

Women in the National Academy of Medicine of Venezuela

Recent advances towards gender equality, Goal 5 of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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SUMMARY

To assess how the Venezuelan National Academy of Medicine (NAM) is progressing on gender equality, established as Goal 5 of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, a quantitative analysis of the process of incorporating women to the institution and its governing board is presented. Two lapses of time are compared: the first 110.5 years since the foundation of the Academy in April 1904 until November 12, 2014, and the last 5.5 years, between November 13, 2014, and June 16, 2020. During the initial 110.5 years, 472 men and 14 women (2.9 %) were elected. In the last 5.5 years, 17 men and 7 women (29.2 %) have been admitted. The current proportion of women in the NAM is as follows: 13.5 % Individuals of Number (IN), 28 % National Corresponding Members (NCM), 3 % Foreign Corresponding Members (FCM), and 24 % Courtesy Guest. On the Board of Directors elected on June 2, 2020, for the biennium 2020-2022, there are 2 women in 5 (40 %), Vice-president (Isis Nezer), and Treasurer (Lilia Cruz), while in the previous biennium there was only one woman. Considerable progress happened since the first female was elected to the NAM in 1981, especially over the past 5.5 years, but the corporation is far from gender equality. Work must be done to achieve that goal.

Key words: Women in academics, academy, gender equality, Venezuela, National Academy of Medicine, Goal 5 SDGs, SDG5.

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RESUMEN

Para conocer cómo la Academia Nacional de Medicina de Venezuela (ANM) avanza para lograr la igualdad de género entre sus miembros, establecida como meta No 5 en la Agenda 2030 de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU) para el Desarrollo Sostenible, realizamos un análisis cuantitativo del proceso de incorporación de la mujer a la institución y a sus órganos de dirección. Dos lapsos fueron comparados: los primeros 110,5 años, desde la fundación de la Academia en abril de 1904 hasta el 12 de noviembre de 2014, y los últimos 5,5 años, entre el 13 de noviembre de 2014 y el 16 de junio de 2020. Durante los 110,5 primeros años, 472 hombres y 14 mujeres (2,9%) fueron elegidos. En los últimos 5,5 años fueron incorporados 17 hombres y 7 mujeres (29,2%). La representación porcentual de la mujer en la ANM en la actualidad es la siguiente: Individuos de Número (IN): 13,5 %, Miembros Correspondientes Nacionales (MCN): 28 %, Miembros Correspondientes Extranjeros (MCE): 3 %, Invitados de Cortesía: 24 %. En la Junta Directiva electa el 2 de junio de 2020 para el bienio 2020-2022, hay 2 mujeres entre 5 personas (40%): vicepresidenta (Isis Nezer) y tesorero (Lilia Cruz) mientras que en el bienio precedente hubo una sola mujer. Ha habido progreso considerable desde 1981, cuando una mujer fue electa por primera vez en la ANM, especialmente en los últimos 5,5 años, pero la corporación se encuentra muy lejos de lograr la igualdad de género. Es necesario trabajar específicamente para alcanzar el objetivo propuesto por la ONU.

Palabras clave: Mujer; academia, igualdad de género, Venezuela, Academia Nacional de Medicina. Objetivo 5, ODSs, ODS5

INTRODUCTION

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls is Goal 5 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) adopted by the Member States of the United Nations (UN) in 2015. It is one of 17 SDGs. The UN states that “*Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world*” (1). Progress towards Goal 5 has been made in Venezuela over the last six decades, especially in achieving equality in access to higher education, but women continue to be under represented at all levels of academic and political leadership.

The National Academy of Medicine (NAM) is an official, scientific, and consulting corporation that represents national medicine. It was created by a constitutional law of the National Congress on April 7, 1904, to promote medical sciences and health care in Venezuela. The law established the number of members as follows: 35 individuals of number, 40 national corresponding members, and 25 foreign corresponding members. The National Congress on July 15, 1941, repealed the law of April 7, 1904, and promulgated a new law which included some modifications and raised to 120 the number of academics: 40 individuals of number (IN), 50 national corresponding members (NCM) and 30 foreign corresponding members (FCM). Members are admitted for life after two steps: the election process and the incorporation process (2,3).

