



Women Educational Leaders and Administrators in Education

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Abstract

Across the globe, we find that women hold less than fifty percent of academic and administrative posts in higher education institutions. Women are best represented in lower level academic, middle management positions, and their participation relative to men decreases at successively higher levels. Representation varies between about ten and twenty percent at middle management level and from nought to ten percent at senior management level. Representation in the committee system follows a similar pattern with women more likely to be members of departmental and faculty committees than on governing boards or councils. A consequence of this pattern of decreasing representation at successively higher levels is that senior women frequently find themselves isolated in hierarchies which are predominantly male.

Key Words: Gender roles. Gender discrimination, barriers, leaders, aspirations, role models.

Introduction

In the field of education in India, one finds very few women at top levels such as vice chancellor, director of public instruction, principal, or dean, even though there are many women who choose teaching as their profession.

The reality is that women's participation at decision-making levels in any field is low, considering the fact that women constitute almost half the population, the number of women should also be half in various career fields including educational administration.

Women constitute 30% of the teaching profession. In 1984-85, in higher education there were 28 women to every hundred men with the improvement over the 1950-51 figure of nine per hundred. Among university teachers, there is one woman for every ten male teachers; in research, the ratio is 1:9; in professional colleges the ratio is 1:6 and in general education 1:4. Women lecturers in affiliated colleges are around 21% while it is 11.6% in university departments. It is reported that there are only two women for every hundred men who are university professors. At any point of time there may not be more than 10 to 15 vice-chancellors, including those heading the nine women's universities, in the existing more than 230 universities in the country. In 1992, there were seven women and 98 men as vice chancellors, two women and 28 men as pro-vice chancellors, two women and 100 men as Registrars, and one woman and nine men as Directors of Continuing and Adult Education. As academic heads, 57 women and 603 men were deans.

Agarwal Vidya (2009)

Although women have gained access to higher education all over the world, the scenario is the same that their numbers are still far below men in the management of institutions of higher education. Women are lagging behind men in taking to educational opportunities possibly contributes to the fact that women are not visible in large numbers at higher positions in educational administration. But there are many within the profession who are very capable and could wear the mantle of leadership easily. Yet women do not seem to aspire for it, even if women do, very few opportunities are available for them in leadership positions.

Most professionals, men or women, such as scientists and doctors, do not like administration because it is mundane and routine. But, generalizing, there is greater love among men for the power and influence that go with administrative posts. The "power structure" in institutions quite often inhibits women. Men say that it is women themselves who deny the chances for upward mobility. This is referred to as 'psychosocial' causes, which could include the behavioural traits and skills of women. Perhaps women's attachment to familial duties, whether shared or not by men folk, makes women less mobile and unwilling for transfers or changes of any kind. Maybe the situation in the home is such that women are fearful of their men folk/in-laws who may not want women to appear as ambitious, desiring or rise in their career. Gender stereotypes and the patriarchal ethos possibly govern their thinking.

The reason why women should be in administrative positions in higher educational institutions and universities as in all spheres of activity is that women have to be treated like any human being whose rights must be upheld and whose aspirations must be given opportunities for fulfilment to



ensure a just and equitable society. Secondly, everywhere, in every activity of decision making, women's viewpoints and experience, as much as men's, need to be captured for the decision to be balanced and complete.

Barriers to women as educational leaders

Within higher education classifications, community colleges have the highest share of women presidents, but there is still a lack of gender diversity that is the result of major obstacles that have led to the underrepresentation of women as higher education college presidents. Some of the internal barriers ascribed to women include a lack of confidence, motivation, and aspirations; deficiencies in credentials and experience; and socialization and gender stereotyping, Shakeshaft (1999).

