

'Empowering Women in STEM':

Need to encourage, mentor women to take up STEM subjects: KU VC

'Crucial to bring more female scientists into leadership roles'



Srinagar, Sept 3: To address the persistent gender inequality in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines and encouraging opportunities for women in these fields, the Department of Botany, University of Kashmir (KU), organised a two-day national workshop that concluded here last week.

Titled 'Empowering Women in STEM: Bridging Opportunities in Jammu and Kashmir', the programme was sponsored by the J&K Government, Centre for Socio-Legal Research India (CSLR), and the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

KU Vice Chancellor Prof Nilofer Khan, who inaugurated the event highlighted the increasing participation of women in higher education and research reiterating the varsity's commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for all female students.

"The number of females pursuing PhD degrees has risen by 107% over the past decade, reflecting their growing excellence in fields such as research and mathematics," Prof Khan said, adding that 58% of students admitted each year at KU are women and that "we must continue to encourage and mentor them to take up STEM subjects".

Director, BITS (Birla Institute of Technology and Science) - PILANI, K K Birla Goa, Prof Suman Kundu, in his address, emphasised the importance of women supporting each other in the scientific community and that empowering women is essential for their development.

“We must bring more female scientists into leadership roles. It is a significant milestone that out of twenty-one Vice Chancellors at KU, Prof Nilofer Khan is the first female to hold this esteemed position,” he added.

Senior Assistant Professor at the Department of Botany, KU and the Convener of the workshop, Dr Riffat John, emphasised the importance of such initiatives in bridging the gender gap in STEM fields, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir.

“This workshop has been pivotal in creating a platform for young women to explore and excel in STEM careers. The active participation of experts and students alike has set the stage for future research collaborations and career advancements in these disciplines,” she added.

The workshop featured technical sessions led by eminent scientists and academicians, including Prof Madu Dikshit (Ex-Director, Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow); Prof Alok Nag (former Dean, South Campus, University of Delhi); Prof Renu Deswal (University of Delhi); Dr Deepa Agashe (NCBS, Bangalore); Dr. Suphiya Khan (Shri Ram Institute, New Delhi), Prof. Deepa Venkitesh (IIT, Madras), Dr Ruhul Jabeen Shah (SKIMS, Srinagar); and Dr Fatima Jalid (NIT, Srinagar).

The workshop concluded with a panel discussion focussing on strategies to overcome the challenges faced by women in pursuing careers in STEM and underscored the need for continuous efforts to ensure gender equality in these fields.

Head, Department of Biochemistry, Prof Shajrul Amin, proposed the formal vote of thanks.