LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES: EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEADERS

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of the study is to find out the challenges women experienced in reaching leadership positions. At the global level, according to the Global Gender Gap Report (2022), 33% of women hold leadership roles; however, in Pakistan, this number is lower. Eagly and Carli's (2003) theoretical framework emphasized the multifactorial barriers that women face in achieving leadership positions. A qualitative approach was used to get an in-depth understanding of the problem. Using the non-probability purposive sampling technique ten female heads of departments from the different public sector universities of Rawalpindi were selected who were willing to participate in the study voluntarily. With mutual consent, in-depth interviews were conducted. The findings reveal multiple barriers that affect women's ability to advance in leadership positions on three different levels: barriers at work, barriers in the home, and barriers at the individual level. The findings at work-level challenges include dealing with gender stereotypes, problems with leadership styles, and a lack of social networking. The findings at family-level barriers include work-family imbalance, different types of early socialization, and a choice between family and career. The findings at individual-level obstacles include issues with the physical appearance for upward mobility, Barriers for family oriented female leaders and grateful attitudes of female leaders. Based on the findings, the study suggests multifaceted approaches to deal with this issue at every level.
Keywords: Career, Challenges, Leadership, Obstacles, Stereotypes, Women

INTRODUCTION
Women comprise almost 50 % of the world population and their status has improved in the global society (UNDP, 2019). This has also increased attention to bring women into leadership roles for the benefit of societies. The Global Gender Gap Report (2022) highlighted that 33% of women hold leadership roles globally, however, the situation is different in Pakistan. Although women in parliament of Pakistan hold 17% seats but a report by Punjab Commission on Status of Women (2017) highlighted that the government presented 26 bills in the parliament in the year 2016 and out of it only one was proposed by women. This gender gap is also highlighted in the women leaders' conference on Global Health in 2016 regarding women in health leadership positions as well as they demanded 50% gender based equal representations in global health leaderships by 2030 (Ottsen, 2019).

As a matter of fact, Pakistan ranks lowest in economic participation 143 out of 156 due to multiple socio-cultural and other factors, the ranking is no better in health category where Pakistan rank 143 out of 156, a little better position in educational attainment category where Pakistan rank 135 out of 156 and a much better position rank is political empowerment which is 95 out of 156 due to quota system reserved for women in the parliament of Pakistan (Global Gender Gap Report, 2022).

We live in a patriarchal society where men and women are socialized in traditional roles according to their assigned genders that forced women and men to abide by certain socio-cultural norms that create obstacles for women to utilize their potential and exhibit their leadership skills in policymaking. This study is an attempt to explore those challenges that women experienced in reaching leadership positions.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Leadership is a broad concept and included certain theories, behaviors, styles, as well as role of the culture in developing leadership styles. Juliusdottir and Rafnsdottir (2018) highlighted that culture is one of the factors of low leadership positions for women that are still affected by gender norms. Although, extensive research on gender-related comparisons of masculine and feminine traits on leadership styles has been carried out (Carless, 1998; Eagly, 1987) and found leadership styles may be influenced according to gender norms in different cultures that tell men women and leaders about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors according to gender roles (Schein, 2007). Gibson (1995) mentioned male leadership styles as instrumental, agenetic, and with transactional qualities while female leadership styles as communal, caring, participative, and inclusive called transformational (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Leadership entails some elements included influencing people to achieve organizational goals with certain leadership styles (Daft, Kenrick & Vershinina, 2010). Effective leadership is considered universal that included leaders as team players, value-based participative, and humane while rejecting autonomous leadership that is based on competition status-conscious and self-centered. However, researches on leadership showed different notions and perceptions about leadership behaviors in different societies as well as perceptions of subordinates about gender differences in leadership styles of managers (House et al., 2004; Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2002; Bass & Stogdill, 1990).

These gender differences are the outcome of childhood socialization in families that trained girls and boys differently and encouraged boys to pursue their careers and girls to be passive and avoid risk-takers (Antecol, 2011). This childhood socialization creates an impact later in professional life where women are afraid to demand more in their salaries as compared to boys in similar positions (Blau & Kahn, 2017). The family because of binary division of labor and culturally unique forces not only have created obstacles for women at workplaces but also has hindered their career aspirations and opportunities for leadership as a result of which they remained underrepresented in leadership roles (Smirles et al., 2020). However, it is anticipated that the attitudes of employees, management, and organization could be the result of gender role socialization in leadership positions who are responsible to hire (Harrison, Leitch & McAdam, 2015).