Self-esteem, Motivation, and Aspirations

A lack of confidence, motivation, or aspiration are often reasons given for women's low representation in positions of public leadership. There is some evidence to indicate that women lack the confidence to apply for promotion and that, in contrast to their male colleagues, they only apply for jobs for which they are fully qualified (Shakeshaft, 1999). Research reported by Shakeshaft (2001, 2003) supports the perception that females tend to receive less constructive criticism than males in carrying out their work. As a result, it is suggested that they are less able to deal with negative comments and consequently take them personally and allow their confidence to be unnecessarily damaged. Some suggest that these psychological, internal or intrinsic barriers, however, are seldom more prevalent for women than for men, and it is not usually the woman's psyche at fault, but the social structure of society that is the root cause of the inequities (Shakeshaft, 1989). Women may be aspiring to leadership positions, but systemic barriers can prevent them from acting upon these aspirations.

Credentials and Experience

Women being deficient in credentials and experience has often been cited as an influencing factor in women's underrepresentation in educational leadership, even though, time and again, research illustrates that this is a fallacy. Though women's lack of credentials may have been a factor in the past, it does not hold to scrutiny in a contemporary context.

Gender Stereotyping

As the number of women in upper-administration level positions are increasing, Eagly and Carli (2007) note that it is important to identify further possible obstacles they may encounter, such as socialization and gender stereotypes. To identify these obstacles, they conducted a qualitative phenomenological examination of the experiences of six female community college presidents. Some of the barriers the participants faced included the male-dominated culture of higher education leaders and balancing personal and professional commitments. There were also issues associated with women's persistence toward leadership positions, which begin in the sociological beliefs of a woman's role and the responsibilities of work and family. They found that women—regardless of marital status or professional

experiences, qualifications, and positions remain closely linked to biased views of work capacity, which often means that policies do not adequately consider the perspectives of female educators. Gender remains a pivotal concept within the framework of leadership development. The focus on women and women's leadership remains congruent between education and professional practice.

Socialization

Some qualified women have psychologically accepted a secondary role in their profession because they are concerned about their family or because of lack of confidence (as cited in Grady, 1998). Likewise, Speizer states that few women have been socialized to have a clear sense of a career track to develop their leadership skills. They have also been denied the support, opportunity, and experience given to men (as cited in Grady, 1998). Grady (1998) suggested that there remains a psychological barrier that manifests in a lack of self-esteem that prevents women from actively pursuing non-traditional roles in school administration. In addition, women have typically been perceived as being weak and not robust enough for the difficult, intensely political nature of educational administration.

Unavailability of Appropriate Courses

The University Grants Committee (UGC), the Central Government, the State Government and other bodies who are responsible for the management of higher education have attempted to provide a lead in developing relevant courses as well as in the matter of acquainting to aspiring women leaders with current realities, traditions and culture. Schemes exist to restructure courses and to develop applied components in syllabus. The National Social Service (NSS), Population Education, Adult Education, Literacy Extension Education are some of the schemes introduced with these objectives in view. All universities in India have been involved in these programmes. But, they have had very limited returns. This is partly because the programmes are centrally conceived, directed and lack the spontaneity, flexibility and autonomy which, as experience from successful development projects has proved, are absolutely necessary to establish contact with the realities of Indian life.

Acceptance within the System and Self Concepts of Women Managers

From the foregoing, it is evident that women's access to positions of management in higher education is restricted by many factors. But, by the personal experience it indicates that those who make it to these positions are generally well accepted by their students, by faculty, by other administrators and by the authorities. This is corroborated by the few data that are available.

Two organisations that work for the advancement of women are: The National Institute of Educational and Public Administration (NIEPA) in Delhi; and the SNDT Women's University at Bombay, which regularly conduct courses for women managers of higher education, collecting information to guide women in designing and administering courses. Data

on principals of 300 out of the 800 women's colleges by NIEPA in this connection indicate that women principals function as confidently as their male counterparts. The study which assessed women's confidence in terms of twelve items pertaining to work indicates that women scored an average of 30.32 points as compared to 30.22 scored by men on a scale of scores between 16 and 36 (NIEPA 2007). The details of the data reveal some minor variations.

