

Exploring the Factors Affecting Women's Participation in Leadership Positions in Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan.

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Abstract

This study examines the obstacles that hinder women's involvement in educational leadership roles within higher educational institutions, specifically focusing on the University of Sargodha. Data were collected by conducting interviews with four female department heads and one female faculty member each from twenty-six departments of the university. Upon analyzing the qualitative data, it became evident that there was a notable lack of female representation in leadership positions. Five primary factors were identified: personal factors such as home responsibilities, interpersonal factors like gender-stereotyping, socialization process, and role conflict, and organizational factors related to male dominance. The study emphasizes the crucial role of societal socialization processes in perpetuating this inequality. It indicates that societal expectations, which relieve men from domestic duties, add to the double workload faced by women. To tackle gender disparity, the study suggests creating an environment that encourages the belief in equal capabilities for all children, regardless of their gender, to take on different roles.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women play a central role in a country in various spheres, like family, social, and economic. In academia, the percentage of women's representation is reasonable and encouraging as compared to other professions in Pakistan. Women are also working in leadership positions at higher educational institutions, but their representation is still not appreciable. Batool & Sajid (2013) identified that administrative leadership in higher education remains the domain of men, and the proportion of women decreases significantly as women move up to educational and occupational ladder. Northhouse (2013) described leadership as a process whereby individuals influence a group of people to achieve a common goal.

According to Tiwary & Gupta (2022), various dynamics arise from characteristics of women, characteristics of institutions, and from the interaction between these two. Personal factors like personality, background, and socialization play a role for women in work settings. Interpersonal factors result from the dynamic interplay between a woman and her environment; two key types of these factors are gender role stereotyping and inter-group polarization. Organizational factors reside in the institutional system of educational administration. They are found in the policies and procedures of organizations and in the formal and informal systems of the organization. This study attempts to explore the factors that affect women's under-representation in leadership positions at higher educational levels. Some factors (which have been recurrently indicated in literature) cause low participation of women in administration and academic positions. This study attempts to identify such factors which account for women's participation in leadership positions at higher educational institutions in Pakistan.

Particularly, the study enquires into the personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors that hinder women's involvement in leadership roles in higher education institutions of Pakistan. To this effect, women in leadership positions at the University of Sargodha have been interviewed along with one faculty member from each department at the mentioned university. Through analyzing the interviews, the study highlights the multiple challenges that adversely affect women's leadership in Higher Education Institutions. The study identifies three primary categories of factors affecting women's leadership: personal, interpersonal and organizational. Personal challenges are also a cause of concern as women are mostly homemakers; they lack

confidence, and their ambitions are dissimilar to those of their male counterparts, thus making it very difficult for women to seek leadership posts. This study deals with interpersonal factors, among them gender-role stereotyping and societal norms that brainwash the society into believing that leadership is a male prerogative, thus dissuading women from pursuing leadership positions. Further, other organizational factors such as gender discrimination, where females are not considered for promotion or even hired for leadership positions, also hamper women's representation in leadership positions.

In a nutshell, the present study provides an important and detailed review of higher education institutions in Pakistan which has not been studied in detail in the context of women's participation in leadership roles. Using a qualitative research study method, it reveals specific ways in which personal, interpersonal, organizational, and social factors all contribute to women having difficulty reaching leadership positions. The present study fills a literature gap through providing a useful context in-terms of establishing a special emphasis on social pressures which lead to women's burdensome workload.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review reveals a realm of factors that women in academics face in moving ahead to a leadership position in academics. These factors are responsible for the current state of underrepresentation of women in higher education institutions and the slow pace of its improvement. It is common that women are grossly under-represented in leadership positions at universities and continue to be under-represented even in the wake of equal opportunity policies in gender equity era (Zulu, 2016). This section attempts to locate how some personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors prohibit women's entry and promotion to positions of leadership.

