to benefit their families. Dr Oresegun concluded by encouraging women to choose happiness and balance their professional achievements with personal relationships and not sacrificing personal life for work.

Session 2: Managing gender bias and stereotypes – Professor Soheir Korraa (President, Women in Nuclear, Africa)

Professor Soheir was also a passionate speaker, and she traced the problem of gender stereotypes to its source by revealing how men and women have been programmed from childhood to take up certain roles, a major contributing factor to the now perceived traditional roles that men and women are expected to take. She emphasized the need for women to improve their skills and knowledge, and not to rely on societal expectations or gender roles. She also highlighted the importance of self-confidence and not being deterred by negative human emotions that may arise as one climbs the career ladder but to learn to manage them and use them to one's advantage. She highlighted the importance of self-satisfaction from the love received from family and the importance of not seeking external validation for one's achievements. The conversation ended with a call to action for participants to work hard and strive for personal growth.

Session 3: Managing cultural expectations - Dr Zainab Shinkafi - Bagudu (President-Elect, Union for International Cancer Control)

Dr. Zainab Shinkafi-Bagudu was another excellent speaker who had traversed many waters from medicine to politics to being an influential advocate for women's health. Her background and experience unraveled the unspoken challenges of the cultural expectations of women. She emphasized the importance of understanding cultural norms and expectations, and the impact it has and can have on one's career and personal life. She also highlighted the challenges faced by women, such as gender discrimination and the pressure to fulfil traditional family goals. Dr. Bagudu suggested strategies for managing cultural expectations, including education and awareness, advocacy and support networks, communication, and the role of mentors. She encouraged women to be agents of change and work together to challenge and redefine social norms.

Session 4: Career advancement: Breaking the Glass Ceiling – Dr. Anna Barnes (President, Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine)

Dr. Anna Barnes rounded off the talks with the all-too-important subject of breaking glass ceilings. She is the first female president of IPEM and was just the right person to do the topic justice. She shared her journey as a woman in science, from her early education to her current leadership role, she spoke on the importance of mentorship, building

professional networks, and developing strong communication skills to overcome barriers and advance in male-dominated fields. She also discussed how she deliberately took her time to develop her skills and network before stepping into leadership positions. Dr Barnes pointed out the importance of having allies, both male & female throughout one's career and building good rapport. She stressed the importance of knowing oneself and defining personal success, rather than being swayed by external accolades, noting the value of teamwork and work-life balance. She ended by highlighting the value of enjoying the journey rather than focusing solely on the career goal.

The profiles of the speakers are on the NAMP website [10], and the recorded talks can be found on NAMP's YouTube channel.

V. POST-WORKSHOP SURVEY

Several responses were received from the survey. In terms of educational qualifications, 57 % of the respondents had master's degree, 21 % had bachelor's degree while the rest had PhD as their highest level of education. All the responses came from women in the African continent, with Nigeria having over 70 %, while Tanzania and Cameroun had 14 % each. About 64 % of the responses were from scientists including medical physicists, 14 % from medicine and 7 % each from the social sciences and technology.

When asked about the topics that best resonated with them, 78 % resonated with the first session titled, Navigating Career Advancement while Prioritizing Family; 43 % resonated with Career Advancement: Breaking the Glass Ceiling; 21 % with Managing Gender Bias; and 14 % with Managing Cultural Expectations.

With regards to the effect that family responsibilities had on their career advancement, 36 % of the respondents agreed that family matters affected their career progression; 36 % were not sure; 21 % disagreed, while 7 % were unmarried and therefore could not relate. Those who attested to the effect of family on their careers in a free response section gave the following as reasons: raising children, cultural barriers, and lack of ample time for research.

In terms of the challenges of career development, most (50 %) of the respondents chose the ability to balance responsibilities as the number one challenge, followed by lack of mentorship (42 %), pregnancy & motherhood (36 %) and lack of funding (36 %). Participants were further asked if they would be interested in being mentored and over 70% agreed to participate, while 21 % were not sure.

VI. DISCUSSION

The workshop successfully fulfilled and contributed to the goals of the 2025 International Women's Day. The attention, enthusiasm and engagement by the participants showed that these topics were important and relevant. The issues discussed revealed underlying and unspoken issues bothering

career women especially those in male-dominated fields and those who really want to succeed in all areas, including the home front. Aside from the fantastic topics presented, the nature and quality of the speakers were such that they had practical and relatable models that the participants could easily connect and identify with. These are women who had gone through life's challenges and still going through them to arrive at where they are today.

