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# Gender and STEM: Insights from Portugal

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## ABSTRACT

Building on previous research on ICT and gender, this presentation will further explore the interrelations between gender and STEM in an educational context in Portugal. The research aims to improve the understanding of the co-production of gender and STEM careers, and to develop ways to promote gender equity. The methodology is based on qualitative techniques such as focus groups and collaborative activities. Two case studies were organized, one with pre-service elementary school teachers at a higher education institution and the other with 9th grade students. Previous research underscores the significant influence that elementary school teachers' attitudes toward gender and STEM careers have on shaping students' educational choices. Teachers, often unknowingly, play a pivotal role in reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes that affect how students perceive their own abilities and interests in STEM fields. Positive attitudes toward gender equity can encourage students to pursue non-traditional career paths, especially in STEM, which has historically been male-dominated. Conversely, biased attitudes, even subtle ones, can deter girls from exploring these fields, perpetuating the gender imbalance in STEM careers. In Portugal, the educational system requires students to make critical career-related decisions by the end of 9th grade. At this stage, students are particularly vulnerable to the influence of societal and educational gender norms. By 9th grade, many students may have already internalized gendered beliefs about which subjects and career paths are “suitable” for them based on their gender. These choices can have long-term implications, shaping the courses they take in high school and, ultimately, their career prospects. Addressing these stereotypes early, especially at critical decision-making points, is vital for promoting gender equity.

**Keywords:** stereotypes; education; gender equity; educational choices; careers