Personal factors that are reported by women leaders in various studies can be put into two categories: family-related factors and psychosomatic. Polarized importance systems and gender roles are directly or indirectly associated with personal factors (Ncube, 2016). The most important factors are confidence level, home responsibilities, aspiration level, and effectiveness, which limit the inclusion of women in leadership roles (Tiwarly & Gupta, 2022).

The term "confidence level" as a barrier was introduced by Schmuck in 1976, creation of the first guide for Achieving Gender Equity through Education (Shakeshaft, 2011). Women who wish to hold leadership positions have a lower confidence level or lower aspirations than those who hold leadership positions. Gobena (2014) finds out that studies of females' aspiration for leadership positions reveal the necessity for a clear confidence level. Shakeshaft (2011) shows that women hesitate in applying for promotion due to their low confidence level as compared to their male social group and they apply for jobs only for which they are fully eligible.

Sherifat (2014) indicated that the main factor responsible for women's decreased advancement in leadership positions at higher educational levels is a lack of an encouraging environment for reconciling family and work. It is the responsibility of women to balance their time between taking care of their family and work, but it is not easy for them to fulfill the conditions necessary for development into leadership positions. Too much amount of time is spent at the job results in decreased amounts of time spent with family (Craig & Powell, 2011). Therefore, it is viewed that family responsibilities are situational barriers to the progress of women (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). Women usually show good performance but have a low aspiration level. There is nothing wrong with being a nurse, schoolteacher, or a secretary, but if women aspire to seek high-level posts instead a low-power jobs, then their representation in leadership positions might be increased (Tiwarly & Gupta, 2022).

Societal factors are also involved in the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions (Batool & Sajid, 2013). According to Gaus (2011) this factor seems to represent a complete picture of a society instead of a single individual or organization. Our patriarchal system explains why men and not women hold the educational leadership positions in society. Girls and boys are socialized in different ways in our society, and gender stereotypes in our socio-cultural system about 'what's lady is like' and 'who looks like a leader' are the reason for the low participation of women in leadership positions. Our sociopolitical system is reflected in our defined roles of men and women. Our male dominated society provide fewer opportunities and therefore women have limited aspirations for to become leaders (Gaus, 2011).

Gender-role stereotyping is a big external barrier, wherein men assume that women are less capable and not suitable for administrative leadership positions (Pwadura, 2016). Women and men, both have low confidence in the capabilities of women to perform administrative tasks. Society and social values determine the duties of men and women, which are part of the socialization system. Society has distributed the activities between men and women. Despite being eligible, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions in higher education institutions. Charmes (2019) revealed that women hold all responsibilities of the household and children. In developing countries, household tasks become a significant barrier to the advancement of women leaders for married women. This dual participation of women, family, and professional reduces efficiency. Dual role is a role conflict in which the pressure of work from both sides, family and work, are reciprocally mismatched (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016).

Timpano proposed a method of filtration in 1976 which consists of recruiting filters, application filters, selection criteria filters, interview filters, and selection decision filters (Timpano, 1976). Chernet (2016) has concluded that gender discrimination is present in selection practices in educational administration. The number of women, who have suffered through gender discrimination, is increasing day by day (Ceci & Williams, 2011). According to Tlaiss & Kauser (2011) gender discrimination is a crucial factor in women's career advancement. According to Catherine (2013) there is no criterion for recruitment in educational administrative positions; hiring committees select men over women. Komiti & Moorosi (2020) noted that a barrier for women in leadership positions is the lack of formal networks. According to Davis & Maldonado (2015) women face more problems in becoming educational leaders as compared to men in male-dominated organizations. Coleman (2019) described that the culture of leadership has a masculine environment that systematically excludes females from leadership positions. Women cannot obtain administrative leadership positions due to the authority of male-dominated organizations.

3. METHODOLOGY

Our research has been exploratory in nature. The data collection was done by using qualitative techniques, i.e., interviews.

3.1. Data Collection and Data Analysis

A semi-structured interview guide was used as an information-gathering tool to investigate the factors that affect women's participation in educational leadership. All participants were given an informed consent form with full information about the study: what would be done, possible risks and benefits, and their ability to drop out at any time without penalty. Altogether, confidentiality was maintained; the interviews were kept anonymous and did not contain personal information about the participants. Only the research team was able to use the raw data, and all information was securely stored. Together, these measures shielded the rights and well-being of every female teacher who joined this research study from University of Sargodha.