If women in Africa will survive and thrive in their careers, attention and consideration need to be given to their unique challenges. In this age of globalization, it would become very easy to lose track of cultural and traditional challenges unique to us. The standard of success need not be the same, success should be personalized. A woman who decides to take a break from her career to raise a family should not be considered less successful than one who had no career break and so goes similar examples. No one should feel pressured. We need more female models who have taken diverse paths to achieve the level of success they are in, to show the younger generation that it is possible.

The authors redirect the readers to a very comprehensive review study carried out by Torres et al [11]. They analyzed 52 papers that looked at the impact of motherhood on the career progression of women and concluded that there are negative and positive impacts with the former surpassing the latter. They offer valuable insights for organizations and policymakers with the goal to create environments that professionally support women while allowing them to fulfill their maternal roles.

It was discovered during and at the end of the workshop that there was a need to continue to have these conversations on a broader level, decimating more time to it. It was also discovered that there was a serious need for mentorship programs for women dedicated to addressing specific issues. There is no better way to address an issue than learning from the one who has experienced and dealt with it. The speakers and participants were open to the idea of mentorship as seen from the feedback survey.

As for the low number of female medical physicists in the world today, it can obviously be traced to the relatively limited number of women who study physics as a first degree whereby physics or sometimes engineering is the entry path to becoming a medical physicist. The way to increase the number of women in medical physics would be to increase the number of women who take up physics or engineering degrees. A lot of awareness needs to be created for this to happen.

VII. CONCLUSION

Overall, this workshop gave participants a sense of direction on how to balance their family, work, life and career and provided a beacon of hope to women who had long given up the desire to advance in their careers particularly in male-dominated fields. More workshops and seminars dedicated

to women are needed to promote these conversations and get enlightened. Topics should be tailored to the specific needs of women in a region, country or culture as they vary from place to place. Safe places for women to discuss more sensitive topics should be created without bias or barriers. If a woman thrives and succeeds, the workplace, family, society and humanity will thrive and succeed. Therefore, women's issues should concern all.

VIII. REFERENCES

1. IWD: <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/About-IWD>
2. Torres AJC, Barbosa-Silva L, Oliveira-Silva LC, Miziara OPP, Guahy UCR, Fisher AN, Ryan MK. (2024): The Impact of Motherhood on Women's Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions. *Behav Sci (Basel)* ;14(4):275.
3. Tsapaki V, Tabakov S, Rehani MM. Medical physics workforce: A global perspective. *Phys Med*. 2018 Nov;55:33-39.
4. Covington EL, Moran JM, Paradis KC (2020): The state of gender diversity in medical physics. *Med Phys*. 47 (4) :2038-2043.
5. Akinwale Fehintola Tunbosun (2020): Women in Development: The Historical Trends of Changing Roles of Women in African Society. *International Journal of Innovative Research & Development*. ISSN 2278-0211.
6. Jane English and Karen Le Jeune (2012): Do professional Women and Tradeswomen in the South African construction Industry Share Common Employment Barriers despite Progressive Government Legislation? *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering and Practice*. Vol 138, No. 2, Pp 145-152.
7. Lucy Saddleton (2010): Breaking into the Boys' Club. *Wealth Professional*. <https://www.wealthprofessional.ca>
8. 2025 NAMP International Women's Day Post-Workshop Survey
9. Enkhzul Galsanjigmed and Tomoki Sekiguchi (2023): Challenges Women Experience in Leadership Careers: An Integrative Review. *Merits*, 3(2), 366-389.
10. NAMP IWD: <https://namp.ng/iwd2025/>
11. Torres AJC, Barbosa-Silva L, Oliveira-Silva LC, Miziara OPP, Guahy UCR, Fisher AN, Ryan MK. (2024): The Impact of Motherhood on Women's Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions. *Behav Sci (Basel)* ;14(4):275.

Contacts of the corresponding author:

Author: Iyobosa Blessing Uwadiae
 Institute: Nigerian Association of Medical Physicists
 Country: Nigeria
 Email: women@namp.ng