Empowering Women: Their Fragile Ladder To Achieve The Highest

Dr. Bushra Inayat Raja[1] , Waqas Ali Haider*[2]

[1]Ph.D (Leadership and Management), UCL Institute of Education University of London, UK.

[2]Ph.D Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Okara, Okara, Pakistan.
& Visiting Lecturer, Islamic Studies & Ethics, Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author Email: Waqas.alihaider@gmail.com;

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8391-1138

ABSTRACT

Women's strong personality qualities become weaken because of their own personal attitudes (William Moulton Marston, 2015). This paper reports on an exploratory study to explore the underrepresentation of women in senior management and leadership roles within the universities of Pakistan and endeavored to identify personal constriction and limitations to wear big hats. The qualitative study was conducted on 8 of the public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan. Convenience sampling technique was utilized to select the sample of the study. The semi structure interview was conducted. Prior to that an interview guide was also developed. Ethical consideration were also observed in letter and spirit. Thematic analysis technique was applied. The data was transcribed and data coding process followed step by step to develop the similar themes which responded the objectives of the study and the research questions. The analysis provided an unprecedented and comprehensive view of the complex, and multifaceted dimensions of distinctive factors influencing women's career headway. The participants – both junior and seniors – informed about the limitations they had faced when they got appointed or when they had moved into senior roles.

Keywords: Women, Career Progression, Top Management Position, Pakistan, Personal Factors, Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

For the first time in the global history, the percentage of the world's top universities that are govern by women has reached 20 (Times Higher Education, 2022). It is brilliant update that women university heads is continuing to increase and has reached to a significant number. But still long has to go to achieve the equal parity with men in such outstanding positions in the Higher Education sector (Ibid). Women need to work hard to take on further leadership roles. For which the potential hurdles need to be addressed at each step of their professional and personal lives to increase this percentage.

The literature about women in management positions in Pakistan is limited, a wide range of international literature has been considered which has endeavored to explore the different factors which impact on women's representation in different management positions from different perspectives, adopting different methods. In general, the literature suggests that there are a number of complex factors obstructing women's advancement in leadership and management including gendered attitudes (Vinkenburg and Van, 2005); gender discrimination (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010; Blackmore, 1999); the exclusion of women from male developmental networks (Tharenou, 2005); the exclusion of women from career development opportunities (Morley, 2006).

Morley (2006) argues that gender discrimination excludes women from career development opportunities. Moorosi (2010) also found evidence of discrimination among women at the level of planning, access into management and once they held such positions. Jones et al. (2006) and Blau and Kahn (2007) report that due to bias and discrimination against women they are paid less than men. Eagly and Carli (2007) and Barreto et al. (2009) refer to the glass ceiling and ILO (2004) draws similar conclusions, while Altman et al. (2005) suggest that the glass ceiling operates at the highest management levels.

Ibarra et al. (2010) and Mann (2009) proposes that men continue to dominate because of their greater control over economic, political and social resources. As a result, there is a tendency for women to leave large organizations and pursue their career in small organizations (Fielden and Davidson, 2010). Oke (2003) and Ahmad (2001) also believe that women's career progression is hindered by the social environment, legal and institutional structures, unequal employment opportunities, work-life balance and restricted access to professional development opportunities associated with economic resources. In Asian contexts like India and Pakistan, while avenues for work are now increasingly open for women, they still have to fight against gender bias to gain acceptance as equals (Mirza and Jabeen, 2011).

As far as the status of Pakistani women is concerned, due to the positive changes in girls' education, the female literacy rate has increased during the last decade. Women's participation in higher education has also substantially increased. Generally, women have achieved a satisfactory presence in teaching roles. However, regardless of all of the above, there is a lack of women in senior management positions in higher education. The numbers are unequal to those of men and despite the government's efforts towards opening up more and more opportunities for women, gender discrimination remains a reality with wide inequalities (Jabeen and Iqbal, 2010; Mirza and Jabeen, 2011).

The above mentioned factors speak about the multifaceted reasons but the factors which are associated with the limitations of women's personal attributes, their personality differences and lacking of their personal attributes cannot be ignored. If in true sense the underrepresentation of women in senior level positions need to be reduced. The lack of personal attributes included those relating to the self-beliefs such as a lack of confidence in their abilities to succeed in senior positions. This is important as a positive self-image produces optimistic behavior that is vital to living a self-regulating, dynamic and responsible life (Mathipa, and Tsoka, 2001). Morgan et al. (1981:531) suggest that "a person's self-concept is a direct consequence of the developmental processes and experiences, she or he has had". Further to this, the motivating force in pursuing any occupation is often assumed to be a significant factor in defining career aspirations (Burke and Mattis, 2005). Career aspirations are conditioned by different factors such as gender, socioeconomic position, social environment, parents' occupational environment, academic credentials (Watson et al., 2002). Assertiveness is also perceived as a desirable trait and is defined as the ability to express one's thoughts and to stand up for one's own rights in a way that does not neglect the rights of others (Astrong, 1991). It is the skill to communicate the appropriate expression of feelings, needs opinions, and ideas in a confident and direct manner while respecting the feelings of others (Ibid). It is often believed that women lack this very important aspect of leadership. Consequently, it is considered as one of the barriers to their career development (Mathipa and Tsoka, 2006). Professionalism is how an individual behaves in the workplace. Being a professional requires maturity, integrity and self-awareness (Tomlinson, 2004). Professionalism is considered key to success and advancement (Reamer, 2009). However, a number of studies have noted generally negative perceptions of women as professionals (Deal and Stevenson, 1998).

