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**Attitudes of Academicians towards Gender Equality at
Institutions of higher learning in South Africa**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of academics in the institutions of higher. This paper postulates that Institutions of higher learning are still masculine-orientated, and this creates a barrier for women in terms of career advancement. The study employed qualitative research methods to explore factors that contribute to the under-representation of women in senior positions at universities in South Africa. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to select twenty-five female academics (25). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data. The findings demonstrate that the universities continue to be masculine-oriented within most of employment categories. Women face multiple challenges in ascending the academic ladder which results in their under-representation in management and academic position.

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Roles, Gender Discrimination*

Introduction

Although institutions of higher learning have opened their employment doors for women, there is still under-representation of women in higher positions. Women of all races in academia are invisible in higher positions as compared to men (Martin, 2013). However, some institutions are making progress and there are a number of women who are steadily rising to the top structures of executive management. Although 26 universities in South Africa have had a slight increase in women on an executive level, the ratio between men and women on this level is still disproportionate (Kele, 2015). Literature shows that under-representation of women in management positions at universities continues to be a matter of serious concern.

Background

In spite of efforts at transforming both the country and the public service to embrace national priorities of development and economic growth, challenges persist for women across the public and private sectors (Fagenson, 2003). For example, while women have the potential and ability to be leaders, they often lack opportunities, resources and

support for realizing their potential. The lack of women in senior positions means that women are globally under-represented across all decision-making fora (Dezso, Ross and Uribe, 2013).

Younger female academics face challenges positioning themselves as authentic and secure (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016). Feelings of inauthenticity and insecurity are exacerbated by age, gender, status and a performative ethos where the right products (research outputs and grants) are an essential part of the institutions (Howe-Walsh, and Turnbull, 2016), women are pressured to enhance their research status and reputation. Highlighted below are examples of few countries regarding experiences of the female academics:

In the United Kingdom, women's entry into education, academic and professional arena, the literature shows an increase of women's entry into tertiary education and academia. Singh (2002) and Marley, et al. (2010) assert that the percentage of women professors in developing and developed Commonwealth countries range from 10 to 20%, with the average of 13,1% of which UK had 11,2% female professors by then. According to the statistics given by Morley (2010), out of 4 000 professors in higher education in the UK, over the past decade, 13% were women and 87% men while 73% of senior lectures and researchers (total of 24,630) were male and only 27% were female. Women hold 17% of professorships, and only 19.3% of presidents (vice-chancellors) of colleges and universities. This demonstrates that leadership in higher education is still male-dominated while women continue to bear the primary domestic responsibility, irrespective of other work commitments (Kargwell, 2008).

Morley (2010) and Singh (2002) take this further to indicate that the proportion of female students (55%) and graduates (59%) in the EU exceeds that of male students. However, women represent only 18% of professoriate and in 70% of the Commonwealth's 54 countries, all universities were led by men in 2007 (Morley *et al.*, 2005; Singh, 2008). In 2009/10, men continued to dominate the highest academic positions, such as the professoriate by 80.9% while women's representation stood at 19.1%. In the same period, as Blandford shows, the overall women representation stood at 44% while men constituted 55.7% of academic staff in non-managerial roles, although, men also constituted 72.0% of academic staff in senior management roles (Blandford *et al.*, 2011). Even after 2010, literature continues to show male domination in academic staff members in universities. The 2012 Higher Education Funding Council for England report shows that in 2010 to 2011 most academics

were male (57%) and female academics were concentrated in less senior roles (Blandford *et al.*, 2011).

Like in the UK, women in Portugal are reported to have been increasing their participation in higher education (HE) as students. But, this is not matched by the number of women in senior management and high academic positions, such as in the professoriate. Several studies have highlighted the complexities of gender relations and their evolution. Recent market and managerial-driven changes in higher education have the potential to affect the traditional gender-structural composition of academic career. Portugal has a high level of female participation in academia, even though they are less represented in senior leadership positions when compared with other developed countries (Catalyst, 2013). The academic disciplines wherein women are concentrated shows gendered differences in the choice of disciplines. Women are said to be concentrated in 'soft areas', such as humanities and arts, and are least present in 'hard' sciences or engineering. Statistics given by Fitzgerald (2013) indicate the percentage of women in early and middle careers as between 39% trainee assistants and 45% assistants. But at the top, in academia, this percentage decreases to 32% of associate professors and 22% full professors. This confirms the point that women's representation in senior management positions is very low.

