

show that this gender-gap in mathematics disappears at all levels of maths education. The research basically addressed three questions: Do gender differences in maths performance exist in the general population? Do gender differences exist

UK and Serbia had relatively higher numbers. In the 13 years before the reunification of Germany, East Germany had sent 13 girls where as from the united Germany there have been zero girls taking part in the IMO.

by some studies as well as scholars is that the boys are biologically more variable in their mathematical ability than the girls. This has been challenged by the researchers who have shown that girls' maths scores are as variable as boys in some

countries boys more than girls, girls may be advised against taking maths courses or they may not be identified and nurtured. Cultural beliefs like this are "incredibly influential," says Hyde, making it critical to question them

'No reason there should be an under-representation'

...And at a meeting in Warsaw we drafted the Statutes and sort of formalized the organisation. So it has an office in Helsinki like the European Mathematical Society.

Q: So has it been able to come up with some recommendations for countries to follow or strategies to adopt to increase the numbers and things like that?

A: Yes. There has been a lot activity in each country and actually what is interesting is that the situation in

'What the students see is that the context is almost all male'

Northern Europe is much worse than in Southern Europe and this is contrary to what one would think.

The Northern countries are more like the United States. But the Catholic countries have much more women in mathematics than the

Protestant countries in the North. We had a number of discussions on why this is so because in politics it is the opposite. In Norway, for example, we have lots of women politicians and politicians are not considered to be of any high standing. There are probably historical and social reasons for this sort of strange situation that mathematics is okay for women in Italy for example but not so in Norway. In Italy teaching profession is quite popular and many women wanted to teach. They consider becoming teachers as a very good profession and easy to combine also with family life. This may be more important in Southern countries because of the equality within the family in the Northern countries where men take more of their share inside the home and things like that.

Q: How about France? France has always had some good women mathematicians...

A: French has had a good reputation. It has a long history and very strong women mathematicians. But

they are a bit worried now. France is an interesting example because they have this very elitist system with their *Ecole Normales* which are extremely difficult to get into. If you look at many of the best mathematicians from France they have gone through this *Ecole Normale* school system. And they used to have separate schools for men and women with sometimes teaching and the professors who teach would be the same, and there was some integration but admissions and tests were separate. And then there was this big thing not from the women's side but the government saying that they should integrate the two. As a result the last few years among all mathematics students accepted into *Ecole Normale* there have been a few women but not many. But nobody really understands why except making some psychological guesses that the women don't want to compete with men and it has become too difficult somehow because they have to compete with the men. This is something very strange. I have not read any great explanation of why this is so. What this means is that in

the years to come the situation in France may change because there will be fewer young women entering the field of mathematics and fewer becoming professional mathematicians.

Q: In India familial pressures is one of the main reasons for women dropping out at research level. It seems to be not so much due to lack of interest because at the entry level the numbers are pretty good and the personnel policies are not conducive either. Is the situation similar in Europe?

A: It used to be there. But not any more I think I think is really over in some sense. Most things are taken care of in such a way that if you want to get something done to they can be done and you really feel that you are being helped. Women should be made to feel that the system wants them to continue and do well. If the right policies are in place and the system is responsive, the women will also get reassured that whenever they need there is help around.