The interviews were first transcribed and later analyzed for the identification of themes through creating major and minor categories. This study used purposive sampling to collect information from 30 female faculty members at the University of Sargodha. There were four females in the sample who were heads of departments, in addition to 26 other female faculty members from various departments. The researchers selected women in leadership and teaching roles to help understand the factors that shaped their participation in leadership positions in this higher education institution.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was applied to interpret the participants' experience. IPA is a method designed to understand people's lived experiences and how they make sense of them in the context of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA can be used to address a variety of research questions in different research areas (Smith & Nizza, 2022). The interviews were analyzed following the sequence of text analysis presented by Creswell (2002), as shown in Figure 1.

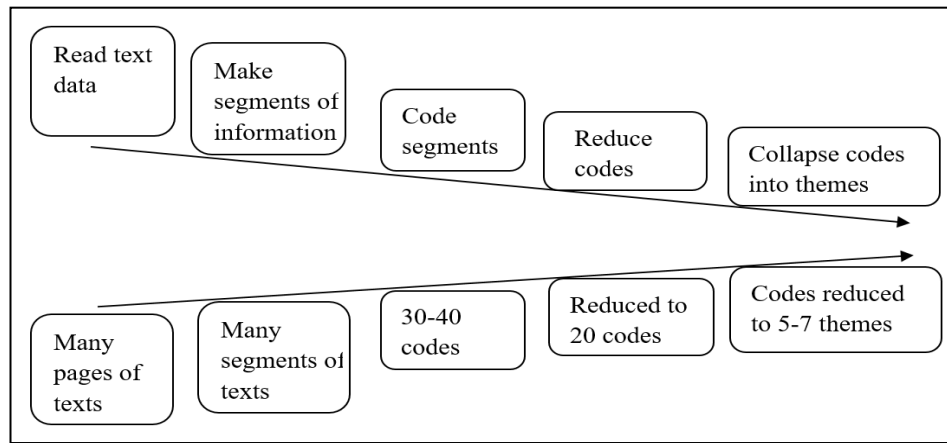


Figure 1: Methodological sequence of qualitative analysis according to Creswell (2002)

4. RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Findings based on interview data indicated the eight problems (presented in Figure 2) that come under three factors. Three were related to personal factors; three belonged to interpersonal factors, and two were related to organizational factors.