The National Academy of Medicine was installed on June 11, 1904. By December 1, 1904, the 35 positions of IN were filled. None of the 35 founding members in 1904 was a woman (2,3). At that time, no woman had ever graduated as a medical doctor in Venezuela. Women were educated to be good wives and housekeepers (4); they were subject to legal discrimination, unfair social norms, and attitudes. The first woman who completed her studies in a Venezuelan medical school was Lya Imber de Coronil (5). She got the Doctor of Medical Science degree in 1936 at the Central University of Venezuela. The access of women to the universities grew very slowly during the fourth and fifth decades of the twentieth century. After 1958, with democratic governments, access to all levels of education

for men and women increased rapidly. Gender equality in medical schools was achieved in 1975. Since 1985 more than 68 % of graduates from medical schools are women (6,7).

First woman elected to the NAM

The first woman elected as a National Corresponding Member (Post 45) was the above mentioned Lya Imber de Coronil (1914-1981). The election occurred on July 9, 1981, **77 years after the creation of the NAM**. Unfortunately, she was not inducted because she died on September 13, 1981, two months after her election (8,9). Lya Imber was a distinguished professor of pediatrics at the Central University of Venezuela (5), director (1968-1971), chair of Medicine and founder (1961) of the Mental Hygiene and Child Psychiatry Service at the children’s hospital “*Jose Manuel de los Rios*” in Caracas. She was the first woman member of the board of directors of a Medical College (1941) in Venezuela and a member of the UNICEF board of directors (1972 – 1974). Her husband, Fernando Ruben Coronil, an outstanding professor of surgery, who graduated with her in the class of 1936, had been elected IN in 1968 (9), much earlier, an important difference showing a preference for men in the election process.

First woman incorporated to the NAM

Milena Sardi de Selle (1926-2008), a child psychiatrist, was the first woman to be incorporated as NCM and IN (10,11). She was elected National Correspondent Member, Post No 33, representing the Federal District, on November 11, 1981. Nine and a half years later, on June 26, 1991, she was elected *Individuo de Número*, seat XXXIX, and incorporated on Jan 1, 1992. It took nearly 88 years to see a woman as Individual of Number in the Venezuelan National Academy of Medicine. It happened in the last decade of the twentieth century. She remained the only woman in the NAM until December 4, 1986, when Gioconda Stopello de Morales (1920-2005), an ophthalmologist, was the third female elected NCM, Post No. 4, for the Federal District, As IN, Milena Sardi de Selle was the only female in the NAM for 16 years, until her

death in 10-26-2008. Doris Perdomo de Ponce, the second IN, occupied Milena's seat XXXIX in June 25, 2009. Doris had been elected NCM,

Post 43, in 2003 (8,9). It is evident that the participation of women in the NAM began late and was very scarce.



Figure 1. The first three women elected to the NAM. A) Lya Imber de Coronil (1981), B) Milena Sardi de Selle (1981), C) Guioconda Stopello de Morales (1986).

Progress towards Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the NAM

On November 12, 2014, we presented to the X Congress of the Venezuelan Society for History of Medicine a paper entitled "*La mujer en la Academia Nacional de Medicina de Venezuela*" (8) where we showed the participation of women in that corporation during its, by then, 110 and a half years of existence from June 11, 1904, to November 12, 2014. To evaluate the progress made in the NAM towards Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we compared the number of women and men who were elected in the last five and a half years, between November 13, 2014, and June 16, 2020, with the previous 110.5 years.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

To count the number of academics we used 3 books which contain biographical information of

the academics admitted since the foundation of the corporation (2,3,9), several issues of the journal *Gaceta Medica de Caracas*, the official publication of the NAM, which list the living academics every three months (12-15) and information available in the NAM archives. Since many academics begin as NCM and later become IN for life, they were counted only once. All members with residence in Venezuela are grouped in the sum of IN + NCM. The other group includes the Foreign Corresponding Members.

RESULTS

The results are shown in Table 1. During the first 110.5 years, 14 women were elected to the NAM as IN and NCM in Venezuela, none as FCM. Those figures compare to 354 and 118 men, respectively. The proportion of women among academics during this long time was 2.9 %, 14 women in a total of 486 academics.