It reflects the importance of the personal attributes that play a significate role in the career progression of women. This importance led me to undertake this in-depth study on the factors influencing women's career progression to senior management positions at women's own personal level. Rather than digging out the external factors for this purpose. The research reported here has rigorously attempted to explore women's personal factors influencing their career progression to the senior positions

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The study designed to build on the existing research and adopt an individual perspective, concentrating on women's own personality, instead of multifaceted viewpoint to explore those factors influencing on women's advancement to senior management positions.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question for the study was:
What major constraints do women face at personal level to their advancement to senior management positions?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

i.   Sampling Technique

In this study the purposive sampling was deliberately used to address the specific issues related to women's underrepresentation in senior management positions. This involved the selection of a group of women to study on the basis of relevance to the focus of my research

The sample of focus group and key informants was also purposive and not necessarily representative

ii.   Study Group and Population

Eight of the public sector universities located in the Punjab province of Pakistan were selected. The study involved a total of 48 women; 30 senior women in university management, married, single, with/without children working in cadre/basic pay scale (BPS) 18 and above which comprised Deans, Directors, Heads of Department, Registrar, Treasurer and representatives of other management units of Universities. Eighteen younger women working in cadre/ BPS 17 as Assistant Controller, Assistant Registrar, Assistant Treasurer and Assistant Director having demographic characteristics similar to the senior women were also selected. Detail of the sample is shown in the following table:

Table 1. Sample of Public Sector Universities in Pakistan

Serial #	Name of University	Rural/Urban	Mixed/Single Sex University	No. of Participants Senior/Junior
1	University A	Urban	Mixed	2/2
2	University B	Urban	Mixed	2/3
3	University C	Urban	Women only	3/3
4	University D	Urban	Mixed	4/2
5	University E	Urban	Women only	5/2
6	University F	Urban	Mixed	7/1
7	University G	Urban	Mixed	4/2
8	University H	Rural/Urban	Mixed	3/3
Total				**30/18=48**

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The main research approach was in-depth interviews using a semi-structured 'Interview Guide to explore the perceptions of 48 women working in management positions and to gain in depth insights into the personal challenges and obstacles they encountered that impeded their career progression.

Since this study aimed to discover and explore a wide range of views, opinions, and meanings that women assigned to their experiences, a focus group discussion was also conducted considering as a further appropriate qualitative research method for the study.

Ten key informants were also interviewed to get detailed information and opinions based on their positions responsibilities and understanding of the issue to be explored.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

For the analysis of the qualitative data the graphing features in Microsoft Office Word and Excel were used to display the frequency count of the responses. The inductive coding and thematic analysis was utilized searching for patterns and themes. The analysis provided an unprecedented and comprehensive view of the complex, distinctive personal factors influencing women's career progression.