Masculinity is still a dominant feature of leaders across cultures (Ottsen, 2019; Koening, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011). The managers show their biases while recruiting and evaluate positively male applicants in comparison with female applicants with similar degrees and experience (Ottsen, 2019; Isaac et al., 2009). The gender bias in wage is also viewed in different researches as women are less paid and advance at a slower pace as compared to men having the same qualifications (Eagly & Carlie, 2003). Another gender bias has shown in different researches towards favoring male junior employees through providing them access to connections and informal pathways to power which ultimately help men to reach leadership positions with a fast track (O' Brien et al., 2010).

Moreover, Alvesson and Billing (1997) mentioned that organizations and markets are also divided on the basis of gender. As mentioned by Eagly and Johnson, (1990) gender differences do exist with regard to beliefs on leadership behavior but in terms of the effectiveness of leadership and leadership styles, there are no gender differences present but with some cultural variations (Prime et al., 2008). But these beliefs regarding gender and leadership behaviors influence women's opportunities for career advancement (Ellemers et al., 2004; Schein, 2007), including managerial selection, promotion, placement, and training decisions (Schein, 2007). And women tend to receive less favorable or prejudicial evaluations (Powell, 1999).

Agars (2004) argues, in line with other scholars (Barreto et al., 2009; Ellemars et al., 2004), that gender differences, or perceptions of such differences, play a powerful role in maintaining the glass ceiling and a reason of few women leaders at the workplace. However, as shown in a study of recruitment by Nielsen (2015), the principle of meritocracy is often at odds with how selection actually works. Numerous factors, other than job-related skills, are involved in leadership acquisition and some of them are affected by gender norms.

A report of UNDP (2019) "Gender Equality in Public Administration" mentioned that currently, women in civil services are 43.9% and in a decision-making position, it is 29.7 % of women globally and also highlighted 22% of women's leadership positions in public service and hoped to make it 50% by 2050 globally. With regard to women's leadership positions, the main question remains unexplored about the few women in leadership positions (Rosser, 2003). More explanations are required

for those factors about few women in leadership positions (Lammers & Gast, 2017). As stated Smith (2017) by the influence of perceived incongruity over the time has resulted into smaller number of women in leadership positions. Apart from increasing the women in leadership position on considerations of fairness, improving the status of women overall is one of the shrewd policy (Han & Noland, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Eagly and Carlie (2003) identified different factors that create obstacles for women to reach in leadership positions. The five multifactorial obstacles that women confronted in leadership positions included 1) vestiges of prejudices, 2) resistance to women leadership, 3) issues of leadership styles, 4) demands of family life, 5) underinvestment in social capital. In addition to these factors, Hyrniewicz and Vianna (2018) identified three more barriers in their study 1) motherhood, 2) personal appearance and 3) childhood tasks. I used these frameworks to interpret my data as Pakistani society is more complex and included gender division of work in the family and men's legal assigned position as head of the household.

The Current Study

The purpose of the study is to find out challenges that women experienced in reaching leadership positions and based on these findings, a way forward can be developed.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach with feminist constructionist epistemology was used to get the answer to the research question. An in-depth interview as a method of data collection was used from ten female heads of departments from different universities of Rawalpindi/Islamabad with a purposive sampling technique. Unstructured open-ended questions were drawn to explore their understanding of few women in leadership positions.

Thematic analysis was done by using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps model. All the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and then started developing initial codes to understand the data. In the second stage, codes were assigned numbers for familiarizing data. In the third step, those codes were organized into different categories of similar concepts. In the next stage, further analyzed all these categories by clubbed them into different theoretical categories, and then all these theoretical categories were assigned different names and labeled under different themes. Finally, these themes were reported in the results section.

