A PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN PAKISTAN

By

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ABSTRACT

The researcher is stimulated to work on the growing trends of women leadership. The problem has been designed to investigate the factors influencing the emergence of women leadership at higher education level in Pakistan. On the basis of the studies conducted by Oplatka (2006) and Cubillo, Brown, 2003, it was assumed that specific factors influence the emergence of the women success in the society.

The researcher used a mechanism of interacting with ten successful women leaders through in-depth semi-structured interviews to find out the secret of attaining their positions as leaders. The study led to the findings that women in leading positions were highly motivated and ambitious. Their elevated positions were attributed to their supportive families (particularly the father and husband), who valued education, and their equal treatment with their male siblings. They were challenged by the incongruence of their roles as female leaders relative to the prevailing social values and expectations towards women and their traditional role in society.

Keywords: Women, Leadership, Higher Education, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

The pace of change in the role and status of women has greatly been elevated in Pakistan. Legally and constitutionally, women are assigned equal status to men but the institutions of casts particularly and the prevailing value systems are still a lag between the implementation and the neutralization of the sprit of male dominance (UNICEF, 2006). Though the number of highly educated women in the proportion is still very low compared to the developed countries but the rise in number of women leaders, especially in urban areas of Pakistan shows that society is going through a process of re-adjustment of the traditionally set social roles of men and women in the society (Lari, 2000). Women are holding the positions previously reserved for men, like police, the administrative services, executives and management posts. There have been now an up rise in the number of women participation in National and provisional assemblies. They are becoming ministers, speakers, governors and prime ministers.

Research studies indicate certain social, cultural and economic factors framing emergence of the women leaders (Shvedova, 2002, Cubillo, Brown, 2003). Pakistani women are also influenced by unique and specific socio-cultural factors which are a part of their heritage and tradition along with the economic factor.

In recent years, modernization, development and economic pressures also influence opportunities for women and their professional development that increased their number in teaching and educational leadership within many developing countries (Handelman, 2000). Pakistan also has developed large-scale programs for increasing women participation in education at all levels (Sales, 1999). One of the major goals of Pakistani education is to reduce gender disparity and empower women (Kirk, 2004). The National Education Policy 1998-2010 highlighted "equality in education" as a right for girls and boys. Documents indicate that despite many cultural barriers, women have now started coming at management level positions in educational setups and are competing to hold higher positions.

It is vital to highlight the success of women that how they develop leadership traits as narrations could provide role-modles for other women.

This study focuses on the interviews of successful women

to gather personal accounts of their career experiences as the objective of the study was to get a comprehension of dynamics of women's careers with the intention of exploration of the factors responsible for the success of the women in their careers. Czarniawska suggests inquiry technique as best suited method for the interpretation and presentation of lived experiences (2004) because people get inspirations, look into their positions and articulate their patterns of life accordingly. It was assumed that specific factors influence the emergence of the women leaders at higher education level which served as the primary hypothesis of the study.

1. Methodology

The study comprised of all the women leaders working at higher education institutions of Pakistan. Ten senior women administrators holding positions as professors, directors, deans, and heads of department with high-level responsibilities were selected randomly from five higher education institutions. They were consulted and approached for semi-structured interviews to investigate the problem. The interview technique was used as the means of data collection as it enables the gleaning of required information from the respondents out of a detailed conversation regarding the issue because this tool allows flexibility to explore concepts as fully as possible, clarification, ensures communication and permissibility to probe for the required information along with the provision of revealing unanticipated but significant information. Interviews were conducted on one-to-one basis with mostly held at their offices. Participants were given as much time as they required narrating their stories of success making sure that main focused issues of the study must be addressed. Interviews were structured on the basis of factors emerging from the review of relevant literature to as the factors affecting the success of women's careers. The topics discussed to investigate the factors were the role of parents, siblings, extended family, and home environment in upbringing of the careers of the women, individual's own commitment towards the development of leadership skills, perceived future goals, challenges faced to excel, social and cultural influences and organizational status.

The interview questions were divided into different sections. First section contained questions relating to the personal profile of the participants which was optional to answer. Second section dealt with the components contributing towards the successes of the interviewees. Third section dealt with the problems faced by the interviewees during their journey to success.

Interviews were, audio recorded to enhance reliability and validity which were transcribed later. The transcripts were then returned to the research participants to remove the confusions and for that, short follow-up interviews were conducted later on with two participants to clear the disagreements and were analyzed then.

2. Procedure for Analyzing Data

The transcribed interviews were analyzed and interpreted by the use of comparative approach (Straus and Corbin, 1990). Common themes were identified by the use of content analysis of the interview data.