The theme personal constraints along with its sub-themes is discussed in the following sections with descriptive examples selected from the participant's responses to explain the ways in which participants' perceived deficiencies in relation to their personal and professional attributes which limited their progress to senior management positions. The themes include:
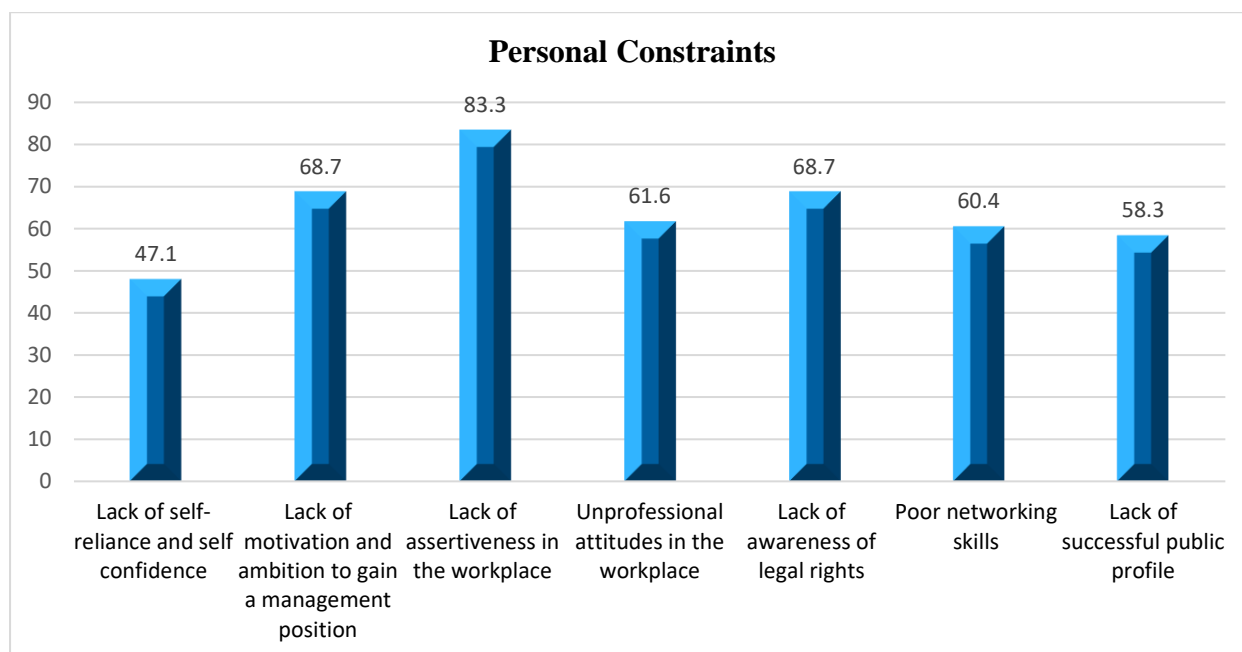
Perceived lack of personal attributes

- lack of self-reliance and self-confidence
- lack of motivation and ambition to gain a management position

Perceived lack of professional attributes
- lack of assertiveness in the workplace;
- unprofessional attitudes in the workplace;
- lack of awareness of legal rights;
- poor networking skills;
- lack of successful public profiles

The Figure 1.1 shows the percentage of participant's self-perceptions in relation to the emerged theme personal constraints:

Figure 1.1 Personal factors influencing women's career progression

Personal Constraints

DATA INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Part 1: Perceived lack of personal attributes

This section sets out examples of the emerging themes relating to their perceived lack of personal attributes influencing women's career progression.

a. Lack of self-reliance and self-confidence

With reference to the findings emerging from the interviews a key informant indicated that generally women were reluctant to apply for senior management positions. They did not put themselves forward as potential candidates for the positions advertised, although they were appropriately qualified to apply.

The lack of applicants may also impact on the behavior of interview panels. As Poskitt (1999) suggests those wishing to appoint women are often discouraged by insufficient female applicants. This situation cannot be attributed to a shortage of appropriately trained professional women. Elsevier (2001) argues that women always underestimate their potential.

Another key informant also commented that women were less likely than men to submit job applications for posts for which they were appropriately qualified. Men did not hesitate to apply for senior positions whether they fulfilled the job requirements completely or partially:

> "Due to the nature of my job, I have direct contact with university management regardless of gender and seniority. In general, I have observed that comparatively, women, despite their good qualifications have lower self-confidence compared to men. Men are more confident and have a high level of self-confidence in putting themselves forward. […] women hold back, despite having good qualifications". (Key informant,)

Nearly half of the participants (47.9%) revealed low self-confidence with respect to their management capabilities. They were either less confident in their professional abilities or found the organizational environment highly competitive. Their lack of self- esteem in applying for more challenging roles marginalized them:

"I am believed to be quite a disciplined person. Everybody says I am well organized […] committed, and so on […] Yes, I am […]. I know how to manage my time, how to keep a balance between home and work. […] I want to deliver to the best of my abilities. But at the same time I understand that to work in the most senior management positions requires more qualities […], a charismatic personality […], which I feel I don't possess […]. In a few years I will be retiring but I never thought to apply for the post of vice-chancellor, though, on the basis of my qualifications and experience I am quite eligible to apply. But I have no ambition for that". (Senior Interviewee,)

In other instances, interviewees aspired to progress to senior management positions but were afraid of the challenging tasks and duties associated with such positions. Their lack of self-confidence was manifested in their cautious approach to applying for management positions and promotions:

"I am eligible for the next higher grade. Parallel to the management cadre a faculty position has also been announced. I am thinking of applying for the teaching side because a higher management position requires different skills than teaching […]. If I was appointed to a higher management position, I would have to be present at every activity outside the office. I would have to speak at many forums but I am not confident enough at being effective in meetings. I can't face too many public events […] Despite this, I feel that senior management positions in our country are very attractive and associated with many benefits […] I cannot decide what I should do" (Senior Interviewee,)