African countries are no exception to the trend where the situation is further complicated by traditional barriers. Bhandary (2017) states that deep-seated cultural barriers have conspired to create and perpetuate gender disparity in access to education in many African countries. Moodly (2015) emphasises that higher education provides the means through which women and other historically-disadvantaged groups can achieve positions of leadership and increase their economic well-being, thereby, having a long-term impact on overall productivity and equality of opportunity. Nguyen (2013) contends that higher education supplies the best resources for the labour force; higher education influences current leaders and prepares future leaders so women should be visible in higher education. Scholars argue that leadership self-efficacy pertains to the confidence that one has in his/her knowledge, skills and abilities to lead others and accomplish various leadership tasks (Hannah & Harms, 2008; Paglis, 2010).

Literature on Africa seems to portray a more complicated scenario with regards to gender disparities in institutions of higher learning. Women, like in the developed countries, outnumber men in universities in several African countries but their domination is confined at lower

positions (Davidson & Burke, 2011). Morley (2013) found out that across regions, cultures and nations women were under-represented at all levels in African universities and were concentrated in traditionally female fields such as education. Despite much increased training and development, and increasing years of work experience necessary for career advancement, women often experience a glass ceiling especially with regards to the professorial level and in senior management (Maseko, 2013). It can, therefore, be said women remain discriminated against in terms of accessing top management/leadership positions as well as the professoriate.

Tanzania, also faces gender disparities in institutions of higher learning. Literature illustrates that patriarchal, non-conducive organizational culture and management practices discourage women from entering academia (Mukangara, 2013). According to a study conducted by Mukangara (2013) at the University of Dar es Salaam, the statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology published in July 2007 indicated that out of 951 PhD holders teaching in all Tanzanian universities, only 11% were women; secondly, out of 1,321 academic staff with master's degrees, only 261 (20%) were female and thirdly, when more than 98% of the accredited universities in Tanzania were surveyed, females were under-represented in leadership positions. It is important to note also that there is only one female vice-chancellor out of 26 in Tanzanian universities. The trends also indicate that the majority of female academics are Assistant Lecturers and Lecturers. 8% of Associate Professors and Full Professors are female, only 27 (21.4%) of the 126 academic staff who completed their PhD and master's degree studies during that period were female. The University of Dar es Salaam has achieved much in addressing the gender balance amongst students. However, despite these efforts, achieving a gender balance at the university remains a challenge amongst the teaching and research staff.

The status of women in higher education in Ghana is also of major concern just like in the above mentioned countries. Data provided by the National Council on Tertiary Education (2006), reveals that in the 2000/2001 academic year, there were only 12% women in the faculties of the six public universities in Ghana; in 2005/2006. Eboiyehi (2016) argues that most issues regarding tertiary education that are discussed in Ghana deal with financing higher education and making universities economically independent. In the 2006 statistics, women associate professors were 2.3% of academic staff and women full professors were only 0.7% of academic staff. More than 60% of female academics are in

the lecturer grade as opposed to less than 50% of men. Only about 5% of all women academics were professors as compared to 10% of men. In other words, women continue to be concentrated in lower ranks. According to Eboiyehi (2016), a total of 9.5% women are employed as full time academic staff in Ghana.

South Africa is not different from these other countries when it comes to gender inequalities. Since the 1994 educational reforms in South Africa, including the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry for Education 2001), the country has attempted to "provide a system of education that builds democracy, human dignity, equality and social justice" (Department of Education, 2001). However, gender inequality in the South African educational system persists. Girls tend to be predominantly present in the social and caring fields of education while even the participation rate of boys has even declined in these female-dominant fields of education due to deeply lodged gendered assumptions in organizational practices, parental influence and the lack of gender-sensitive vocational guidance programmes for male students.

The challenge outlined above permeates all South Africans institutions, including institutions of higher education. This sector has its own challenges with regard to representation of women in senior management. Although women constitute over 50% of the higher education workforce in South Africa, they are still under-represented in senior positions (HERS-SA, 2007). Kayi (2013) argues that in 2003 the average number of women in senior management was roughly 24% across all the 17 institutions of higher learning. At the time there were only three women vice-chancellors; 82% of the professors were male. Despite HERS-SA's efforts, statistics show little improvement, particularly for women educators in high-level positions. In 2007, women representation had not improved, 13% of the vice-chancellors, 21% of the deputy vice-chancellors, 21% of the registrars and 21% of executive directors, 24% of professors and associate professors in South Africa were women (Council on Higher Education Statistics, 2009); currently the percentage of women vice-chancellors remains the same.

