

The Recent Increase in Women Scientists in Korea: An Analysis of Legal Policies and Societal Factors

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Since the early 2000s, Korea has experienced a notable increase in the number and proportion of women scientists, outpacing comparable trends observed in Japan. This presentation examines the socio-political and institutional factors behind this surge, emphasizing the pivotal role of the Act on Fostering and Supporting Women Scientists and Technicians enacted in 2002. Key findings indicate that (1) sustained government-driven support—such as dedicated funding, mentoring programs, and family-friendly policies—has mitigated barriers like career interruptions; (2) expanded higher-education initiatives have attracted more female students into STEM fields; and (3) social and corporate pressure to diversify R&D teams has led to inclusive hiring and retention strategies. Despite these advances, challenges remain, including the relatively low representation of women in senior leadership and the ongoing need to strengthen policies ensuring long-term gender equity in research environments. By contextualizing these successes and hurdles, this study provides insights into how legislative frameworks and robust support measures can shape a more inclusive ecosystem for women in science and technology.

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