To maintain the objectivity and truthfulness of the research findings, criteria developed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) were used. Ethical considerations were carried out to keep the confidentiality of the participants' anonymous numbers were used instead of their names during the data collection, analysis, and reporting period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed multiple barriers that affect women's ability to advance in leadership positions on three different levels: challenges at workplace, challenges in the home, and challenges at the individual level. The data under different themes are presented below:

Challenges at workplace

Dealing with gender stereotypes

In general, there are some traits that are linked to men and women, such as men displaying self-assurance, aggression, and autonomy, while women display empathy and kindness. These mental associations are also linked to leadership roles, and Eagly and Carli (2003) mentioned these mental barriers as discrimination in advancing women in their careers. The results revealed traits like strengths, ambition, and self-confidence for men and dedication, and team players for women, which supported these stereotypes when researchers inquired about the most frequently observed leadership qualities. In addition, women were also thought to be more attractive, empathic, optimistic, dedicated, and attentive than men. According to Eagly and Carli (2003), men's attentive behavior is always emphasized, while women who exhibit the same behaviors are not. In the same way, men's unhelpful behavior is ignored, while it is not the case with women. According to Bennett (1997), men tend to overestimate their skills while women tend to underestimate them. Some participants emphasized the gender stereotypes that women experience when working in their current leadership positions, including the following: -

"Women always talk and think about relationships, and men discuss politics and sports." (Participant 3, 40 years)

"Women are emotional, and it is easy to deal with because the competition with them is not at the same level." (Participant 10, 50 years)

"I think men are more objective because this is their life, and women have a life at home as well." (Participant 8, 40 years)

In fact, women's leadership involves continuous questioning, judging, and facing prejudices in their careers. Women leaders managing men as colleagues, subordinates, and bosses is itself a challenge, and men take this as a challenge to their masculinity and behave very strangely. They are not receptive to accepting women as bosses. As

"One of the male runners under me refuses to make tea for my guests, as he told me that he never used to make tea at home, while I have seen him making tea under male bosses." (Participant 5, 39 years)

This is consistent with Eagly (1987), who argued that the traditional leader image is related to males, and they are considered natural leaders. Women are considered others or a token to stand out in management positions, and all their actions are scrutinized and analyzed under a male gaze (Oakley, 2000). Some of the participants highlighted this behavior as:-

"There is an inbuilt perception that men are natural leaders and they can manage all the things properly." (Participant 3, 40 years)

"Women cannot bear pressure as they always ask for help from others before making final decisions." (Participant 8, 40 years)

The results show that pressure is an essential component of leadership roles and that women bear the brunt of unnecessary comments made at work, which can range from harassment to insults to the person and are frequently based on stereotypes. These are considered jokes or compliments by those who cannot see the underlying prejudice related to women. One of the participants revealed that comments are not related to their ability rather these are personal insults during the conversation it is pointed out that

"Madam, you put weight or your complexion is going to be dark." (Participant 8, 40 years)

Moreover, women are called hysterical when they are assertive and speak louder, and it has not happened with men. This is confirmed by Heilman (2001), who says that it is easier to give personal judgment than to distort a person's achievements.

Problems with leadership styles

Eagly (1987), in her study, mentioned that traditional leadership is associated with male behavior. The literature on gender-related leadership found a mix of leadership styles and found male leadership styles to have genetic, instrumental, and transactional qualities, while male leadership styles had communal, caring, empathic, and people-related qualities (Gibson, 1995). Gender differences in leadership behavior are not fixed, as they appear and disappear according to social context. Social role theory explains that appropriate behavior for men and women in leadership styles may be influenced by different cultures (Schein, 2007). However, findings reveal that they do not think that men and women have different leadership styles. As

"It depends on men and women how they behave in certain situations." It's more of a personal matter than a gender." (Participant 1, 35 years)

"I believe that as leaders, there is no difference between men and women. Women demonstrate to prove more than men." (Participant 7, 45 years)

Some of them also provide contradictory views and remarks as

There is a difference between what people say and what they believe, so men and women are different in their leadership styles as men are more confident, can spend more time, and are more dedicated to their work." (Participant 3, 40 years; Participant 6, 35 years). Women exhibit a more transformational style of leadership when there is a need to motivate team members, clarify objectives, communicate values, and always align with organizational expectations (Eagly & Carli, 2003). One of the participants mentioned that

"She changed her leadership style and adopted the masculine style to prove to be a good leader and stay in the position." (Participant 6, 35 years)