Conceptual framework: Masculinity theory

Masculinities relate to perceived notions and ideals about how men should or are expected to behave in a given society (Connell cited in Dewing, 2007). There are several common attributes of masculinity, namely, dominance, competitiveness, assertiveness, physical strength,

aggression, risk-taking, courage, heterosexuality and lack of feminine traits in men and masculinities. Femininity, on the other hand has been stereotyped as dependent, submissive and conforming, and because of that women have been seen as lacking in leadership qualities because, traditionally, leadership is associated with masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007; Uwizeyimana and Mathevula, 2018; Ryle, 2015). However, other studies provide evidence that women are better leaders than men and this is attributed to their caring qualities such as kindness, patience, good listening skills which makes them more approachable than men (Maqubela, 2013). Gender division of labour has traditionally associated men with breadwinner positions and women with homemaker positions and because of that women continue to face difficult challenges in climbing higher positions (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Women have always been dominated by men in workplaces because of this traditional view that a man is always the financial provider of the family, which is also an important attribute for masculinities, while a woman is always considered as a house-keeper.

Additionally, when women occupy leadership positions, they are likely to encounter more disapproval due to perceived gender role violation (Paustian- Underdahl *et al.*, 2014). Although more women are assuming leadership roles today than before, the notion of women as a leader is still foreign to many individuals, both male and female alike (Paustian-Underdahl *et al.*, 2014). The assumption that leadership is equated with maleness is still deeply embedded and rooted in both our thinking and language. Leaders are often described with adjectives such as, competitive, aggressive and dominant, which are associated with masculinity. Paustian-Underdahl *et al.*, (2014) further states that these kinds of stereotypes, to date, still exert a powerful influence and are at least partially to blame both for women's difficulty in attaining leadership positions and for society's struggle to accept them in that position. According to Mazibuko (2006), the existing literature on underrepresentation of women in the senior levels of South African academia has argued that the centres of power and excellence in South African universities are dominated and influenced by men and masculinized cultures that make it difficult for women to enter and succeed at these terrains (Mathevula, 2014). Maqubela (2013) states that masculinity is considered to be natural, which however has been problematized through comparisons within and across cultures and seeing variations in the forms of masculinity from one context to another. Masculinities are perceived as multiple, diverse, fragile, temporal and fluid. Maqubela

(2013), Ryle (2015) and Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2018) further argue that researchers have concluded that masculinity, as is the case with femininity is not at all given but is socially and historically constructed and fluid (Maqubela, 2013).

Methodology

This study used the feminist standpoint research methodological approach, and has thus been guided by four feminist principles, namely, 'the researcher's positionality', the researched 'epistemic privilege', the reciprocity between the researcher and the researched and power relations between the researcher and the researched (Wood, 2012).

The study was conducted at a rural university (i.e. University of Venda) in Thohoyandou, Thulamela Local Municipality, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province in South Africa. The study population consisted of female academic staff members at the University of Venda. The population was chosen mainly for its availability and easier accessibility.

Non-probability purposive and convenient sampling methods were used (Neuman, 2011). . These sampling methods were both used because the researcher conducted the interviews according to the availability of the participants. The sample in this study comprised of twenty-five (25) female academics at the University of Venda.

Semi-structured face-to- face interviews were used to collect data. Face-to face interviews were conducted with participants. The aim of the interviews was to acquire information regarding the gender representation as well as the attitudes of academicians towards gender equality. Using face to face interviews in this study had advantages such as, making it possible to collect and represent the voices and perspectives of the marginalized groups, such as women (Oltmann, 2016). The other advantage stated by DE Vault and Gross, in Maqubela (2013) is that through interview conversations subjugated knowledge is unearthed and women's experiences elicited, thus bringing them to light and subjecting them to systematic analysis, making them visible. Data analysis refers to a process of systematically ordering and arranging the interview transcripts and field notes that a researcher accumulates (Sutton and Austin 2015 :Boijie 2010). The data was analysed systematically from the major themes that emerged from the interviews through the use of the thematic analysis method.

Results

The study demonstrates that the university environment continues to be masculine oriented with most employment categories, in academia, being male dominated. Findings show how women struggle to thrive within such an environment. Women face multiple challenges in ascending the academic ladder which results in the under-representation of women in management and academic levels. Their career development continues to be fraught with challenges which do not seem to be receding. Data and statistics continue to show the persistence of the 'glass ceiling' which builds up to a 'concrete wall' that keeps women in functions unlikely to lead to senior employment levels.

Knowledge of gender equality

In this section the researcher sought to investigate Univen female academic staff members' perceptions and attitudes towards gender equality. The first question sought to determine knowledge and understanding of participants on gender. To this effect participants were asked as to "how they would define gender equality". Majority of the participants defined gender equality in terms of equal opportunities. Some defined it in terms of same treatment in terms of allocation of employment positions and equal payment for same positions between men and women. Others added equal gender representation. A few mentioned equality not only at work but in all spheres of life. Thus, all responses contained different aspects of gender equality. This demonstrates that participants have adequate knowledge on gender equality, as can be seen in the quotes below.

