Dr Vineeta Bal of the Institute of Immunology is a feminist and member of the national taskforce on women in sciences. Women, she tells TOI-Crest, succeed as men do, but their struggle is much greater.

**Why is the glass ceiling so tough in science?** It is highly competitive with that said for long hours and years. You are normally past 25 when you qualify for a job. By then, you are in your early to mid-30s and most probably have children. This is also the age when you could be too far gone. But most women in this age group don’t have the luxury of that quiet mental space which is so necessary for scientists to be more productive. They don’t have time to brood with colleagues, others in the fraternity. With this kind of a pressure, a woman candidate for a directorship or a top award is quite likely to be hypothesized.

**Are behavioral issues a problem in labs?** Some men don’t even want to engage in eye to eye contact with women: bosses. Even at the PhD level, they may not even want to listen to or obey a female guide. It is hardly surprising that women become dissatisfied about taking on administrative responsibilities.

**Is it tough for women scientists to make a re-entry into their career if they take a break?** Is it hard, IT, technical matters or physics are all fields where it is possible to do fine hours. But in biology that is not possible. It requires a certain discipline; it requires a certain cripplishment, certain hours in the lab. Over the last 15 years, we have been doing a huge information overload. If you take two years off, the ‘research’ will simply pile up and then you lose the edge.

**Do you favour reservations for women scientists?** No, it don’t. It is better to have affirmative action policies which help women, says Bal.

**What was the biggest concern against women?** Abusing of women is something which would have been a different story altogether.

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