

Ancestral Landscapes and Women's Career Headway to the Top

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on an exploratory study that aimed to examine the strengths of familial ties that contribute to women's career advancement to the top management positions in the field of higher education and management. It was assumed that nature of these settings might obstruct the functioning of public policies and programs for attaining effective and sustainable development in the quantity and quality of employment for women. This study was expected that woman officers' perceptions of the difficulties and support and the strategies they have proposed for improving this situation, hopefully, will bring their insights to a wider audience. Such knowledge can enhance the management of women's human resources and their careers in the cultural specific context. Aiming that, this study investigated different aspects by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion with the participants and found dynamics factors influencing women's career advancement to the top.

KEYWORDS

Women's Career Advancement, Familial Ties, Senior Management Positions, Women Career in Islamic Republic of Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

It is broadly documented that very few women succeed in top management positions (Arvate, Galilea, & Todescat, 2018; Catalyst, 2013) despite having made great progress in the workforce (Bagilhole and White, 2011; Coleman, 2011; Adamson & Kelan, 2019) and having increased their enrollment in higher education (Nidiffer, 2010; Morley, 2013). Most countries still do not have strong representation of women in senior management positions (Jauhar & Lau, 2018; Cross, and Linehan, 2006; Bagilhole, 2009; Konrad et al., 2008).

Similarly, in other countries, in Pakistan women hold very few senior management positions (Mirza and Jabeen, 2011; Shah and Shah, 2012; Salahuddin, Mahmood, & Ahmad, 2021). Comparatively, women's share of professional jobs has increased but they are concentrated mainly in traditional occupations, such as education and health. (Jabeen and Iqbal, 2010). Women have made less progress in legal, political, economic, administrative and decision-making positions (Ibid). This inequality raises many questions and has led me to undertake this in-depth study on the factors influencing women's career progression to senior management positions in higher education. In the subsequent sections, the paper reviews the relevant literature on factors influencing women's career progression, presents the research question and methodology, discusses the research findings and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many authors have shown that the existence and persistence of stereotypical cultural practices and socialization and gender biases explain the poor representation of women in senior management roles (Angus, 2020; Curry 2000; Cubillo and Brown, 2003; Embry et al., 2008; Shah, 2009 Shah and Shah, 20120. Miler (2005) defines societal norms as everything that adds to shaping society what it is, guides and directs what people do in communicating values and also determines how they do so. It develops implicit and explicit biases, negative gender role perceptions, and stereotypic social values about women's abilities, management performance, and leadership attitudes (Breda, Jouini, Napp, & Thebault, 2020; Shakeshaft, 2006; Mirza and Jabeen, 2011).

Other research has provided evidence that these traditional stereotypes of women and men predominate in work settings particularly in relation to the upper level management positions (Schein, 2001) and have a strong impact on women's career development (Forster, 2001; Buddhapriya, 2009). For example, Moorosi (2000:7) notes how an ingrained societal perspective which maintains that "a woman's place is in the home" has contributed to the exclusion of women from senior management positions and causes gender inequality in society. Blackmore, et al. (2006) suggest that there is a huge impact of this perception on women's access and entry into positions of top management. From the Pakistani perspective, Jabeen and