Lack of social networking

It is difficult for women to invest time in making connections because of the load of double burden, they can invest in socializing with their fellows to link after office hours. As Eagly and Carli (2003) argued that promoting work, and confirming status and competence is not a communal behavior for women, it is unusual, and men always confirm these behaviors. Furthermore, modesty is an additional thing that is required for women who are not associated with men. Women find it difficult to make close relationships with their bosses and mostly these are men in most cases, women left their jobs and promotions. One of the participants mentioned that

"I do not like to project myself in front of my boss because I do not like to talk all the time with the bosses as it showed a flattering behavior as well." (Participant 9, 35 years)

There were a few more obstacles highlighted during research which were identified as family or career: a choice of her own, women with children undergoing problems, not celebrating their abilities rather attribute to external factors, and lack of confidence in affirmative actions.

Challenges at home

Work family imbalance

Every woman has to go through and fulfill the demands of family life during her career. Women continue to work after their jobs in the household which is more than a man. Eagly and Carli (2003) mentioned that women spend more hours on household chores in a week than men. The findings reveal that household chores and child care is the responsibility of women in Pakistan and married women having children do double or sometimes triple childcare and household work. The women who hired helpers in the household, only women interact or supervise them. One of the participants mentioned that

"Even if they are outside from home for office work and the husband had to take care of the children, in case of sickness, they asked the child to call your mother and get advice from her" (Participant 9, 35 years)

This is not equal and it is difficult to think about equality in this regard. Most women think that child care and household is their responsibility and at the same time men also think that it is women's responsibility to take care of the household and children. Modern women are not only supporting the family financially but also they must look after the household which is a double or triple burden on women and which Hochschild called a "second shift".

"I never see my husband doing this, I have to give up what I am doing when my daughter call me for any help in writing or reading" (Participant 3, 40 years)

Its women's duty to do household chores (Participant 1, 35 years)

My husband has flexible working hours but he never does anything related to cleaning or any other household activity (Participant 1, 35 years)

One of the participants pointed out that

"Women are always pointed by the family if they enter late at home and asked me to lighten my work and spend more with the family and it is not the case with men as they worked late hours, it is expected to be late" (Participant 8, 35 years)

It is because of the expectations that women ended up with more to family than their careers as compare to men. When they have small kids, they try to reduce their workload and do not participate in any official outside activities, and spend more time at home. As one of the participants mentioned that

"I could not participate in any more activities because of my kids and my schedule at home and I cannot reach late at home" (Participant 1, 35 years)

The work-family imbalance that women leaders faced particularly women who are in managerial positions, heads of departments, directors of the centers which is already time-consuming and important positions in the institutions and women in these positions still have to take care of their families and households which Cheung and Halpern (2010) argued that mothers in leadership positions are considered multitasking and they never take work and family experience as two separate lives. If it can take different and the responsibilities can be balance and household chores are shared by both men and women, it could be an opportunity for women to pursue their careers in a possible way.

Early socialization with working mothers

Children learn to model behavior by admiring their loved figures and in childhood, the modeling figures are their parents. They learn to behave about how their parents behaved during their childhood. Looking

mothers at work, show their children that women can work and have a family while the sexist education confuses them about their future life. One of the participants mentioned that

"I always wanted to do a job as I saw my mother working" (Participant 4, 35 years)
"It was in my mind that I have to do all this work when I will be married but I was also thought that it is the responsibility of my father to do some of these work but I never saw him helping to do these tasks. Actually, our educational system does not train men to do household chores and help working women by sharing their responsibilities." (Participant 3, 40 years)

Some of the participants shared their experience opposite what they saw in their childhood and they want to change their life by becoming independent and not economically dependent on men but it was hard to change men as they were not ready to take share the household responsibilities.

"My mother was a housewife and she motivated me to be independent and looking women economical dependent, I wanted to become an independent woman" (Participant 6, 35 years)
"I do not want to be dependent on men although my parents were living happily I want life for myself a self-independent life" (Participant 1, 35 years)

The findings reveal that most of the participants saw their mothers as housewives but their mothers always encourage them to be self-independent and have money on their own hands which motivate the girls to do work outside the home as a positive thing while they did not get help from their husbands in their household responsibilities.