Furthermore, in the same study the women principals were asked to specify the problems they face and to indicate what kind of help they need by way of training. Both men and women mentioned the same kind of problems. However, some women mentioned the problems of gender-bias. The other problem most frequently mentioned was mobility. Many women principals feel that it is more difficult for women than for men to visit Government offices or to visit Delhi or even the capital city in the state for administrative matters. Women feel that they move around less, are less able to socialise, and are, therefore, less informed on relevant issues than their male counterparts. Several respondents also mentioned that as women they find it difficult to exercise authority over male subordinates, particularly if they are male chauvinists. Several respondents referred to the corruption and political pressures they face.

It is more difficult for women than for men to withstand and fight corruption and political pressures, since those who exercise them do not hesitate to indulge in character defamation. In addition to this, most of the women mentioned the difficulties they face in balancing their responsibilities as college principals and home-makers. The same study solicited information from the principals on the exact nature of their training needs. The following table indicates the priorities of both the male and the female principals with reference to the nine items listed in the questionnaire. (NIEPA, 2007).

Table 1
Gender Differences in Academic Organizations in India (2004)

	Area	Females mean	rank	Males mean	rank	Total mean	rank	Group ranking based prioritization
1.	Key Issues in Higher Education	2.09	3	2.21	1	2.12	2	5
2.	Institutional Planning	2.03	5	2.004	4.5	2.02	5	2
3.	Administration	4	2.04	3	4	4	4	1
4.	Finance Management	2.18	1	2.14	2	2.17	1	4
5.	Personnel Management	1.98	6	1.99	6.5	1.98	6	6
6.	Academic Management	1.73	9	1.70	8	1.72	9	3
7.	Student Affairs	1.76	3	1.69	9	1.74	8	7
8.	Linkages	2.11	2	1.99	6.5	2.09	3	9
9.	Self-Development	1.87	7	2.00	4.5	1.89	7	8

Gender-Friendly Environment

One of the best ways of attracting women to higher posts is to create an environment in which sexual harassment has little or no chance to prevail. Gender sensitisation in every profession is necessary for men and women separately and in groups where they work together, so that existing practices can be reviewed by them and can be discussed for improvement.

As a matter of policy, a decision needs to be taken at the highest decision-making level such as the Government, the U.G.C., the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), the universities, and colleges that the representation

of women at all levels of policy making bodies and committees should be increased.

To create a pro-woman atmosphere, the rules and regulations of an institution have also to be looked at, to observe whether there are any provisions that needs revision or which must be made more woman-friendly. Provision of support services for the care of children in the premises of the institution or close by, transport, housing, and single women accommodation, also need to be taken up on a priority basis.

When women recognize the subtle and pervasive effects of second-generation bias, they feel empowered, not victimized, because they can take action to counter those effects. They can put themselves forward for leadership roles when they are qualified but have been overlooked. They can seek out sponsors and others to support and develop them in those roles. They can negotiate for work arrangements that fit both their lives and their organizations' performance requirements. Such understanding makes it easier for women to "lean in."

Women's Role in Administration in India

Women who manage institutions with large numbers of women students are well situated to contribute to the social and political advancement of their students. Women administrators can do so by acquainting students with legal rights available to women with Constitutional provisions in their favour, and by informing them about opportunities for education and employment as well as different kinds of facilities and support systems provided by the State and Central Governments as well as by other voluntary bodies. Women administrators can set up programmes to sharpen the students' awareness of gender discrimination, to lift female student's aspirations, and to change their self concepts so as to enable them to see themselves as independent individuals, successful career women, artists, writers, and responsible citizens—in addition to being wives, mothers and home-makers. Above all, women administrators can use existing facilities such as the National Social Service to involve women students' meaningfully in rural and urban, community service and thus improve their knowledge about sensitivity to social, political and economic realities and simultaneously involve other women in the service of society.

CONCLUSION

The capability of women in 'management' needs to be strengthened through leadership training and imparting of administrative skills. In addition to enhancement of knowledge about "management" and higher education including the need to have a vision and taking people along and working alongside men with confidence and belief in oneself and their capacities, there have to be inputs on behavioural traits to be fostered for leading, working in a team, reacting to a crisis, becoming a catalyst for change, and rising to any occasion.

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