The data showed that people had negative perceptions of their female colleagues. They considered that women themselves were responsible for their absence from senior management. A key informant indicated that some women, who had succeeded to get to the top levels, still had feelings of low self-confidence. They did not speak publically. They felt uncomfortable with argument and discussion. They avoided being visible in public forums. Although these attributes were not included in selection criteria they were perceived as impacting negatively on women's selection for senior management positions:

"[…]. Once I accompanied a group of senior managers to a foreign country to attend an international meeting for university administrators. During the sessions I observed that most of the arguments originated from male

colleagues. Female participants kept quiet […]. Realizing that I tried to cover up the gap from the women's side, though relatively, I was younger […]. Despite that I participated in the group discussions. This kind of behavior is unacceptable for senior women. They shouldn't behave like that […]. They need to speak up if they want to be recognized […] but they never spoke during the meetings […]. This destroys the image of women leaders". […] (Key Informant,)

One participant acknowledged that she was not able to speak confidently in public:

"Yet this is indeed a skill that a good leader must have but I still get nervous while asking questions at conferences or seminars, even during the meetings. Actually I am introverted. I feel happy working while in the office and try to avoid this kind of situation which I find difficult. […] This is the only thing which is beyond my control otherwise I enjoy my senior position". (Senior Interviewee,)

The junior participants also acknowledged that getting their point of view across during important discussions was significant for their careers but they were not confident about the strength of their arguments. This led them to keep quiet and not contribute to official meetings and conferences. While they were clearly aspiring to high level administrative positions, a few of them were afraid of not being able to cope with the most senior positions:

"I could not speak up and express myself even when on most occasions I have something important to add to the discussion […]. We are four women working in the same office in equal positions. I am satisfied with my work inside the office and managing my files on the computer. Whenever representation of our office is required, I always wish that my other colleagues would go. […] There is no doubt that I want to attain a senior position. This is my utmost desire […] but the main question is how I would cope with the job requirements". (Junior Interviewee,)

The data showed that personal constraints were believed to limit women's confidence in applying for senior management positions. The participants exhibited low self-confidence, despite the fact that they were fully qualified and sufficiently experienced to apply for such positions. They held negative self-perceptions and lacked self-assurance in their work abilities.

b. Lack of motivation and ambition to gain a management position

The data revealed that 68.7 percent of the participants lacked motivation and ambition to gain a management position. A key informant suggested that women's relatively low career aspirations and career behaviors were related to the real hurdles that they faced to their career advancement. Women themselves were often unenthusiastic about accepting management positions:

"Very few women have the aptitude and motivation to participate in senior management positions" (Key informant)

The participants acknowledged that they had a lack of career ambition. They had low aspirations for acquiring such a leading role. They had not planned a career path to a top position. They had proceeded with their career in an unplanned manner or attained a management position either accidentally or in fulfilling parental aspirations:

"Honestly speaking, I was not interested in my higher education but my father was keen on my studies […]. When I did my PhD my parents thought I should take a job […], so I did […]. I never demanded anything. I didn't desire a leading position. All is blessings of Allah[1] who has given me this high status. I never wanted to become the chairperson and Head of Department. It is well known to everybody here in this university that twice I refused the position of chairperson. I had developed some kind of conflict over this issue but despite my resistance I had to do it […] Actually, I have no temperament to be a manager or leader. I never wanted to be what I am now. I want to be good looking and charming. I want to wear good clothes. The beautiful dresses of brides attract me a lot. To be very honest, these are the truths of my life". […] (Senior Interviewee,)

The data further revealed that women often needed to be persuaded by others to apply for management positions. In some instances their spouse's influence on their career was stronger than their own choices:

"Once I applied for a Vice-Chancellor's position but I did not do so by myself. My husband convinced me to do so, although I was not fully convinced but just respected his wishes and idea […]. He prepared all the papers for me and completed the due requirements for the application […]. I just appeared before the interview panel […] However, I was not appointed which is not surprising at all". [Laughed] (Senior Interviewee)

Another senior participant perceived that her senior position was due to her work experience in the field not her own aspirations. She was committed to her previous teaching job:

"I came to the management cadre through the passage of time. Due to my seniority, I was appointed as the Head of the Department […] However, parallel to the management role, I feel pleasure and satisfaction while teaching […] I have no such feelings relating to management work,

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[1]Arabic word for God

> sometimes I feel this is absolutely a thankless task". (Senior Interviewee, 25)

Low career aspirations also led to less interest among junior participants in attempting to obtain high level management positions. Although they were educated and experienced, they did not see themselves in more senior management positions. They had been persuaded and advised by others to take up available opportunities:

> "I did not apply for my first induction to a management position. The vice-chancellor of this university knew of my experience and qualifications therefore, I was called up and offered the job […] Although, I was quite reluctant because it was not my choice. I am still planning to go for an academic role. Whenever the opportunity is available I will do that". (Junior Interviewee)