Following were the identified themes of the study.

- Family support
- Inspiration/ Commitment
- Self-confidence/ Ambition
- Organizational culture/situation/surroundings
- Socio-culture environment

3. Data Analysis

Table 1 shows the initial part of the interviews contained questions such as age, marital status and their current position. The women's average age was 50 years. In terms of marital status, 70% percent were married, 20% were single, and 10% were divorced. Results of the interviews were analyzed theme wise.

Participants	Organization	Position	Age	Marital Status
1	International Islamic University	Director	64	Married
2	International Islamic University	Head of Department	40	Married
3	Fatima Jinnah University	Dean	52	Married
4	Fatima Jinnah University	Chairperson	48	Unmarried
5	Quaid-i-Azam University	Head of Department	49	Married
6	Quaid-i-Azam University	Professor	51	Married
7	Higher Education Commission	Director General	47	Unmarried
8	Higher Education Commission	Director	48	Married
9	Arid-Agriculture University	Dean	51	Divorced
10	Arid-Agriculture University	Professor	53	Married

Table 1. Interviewees' Profiles

3.1 Family Support

One of the very basic influential factors that shape up women's behavior in the development process of leadership is parental support. Research study identifies the role of family as a key factor in developing leadership qualities in women (Cubillo and Brown 2003). Discussion with women educational leaders relating to family background / history revealed that parental support was paramount to all respondents. In response to a question about parents' role in their up-bringing, education and influence on their career building, generally women identified both father and mother.

A woman commented

> "The position and success that I have attained is not exclusively an individual effort but, it has been achieved with the support of my family"

Another significant factor came up in the study that these women have emerged to such noted positions with a major support of a male at their back. Mostly before marriage it was father and after marriage, husband. This paternal support may have been a consequence of the strongly patriarchal society into which these women were born and socialized, where the supreme power is in the hand of the male member of the family (Moghadam, 2003). This phenomenon resolves to another important aspect of women leadership such as domestic conflict resolution. No matter what and who a woman is, she is expected to come up to certain level of commitment towards liabilities at home but cooperation from male fraction of her life makes it easier to peruse her career (Aryee, 1992).

A woman commented

> "I would say, the credit of women, progress largely goes to…men when they are supportive, women get and avail as much opportunities to get progress in life as they want".

Another woman said

> "I had great support of my father and then my husband was my real strength as I got married when I was in college so reaching to this level was only possible with their extraordinary support".

It is evident from the data collected through the interviews that education has always been valued high among the families of the women leaders.

> "My parents believed in education and we grew up to view education as a necessity, though my parents were illiterate, they realized the importance of education in changing peoples' lives; they had the understanding that it opens doors and opportunities that would be impossible otherwise".

It is noteworthy that these women leaders received support not only by their parents and husbands but also by their extended family members and other relatives. It is because of the traditional values of cooperation on which Pakistani society is based. These findings are different from Loderstedt (2005) study conducted in the west, that depict women may forgo motherhood for their career development. Majority of the women in the study also attribute their career advancement to their extended families. Family support helps them in carrying out multiple roles simultaneously by sharing family responsibilities. Their family members facilitated their career development by looking after their children, taking care of household matters and even helping their social interaction on their behalf.

> "I can't forget the facilitation of my in-laws, particularly when my children were small, it was about to impossible to manage every thing successfully if they were not behind me".

3.2 Inspiration and Commitment

Inspiration and commitment also emerged as two major factors out of the analysis of the interviews. Wells found that successful women leaders had positive role models throughout their life (1998). Women in this study had been initiators at one level or the other but somehow, they seem picking courage, following footsteps of certain great figures of their life time. It is observed that 80% of the respondents named, mother, father or teacher as inspiration or support and considered them as major contributors to their success.

Some comments of women who were deeply influenced by parents

"My parents have been my best life teachers in helping me think about how I want to live my life. My father was my inspiration, instilling in us the passion to attain goals in life and my mother supported all of our efforts and encouraged us to work hard. The lessons I learned from both of my parents have been always valuable in my life."

"My parents particularly my mother has been one of the strongest influences on my personality. She remained a great source of inspiration, she taught me to live with a huge sense of accomplishment that made me feel ready to conquer anything. Thank for her hard work and making it possible for me to achieve my goals in life".

Another woman said

"The role of the mother was most prominent in our up-bringing, she was an educationalist who always emphasized the importance of education in our lives, I grew up with a very strong mother who worked hard to raise us and provided a sense of leadership in the home."