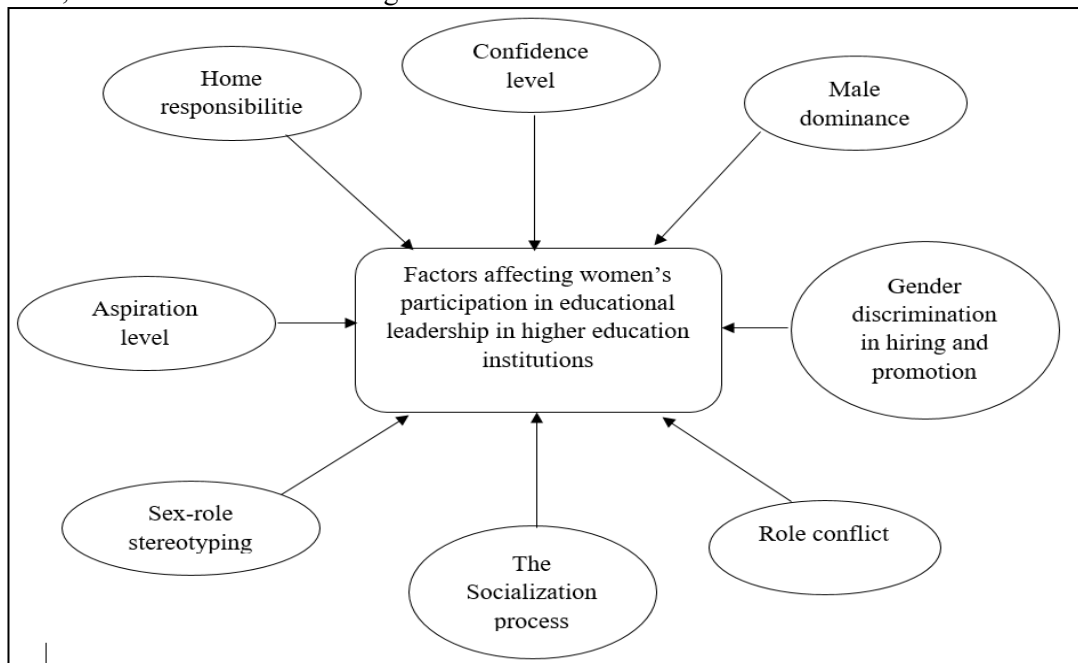


Figure 2: Factors affecting women's participation in educational leadership.

For a descriptive view of the interviews' transcripts, the word cloud of the words used by the interviewees is presented in Figure 3. The size of a word is a measure of the frequency of word usage. At first sight, it seems that the discussion revolves around the words-“Women”, “Family”, “Men”, “Leadership”, “Society”, “gender” and “time”, “responsibilities”, “successful”, this already gives a feeling about the nature of upcoming discussion.

successful housewife". Nicely summed by a respondent, *"My familial commitments prevent me from moving forward. Household commitments, housekeeping responsibilities, and raising children all pose significant barriers to work advancement. When I can't manage time, then my career would suffer"*.

Some of the respondents told us that they receive immense support from their families. One of the respondents said that *"I feel comfortable because my family morally supports me"*. Another respondent said that *"My family is the reason I am who I am today"*. However, the dominant viewpoint suggests that family restrictions and responsibilities prevent females from taking leadership roles in academia.

4.1.3 Aspiration Level

We discovered that respondents had varying degrees of aspiration to take on leadership roles. This could be due to differences in socioeconomic status and family structure. Like one of the respondents said, *"Yes, I personally like women in leadership roles because I am a woman and I feel that a woman can better understand the problems of women, while men don't concentrate on women's issues. In Pakistan, there are a very few numbers of women who are leading other people. Here, people are of the view that women are not fit for leadership roles. Nobody gives chance to her to lead people, and even in learning time, you heard that lady not performing well"*. Another respondent said, *"Definitely, if I got a chance, then I would like to be Head of Department. It's a good job, authorized job. I think I can perform better for my people for my university on sitting that position"*. On the contrary, a respondent said, *"To some extent, our society doesn't like women's leadership role"*.

4.2 Interpersonal Factors

Our results reveal the following interpersonal factors that affect women's participation in leadership positions in higher education institutions.

4.2.1 Gender-role Stereotyping

Our results reveal that a majority of females believe that certain roles are meant to be played by a particular gender. Most of the respondents were of the view that leadership roles better suit males. In the words of a respondent, *"A woman cannot be a good administrator"*. One of the respondents attributed the suitability of the males for leadership roles to their ability to see the broader picture and problem-solving skills by saying that *"In my opinion, men understand the broader and generic picture. Women are more sensitive; they take and transfer anxiety, albeit this fluctuates depending on the context. My own experiences with women are not positive"*. Another respondent put it as *"Men have more analytical power, and administration requires analyzing things; women cannot effectively analyze facts and figures. Administration is a role for men, and women can assist them. Women organize everything at home, making them better organizers"*. A respondent attributed this so-called inability of females of not being good administrators with their dual task at home and at work place, saying *"Women have to perform a dual task at a time at home as well as at job. They want to be a good wife, good mother, good daughter and good sister so that they are not a good administrator"*. Another respondent put it as *"I think males are good administrators because I perceive women have no standing power in their decisions and because of their sympathetic character, they are not neutral."*

