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Report: Women STEMM Faculty Face Disproportionate Impact from Pandemic

A new report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic found “intensified complications related to work-life boundaries that largely affect women,” NASEM officials said in an announcement. These effects, among others, “may roll back some of the achievement gains made by women to date,” said Eve Higginbotham, chair of the committee authoring the report. Higginbotham is vice dean for inclusion, diversity, and equity and a professor of ophthalmology at Penn Medicine. The committee commissioned five research papers; one included a survey conducted in October of 933 women in science, technology, engineering, math and medicine (STEMM). “Preliminary evidence suggests women in academic STEMM are experiencing increased workload, decreased productivity, changes in interactions, and difficulties from remote work caused by the COVID 19 pandemic and associated disruptions,” NASEM said.

For example, “budget cuts made by many colleges and universities in response to the economic constraints that arose during 2020 greatly affected contingent and non-tenured faculty members—positions disproportionately occupied by women and People of Color,” according to highlights of the report, which also noted that “nearly 70 percent of faculty are not on the tenure track.” Committee members were asked “to inform, without making recommendations,” but they did suggest nearly three dozen questions related to the pandemic and women in STEMM positions that warrant further study. The report “may help inform the decisions that academic leaders, funders, other interested stakeholders, and both current and aspiring academics will continue to have to make over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic,” according to highlights.

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