A few participants got their management position because when they had completed their degrees, opportunities were available. They applied for and got a position:

> "To complete my degree requirements I had to do an internship in this office for three months. The senior officer was impressed with my managerial skills. After completion of my degree I was offered this job. I accepted it as at that time there was no other job available and I wanted to have a job. […] Since then I have carried on working here but continuously feel uncomfortable with management responsibility. It seems, this is not for me […] although, and through the passage of time I have enough experience and am qualified with the required skills and experience. But I would not be interested in a further senior position and want to go for teaching". (Junior Interviewee)

The research also revealed that some of the participants were hesitant to work in departments where hard work was required They wished to direct their career goals towards less challenging positions and wanted to follow a simpler career path:

> "I am not too keen on being in a senior post in this department […] I am happy with my present position. In particular, the department in which I am currently working is very sensitive and requires a high level of confidentially to ensure that the information and particular files are not approached by unauthorized persons. […] If I became overall in charge, I would be accountable for different matters and issues […] I want to remain away from all that".
> (Junior interviewee)

Some of the senior participants also did not aspire to the most senior positions. They reported that they were satisfied in their current role. They lacked clear aspirations to be in the most

powerful positions. They had little concern for their career progress. They had not planned to get a higher degree which was a prerequisite for the most senior positions

> "I never thought about getting my PhD […] though there were several opportunities available when I could get a scholarship for studying abroad, because I was working in the department which awarded grants to get higher degrees to the students. I was not interested at all in spending my life in studies. I have no such aspiration […] what I have acquired is enough".
> (Junior[2] Interviewee)

Some of the participants who had taken on a management position did so because they did not consider that they had appropriate skills to be successful university teachers. According to them, university level teaching required high level skills and they did not feel that they were competent to meet these requirements. Therefore they preferred to have an administrative role:

> "I wished to apply for an academic position but to be honest I think to deliver, one must have a sound knowledge of a relevant subject and proper qualifications […] At the moment, the degree I have is enough to work in my current management position, but not enough to deliver at university level. […] Furthermore, to deliver, you have to prepare yourself. I am not that kind of person. Therefore in management I am happy […] at least you don't have to prepare a lecture at night […] I just finish my daily work and go home".
> (Senior Interviewee)

The interview data suggested that women's relatively low career aspirations constituted barriers to their career advancement. Some women did not want to pursue a management career path, therefore they held back from seeking advancement into senior roles.

PART 11: PERCEIVED LACK OF PROFESSIONAL ATTRIBUTES

In addition to personal constraints, the data revealed that there was a perceived lack of professional attributes including the attitudes of participants towards their profession which were related to their career behavior, assertiveness, networking skills and professionalism. This deficiency hampered their career progression in the ways set out in the following sections.

a. Lack of assertiveness in the workplace

The data revealed that most of the problems relating to the non-assertive behavior of the participants was in the workplace. The majority of the interviewees (83.3%) were not assertive in their dealings with others and this constrained them in attaining their rights. This presented a major obstacle to their career advancement. One of the participants shared how one of her

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[2]Recently promoted to a senior position

colleagues lost her chance for promotion and although the action of the university authorities was morally and professionally inappropriate she did not protest:

> "Once, she was in a foreign country attending an international conference. During the conference she got an interview call from her university. The interview was scheduled within a week. She had to shorten her trip, and skip the remaining conference programs. She made every effort to change her flight and managed to get back for the morning of the interview. Five minutes before the interview the relevant administrator said: "there was an ambiguity about your eligibility, therefore you cannot be called for interview […] Oh, my goodness! […] It was the height of irrationality […] It was 100% true that they gave a false excuse and wanted to select their own favorite […] She had full rights to file a case against them. […] She took no action. I personally tried to convince her to do something. She said leave it, otherwise they might develop a grudge against me. This was about 7 years ago and she is still working at the same grade". (Senior Interviewee)

The research suggested that regardless of professional expertise and performance, lack of assertiveness in the workplace remained an issue for most of the participants. They were hesitant to take the appropriate steps against any unfair treatment and did not attempt to get justice. Consequently, they faced failure at different stages of their career promotion:

> "I was successfully working in charge of a university department. The innovations I had made were well known and appreciated by everyone. One day out of the blue, I received a letter asking me to hand over the responsibility. The decision was entirely unjustified and was based on the personal likes and dislikes of another senior person involved. It was apparent that the experience which I was gaining ultimately would provide me with the basis to be eligible for a further senior management post. Therefore, abruptly, the responsibility was withdrawn from me. Even during this process a senior person [she named that person] ignored the institutional code of conduct and used very inappropriate language […] I wanted to appeal against this unjustified and unfair decision which would affect my seniority. I was very perturbed over the situation. […] I drafted the appeal letter but could not convince myself to send it." (Senior Interviewee)

