

Why are women underrepresented in science and math careers?

A study found that women may be less likely to pursue careers in science and math because they tend to be equally skilled in other fields.

In the career world, it's ladies' choice.

But having so many options may be why women are underrepresented in fields like science and math, [a new study says](#).

Women perform about the same as men in math classes, but are still less likely than men to seek a career in science, technology, engineering or math — fields sometimes called STEM. A study in the journal *Psychological Science* suggests that if the gender gap isn't fueled by ability, perhaps it's fueled by opportunity.

Women, the study says, tend to have a broader array of career options than men.

"Our study shows that it's not lack of ability or differences in ability that orients females to pursue non-STEM careers. It's the greater likelihood that females with high math abilities also have high verbal ability," said developmental psychologist Ming-Te Wang, who helped run the study.

"Because they're good at both, they can consider a wide range of occupations," he said.

The researchers suggest that "educators and policy makers may consider shifting the focus from trying to strengthen girls' STEM-related abilities to trying to tap the potential of these girls who are equally skilled in both math and verbal domains."

National Science Foundation. Gender gap: Women are underrepresented in fields like science, but not due to lack of ability, a study found. IMAGE

GENDER GAP

Another study from this month said that while female scientists have made gains in the field, they face "persistent career challenges."

[The study](#), published in the journal *Nature*, said that U.S. universities and colleges tend to employ many more male than female scientists, and that men in the field earn significantly more than women.

"One of the most persistent problems," the study says, "is that a disproportionate fraction of qualified women drop out of science careers in the very early stages."

The study suggests the reason for this could be a lack of role models, resulting in females in the field feeling like they don't belong.

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