Choice between family or career

Women who enter into the job before their marriage, afraid to reach certain positions as they fear that they were not able to manage the balance between work family and their marital life will suffer in case they get that position. That is the very cultural context of Pakistan where men hold the head of the household status and they always hold certain powers on women and to maintain that power, they put pressure on their wives to leave the job as I can manage financially. It is hard for them to take leadership responsibilities. One of the participants mentioned about one of her colleague that

"She has joined this job before marriage as her mother motivated to be economically independent and now after thirteen years spending in the careers, she is being forced by her husband either to choose family or the job." (Participant 9, 35 years)

It is a fact that there few women in leadership positions as compare to men and it is considered as it is their own choice. Actually, women are taking the extra burden from women, it is difficult for women to get promotions. As women carry more family responsibilities in their lives and their work is less centered. This is not about her conscious decisions but the invisible or unconscious influence on their work which makes it difficult to understand the underlying biases and prejudices against women.

Challenges at individual level

Physical appearance for upward mobility

Physical appearance is another gender bias that women faced at workplace, when they are ready for promotions in their careers in the same job with the same experience, men promoted faster than women because of these biases mentioned by all the participants and this is consistency with Eagly and Carli (2003) that argued the faster promotion of men as compared to women as a vestige of prejudice. The physical appearance of women is associated with their job promotion as women are judged on their dressing, hair styling, and they are asked to change their dressing and hairstyling as compared to men at their workplaces, as no one comments on men's physical appearance. The findings reveal that women faced comments on their dressing like

"The color of your dress is cool" "it's beautiful", "you look gorgeous", "and the dye of hair suit you"
(Participant 2, 37 years; Participant 8,40 years; Participant 4, 35 Years; Participants 10, 50 years)

The findings further reveal prejudices that young women always faced comments on their weights. Furthermore, Women always wear their make-up even they are working like mad. If they will not care about their looks, they faced certain comments mentioned as

"Make some clothes according to the fashion" (Participants 2, 37 years)

All these comments actual not only feel women devalue in their work contribution but also play a role as an obstacle to advance in their career in leadership positions as Heilman (2001) mentioned all these a demerit of women and a serious problem in advancing their careers as these are the problems that men do not face at their workplace.

Barriers for family oriented female leaders

In Pakistan, the average family size range from four to five persons, and women bear the extra pressure of society to have children within the first year of their marriage. This leads to an increase in the family size and the larger the family size, less the chances to be in leadership positions for women as compared to those women who do not have children and excel in their careers. The participants revealed that women without children face less prejudice in their careers as most of the three participants who were leading as academic heads were without children. It was realized that women who remain unmarried, if she wants to reach on some higher position as these are not the demands that are often required from men. That's why it is not mandatory for women to reach leadership positions as these issues are not confronted by men. Some of the participants mentioned that

"My husband knew that I will leave any opportunity due to care work of the family" (Participant 9, 35 years)

Furthermore,

"The men as boss refuse to take female attendants in their offices because they think that female attendant will not stay with them late in the evening" (Participant 10, 50 years)

Grateful attitudes of women leaders

Women not only need acknowledgment but at the same time, they did not appreciate themselves and tend to attribute their success to external factors and to luck which in return, reduces their achievements and merit to the potential jobs. On one hand, they admit their hard work and investment in the work but at the same time, they avoid presenting themselves as superior (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Two of the participants mentioned as:

"No doubt, I worked hard a lot and studied too much but it's my luck that I am here as I never thought about it" (Participant 5, 39 years)

"If God pleased with their favorite then shower blessings on them and I am one of those that have been blessed with the blessings to have this position" (Participant 10, 50 years)

CONCLUSION

There are a number of obstacles that Pakistani women in higher leadership positions faced during their careers. At the workplace, women must be perfect in their physical appearances as well as equally good in their leadership positions but women are required to be bossy at the same time. One expectation from both men and women is to behave differently in their leadership styles but put pressure on women to balance their work-family life. This work-family life balance affects the children later in their life as children from working mothers are socialized differently and undergo many problems and it was also reflected from the women whose mothers were working. Balancing work-family life left no room for women to engage themselves in socially networking which is helpful in advancing women their career. Women in leadership positions often found guilty about their choice of preferring career over family. Women with fewer children faced fewer problems but mostly, they are thankful for their luck in their success rather than the hard work they put in their career.

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