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ABSENT LEADERS - A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION**Dr. Anisa Jan¹**

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ABSTRACT

Women's absence in top management positions in general and in the higher education sector in particular is a major concern for academia. The article discusses the issue of gender disparities within the higher education sector. Specifically the research is aimed at studying empirically the relationship between increased presence of women in academic leadership positions and perceived positive impact on progress of women in the professorial ranks and to analyze the organizational, social and relational barriers that prevent women from taking up positions of power in higher academics. Descriptive research design was used for the study where in data was gathered using structured questionnaire and the data was analyzed using statistical methods. Findings indicate strong evidence that various organizational, social and relational barriers hinder the journey of woman academicians towards the positions of power in higher education. In the end, suggestions for potentially promising levers for change to speed the progress of women faculty in our academic institutions are provided.

Keywords: Absent Leaders; Women Leadership; Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Concerns about gender disparities within education sector have been long standing in many parts of the world (Davies 1990, Dorsey *et al* 1989, Gray 1989, Shakeshaft 1887, Saint 1992). Although women currently comprise half of the workforce, they are still greatly under-represented at the top levels of organizations. The resulting "tokenism" continues to perpetuate an unequal playing field in terms of advancement opportunities for women: women continue to be subject to labeling, excessive scrutiny, and stereotyping as they attempt to rise up the organizational hierarchy (Kanter, 1977).

Research surrounding women's less presence at the top in higher education has been ongoing for several decades. Early research shows that there is a "chilly" academic climate experienced by women faculty, administrators, and graduate students. A range of behaviors, from overt to subtle—including assignment to more and/or more time intensive but less powerful committees, support rather than leadership roles, resource inequities, stereotyping, and unclear professional etiquette creating male discomfort which exacerbates social isolation—combine to discount, discourage, and disadvantage women at all levels in academe (Sandler 1986).

Later empirical tests demonstrate gender bias favoring men in the evaluation of candidates for faculty positions. Steinpreis, Anders, and Ritzke (1999) showed that identical curriculum vitae produced higher evaluations and greater preference to hire if the candidate was portrayed as male rather than female; both male and female evaluators exhibited this bias. Although recent research reveals increasing prevalence of women throughout the various academic ranks, yet the progress is mainly due mainly to greater numbers of women applicants rather than diminishing gender bias. Continuing barriers for women seem especially pronounced in departments of science and engineering (Etzkowitz, Kumelgor, and Uzzi 2000; Nelson and Rogers 2004), where only 19% of full professors are women in four-year colleges and universities overall, with even lower representation in research institutions (NSF Science and Engineering Indicators 2008).

There still seems to be a tacit assumption that women manage differently than men; that they make inferior leaders. The majority of men still think that women must be exceptionally talented to advance to an administrative position. One man out of three still thinks that women will never be totally accepted in leadership roles (Crosthwaite, 1986: 178-180). Such psychological barriers, on the part of women as well as men, have frequently blocked the movement of women into top administrative positions in American community colleges.

Given the strength of the belief that leadership is a masculine domain, one would expect to find a volume of literature clearly delineating the "masculine traits" associated with effective leadership. This, however, is not the case. A recent study involving 300 male and female administrators at American community and junior colleges revealed no statistically significant differences in the overall leadership effectiveness of the participants (Jones, 1986: 118-119). Yet the myth regarding gender-related differences in ability still persists. This subtle form of sex discrimination, still common to many institutions, including higher education, can be just as damaging to a career as the more blatant forms. Educational institutions tend to be tradition bound, focusing on the past as the reference point when planning the future (Arnes and O'Banion, 1983). Since women have rarely held senior level administrative positions in higher education, it may be more difficult for them to acquire those positions in the years ahead unless they take carefully planned actions to advance their careers. Therefore, women must seek ways to improve their own opportunities for advancement. The suggestions that follow should prove helpful to women seeking higher level positions in college administration:

It is by now well established that a majority of the senior positions in the universities are held by men, while women are concentrated at the lower rungs. Data on the proportion of women in senior academic leadership positions in higher education institutions shows an abysmal presence of women in strategic leadership positions. Therefore, a pertinent question: why do women academics stagnate and remain relatively disadvantaged when it comes to promotions and leadership positions?