Jadoon (2008) suggest that cultural and social beliefs, attitudes and practices prevent girls from benefitting from educational opportunities and subsequently in gaining access to top managerial positions. Cubillo and Brown (2003) found similar examples of stereotypic expectations and social and cultural expectations as barriers to women's careers in China, Cyprus, Dominica, Gambia, Greece, Indonesia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Zambia. These societies failed to recognize women's potential. While many researchers have asserted that gender role stereotypes miscalculate and under-represent women's actual qualities and capabilities and continue to manipulate decisions regarding women's promotion and advancement to senior management (Jenny et al., 2011). As a result women are perceived as less competent for positions of power (Davidson and Burke, 1994). Mann (2009) also asserts that women and men continue to be viewed differently with respect to many traits that have long been included in traditional gender stereotypes and as a result it is assumed that management is a masculine domain and men continue to hold senior-level positions (Blackmore, 1999; Binns and Kerfoot, 2011). Professional women persistently find themselves surrounded by such perceptions (Bardoel et al., 2011). These are hard to eliminate from organizations (Greyvenstein, 2000). Moorosi (2010) argues that women's preference for management positions was narrowed by family responsibilities. The participants in her study felt that they could not seek promotion early in their careers because they had family commitments. Uneven work-family responsibilities create pressure for working women. They can find it difficult to balance their personal and professional lives and therefore be reluctant to take on work responsibilities (Scott et al., 2008). Foster (2001) also found that despite the very genuine progress that women have made over the last several years in many professions, women continue to take a greater responsibility for domestic responsibilities, even if this impedes or even stops the progress of their careers. Historically, as well as in recent years, there has been considerable research on work and family life (Kossek et al., 2010) particularly in relation to the actual and perceived impact of dual responsibilities as a barrier to women's career progression (Miller, 2006). There is a huge body of literature that suggests work/life balance challenges career opportunities in women's lives and forms the basis of work-family conflict (Currie et al., 2002; Guillaume and Pochic, 2009). Korabik et al. (2009) argued that the more an individual is devoted to their work role, the more work-family conflict arises. White et al. (2003) found a conflict between high-performance practices and work-life balance policies.

Alongside domestic responsibilities there are many working individuals, who are caring for their aging parents, disabled family members, and young children (Cantor, 1992; Barling et al., 1994; Sunoo, 1997). These obligations have a major impact on care-giving employees and their organizations (Ahuja et al., 2002). Society still expects women to be ready to give time to fulfill these care demands. This presents challenges for women as elderly people in the family require considerable care (Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998). These obligations on women to care for children and other dependent family members are often perceived as incompatible with workplace responsibilities (Lynch et al., 2009).

Morley (2007) suggests that due to these responsibilities women are slower in acquiring the necessary requirements for promotion; consequently, women rarely make it to the top positions. This seems to be the case among Pakistani women. For example, in one of the Pakistani public sector universities 6 out of 28 women refused to avail themselves of funding opportunities for doctoral studies abroad because of family responsibilities (Rab, 2010). The limited research in the local context led me to see the issue in depth that why women do not attain senior management positions in greater numbers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The research took place in the public sector universities of Pakistan. The study participants were asked about the nature and extent of their familial system and environment and were questioned as to whether that might have constrained their abilities to fully achieve their career goals. For which the main question was: *"What major constraints do women face at familial level, to their advancement to senior management positions?"*

Aiming that, this study investigated different aspects at familial level by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion with 48 women working in senior and junior management positions.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis was adopted to categorize the data into themes (Thomas, 2003). Further, for the quantification of my data I counted the frequency of responses for a particular theme. (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013). This is also suggested by Cohen et al. (2011). The highest quality studies use both qualitative and quantitative analysis. I followed this technique meticulously. The percentages of participants' responses relating to perceived familial constraints to their career progression revealed that most of the participants (62.5%) believed that gender role stereotypes and family commitments (45.8%) delayed their progress to gaining senior management positions. Women's own choices (52 %) also played a significant role in this regard. However, comparatively few participants (14.58%) reported incongruity between work and family.

All themes emerged are discussed in the following sections with illustrative examples taken from the data which explain the ways in which participants' role in their specific cultural context represented familial constraints and influenced their career life.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Whilst in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with 48 women participants working in the public sector universities of Pakistan, the study participants were asked about the nature and extent of their social roles at familial level, and were questioned as to whether that might have constrained their abilities to fully achieve their career goals. The participants acknowledged that they had faced challenges and constraints arising from the cultural stereotypes within their family setup. Subsequently different themes emerged from the data. These themes will be discussed in the following sections with few of the illustrative examples taken from the data which explain how participants' social role in their specific cultural context represented familial constraints and influenced their career life.