Another participant was also clearly treated unfairly in a selection and promotion process. She did not have enough courage to stand up for her rights. She found it a very challenging and difficult task. This had a profound impact on her professional life and career:

> "Despite my qualifications, when another candidate was given preference over me with less qualifications and experience, my colleagues, friends and family members asked me to seek justice from the court. But I did not do

that. […] though it was obvious that I could easily win the case. But I thought
I would be penalized in the future". (Senior Interviewee)

The key informants also associated assertiveness as important in bringing about change. They argued that if women exposed organizational issues courageously, responsible people would be more careful in future. In contrast, men did not forgive anyone who might hamper their careers:

"There is a faculty lounge for all academic staff and administrators to spend their free time. I noticed that male faculty members openly discussed their personal concerns over organizational issues which were likely to affect them. […]. I have never heard any women speaking about their concerns like men do […] I personally can identify female colleagues who were marginalized at different times in their career but they never found the courage to pin point such unfair practices […]. Generally, women working in the university sit in a corner of the faculty lounge, having tea and reading newspapers. If they have any organizational concerns they speak only to those who are close to them. Otherwise they try to hide their problems". (Key informant)

Further to this, the junior participants reported that whenever senior colleagues had a matter that they did not want to deal with themselves, they passed it on to their junior colleagues. Whenever they asked them to do something that was outside the code of conduct, they never refused. Senior staff tried to take advantage of their non-assertive nature. One of the participants narrated the case of a colleague, who did not assert herself in relation to a demand from her senior colleague. This inability to say "no" worked to the detriment of her career:

"[…]. She was brilliant. If she had continued with her job, certainly, she would have been promoted to a higher position. But a very sad thing happened to her […]. She managed the personal files of all university employees and her immediate boss asked her to insert a paper in a personal file. Despite the fact that she believed this shouldn't be done, she couldn't say "no" to her immediate boss and did what she wanted […] After a year when the employee concerned who had a high level of authority found the information in her file was different from before, she suspected that something was wrong. The matter was investigated thoroughly. She was found guilty. Consequently, she had to pay the price and was dismissed from her job". (Junior Interviewee)

The research suggested that lack of assertiveness was a barrier to women's advancement to senior positions. In times of need they did not show sufficient courage to demand their rights and let others take advantage of the situation. Thus, they lagged behind others in selection processes and subsequent promotion. The participants themselves felt that a lack of assertiveness to take action against unjustified prejudiced attitudes cost a lot in career terms.

b. Unprofessional attitudes in the workplace

Generally, women's attitudes to the workplace were critically viewed by the participants. The majority of the participants in the focus group discussion were of the opinion that though women continued to make a major impact through their management abilities and a number of women were taking up significant roles within the country and had succeeded in managing successfully and professionally and were seen as good role models of those organisation's values, they generally lacked professional attitudes.

The research also revealed that the majority of interviewees (61.6%) believed that women lacked professional attitudes in the workplace. The absence of such attributes not only undermined their abilities and potential but also limited the prospects of other women for being considered for promotion to senior management positions. The participants elaborated the generally held perceptions of women about themselves, the classification and identification of themselves as being the second gender a role which women had created for themselves. They indicated that some women tended to avoid difficult work assignments believing that some tasks were beyond their management capacity and best handled by men:

> "A few women have spoiled the image of other women. Whenever there was a university event where different tasks had to be done effectively, I used to create different events committees and distribute different tasks among all staff members. […] Usually a committee comprised both males and females but some women would side line themselves by saying to their male colleagues, could you please do me a favor, you know I cannot do that. Or they would say I have to leave early therefore it would be impossible for me to complete this […]. Their attitude suggests that certain tasks are beyond their capacity. Further, they suggest that being a woman they require extra care for themselves and want to be looked after […] They should behave as a professional not as a woman even if it takes more time or requires more energy" (Senior Interviewee)

A few senior participants verified the above information by sharing their experiences and observations of how some female colleagues wanted to be supported by their male colleagues when it came to work-related tasks. They explained that male colleagues used to take on the work of these women. While these offers were often perceived as desirable and apparently advantageous, for the women this acted negatively for their career. These offers actually benefited men not women. Women showed themselves to be weaker and men comparatively stronger to handle problems and difficult situations. A senior participant gave a glaring example of an unprofessional attitude in a woman:

> "One of my female colleagues, who was a member of a committee received an offer from one of her male colleagues to look after her assigned work to enable her to leave for her home to look after her home responsibilities. This should not have been acceptable to that female

colleague but she not only happily accepted the offer but was also obliged for the generous offer and perceived this member of staff to be very kind hearted to recognise the problems of others […]Women should not ignore difficult issues. They must realize that every official assignment must be done by them as they are paid for their responsibilities. But they don't understand that this is a weakness. They take it as their right".   (Senior Interviewee)