Equal opportunities, equal treatment, equal jobs for men and women as well as equal representation of both men at all levels of work (Derika, 53, Senior lecturer).

Is when male/female are treated equally and given equally chance in everything/work we do, give the job not looking at gender but equal shared including salaries (Pinky, 55, lecturer).

Gender equality is when men and women are both treated equal in terms of opportunities (Rough, 28, junior lecturer).

In addition, a few participants referred gender equality to equally opportunities including equal salaries.

Women should be valued/ be equal with men in all opportunities. I believe that male and female staff must have the same salary scale on the same post levels (Clere, 45, lecturer).

It is the share of equal opportunities between men and women, including equal salaries in similar jobs (Isha, 44, lecturer).

Male and female staff must have the same salary scale on the same post levels (Vydia, 43, associate professor).

Other participants referred gender equality to the relationship shared by men and women and the non-discrimination in relation to gender not only in the work-place, but in all spheres of life. This can be seen in the answers that follow:

Gender equality refers to the relationship between men and women and how this relationship results in the allocation of resources, perceptions and welfare of women and men. No discrimination in accessing all aspects of work and promotion (Rasham,57, Professor).

Gender equality can be defined as the state of not being discriminated in all spheres of life because of gender (Vera, 52, lecturer).

It is the manner in which men and women are treated and perceived the same way (Neetu, 54, Senior lecturer).

Another participant highlighted that gender equality is all about sharing responsibilities without concentration on whether a person is a male or female.

In simple terms is when we live life that is gender blind, we allocate responsibilities in a way that is gender blind (Brown, 41, junior lecturer).

One participant pointed out that gender imbalances at UNIVEN persist even to date.

Gender equality is not yet realised within Univen because there is still a gap between leadership positions. Men are seen to acquire senior position than women (Tino, 34, lecturer).

The attitudes of academics towards gender equality at Univen

This section gives attention to attitudes towards gender equality. It also focuses attention on attitudes towards women in leadership positions.

4.7.1. Perceptions on gender equality

Here the researchers look at participants' perceptions on gender equality; it sought to solicit the views of the participants on whether men and women should be equal at the work place. In response to this, 100% of the participants strongly agreed that it was high time for women to be treated as equals with men. The participants shared the view that women are as capable as men. They further indicated that it is just that they were being held back by the patriarchal system, including gender stereotypical notions of 'masculine leadership', as illustrated in the quote below:

Because women's lagging behind is not due to the fact that they are not intelligent or capable but because of the patriarchal stereotypes that men are the heads therefore should take the lead and women follow (Isha, 44, lecturer).

Some of the participants emphasised that women were as intelligent as men, at times even more intelligent than men, and should thus be treated equally.

Because women are intelligent some even more than men, so when it comes to opportunities we have to be equal as women are capable of holding higher position, physical men are believed to be stronger than women (Clere, 45, lecturer).

Men and women are equal in all ways expect physical strength. In terms of intellectual capacity there is no difference. There are men who are better than women but there are also many women who are better than men. The socially constructed gender differences some be deconstructed (Rasham, 55+, Professor)

Other participants held the view that since women and men do equal work, they should be treated the same. This sentiment is aptly captured in the following statement:

We can both perform the same duties so why should we be discriminated against as women (Tamu, 34, lecturer).

We do the same job so we should be remunerated the same, be promoted equally and have equal share in the decision making process (Vera, 52, lecturer).

We are all human beings, regardless of the biological make-up we need to be treated equally, supported equally in everything because we are all capable of doing the same thing (Tady, 44, Senior lecturer).

Furthermore some participants argued that both men and women held equally rights which are in the constitution and during the period of being employed, there is the usage of contracts which is similar simply meaning that both men and women deserve to be equal as illustrated in the quotes below:

Both are human beings with equal rights provided for in the constitution therefore measures should be in the place to bring about this (Yash, 55+, HOD).

Both men and women are employees with similar employment contracts and therefore have to be treated equally (Krish, 47, Professor and HOD).

However, if men and women are treated on the basis of 'sameness' it would mean that women's specific needs, such as childcare and other family responsibilities, were not going to be addressed (Maqubela, 2013). Other participants were of the view that they were not discriminated against because of their less capabilities but due to biological make up which seemingly renders them inferior to men.

I strongly agree on this one because it has been long that we have been oppressed and undermined because of our gender not that our minds operate differently from males. I don't see any reason why women shouldn't be equal to men (Vydia, 43, Associate professor).

It is, however, interesting to note that majority of participants were of the view that both men and women should share family responsibilities.

Yes, they should be equal; men and women should share even family and child care responsibilities since they are already sharing the provider role. Women do all especially those who are single parents do both (Derika, 53, Senior lecturer).