4.2.2 The Socialization Process

We have found that most of the respondents receive immense support from their families even after marriage. However, an increase in the household-related responsibilities after marriage has been observed to be a major obstacle to a female's career in aiming high. When asked about the level of support from her husband, a respondent reported that *"Definitely he supports me a*

lot, we are working in the same setup, he helps me in household activities like rearing and caring of children". Responding to the same question, another respondent said, "Certainly, he is very supportive". At the same time, the respondents complained that the increased burden of household responsibilities after the marriage has restricted their growth. In the words of a respondent, "Single women can rise higher in society because of their focus. She might be able to concentrate on her work while married women cannot concentrate like single women, consequently, they lose focus on their work. Even a very determined married woman would be unable to fully focus on her work; her pace of growth would be slow. On the other hand, if a single woman is target oriented and has focus as well, she may act according to the plans and rise higher in society" As another respondent said, "Single women have no home responsibilities, while married women have liabilities, which are to be fulfilled before their professional tasks".

4.2.3. Role Conflict

Our results show that most of the time, the social roles of a working woman, such as mother, wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law, take precedence over her professional aims. Most of the respondents report that their working hours are greatly affected by their social roles. The social system of Pakistan has a deep impact on their personality, and most of them always prefer their family over work. One of the respondents stated that "[Sometimes] I limit my working hours because my home is my priority". Another respondent said almost the same thing, "Sometimes I limit my working hours when I have a problem at home". Another respondent talked about it in detail by saying, "I reduce working hours because of my home liabilities. My children are at home even the old people at home need my attention. Therefore, I go home earlier because I am responsible for home responsibilities as well."

4.3. Organizational Factors

Our results reveal the following organizational factors that affect women's participation in leadership positions in higher education institutions.

4.3.1 Gender Discrimination in Hiring and Promotion

In general, our respondents feel that there is a negligible level of gender-based discrimination in the university hiring process. Some of the respondents were of the view that discrimination happens both ways. Sometimes, the selection of the board is dominated by females, and sometimes the other way round. The respondents are of the view that in the former situation, likelihood for the selection of a female candidates increases and vice versa. In the words of a respondent, "There is discrimination on both the male and female sides; I saw a panel with just female members, and they have a leaning towards selecting female members. I recall in college when we were taking exams, we prayed that the external would be male for the viva voice since males do not treat female students strictly. Discrimination from the male side is seen in such a way that they appreciate women as a showpiece but cannot imagine women in greater positions than males." Another respondent said that sometimes males are even undermined by saying, "Men are undervalued in the university system, while women are given an advantage due to the peculiar mindset of the male-dominated selection board committee. Favoritism arises in the judging process because male members prefer women while underestimating male members; in reality, men are more biased than women". Another respondent negated the presence of gender bias in the selection process by saying that "In our organization, equal standards are there for men and women for judgment".

4.3.2 Male Dominance

According to this research, the academic culture in Pakistan is found to be male-dominant. This somehow highlights the fact that the organizational culture differs from the

selection process. A respondent said that *"I don't know what's going through their minds, but I believe that envy is ingrained in them. Being socialized to believe that women are less valuable than men make it difficult for them to accept women's dominance. Women are inherently jealous as well"*. In response to a question regarding the low presence of females on leadership position, one of the respondent said *"In our society women have no right to choose their life partners then leadership rights are far away"*. Another respondent said that *"This Male dominated society has become barrier for women in occupying leadership positions"*.

4.4 Discussion

The study has identified various factors that influence women's involvement in leadership positions in higher education institutions. First and foremost, it is observed that women lack the necessary confidence needed to take up a leadership position in higher education institutions. This finding could be attributed to the fact that, in Pakistan, women are raised in a specific manner of modesty that prevents them from being vocal and pragmatic, which sometimes is required to be a leader. Qin, Torres & Madsen (2019) also recognize that women necessary confidence level and show hesitation to tell other people that being a working women, they are a dominant part of the organization.