One of the participants reported another example of the non-professional attitude of one of the most senior woman in the university. She recognized that some women felt happy to blame external factors for the poor numbers of women in management, but they generally failed to exhibit professional behavior:

"Attitude reflects leadership […]. What do you do about the woman leader who gossips about employees, discussing their personal appearance, family matters? […] Once we had such lady in a most senior leadership position […]. Whosoever used to visit her office, the first thing she always said to them was 'You are looking very smart; your earrings are beautiful, well matched with your clothes, where did you buy them, how much for'? […] She discussed their family matters […] She put personal talk above professional matters. She never seemed to be worried about organizational concerns […] she might have been expecting favor by praising others […] but all employees have the wisdom to judge things critically. She was not liked by all for her non- professional attitude. I personally heard a male colleague say "A lady who behaves like this won't be able to take the organization further" Such women have destroyed the image of a female boss". (Senior Interviewee)

One of the participants narrated the situation of someone who always behaved unprofessionally in the workplace without even noticing it:

"One of our senior colleagues who has two children, during every holiday, mostly on Saturdays she used to bring both to her office […] Soon after their arrival they occupy the whole of her office. One sits in her office chair, putting his drawing book on the table, and coloring in it. The other sits in her computer chair tampers with her office computer and plays video games. She always justifies this with a smiling face 'whenever their schools are closed I ask them to come along with me. They always love to come as there are so many things in my office that attract them' ". (Senior Interviewee)

The interview data revealed that non-professional behaviors exhibited by women themselves added to women's under-representation at senior management levels. It was reported that a few women had created this perception by avoiding taking up challenging tasks. They self-selected

easy responsibilities and put in less effort than men in the workplace. To meet the requirements of a senior leadership role requires extra effort and a willingness to contribute.

c. Lack of awareness of legal rights

68.7 percent of the participants reported that women were unaware of their legal rights in organizations. Lack of information about the university acts/ordinances not only affected their legal rights but also deprived them of professional development opportunities. This appeared to contribute to the overall underrepresentation of women in senior management positions. The majority of the senior participants argued that it was crucial for all women to raise their understanding regarding all kinds of rules and regulations written in organizational documents or laid down by government departments, if they really aspired to senior positions. One of the participants shared her experience and explained how she lagged behind others in career development until she became aware of her rights and fought against unfavorable circumstances which were hindering her progress in the workforce:

> "[…] My request for university funding to get higher education was turned down many times […] I never asked the relevant authorities why it always happened to me, I just kept on applying, […] In the meantime the situation changed in the sense that my junior colleagues got senior grades on the basis of their qualifications […] This left me in a very depressed position. […] Then I consulted my father, he consulted the university's legal advisor who explained and advised about many things that I could do […] A few eye opening facts encouraged me to think that I should pursue my case. So I did […] Along with my next application I drafted a file and put all the photocopies of previous applications in it and asked the authorities to provide me with a valid reason why I had been refused so many times […] because clause so and so suggested that I am quite eligible for that […] Things changed drastically […] Since there was no valid reason behind the rejection of my requests, they could not escape by giving false justifications […] Finally, I succeeded. I got funding for my higher degree […]. As a result I attained this senior position […] but I admit that, including me, normally women don't do that. They accept whatever has been imposed on them because mostly they don't have knowledge of rules and regulations. This is a serious dilemma". (Senior Interviewee)

Further to this, the data revealed that, compared to men, women did not bother to learn about rules and regulations. Therefore, they did not feel confident about pursuing issues. Consequently, they were not able to protect their rights in their organizations:

> "I always observed that men in the meeting referred in their contribution to rules and policies. For example they used to quote that "clause so and so suggests that … […] and impress others and show themselves as sound. This is the reason men are always confident about the validity of their arguments, that what they have talked about is absolutely right […] I have never seen

women talking like that. They are not confident about giving their point of view and speaking confidently". (Key Informant)

The data showed that women's ignorance about their rights and unfamiliarity with organizational rules and regulations brought many challenges for them. With regards to their selection and promotion many issues arose for them in organizations. Taking a stand in the workplace was perceived as helping women to succeed rather than letting outside influences dictate their employment positions.

d. Poor networking skills

Generally, women have fewer support networks within organizations (Coleman, 2011). The interviewees indicated that although women had their own networks and that these might help them to develop their own contacts, these were not very useful as they found it difficult to attend meetings regularly. Senior participants who were already successful wanted to create a platform where other women could feel comfortable talking about themselves, their ambitions and their career needs. Realizing that such forums were lacking and were necessary for professional growth and career progress, a few women had made an effort and tried to develop close contacts with working women inside the university. However, the majority of the women (60.4%) did not actively participate in such gatherings and forms;

