

Barriers Faced by Women Educational Managers at an Indian University

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INTRODUCTION

The development of a gendered perspective in relation to educational leadership and gendered influence is valuable. Carol Gilligan (cited in Whitehead, 2000) is correct in advocating the recognition of gendered perspectives, because different perspectives with different standards of judgement may be reflected in two different moral ideologies, with separation justified by an ethic of rights while attachment is supported by an ethic of care.

Most of us are intellectually aware of the complexity of women's situation and recognize that it needs to be viewed in a broad historical context of inclusion and exclusion. For example, recently Venkatasubramanian(2001) observed that literacy and employment rates among women had improved over the nineties however, their role in family decision-making continued to remain low. By exploring women's place in higher education (HE) institutions, the lack of women's leadership should be analyzed to determine for the gap and persistence factors in maintaining the gap. Chliwniak (1997) analyzed the gender gap in HE leadership and discussed the differences in the leadership style of men and women in HE, and the glass ceiling in HE. Getskow (1996) also reviewed the current literature on the status of women holding administrative positions in

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American community colleges, their styles of leadership, and the ways in which they can promote future opportunities for women in their institutions.

According to Aguirre (2000), women face barriers in the academic workplace that question their legitimacy as academics and their access to institutional resources that promote professional socialization.

Although in Indian HE system, women are severely under-represented at senior academic management positions, there is lack of research-based information about the women managers' perceived barriers faced by women educational managers (WEMs) at an Indian University in terms of existence, type, causes, and remedies.

METHOD

In the university under this study, there are three women educational managers at the post-graduate department level. The Heads of the Departments are considered as educational managers. The Head of the Department of one of the departments is also In-charge Vice -Chancellor at present. All these three women educational managers were the participants in this study.

We conducted open-ended, unstructured, and relatively in-depth interviews with these women participants to explore and elaborate their perceptions of the barriers faced by them. The interview process with each participants lasted about one hour. These interviews were centered around the 'what', 'why', and 'how' of the perceived barriers of women educational managers.

We inductively analyzed the content of the data collected through interviews for the patterns in their perceptions. For this analysis, we followed the suggestions of Bogdan and Biklen (1992, pp. 153-183) for such qualitative study.

RESULTS

Yes, I Have Barriers.

The content analysis of the interview generated material clearly showed that WEMs faced barriers. The barriers, they experience, can be classified into two types: internal and external.

Internal barriers were expressed by them as their womanly characteristics. These internal barriers include: emotionality, shyness, decency and lack of aggressiveness and rapid decision making. They perceived these characteristics as barriers in their managerial duties. One of the participants said, “we think much before deciding anything, so we cannot take rapid actions like males.”

It seems that the WEMs run institutions very smoothly but the analysis of the interviews revealed the clear perception of barriers the WEMs faced from the environment. These barriers are considered as external.

The WEMs perform a dual role. They have to manage two ‘fronts’: family and work. In comparison to male educational managers, they have more responsibilities. Furthermore, they have peculiar types of restrictions from family and society. That’s why one of them said, “we lack wide and vivid experiences as, in comparison to males, the opportunities to experience the world are restricted for us.” This situation leads them not to arrange meetings with other educational managers so easily as males can have. Being WEMs, they have experienced that male colleagues take them as inferior personality and “The ego of male colleagues, even of peons, is hurt in obeying a woman.” The majority of administrative staff, being male, avoids WEMs, especially in case of crucial decisions. It was the opinion of all the participants that barriers, however, come from administrative staff and not from academic equivalents. The male administrators on higher

positions showed negative attitude towards WEMs. It was the common observation of all the participants that male kept abnormal distance and they have to face a vulgar type of prejudice from males.

These Are the Causes, Sir!

The WEMs attributed the barriers mainly to family, society, socio-cultural background, and minority of WEMs. When we asked them the causes of the barriers, they faced, the unanimous response was: Our social system has the roots of these barriers.

The analysis of interviews showed that family, society, and socio-cultural background were the major causes of barriers faced by WEMs. They were of the opinion that the social pattern makes males believe that the social pattern makes males believe that the deciding factor should be male and women can be controlled. This type of mentality is cultivated due to the tradition of male dominance. The WEMs also considered family as a cause: “girls don’t have opportunity of decision making at home. Even the decisions directly related to them are taken by the family.” They mentioned that gender differences can be traced in upbringing of male and female children. Such treatment in the family leads women to expect protection from men.

The participants opined that males are not habituated to receive orders from females and females don’t have habit of self-imposition. This phenomenon causes barriers when females have to work as educational managers. They also said that the lack of confidence on the part of WEMs can also be a cause of such barriers.

Though the minority of WEMs emerged as a cause of these barriers, all the participants were not of the same opinion. It was believed that these barriers have a biological base also.

Here are the Solutions.

We finally asked the participants the probable remedies of the barriers faced by them. Three remedial measures emerged from the discussion with WEMs: democratic management, training and education, and assertiveness.

The participants suggested that the democratic management can be a solution: “Whenever it is possible decisions should be taken based on discussion with colleagues. They should feel that the decision is taken by them also and not by WEMs only.” They insisted that interaction and persuasion can be a remedy of these barriers. Women should cultivate the habit of open discussion and should try to meet and talk freely with colleagues.

All the participants perceived training and education as a remedy. They suggested that the male should be trained in gender sensitization: “At home children should be educated for gender equality.” They traced out the role of family to impart necessary education; family can play the role of an important agency. The opinions of the participants regarding the role of formal education differed largely. One participant opined that the formal education can be a major remedy; One participant, on the other side said that present formal education system can help little, but she also said that education with feminist interpretations can be useful in avoiding such barriers. It was also suggested that WEMs should be given training in the area of decision making when they have already entered the field. Seminars and workshops can be organized to fulfill such purposes was a suggestion revealed from the analysis of the interviews. It was also suggested that WEMs should develop assertiveness. It can help them in avoiding the barriers.

DISCUSSION

The WEMs did face barriers. Their own emotionality, shyness, and lack of decision-making were their internal barriers in HE management, whereas continuing conflict between family and work, and vulgar type of prejudice from masculine gender in every sphere were external barriers.

The WEMs perceived that the gendered *sanskritization* of our context is the root cause of the barriers.

They envisioned their liberty from the barriers through 'inclusive' education in its broadest sense.

And perhaps, the first lesson of the education may be Venkatasubramanian's(2001) these words, "women! Be courageous, other things follow."

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