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Table 1

Years	110,5				5,5			
	Women	Men	Total	%	Women	Men	Total	%
IN + NCM	14	354	368	3,8	6	16	22	27,3
FCM	0	118	118	0	1	1	2	50
Total	14	472	486	2,9	7	17	24	29,2

During the five and a half years since November 13, 2014, to June 16, 2020, 22 National Corresponding Members and 2 Foreign Corresponding Members were elected, a total of 24 new academics, seven of whom were women, so that 29.2 % of new admissions were female. This is still far from gender equality, but it is an important advance. Historically, the total number of academics rose to 510, with 21 women or 4.1 %.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of members of the NAM by sex and category in the years 2014 and 2020. The number of females IN increased in the last five and a half years from 3 to 5, and

they represent 13.5 % of that group, up from 8 % in 2014. There is one female NMC that has been elected as IN, but her incorporation is pending. The number of women NCM increased from 7 to 12 and now they constitute 28 % of the group, up from 17 % in 2014.

The first incorporation of a woman as a Foreign Corresponding Member took place on October 18, 2018. Her name is Carmen Luisa Garcia de Insausti, a distinguished hematologist who lives in Spain. In 2020, one female out of 30 FCM equals 3.3 %.

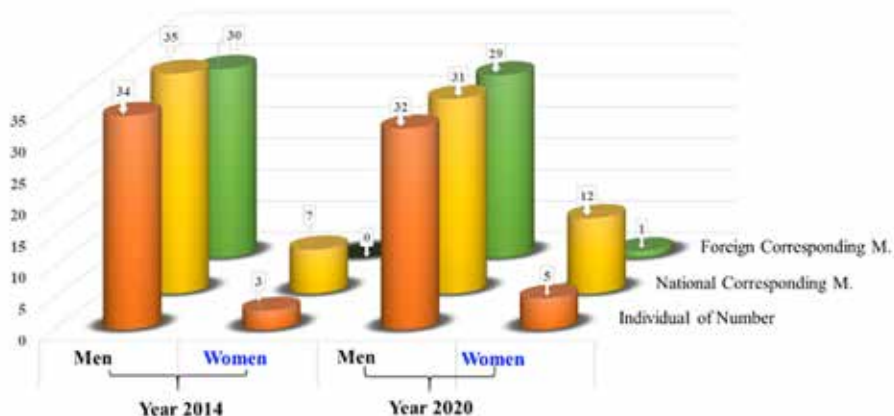


Figure 2. Distribution of members of the NAM by category and gender on November 12, 2014, and June 16, 2020.

Current female presence in the NAM, in alphabetical order

Individuals of Number

Cruz Rodriguez de Montbrun, Lilia (Seat XIX)

Müller de Soyano, Aixa (Seat I)

Nezer de Landaeta, Isis (Seat XVII)

Perdomo de Ponce, Doris (Seat XXXIX)

Uzcategui Uzcategui, Maria Ofelia (Seat XXXII)

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Figure 3. Individuals of Number: A) Doris Perdomo, B) Lilia Cruz, C) Isis Nezer, D) Aixa Müller, E) Ofelia Uzcategui (in order of induction).

National Corresponding Members

Baez de Borges, Elsa (Post 20), Caracas

Blandenier Bosson de Suarez, Claudia Antonieta (Post 24), Caracas

Casanova de Escalona, Laddy Margarita (Post 34), Valencia

Cedeño de Rincon, Rosa (Post 49), Maracaibo

Janice Fernandez D Poll (Puesto 48), Maracaibo

Figueroa de Sanchez, Evelyn (Post 12), Valencia

Karam Aguilar, Emely Zoraida (Post 18), Caracas

Lopez de Blanco, Mercedes (Post 36), Caracas

Marcano Torres, Myriam (Post 15), Valencia

Mora Gonzalez, Eddy Veronica (Post 1), Valencia

Sileo Giuseffi, Enriqueta (Post 38), Caracas

Vasquez de Ricciardi, Laura C. (Post 7), Valencia



Figure 4. Female National Corresponding Members incorporated to the NAM before Nov. 12, 2014. A) Rosa Cedeño, B) Laura Vasquez, C) Myriam Marcano, D) Elsa Baez, E) Emely Karam



Figure 5. Female National Corresponding Members incorporated to the National Academy of Medicine since November 13, 2014 to June 16, 2020: A) Laddy Casanova, B) Eddy Veronica Mora, C) Evelyn Figueroa, D) Enriqueta Sileo, E) Claudia Blandenier F) Mercedes Lopez, and G) Carmen Garcia, Foreign Corresponding Member.