However, one of the participants when talking about sharing equally family responsibility argued that they were some duties that men were

unable to do, for instance, child bearing. Therefore, equality should only be considered for work opportunities. See the quote below:

It's different when you look at gender roles in the home because there is definitely some things that the man is unable to do for instance bearing and breastfeeding children BUT when it comes to the workplace, I don't think those roles are evident anymore as I believe a women is equally capable of delivering on a task as much as a man can so there I think equal opportunities should be given (Pakhie, 33, lecturer).

Some of the participants implied that to combat gender inequality, there is a need to have women representation in high positions, since male dominance in high positions perpetuates oppression and abuse of women.

If man are given the freeway of only being themselves in power, it perpetuate oppression and emotional abuse (Brown, 41, junior lecturer).

4.7.2. Attitude towards Women in Leadership

In this sub-section the researchers focused on attitudes of female academics towards women in leadership positions. To determine this, women were asked the following question: *"Do you think women are capable of holding leadership positions?"* This was to see whether women believed in themselves and other women when it came to leadership positions. Firstly, the majority of the participants expressed the view that both men and women have a right to equal representation at all levels since they are all capable of holding leadership positions. If given the opportunity women could do a great job as participants cited below.

Everyone is entitled to empowerment, if women are able to develop themselves the same way as men why not be given the leadership position (Vera, 52, lecturer).

There is no reason to be treated unequally both genders have similar capabilities (Kamla, 55+ Senior Lecturer).

Women are capable of holding leadership positions just as well as men (Rasham, 55+, Professor).

Secondly, a significant number of participants elucidated that women make incredible leaders. The participants gave examples of the female

deans who were in what has been considered to be a male territory, in the Schools of Law and Natural Sciences, as a good example of the capability of women in leadership. They also related to the most prominent women in South Africa as tangible proof that women excel in leadership positions.

For instance in the school of law and natural sciences the deans are women and are doing a great job on those positions. Also Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma is a great example of a female leader (Brown, 45, junior lecturer).

We have seen women taking the higher seats for example Winnie Madikizela is a great example that women are capable (Clere, 45, lecturer).

Linked to the above, some participants asserted that women have the capability to excel in leadership positions because they possess intellectual capacity, qualities and good management skills. This is based on the qualities and skills to multi-task, focus and patience, as can be seen below. This is in line with Maqubela (2013; 2016) who asserts that women excel despite having many other responsibilities that they are facing. This is also corroborated by the following statements by some of the participants:

They are very intellect people with skills to manage things so yes they are capable of holding leadership position (Rough, 28, junior lecturer).

Women have exceeding capability of leadership position compared to man. Most families are headed by females and become successful in life. Women are capable of mentoring, empathise and impart their skills to their subordinates and I believe those are qualities of a leader (Samie, 46, Lecturer).

Women are capable of holding leadership positions because they are perfectionists and are as good as men (Krish, 47, Professor and HOD). Why not we have the brains, aptitude, zeal- we have it (Jacky, 43, lecturer).

Both men and women who have the same knowledge (qualifications) are perfectly capable of being leaders. Women especially are the ones who run family which requires leadership skills therefore they too can be leaders (Yash, 55+, Senior Lecturer and HOD).

Another participant added that when it came to life women had a better view and perspective as seen below.

They are able because they can multi-task and have a better perspective about life (Neetu, 54, Senior lecturer).

However, women face various roadblocks to top positions due to the masculine or patriarchal nature of the workplace. This resonates with the existing literature which demonstrates that the cultural structure of leadership in itself initiates differences as people tend to perceive men as being competent, skilful, aggressive and able to get things done; and thus ascribe leadership to men, while women are regarded as warm, expressive, quiet, gentle and lacking confidence (Posholi, 2013; Akinyi, 2014).

To further elicit participants' perceptions and attitude towards women leadership, the researchers asked a series of questions. The first question asked was if they would prefer having a female vice-chancellor for a change at Univen. The majority of the participants felt that it was high time for the status quo to be challenged as the position has always been occupied by men as they cited below.

Women should be given an opportunity to hold the position of Vice-Chancellor. Senior management level it's a men's world because there has never been a woman in such level at Univen, and I believe this is the time for them to be given a chance (Isha, 44, lecturer).

Definitely, it's a long overdue, cause it's as if women are not capable of functioning in that position (Brown, 41, junior lecturer).

In addition to the above, participants call for institutional transformation, particularly gender transformation in HEIs. They felt that women should be given a chance in leadership positions and that they should also be accommodated with their gender needs, as seen in the quote below.