Research on gender and leadership in universities suggests that objectivity and neutrality of organizations is a myth. The functioning and the place of women in educational institutions have been re-examined from a gender perspective, which led to the understanding that the organizations are social constructions. Further, the system being gender-neutral is not enough, it has to be pro-women, i.e., make conscious efforts to integrate women into the system; neither access nor equal participation in leadership and management is possible.

Another myth is that women who can access higher education are from privileged homes and, therefore, they do not have any problems in the academe. However, the gendered processes and structures in higher education are critical to the creation and reproduction of gender differences. The reality of academic life for women, irrespective of their class, is different from the ideal of academic institutions, and the universities do not promote merit and equality (Chanana, 2008: 8-9)

A multitude of factors impact women's advancement through either the professorial or administrative ranks. Many barriers are embedded in the gendered organization, including the so-called "second shift" (Martin 1994, 409), where women juggle home and professional responsibilities, compounded by "the

coincidence of the biological clock and the tenure clock”(Martin 1994, 409) and the “invisible job”(Martin 1994, 410) of greater academic service roles.

Female academicians have to face a multitude of barriers right from the recruitment process and through all steps of their career path. Empirical tests demonstrate gender bias favoring men in the evaluation of candidates for faculty positions—identical curriculum vitae produced higher evaluations and greater preference to hire if the candidate was portrayed as male rather than female; both male and female evaluators exhibited this bias (Steinpreis, Anders, and Ritzke 1999). Women are not included in the all-male formal or informal networks in departments and universities, thereby excluding them from national and international networks. No doubt, women have started establishing girls’ networks; yet such women are still a minority. They need the same socialization into the profession that men get from male networks and sponsors.

The gendered institutional environment creates an unequal playing field through organizational work policies, interpersonal networks, and embedded attitudes favoring the advancement of men. A range of behaviors, from overt to subtle—including assignment to more and/or more time intensive but less powerful committees, support rather than leadership roles, resource inequities, stereotyping, and unclear professional etiquette combine to discount, discourage, and disadvantage women at all levels in academe (Sandler 1986).

Women, with a different life experience including career interruptions for child birth and rearing, domestic responsibilities, and socialization to be supportive rather than dominant, are systematically disadvantaged in this male-normed institutional environment (Acker 1992; Bailyn 2003; Hochschild 1994; Kanter 1977; Martin 1994). Stereotypes of male and female roles unconsciously pervade attitudes of both men and women, leading to a persistent pattern of overrating of men and underrating of women when work-related behavior is compared to entrenched expectations (Valian 1998).

Higher proportion of women in strategic positions can facilitate institutional change. More and more women in higher positions in educational institutions can improve recruitment, retention, and advancement of women within the professorial ranks by providing greater understanding of pragmatic work policy obstacles, enhanced networking possibilities, and demonstration of a shifting organizational culture.

It is logical to presume that greater numbers of women in the administrative hierarchy can jump start an organization’s change process by facilitating advancement of women through the ranks. Their personal experience with pragmatic work policy obstacles and inherent understanding of subterranean barriers faced by women provide insight which, combined with levers of authority in their positions, can be instrumental to improve recruitment, retention, and promotion of female faculty. Ultimately necessary but immensely time consuming efforts to shift institutional culture away from that of the gendered organization need not fully play out (for decades!) before meaningful change can begin. In fact, having more women in formal leadership positions actually models the desired culture change in a conspicuous and powerful way, while opening valuable networking opportunities for both women and men to experience a new outlook. Rather than relying on familiar tactics adding more women at the front end of the academic process and encouraging them through the career maze, we believe a demonstrated commitment and proactive approach that increases women in academic leadership positions will speed progress of women toward fuller participation in the professorial ranks.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

There are very few women in leadership positions in the administration and management of universities. The gendered organization and functioning of the universities, on the one hand, and the constraints of socialization, dual careers and their impact on the goalposts of women faculty, on the other hinders women to move up in the system. There is a glass ceiling and women faculty has to understand the gendered nature of higher educational institutions, their governance and the male-centred academic leadership.

