



Beyond Stereotypes: The Evolving Role of Women in Forestry

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Keywords: *women workforce in forestry, male-dominant fields, gender equality paradox in STEM, gender differences, gender pay gap*

Extended summary

The presentation offers a personal perspective on the evolving role of women in traditionally male-dominated fields, with a specific focus on forestry. Drawing on both personal experience and statistical data, the speaker highlights the increasing presence of women in the forestry workforce. In Slovenia, approximately 41% of forest owners are women, and more than half of students in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and veterinary studies are female.

Despite this progress, challenges persist. The presentation tackles the enduring stereotypes about women in forestry. The speaker raises thought-provoking questions about the origins of these stereotypes and whether society should explore their potential relevance.

Gender-specific challenges, such as safety and the physical demands of forestry work, are also addressed. Humorous photographs illustrate these challenges, exposing the speaker in an attempt to cut down a small, electrified garden tree. The presentation also includes data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, showing that logging workers face the highest number of work-related injuries and fatalities, highlighting the hazardous nature of the sector. The speaker then poses a critical question to the audience: Is the notion of protecting women due to their reproductive roles still necessary in modern society?

The discussion shifts to acknowledging the wide range of forestry tasks that are not dependent on physical strength, making them equally accessible to both genders. As climate change reshapes the industry, the need for diverse forestry work is expected to grow significantly.

Another important topic is the broader societal context, particularly the gender equality paradox in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education. The speaker draws on research showing that women in more gender-equal societies are less likely to pursue STEM careers, often excelling in and preferring the humanities. This paradox raises important questions about how to support women's participation in both forestry and STEM fields in the best possible way. Data from the Slovenian Statistical Office for the 2021/2022 academic year supports this paradox, illustrating similar trends in tertiary education by field and gender.

The talk concludes with a reflection on the future of women's workforce participation, emphasizing the need to create equal opportunities while respecting gender differences. Despite progress, women still earn less than their male counterparts for the same work. The speaker advocates for a societal approach that not only supports women in forestry and other sectors but also recognizes the value of unpaid work, such as childcare, hence responsibilities that often fall disproportionately on women.

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