It's high time that the status quo should be challenged as there is absolutely no reason why women should not be a vice-chancellor. It is just that they need to be accommodated with their responsibilities. But it is important that the workplace should be transformed (Derika, 53, Senior lecturer).

Women do have something to contribute in institution's management therefore they should be given the chance. Besides women have skills of bringing about harmony therefore higher institutions would thereby be more peaceful under women's leadership (Yash, 55+ Senior Lecturer and HOD).

To sum up, all the above subsections have emphasised the need for gender transformation in the higher education sector. Although participants argued that women should be employed in leadership positions; they advocated for the 'same treatment' approach for men and women with regards to qualifications, disregarding gendered responsibilities and needs, especially for women. Their emphasis was on competency as can be seen below:

It is only the qualification that matters most, if one holds the qualifications necessary for her to take that position why not? It will be very good because it has always been occupied by males (Green, 52, HOD and Professor).

For me the Vice-chancellor should be one who qualifies for the job and earns it on merit not only because of gender. If a woman qualifies the post should be given to her (Samie, 46, Lecturer).

The above statement was from a white HOD and professor. It implies that men and women are at the equal plain to be promoted or given high positions.

Yes women can also perform the same job as men but when looking for a women vice-chancellor it should be based on their competence. Women should not get the position because people want to meet the gender equality requirements, but because they can do the job (Tamu, 34, lecturer).

Women have to be represented in the leadership positions as long as they are competent (Tinu, 37, lecturer).

We should have a woman V.C but it should not be tokenism rather the person must have appropriate qualifications and experiences (Rasham, 55+Professor).

The issue of competency again comes into play, as also shown earlier under the section on representation. Participants mentioned that leadership requires a competent individual which is oppositional to how most women operate - collaboratively and cooperatively (Maqubela *et al.*, 2016).

Some women seem to think that women representation in leadership positions automatically means gender needs at the workplace are taken care of as appropriately captured in the following statement:

She will fast track the role of women in leadership and most importantly exercise gender programme for instance mainstreaming them and put systems in place (Vera, 52, lecturer).

Some pointed out women's qualities that resonate with 'good' leadership qualities.

Women can aspire and inspire a lot of people, they lead with integrity, and they have an authentic leadership skill. They are approachable and also hard workers. Therefore they can make it (Tady, 44, senior lecturer).

Women are better in-terms of record keeping and understanding the plight of students (Neetu, 54, Senior Lecturer).

In addition, the researchers also asked the participants with regard to whether there should be a female registrar within the institution. The majority of participants stated that a woman would be the most suitable candidate because of women's caring qualities as well as, their patience and tolerance which they maintain are requisites of a good leader, particularly for this position.

Actually although this is a demanding post, a woman would even be more suitable because it needs a lot of patience, tolerance and a caring person. Looking after people is in us women of which I know this sounds stereotypical but it seems to be so true (Derika, 53, senior lecturer).

Some expressed the need for transformation, as they articulated the need for cutting 'loose' and setting women free from traditional roles as can be seen in the quote below.

I feel that we are trapped in these traditional roles and it's time to cut them loose (Brown, 41, junior lecturer).

The response below articulates that women are as equally capable as men to work in leadership positions.

Women are not concentrated in the managerial level because they are being undermined either individually or as a group and given the opportunity they can do a great job as a Registrar (Isha, 44, lecturer).

Women have as much skills as any men therefore they can hold any position including being a registrar. Being a registrar doesn't need any male qualities (Yash, 55+ Senior Lecturer and HOD).

However, some of the participants pointed out that although it would be nice to have a female registrar, women should be appointed based on merit as demonstrated by quotes below:

Women must have necessary credentials (Rasham, 55+Professor).
All the selection must be based on ability, their merit (Kamla, 55+ Senior Lecturer).

4.7.3. Lack of Support for Women in Leadership

This subsection seeks to determine whether women receive full support in their leadership positions either from other women or men. Firstly, the researchers sought to find out if women would support women who are in higher leadership positions. To determine this, the question asked was, "*Do women support women who are in leadership positions?*" Subsequent to that, the respondents were asked to elaborate on their answers. Majority of the respondents gave the 'yes' answer to this question. However, upon their elaborations they showed that women do not actually support other women, as was demonstrated by the quotes that follow.

The quote below demonstrates that female academics themselves in the university under study do actually play a role in perpetuating patriarchy in a sense that they subscribe to the patriarchal culture and in turn practice what is referred to as pull her down syndrome (PHD).

Here at this University the following are exercised; culture and tradition, PHD (pull her down) syndrome and the belief that men will always elevate women (Vera, 52, lecturer).