ROLE DIFFERENCES AND IDENTITIES

In the study context, most of the participants (62.5%) indicated that the Pakistani culture led to beliefs about specific masculine or feminine roles. Role differences and identities were created by Pakistani society. This led to most men being disinclined to help with domestic activities in the home as they were raised to be unconcerned with domestic chores. They were taught from a young age that they were to be the breadwinners and caretakers of their families only. And leadership management role suits only men. In addition, these beliefs contributed to the development of a similar mindset of the women as well. A few of the participants indicated that women themselves seemed to, unintentionally, encourage masculine identities in their male children and feminine identities in their female children.

HOUSEHOLD DEMANDS AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

The research revealed that some of the participants were continually engaged with household demands and family responsibilities despite the fact that they had employment outside of the home. The participants indicated that in the Pakistani context men do not work in the kitchen, in home, whether they are husbands, brothers or sons. Women have to perform all household chores.

Almost 31 % of the participants who were solely responsible for the majority of household tasks, shared that their husbands never shared domestic responsibilities. Due to cultural traditions, males were not groomed accordingly. The mind-set had not been changed. One of the participants expressed that she never even thought about it. It was her routine work to deal with all home-related matters. Such kind of attitude unintentionally restrict them to opt challenging job responsibilities like senior management positions and they were happy with low profile job assignments.

OBLIGATIONS TO DEVOTE THEIR TIME AND ENERGY TO THEIR CHILDREN

Besides, household chores, the participants also remained continuously busy with other responsibilities. Most of the participants themselves accepted and believed that they were primarily obligated to devote their time and energy to their children. These were perceived as societal expectations which women had to cope with. For example, 26.9 % of the participants reported being primarily responsible for caring for their children. Their husbands were least bothered for taking care of their children's education, health, and other responsibilities. One of the participants mentioned that due to childcare responsibilities, at times she could not maintain regular mealtimes. This kind of examples discourage other women for aspiring tough job responsibilities.

PRIMARY CAREGIVERS OF ELDERLY PARENTS

Although, the number of participants who were primary caregivers of elderly parents was small (25.2%) They appeared to be taking on the major share of the task of caring for elderly parents. However, because of the value placed on caring for parents in the Holy Quran (Quran Surat Al-Isrā' 17; 23) the participants willingly had a sense of responsibility about taking care of their elderly parents. Particularly in the case of elderly mothers, it never occurred to them that intimate care should be undertaken by a male family member. Therefore, the participants who were unmarried or those who lived in the surrounding areas near to their parents' home, usually liked to take good care of their mothers. Society also expects daughters-in-law to be ready to give time to fulfill these care demands. The women who place high importance to these aspect, pay less attention to the job progression.

CONFLICT BETWEEN CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY OBLIGATIONS

Most of the participants (45.8%) were keen to highlight that the requirements for professional development sometimes conflicted with their family obligations. This was particularly the situation when training opportunities were available far from their place of residence. Although they enjoyed their domestic role, they viewed their family commitments as an obstacle to their career development. They were less likely to take training opportunities that may have enhanced their career prospects but were detrimental to their family commitments.

WOMEN'S OWN CHOICES BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY

Fifty-two percent of participants perceived themselves as not helping their career development by willingly choosing to undertake most of the domestic duties. They viewed themselves as the primary caregivers for children and other family members and happily performed the role of mother and daughter, as well as working outside the family home. Foster (2001) suggests that women have difficulty in leaving their traditional roles of homemakers and mothers and that this results in role constraints. For example, one of the senior participants in the focus group discussion suggested that undoubtedly, it depends on the women and from a very individual perspective, to carry out home duties. She added that in our local context women,

happily cook and do all the chores. It is not being pressed on them”.