Our results on home responsibilities and role conflict are in line with extant literature that females, most of the time, are unable to balance between professional and family life due to their home responsibilities, which creates a role conflict as well. Greenhouse, Ziegert & Allen (2012) also found that women work hard, but they are emotionally involved with their kids. When women do not understand their responsibility at home then problems do arise, and women want to solve them as a priority. This creates a dominance of family life over the professional life of women.

In gender-role stereotypes, we have found that women, in general, feel that administrative leadership roles suit men well, and women in administrative leadership positions remain a misfit. The same is reported by Alexander & Elias (2022). The majority of the respondents also believe that women lack the guts to handle administrative tasks because administration requires the ability to make spontaneous decisions, and women lack it. Our results on male dominance in the society are the same as those of Wood (2019). He claims that society has gender specific expectations. He further argues that the patriarchal system and male dominance have formed the structure of leadership, communication, imaging, and culture. The majority of respondents in this study stated that women need social security and cannot move without the support of a male partner.

Furthermore, women find it challenging to walk outside by themselves because of society's negative attitudes. It was a component of our socialization process, which treats babies differently based on their gender. After they are groomed, this becomes a part of their lives. Tlaiss & Kauser (2011) acknowledged that women's professional responsibilities took a backseat to family matters. The primary duty of women is to care for and raise their children. Social expectations that women should take care of all household duties, including caring for and raising children, are the root of many problems. One of the main causes of women's under-representation in educational leadership at the higher education level is their dual obligations.

Furthermore, it is evident that men predominate in Pakistan's higher education institutions and are in a position to make important decisions. Women in male-dominated organizations are not given leadership positions by male members in positions of control. The majority of the study's female participants felt that organizations are reluctant to grant women authority. Men find it difficult to accept women's authority since our upbringing reinforces it.

5. CONCLUSION, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The study highlights the multiple challenges that adversely affect women's leadership in Higher Education Institutions. The study identifies three primary categories of factors affecting women's leadership, which are personal, interpersonal, and organizational. Personal challenges are also a cause of concern as women are mostly homemakers; they lack confidence, and their ambitions are dissimilar to those of their male counterparts, thus making it very difficult for women to seek leadership posts. This study deals with interpersonal factors, among them gender-role stereotyping and societal norms that brainwash the society into believing that leadership is a male trait, thus dissuading women from pursuing leadership positions. Further, other organizational factors such as gender discrimination, where females are not considered for promotion or even hired for leadership positions, also hamper women's representation in leadership positions.

This study presents a different perspective compared to the existing literature, reflecting changes in societal norms and values. Most previous research, including studies by Tiwary & Gupta (2022), Zulu (2016), Tabak (1997), and Reddy (2006), suggests that organizational factors are the primary causes of women's under-representation in leadership roles. However, this study highlights that personal factors and cultural stereotyping are more influential in this regard.

The society instills the division of responsibilities and sex-role stereotyping as part of the upbringing process. Women face role conflict when balancing the dual responsibilities of home and work, as men are not typically taught by their elders to share domestic duties. In organizational settings, women encounter male dominance, where authority and power are often concentrated in the hands of men, leading to gender discrimination at various stages.

The following policy strategies are proposed by the study as ways of improving the leadership positions of women in academia. The institutions should encourage and enforce gender awareness programs in order to fight stereotypes within organizations. Policies that promote flexibility at the workplace and especially for women with family responsibilities should be encouraged to enable them to balance their jobs and family, to eradicate role conflict and issues arising from home responsibilities. In addition, the programs related to the provision of mentorship and networking can help women to be empowered and thus assist in giving them the required direction into leadership positions.

Finally, institutions should encourage gender equity in the hiring and rewards systems of higher education institutions to offer women equal chances of getting leadership positions. Gender equity policies should be assessed on a regular basis in order to determine the impact they have on an organization.

This study, while insightful, acknowledges a key limitation in its scope. The findings are specifically derived from data collected at the University of Sargodha. Therefore, the generalizability of these results to other higher education institutions across Pakistan, or in a broader international context, may be limited. Future research should aim to explore the factors affecting women's participation in leadership positions by encompassing multiple institutions across Pakistan to enhance the applicability and robustness of the findings.

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