While representation of women at higher professorial ranks is disappointing, women are even scarcer on the administrative career ladder. Relatively few women advance to top academic leadership positions such as dean, provost, president or chancellor. Therefore, women's invisibility at top levels in the system is the focus of this research study. The study aims to analyze the proportion of women at higher positions in the institutions of higher learning. Further the study attempts to probe into the social and organizational barriers that prevent them from taking up positions of administrative and managerial leadership.

Attaining a critical mass of women in the leadership structure is especially important to position an institution for change. Therefore the study empirically tests whether a greater prevalence of women in academic leadership positions facilitates progress for women in the professorial ranks. The National Educational Policy, 1986, recognizes the fact that women needed special supports and programmes in order to bridge the gap between the participation and representation of women and men in the higher educational system. Therefore women are potentially promising levers for change to speed the progress of women faculty in our academic institutions and therefore there is need to increase their presence in leadership positions in these institutions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the organizational, social and relational barriers that prevents women from taking up positions of administrative and managerial leadership.
2. To study empirically the relationship between increased presence of women in academic leadership positions and perceived greater possibility of progress for women in the professorial ranks.
3. To suggest potentially promising levers for change to speed the progress of women faculty in our academic institutions.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

H1: Organizational barriers prevent women from taking up positions of administrative & managerial leadership

H2: Social barriers prevent women from taking up positions of administrative & managerial leadership.

H3: Relational barriers prevent women from taking up positions of administrative and managerial leadership

H4: More women leaders in higher education can contribute positively in the upliftment of other women employees.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was used for the study. Responses were collected from 200 respondents (both male and female) across different universities and colleges across the state of Jammu and Kashmir regarding the issue through a structured questionnaire. Other stakeholders like students, policy makers, organizations working for women issues were also approached for their opinion. The respondent base was chosen using stratified random sampling method and efforts were taken to make the sample representative of the population in terms of all the dimensions like gender, age, experience, designation and many more.

A structured questionnaire using 5- point Likert scale was used as research instrument. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha Test and the Alpha score came out to be .73. The data collected was tabulated and then analysed using various statistical methods like mean, standard deviation, ANNOVA, using SPSS.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 1. Relative Impact of Different Barriers

Barriers		Mean	S. D.	Rank
Organizational	Glass Ceiling	3.34	1.02	3
	Harassment	3.11	1.04	7
	Lack of Mentors	3.26	0.89	5
Social	Patriarchal System	3.67	0.86	1
	Discrimination	3.31	1.12	4
	Stereotypical Roles	3.14	1.21	6
Relational Barriers	Non-Supportive Partner	3.05	1.13	8
	Children	3.54	0.97	2
	Career Moves of Partner	2.97	0.86	9

Table 1 shows the relative impact of perceived barriers that hinder the growth of women to higher positions in institutions of higher learning. With a mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 0.86 it is seen that patriarchal system is seen as the greatest obstacle in the growth of women. Having and attending to children is found to be the second biggest obstacle in the journey of women to higher positions with a mean of 3.54 and S.D of 0.97. Third largest barrier to the growth of women to positions of power in higher education is seen to be the glass ceiling in the institutions of higher learning. This barrier gets an overall mean of 3.34 on 5-point Likert scale and a standard deviation of 1.02.

Career moves by partners (mean = 2.97, S.D. = 0.86) and non-supportive partners (mean = 3.05, S.D. = 1.13) are seen to be least affecting the career path of women suggesting that relational barriers are somewhat diminishing.