The problem is that as female academics we do things on our own, it is very rare to find female academics making suggestions that we meet and see how we can help each other, I have seen we tend to derive joy when one of us is having problems, most of us female academics have PhDs' (Pull Her Down Syndrome), I think we are our own constrictions, because as long as we do not cry out and or reach out for help then we cannot develop our careers (Green, 52, HOD).

Secondly, some responses as seen in the following quotes implied that women can be their own worst enemies, actually worse than men when it

comes to support for women who are in leadership positions. The following statement attests to this assertion:

I am afraid that many women do not support other women at all. If anything they can be even worse than men and am not really sure why that is the case but what I can see happening is that all are doing things silently in groups and trying to out-do others. Hence they don't share information (Derika, 53, senior lecturer).

Women are basically nasty to each other (Tino, 35, lecturer).

Other respondents added jealousy and lack of trust among women as to why women fail to support each other. This is stated as follows:

Women fail to support each other because they are envious, jealousy and greedy (Rachna, 29, Senior lecturer).

Women don't trust each other, jealousy also is a factor (Aliya, 44, Senior Lecturer)

Another participant added that women choose to support men instead, in the process women help in giving males power to marginalize women who are in leadership positions. This sentiment can be traced in the following extract:

Women have problem of jealousy, bullying oppressing and helping/ supporting men to oppress women (Brown, 41, junior lecturer).

In the case of women choosing to support men instead of other women, two of the participants explained that this was due to the fact that women lacked the spirit of unity among themselves and because of the way they were socialised that men are the heads of the families as described below.

I think we lack the spirit of oneness, we have the fear of opening up to each other, we are not also supported by the leadership here, I think they see us unreliable, there is still a huge chunk and mentality of patriarchy which is in existence and is exercised in this university (Pinky,43,lecturer).

Because of socialisation many women are used to having men bosses and often struggle to support female leaders (Rasham, 55+Professor).

In the same vein, the study showed that women lack confidence in other women to the extent that they cannot vote for their fellow female

academics that are capable of holding leadership positions. This attitude can be traced in the following statement:

Women have this perceived thought/ideology that women are not capable to lead because of that they don't support each other, as women, we have a wrong mentality that women are weaker sex (Clere, 45, lecturer).

This can also be related to the findings in the earlier section that women lack confidence in themselves. Therefore, it is difficult for them to trust and believe that other women have the capability to be in leadership positions. This affirms literature that women lack unity and, therefore they cannot support each other (Maseko 2013; Uwizeyimana, 2014).

However, other participants (12%) stood their ground and supported their responses that women indeed supported other women in leadership. One of them explained that she was talking from experience as she was in leadership herself, as demonstrated in the quotes below.

Yes women do support women in leadership position; I am in in a leadership position myself
(Krish, 47, Professor and HOD).

I think the relationship they have with each other counts (Gaury, 45 Senior Lecturer).

The minority gave a both no and yes answer, stating that women do not fall under one category. There are those who find it difficult to be led by a female leader. Therefore, such women fail to support other women at the same time there are women who are more mature and experienced when it comes to leadership. Therefore, they support and uplift other women as explained below:

Unfortunately, women have that curse of not wanting to see another woman get ahead and that is why I have also put no. However mature women who have had experience and who are well versed with issues of management will know well to support other women because it's a chance that is rare and once that person takes that responsibility they will definitely need the support of other women otherwise she will be dominated by men (Aliya, 44, Senior Lecturer).

I think at times some women have a challenge at being led by other women. They might be difficult and find fault with everything she does

but it is certainly not all women who are unsupportive (Samie, 46, Lecturer).

Secondly, the researchers posed a similar question, *“Do you think men support women who occupy leadership position at the work place?”* The majority of the participants revealed that basically both men and women do not support women who are or who aspire to go for higher positions because they are generally not ready to be led by women. Men tend to make women feel inferior by marginalizing them, using ‘hegemonic masculinities’ to their advantage, presenting themselves as superiors and way better than women. The participants shared their experiences on this argument as follows:

I will tell you about my own experience. Men arrogate themselves powers that, to make sure that women are marginalized, at the same time as a way of portraying themselves as are better than women, or as saviours of women, they only assist women who worship them. At one point one of the male professors was saying to us I have been telling these women to come to me and I will help them publish (Derika, 53, senior lecturer).

Men don’t support women because they think they are superior (Samie,46, Lecturer).

This resonates with Uwizeyimana (2014) who found that women in leadership lacked support and acceptance from both men and women. The next quotes still demonstrate the male hegemony that women lack capacity to take leadership positions.

Men have the mentality that women cannot make it in higher position due to their lack of capacity to lead (Clere, 45, lecturer).

Not really man always loves to dominate meaning that they prefer to hold higher positions while women are under their power (Silvia, 45, lecturer).