Claudia Blandenier (Post 24) was elected to Seat XXI. She will be received as IN later in the year 2020. There are 5 NCM who lives in Caracas, 4 in Valencia, 2 in Maracaibo, and 1 in Valera.

Foreign Corresponding Members

Garcia de Insausti, Carmen Luisa (Post 18), Spain

Courtesy Guests

Distinguished professionals may be admitted to NAM as courtesy guests. They attend meetings and collaborate in many ways. For some of them being a guest is the first step toward membership as academics. There are 6 women among 25 courtesy guests or 24 %.

Badell Madrid de Hernandez, Elvia Irene

Cardozo, Alba

Duran Castillo, Maritza de Jesus

Martinez de Mavarez, Ana M.

Mondolfi, Maria Eugenia

Yanez Herrera, Maria

Women in positions of leadership

Board of Directors of the National Academy of Medicine

Milena Sardi was the first woman to sit on the Board of Directors of the National Academy of Medicine. She acted as Academic Secretary from 1994 to 1996. Lilia Cruz has been Treasurer from May 2017 to June 2020. In the election to the Board of Directors for the biennium 2020-2022, held on 2 June 2020, Isis Nezer (Figure 3 C) was elected Vice-President and Lilia Cruz (Figure 3 B, Figure 6) was re-elected, Treasurer. This is a noticeable improvement in gender equality, 2 women among 5 members of the Board of Directors (40 %), achieved in 2020.

Editorial Board of the *Gaceta Medica de Caracas*

Doris Perdomo de Ponce (Figure 3 A), who was the second woman incorporated as Individual of Number, is the first woman to perform the role of Chief Editor of the *Gaceta Medica de Caracas*, a scientific journal published every three months by the NAM. This is a position of great importance and responsibility that she



Figure 6. Board of Directors of the National Academy of Medicine (2018-2020): Lilia Cruz Rodriguez (Treasurer), Enrique Lopez Loyo (Vice-president), Leopoldo Briceño Iragorry (President), Huniades Urbina-Medina (Secretary) and Guillermo Colmenares Arreaza (Librarian).

successfully held amid great difficulties. She was the successor to Jose Miguel Avilan Rovira after his death. Her performance ran for 3 biennia, from 2014 to June 2020. Within the new International Editorial Committee of the *Gaceta Medica de Caracas*, she is distinguished with the designation of Honorary Editor, together with Antonio Clemente and Rafael Muci Mendoza.

Board of Directors of the “Francisco Antonio Riskey” National Academy of Medicine Foundation

Lilia Cruz is the first woman to belong to the Board of Directors of the Foundation supporting economically the NAM since 1996. She was elected Secretary for the biennia 2014-2016 and 2016-2018. In May 2017, when she was elected Treasurer of the NAM, she also assumed the role of Treasurer of the Riskey Foundation, after the death of Jesus Felipe Parra. For the Triennium 2019-2021, she was elected Director and, in the absence of the elected Treasurer, was additionally appointed Treasurer in charge for the rest of the triennium. The Board has 7 members, 14 % women.

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of women in the NAM has improved slowly over the past five and a half years. We are 13.5 % Individuals of Number, 28 % of National Corresponding Members, 3 % of Foreign Corresponding Members, and 24 % among Courtesy Guests. It is encouraging that beginning in August 2020, the Board of Directors will be 40 % women. It is recommended that efforts should be made to promote nominations of women candidates for the NAM and to educate women students and professionals to participate in scientific research, academics, and positions of leadership in Venezuela.

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