Women also spoke of the profound influence their teachers had in their development and growth.

"My teacher was my mentor; she was a big source of inspiration for me. I learnt a lot from her, without her I would never have been sufficiently open-minded to even consider present position as career".

Some women briefly mentioned the positive influences of extended family members, neighbours, and friends.

It is also worth- noting that these women leaders were committed to their academic and professional career which contributed to their growth, development, and success. 90% of these women said that they had a high commitment throughout their academic period and professional career which, they thought is the major factor responsible for their uplift.

"I used to be committed with myself that gave me extra energy and motivation to do well".

Another woman commented

"I always meet challenges on the basis of my sound

commitment because I want to be a in a competitive situation".

These women also spoke out of their involvement in co-curricular and social activities (speech contexts, participation in plays, sports) which they anticipate as an element of speech development and growth of sportsmen sprit that further carried them to high social esteem.

"I was involved in many cultural, social and special interest groups during my college and university life, such participation helped me a lot in developing valuable leadership skills".

3.3 Self-Confidence and Ambitiousness

Women in career are dedicated, focused and real hard workers. These qualities influence the self-confidence of a person and make them more ambitious. Aycan examined the factors influencing women career advancement reveals that self-confidence is one of the significant factors contributing to their success (2004). On the other hand Low self- confidence is considered to be one of the known obstacles in women's career development (Shvedova, 2002).

High achieving women placed great value to self-reliance in their professional growth. Majority of them spoke of challenges and difficult times they faced in the beginning of their career, which gave them more strength thereafter, in spite of having faced unwelcoming and often hostile attitude particularly from male side; all women displayed quite a high level of self-confidence and self-esteem. They have confidence in their knowledge, abilities and were quite certain that they can complete any task.

Some comments of women are

"I know how to ride over the complex situations, I had lot of obstructions in the environment but they were not barrier to me as I did not allow them to be".

"Challenges and tough times helped me develop confidence even more than the earlier times".

"What I learn from life is that never depend on others, it is self-reliance that generates energy and hope; it makes me strong, autonomous, and ultimately successful".

Building self-confidence for women helps in achieving goals in the career and enjoys strong relationships. Remarks reveal that more challenges, tough time and experiences in life make them more confident and more ambitious. These women were given such responsibilities from their very childhood that help them to face the challenges in life.

Findings show that family plays a vital role to involve their girl child in more responsible activities to make them independent and confident from their early childhood.

A woman commented

"I was shouldered with different responsibilities at home at very young age which was quite unusual for my age, but I believe it moved me into a leading role and certainly that built my self-confidence".

Such responses from the interviewees reveal that those who enhance themselves to solve the problems rather than becoming a victim to the situation always gain profit in life. Job-family conflict is another element which sometimes boasts up the abilities, thus, developing women's confidence level and their problem solving ability. The interviewees of the present study stated categorically that job-family conflicts gave them strength and enhance their intelligence level.

Being ambitious is another important factor came out of the women under study. These women were very ambitious, assertive and did not compromise with the traditional stereotype difficulties associated with them. Their high levels of motivation were revealed during the interviews. They visualized their roles beyond the traditional prospects.

"I am a highly ambitious person and always wanted to do something meaningful in life; since my childhood I worked hard, my initial home training extremely helped me in my leadership role".

3.4 Organizational Culture

In order to explore further, women were questioned to what extent their organization/institution has supported their progress.

60% of the sample stated that they were not satisfied by the support extended by their institutions which hurdle their

compatibility in that specific environment. One of the societal beliefs prevailing in the underdeveloped societies is that women are not capable enough to meet the demands of leadership which might be a lame excuse for not extending equal opportunities of education and employment to the women either due to scancity of resources or any other false belief system of the society.

A woman commented

"Initially my set-up was greatly troublesome for me. Males accepted me heavy heartedly and they did whatever they could………but thank God… it was my determination that supported me to survive".

Many interviewees felt that male colleagues found them threatening either due to their male dominance nature or being scared of not competitive enough to compete with women. It was also noted that males by nature don't accept women at a level higher than their own where they need to listen to the advice, orders, arguments, comments and other authoritative statements from the women whom they treat as specie of low dignity and low intelligence in their society.

As highlighted in the following extracts from their conversations

"Males do not like the orders coming from a female. Their attitude some times discourage me and make me think that why I am not one of them. Simply they do not like it that a female is their boss".

However, situation seems to be improved in the recent years with the increasing literacy rate in the society. 20% women interviewed believed that they have been treated in a similar way by their male counterparts. Some of them were very passimestic and viewed their organizations as a forum that enabled them to perform with their fullest potential.