Table 2. Relative Impact of Different Barriers across Gender

Barriers		Gender	Mean	S.D.
organizational	Glass Ceiling	Male	3.14	0.75
		Female	3.86	0.78
	Harassment	Male	2.97	0.92
		Female	3.35	0.97
	Lack of Mentors	Male	3.11	0.86
		Female	3.89	0.74
Social	Patriarchal System	Male	3.21	0.88
		Female	3.95	0.63
	Discrimination	Male	2.93	0.81
		Female	3.83	0.87
	Stereotypical Roles	Male	2.89	0.91
		Female	3.56	0.86
Relational	Non-Supportive Partner	Male	2.56	0.76
		Female	3.44	0.78
	Children	Male	3.26	0.94
		Female	3.97	0.83
	Career Moves of Partner	Male	2.56	0.75
		Female	3.24	0.98

Table 2 shows the relative impact of perceived barriers that hinder the growth of women to higher positions in institutions of higher learning across gender. It is seen that overall men tend to downplay the different social, organizational and relational barriers that hamper the growth of women. This

suggests that men are still not cognizant of the fact that they have a role to play in changing these gendered organizations.

Further it is seen that when the responses of both men and women are taken together there is large difference of opinion among both genders (as shown by high values of standard deviation in table 1). However within the genders the opinion seems to be more coherent (as shown by smaller values of standard deviation in table 2). Thus there is huge perceptual difference towards the issue among men and women.

SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings suggest that we still have to go a far way to remove or at least reduce the organizational, social and relational barriers that women face in institutions of higher learning. These are institutions that shape the psyche of youth and therefore our future generations and if we want any real change in the way women are represented at various decision making bodies we will have to start with our institutions of higher learning.

Women need to fight the patriarchal system and make their way through different obstacles to the decision making bodies of the higher educational institutions. Further they need to advocate for practicing non discrimination in selection processes by ensuring equal rights in the appropriate steps to higher positions of management, use of meritocracy and gender representation. There is a need for educational management boards to balance the selection and ranking of administrative-cum-managerial staff.

Adequate access to organizational resources should be provided to women in these institutions to enable them to grow. Further sufficient opportunities to develop their skills should be provided. Better organizational efforts are needed to ensure that women receive ongoing coaching and mentoring. Women should be encouraged to attend professional development courses, which are extremely useful for their struggle

Further the findings suggest that there is still a huge gap in the way men and women perceive the careers of women and the barriers that hinder the growth of women to higher positions. The new agenda for change can only be 're-written by women in their own hand' (Cockburn 1991: 63) and it is only they who can ensure that the fight for equal rights moves from being a mere addendum to oratory, by the powers that be, to reality. Also women, together with other concerned parties, need to guard against a more sinister discrimination which seeks to discriminate one woman against another. Women need to be aware that they can and should register their objection to discriminatory comments/questions during interviews, regardless of the fact that they may prejudice their chances because a registered objection adds weight to the women's campaign to be taken seriously. Further women need to identify leaders in their organizations who support their development and work for them. In order to remove the stereotype that women are not fit for certain jobs more and more women should take up challenging assignments and make efforts to complete them with zeal and zest.

CONCLUSION

The present paper was an endeavor to study gender sensitivity regarding women's absence in top management positions in general and in the higher education sector. The research paper was aimed at making in-depth analysis of gender disparities within the higher education sector. Specifically the research was aimed at studying empirically the relationship between increased presence of women in academic leadership positions and perceived positive impact on progress of women in the professorial ranks and to analyze the organizational, social and relational barriers that prevent women from taking up positions of power in higher academics. The previous research shows that majority of the senior positions in the universities are held by men, while women are concentrated at the lower rungs. Data on the proportion of women in senior academic leadership positions in higher education institutions shows an abysmal presence of women in strategic leadership positions.

The study revealed that the patriarchal system is seen as the greatest obstacle in the growth of women. Having and attending to children is found to be the second biggest obstacle in the journey of women to higher positions. Third largest barrier to the growth of women to positions of power in higher education is seen to be the glass ceiling in the institutions of higher learning. Further, it was found that overall men tend to downplay the different social, organizational and relational barriers that hamper the growth of women which means that men are still not cognizant of the fact that they have a role to play in changing these gendered organizations. Therefore, it is concluded from the study that various organizational, social and relational barriers hinder the journey of woman academicians towards the positions of power in higher education sector.

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