Based on the belief that mothers can be the best teachers for their children, some of the participants were interested in teaching their children themselves in the first years of their schooling. One of the participants told that she gave up her career for a long time because she felt responsibility for her children’s education. When they have grown up she resumed her job.

WOMEN WERE PRESSURIZED BY THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS NOT TO WORK

In some cases (10.4%), there seemed to be a pressure from family members for participants not to take up senior positions as such responsibilities require long hours to work. Some participants simply decided not to apply for senior management positions despite being qualified for such positions, as they had not gained permission from their in-laws to take a job. Few highly qualified women took the decision to start a career and devote themselves to work responsibilities. A reflection of a senior participant in this regard was that: *“A few women were personally known to me who have good professional degrees as well as aptitude for managerial jobs but due to their family demands and desires they have not applied for administrative positions”*.

Some women indicated that gender role stereotypes continued to influence decisions regarding their promotion and advancement to senior levels in universities. The junior and senior participants expressed the view that in Pakistan if both husband and wife had a professional career, in the case of having to move due to postings or migration, it was the wife who was expected to make any adjustment even compromising her career aspirations.

THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY CONSTRAINTS ON WOMEN’S PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES

There were reported to be a range of effects of family constraints on participants’ lives, one being that they did not progress into senior management positions at the normal pace. Examples are set out in the following Sections:

i) Difficulties in career progression

Since the Pakistani women were expected to be more highly involved in domestic, home roles and men to be more highly involved in external roles, the participants interviewed were asked about the extent of their family demands and commitments and the extent to which these might have operated as an obstacle to their progression to senior management positions. The data demonstrated that 20.8 percent of the participants could not easily gain career advancement, in part due to maintaining their family roles. Some of the participants felt that family demands and family commitments affected their performance in the office. They continued to be responsible for domestic matters while at work.

ii) Incongruity between work and family

Due to incompatibility between work and family domains women can experience strain and stress (Allen et al., 2000), although only 14.5 percent of the study participants reported experiencing tension and disturbance when there was a clash between work and family because of the incompatible behaviors required for each. Despite this, such barriers provide a key explanation for women’s poor representation in top-level management positions (Coleman, 2011).

iii) Lack of time for socialization and personal care

The participants were asked how they thought that their gender role and home responsibilities affected their personal lives. The findings revealed that family-based commitments were associated with reducing the time that they had to spend in rest and personal care for themselves. The majority of participants (66.6%) felt that they had sacrificed other areas of their personal lives to proceed with their career. They did not have enough time for leisure and relaxation; dual responsibilities had shrunk their social life. They had little time to participate in other social activities.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the narratives showed that participants’ career progression and occupational choices were influenced by the values and expectations of family members and the approach through which they themselves perceived their work and family responsibilities.

Overall, the analysis demonstrated that women were responsible for the majority of household work and were usually the main childcare provider. Despite women’s professional responsibilities, they continued to conform to traditional gender roles at home. Further, the participants’ career prospects were affected as professional development opportunities were limited by their family commitments, which shaped their career choices as they prioritized children’s welfare over high salaries and prestigious job titles.

The analysis also indicated that career choices were sometimes strongly influenced by family members, this form of familial influence may be greater for people where collectivist family systems are commonplace, wherein respect for and compliance with one’s parents and elders’ opinion is often greatly valued (Lee et al., 200). Family responsibilities were not merely a matter of societal perceptions, women themselves fully recognized that they had everyday family duties. Despite this, the majority of the participants did not speak disagreeably about their responsibilities. They have accepted that they were the main homemakers and caregivers. The decisions that they made about their career progression they made of their own free will without feeling any regret. However, they described that such responsibilities constrained their career progression. They had experienced times when they had to give preference to family over work. Moreover, some experienced stress, exhaustion, and anxiety in their lives due to their dual responsibilities. Their main concern was that work should be balanced with domestic life

so that they had enough time to pursue their personal interests.

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