> "[…] I along with a few other talented and ambitious women made a joint effort and sought out the practicalities […]. We were able to develop a forum in the university. We invited every woman working in the university to attend and make it successful. We made them realize that its objective was in their best interests […]. Believe me at every meeting female participation was not more than 30%, even less. There were members who never came. They always provided lame excuses […]. It was a hopeless response […]. Even in what is normal routine, the university's annual dinner, the majority of them never attended […]. The important thing to note is that the women who did come, during dinner, they just stood aside and gossiped. They did not mix with others and engage in professional talk. They do not know how to make teams" (Senior Interviewee)

Participants were of the view that women had the potential to bring about change if they so desired, although generally they did not have their own networks and forums. However, where network opportunities were available they were not interested to attend.

e. Lack of successful public profiles

Some of the participants also expressed their deep concern over the lack of successful public profiles of women in higher education management positions and, in part, associated it with their lack of representation in management positions. According to them women did not feel comfortable with self-projection. They did not want to appear in the media. They did not attempt to influence public opinion. This cast doubt on their leadership qualities.

The data revealed that majority of the participants (58.3%) were quite hesitant to promote themselves and their achievements. Thus people remained unaware of the potential that they had:

> "Women who have made it to the top, some of them are working as a vice-chancellor […]. Though they work extremely well in their offices and have made different innovations and uplifted the status of their universities, they never speak about their achievements. They do not like public speaking in the media. They remain behind the scenes. They are happy and feel comfortable working within their offices […]. This can be accepted as their personal choice but because of this a good image of a good female leader is not promoted". (Key informant)

The data revealed a reason for women's reluctance in projecting their achievements. Most of the participants admitted that they personally did not want to be publically known, although they acknowledged that this behavior was not appropriate for a good leader. Women, who had achieved great success, felt that the projection of success might develop resentment among other people, who might see their rising status as threatening. One of the participants reported that:

> "I never tried to be in the limelight. I thought it would be better to take a quieter position […] If I am in the limelight, somebody will notice what I am aspiring to achieve […] I am afraid that someone may become jealous. People will oppose me and create hurdles to my career path". (Senior Interviewee)

One of the participants also acknowledged that:

> "Basically, I am a backbencher […] I want to do work in the 2nd or 3rd position. I don't want to be a public figure". (Senior Interviewee)

Another senior participant who did not give consent for her interview to be recorded but allowed me to keep notes said:

> "I am machine shy. I never recorded an interview for TV […]. Despite my achievements, I never spoke about them […]. I always took challenging projects. I was never afraid of doing hard work. I am called an iron lady […] I have retired formally but due to my innovative and hardworking nature I have been given a further contract in this university. But one thing I did not do in my whole life, I never appeared in the media […]. Apart from university staff people don't know who I am". (Senior, Interviewee)

Although, it was reported that some of the participants did not like to appear in the media, this attitude could be culture specific as one of the participants said:

> "I got my education from a co-ed university. I did my PhD at one of the UK Universities but I am not allowed by my family to be on the television".
> (Senior Interviewee)

The interview data indicated that women did not speak about their successful experiences. They did not speak of their abilities. Consequently, the most brilliant women leaders remained hidden. This lack of a media presence could also create the impression that there are fewer knowledgeable female experts and authorities.

CONCLUSION

The research focused on internal barriers at the individual level related to women's personal and professional attributes which contributed to the dearth of women in management positions. Internal barriers, for example, a lack of confidence, self-reliance, assertiveness, and career direction were identified as impacting on women's lack of entry into leadership and management positions. To apply for top positions required courage but a lack of self-confidence meant that women frequently decided not to apply for such demanding jobs. They had a lack of confidence in their own abilities. They were less likely than men to put themselves forward to avail themselves of career opportunities.

The research revealed that participants were impeded in their careers by their low level ambitions and expectations. For some women the decision not to seek senior positions was linked to their own personal choice. They did not wish to be in a senior management position and some limited their ambitions to junior management positions. Some participants expected to reach a higher position by shifting their career trajectory to an academic route.

The absence of professional attributes was also believed to limit women's opportunities for being promoted to senior management positions. The data revealed that some women exhibited a non-professional attitude in the workplace which presented a faulty perception of their competence as a leader. Ignorance about the selection and hiring practices of an institution was also seen as a barrier for women wishing to advance to the most senior positions. Ignorance of legal rights in organizations contributed to women's lack of assertive behavior. This was a potential constraint which had adversely affected upward career mobility in some cases.

Generally, most women did not belong to networks and were not interested in networking even when opportunities were made available for them to do so although these might have supported their career advancement. Furthermore, participants typically did not want to be in the limelight. Whatever the reasons for this, it impacted on their professional lives and career and did not raise the profile of women more generally.

The next section II sheds light on the supportive factors the interviewed women defined as facilitating their career success.

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