Men don’t support women because they feel undermined and threatened (Kamla, 55+, Senior Lecturer).

One participant added that men were not comfortable with having female leader. This has been contributed by the way they have been socialised as this is stated in the quote below.

Men often are not comfortable with women leaders –again socialisation is playing a vital role (Ammol, 55+ Senior Lecturer).

On the contrary, the minority (12%) indicated that men do support women in leadership, saying that they are experiencing that in their schools as explained below:

I have seen men support and assist women occupying leadership position, I receive that support from my school staff (Vydia, 43, associate professor.)

I have witnessed it in my department, where the HOD is a female and men support her (Brown, 41, junior lecturer).

Men do support women in leadership position; my response is only based from my observation and from my school and department (Gaury, 45 Senior Lecturer).

One participant added that men do support women. However, they end up controlling the ones that they are supporting as explained below:

They do support them, but if that the particular woman is not careful they end up being controlled (Neetu, 54, Senior Lecturer).

On the other hand, some participants (8%) responded with both yes and no answer with the argument that it was two ways. They were men who supported and stood by women leadership as well as those who feel intimidated by women who are in higher position as illustrated below

My answer here again is on 2 levels, some men respect women especially if they are experienced for the job and hold an excellent cv but others may feel intimidated by a woman in a more senior position than themselves so might not be fully supported (Pakhie, 33, lecturer).

Not all men are unsupportive. There are those who support but certainly there are those who are hostile to the leadership of women and feel threatened and their manhood challenged (Yash, 55+, Senior Lecturer and HOD).

Both responses from men and women above concur with Mathevala (2014) who asserts that in the South African education system, men and women are generally not prepared to work under a woman because women lose their femininity the moment they become managers.

Conclusion

This study was about the attitudes of academics towards women representation in academia. The study was conducted at the University of Venda, located in the Vhembe district of Limpopo Province in South Africa. A sample of University of Venda female lecturers were asked to participate in the study as respondents. Through the study, it was found out that women came to work at universities with an expectation of equal treatment and assessment of their work on its merit, and an assumption that they would advance in the same way that men rise to the top of their disciplines. This has not always been the case, as this study has revealed. Women representation in the University of Venda and many other universities in South Africa remains very low, as the findings demonstrated that the representation of women in academia continue to remain low. In this research, it can be concluded that despite considerable efforts to combat gender inequity in higher education, the challenge persists. There is a need for more women representation in executive management, senior management, middle management and as well as in academic positions. What is needed is a more caring, collegial, family, and community-friendly culture within the university to support women. The patriarchal nature of South African society has gradually crept into the universities. This culture, consciously or unconsciously, shapes women's experiences in higher education. Morley (2005) calls for the need to forge alliances that expose and confront how gendered power is relayed via exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence in academic life and in wider civil society.

Recommendations

The researchers have recommendations that mainly may be of help to the institution, The University needs to incorporate democratic values and principles into its system. The university needs to enforce a supportive climate and environment that is responsive to women's issues rather than continue as an environment that impedes women's personal, academic, and professional development. The recommendations are as follows:

Development of a gender equality/equity policy

The University of Venda needs to improve the current employment equity policy and use it to develop an effective and clear gender

equity/equality policy which would provide a framework on mainstreaming gender in all areas of the functioning of the University. This would include the overhaul and reorientation of all policies, programmes and projects to incorporate gender starting from the planning stage (Maqubela, 2013). Among others, policies such as staff development, mentoring, research and publication and HR policies such as recruitment and selection policies should be among those in which gender should be incorporated, as also elaborated below. A commitment must be made by the University, in consultation with the Gender Studies Unit, for example, to organize and run a gender-sensitization program and for a, sex-role socialization program to educate men who are set in their ways as traditional thinkers and are proponents of patriarchy. There needs to be a collaboration of both women and especially men in achieving this effort.

Women in leadership must be seen to be doing things differently, promoting the culture of inclusion and challenging the power status quo, rather than being co-opted into the dominant power structures. Those who have managed to get into high positions should represent the needs of other women. Women in academic leadership can be empowering and can mobilize collective action toward a common good. In addition, women in leadership positions have to challenge established patriarchal and hierarchal styles of leadership, redefine power relations rather than allowing themselves to be co-opted and take risks of advancing the transformation and reconstruction agendas (Iannello, 2010) .

- Female academics should also strive to attain PhDs as this will increase their chances of being promoted.
- Female academics should have a positive approach towards research and publication to ensure that they are adequately exposed to academic writing which would help in their career development and increase their chances of getting promoted to leadership positions.
- Female academics should be assisted, guided, and appreciated so that they can be more assertive and progress in their careers. Social support is vital within the institution

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