"My supervisor appreciated my talent and facilitated me in polishing it".

3.5 Socio-Cultural Environment

The interview then moved to questions relating to overall socio-cultural environment of the society where they live.

Attitudes of people in different societies are mostly dependent on culture that significantly adds to the development of its individuals. A patriarchal society like Pakistan, men tend to hold positions of power in all spheres of life therefore, generally, gender negatively affect women's career development (Madhani 2007). A significant feature amongst all the respondents was the egalitarian nature of their home environments with regard to male/female upbringing. It is worth noting that almost all of the women interviewed for this study have reflected absence of gender while giving account of family support similar to the study conducted by Asya on Omani women (2007). Being seen equal to male children at home have given them courage to aspire bigger goals in life than just taking up traditional roles such as an ideal wife, mother, and daughter or only as woman. Data reveals that almost all of the respondents did not fit the traditional gender stereotypes in their growth experiences and described themselves equal to men.

"My family, particularly my father never ever treated us (brothers and sisters) differently. We all have been given equal opportunities throughout our career that really supported me to reach at this position".

Another woman commented

"I was raised in a home where both my parents believed in equality with children in all their treatments. I was never made feel inferior to my brother and the emphasis on education and hard work was exerted on all of us equally. My early socialization which fostered equality between male and female members of the home has prepared me in many ways to face the challenges of my job".

On the other hand, liberal family values expressed by these women do not necessarily reflect the predominant Pakistani values; however, it gives the picture of progressive elements of the Pakistani society. Data reveals that women confront problems outside the home due to the traditional expectations of women behaviour by society as a whole. Women were subjected to various challenges and had to face gender inequity experiences in society.

A woman commented

"Yes, there were crucial problems of attitudes and conventional behaviour...........and despite of all independence given by my family, it was so upsetting some times".

Other women commented

"My friends and neighbours use to say that having a family structure without financial problems, there is no need to go out for".

"As far as the society is concerned as it is male dominating so it always pushed me down. But one has to stand up and perform her role by will power and determination".

4. Findings

Women in this study have provided insights into the major influences that shaped their career paths. This study also highlights some conceptions about exclusion of women from leadership in Pakistan. The main issue that emerged out of the analysis of the interviews was the importance of familial support in shaping their thinking and enabling them to aspire to higher education and career development. Women in the study grew up in homes that fostered equal treatment with their male siblings; valued education; a supportive father and the freedom to be what they want, all of which promoted their self confidence, assertiveness and a strong sense of identity in dealing within male dominated environments. Women in this study displayed remarkable qualities of self-resilience. These women were very competitive which is somewhat different from the Madsen; findings indicate women with moderate competency level and holding high positions (2007). Most of the women in the study were motivated to achieve excellence in academic and co-curricular activities to acquire positions. These comments are in congruence with research pertaining to women in developing countries who often mention family support, particularly the influence of one of the parents (predominantly fathers) to have influenced their desire to get an education and break the tradition (Riphenburg, 1998). These women had leadership opportunities during their academic period as well as home environment also

provide them a chance to polish their skills that had strong impact on their personalities. Sample women participated in different kinds of activities such as sports, debates and drama. That provided them internal strength to compete and courage to face difficult situations. These women got strength from a wide variety of individuals for their personal development. The most influential individuals include parents and teachers. Some events and times in these women's life were difficult and challenging but those experiences were considered most beneficial for effective and successful leadership.

5. Recommendations and Implications

On the bases of the findings of the study, the following Recommendations and Implications were made:

- Women who rise up and get hold of leadership roles especially in educational administration have to struggle hard depend upon family and socio-cultural support. Building self-confidence for women and boosting self-esteem will open the door to professional and personal success.

- Organizations have to provide a more supportive environment and understanding that the work they produce is good to their professional women leaders so that they may perform to their fullest potential.

- Study ends up with a plea that societal development needs to be accelerated in order to bring the required strength of women in the main stream developmental projects.

Conclusion

Women face a host of stereotypes and environmental challenges, especially in leadership roles. These include exclusion from informal networks, gender-based stereotypes, lack of role-models in leadership positions and inhospitable corporate cultures.

Women still have a long way to go before they are treated equally to men as leaders; though things are gradually changing as a result of more women entering into the workforce. Pakistani society is a developing society and is in the phase of social re-adjustment of male and female role. Society's attitude in general is changing slowly towards women's empowerment but there is still more to

do for the issue. Equal opportunities are extended to both the genders in all fields of life but somehow the flow of these opportunities is still not equal in the real sense of the word.

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