

Effect of Organizational Barriers on Women'S Career Advancement in Leadership Positions at the School Level in Punjab

Saba Sarwar

sabasarwar92@gmail.com

PhD Scholar, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

Dr. Muhammad Nadeem Anwar

nadeem.anwar@uos.edu.pk

Associate Professor, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

Dr. Asma Khizar

asma.khizar@uos.edu.pk

Assistant Professor, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: * Saba Sarwar sabasarwar92@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Despite tremendous progress toward gender equality, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles in the education system, especially on the school level. This research investigates the organizational hurdles to women's promotion to leadership positions like as principals, vice principals, and administrative heads. Key organizational concerns, such as biased recruiting and promotion practices, a lack of mentorship opportunities, gendered expectations, and hostile workplace environments, are thoroughly investigated. The study emphasizes how institutional rules and practices frequently promote gender gaps by limiting women's access to leadership opportunities and decision-making positions. Using both qualitative and quantitative data from school administrators, the study demonstrates that even highly educated and experienced female educators encounter structural barriers that limit their leadership potential. The findings highlight the importance of regulatory reforms, inclusive leadership development programs, and culture change inside educational institutions to ensure women have equal chances. Addressing these hurdles is critical not only for gender fairness, but also for improving school leadership and academic performance.

Keywords: Women's Career Advancement, Leadership, School, Punjab.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic law, which has upheld women's rights for more than 1400 years via the Holy Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.), protects women's rights in Pakistan (Chishti, 2003). The Qur'an stresses that men and women are equal before Allah, with equal rights, obligations, and blessings for their deeds (Shabana, 2007).

According to Abidi (2013), women's rights are guaranteed under Articles 25, 27, 34, 35, and 37 of Pakistan's 1973 Constitution, which asserts that all people are equal regardless of gender, caste, or religion. The Pakistani Constitution guarantees equal opportunity for men and women to vote and run for office. It also grants the state the power to pass specific legislation to protect women and children. The Constitution recognizes education as a fundamental human right and highlights the importance of women's participation in all sectors of society. This includes ensuring access to employment, education, and other possibilities.

Numerous obstacles that prevent women from advancing in their careers have been discovered by research. Tharenou (1999) draws attention to problems such isolation from professional networks, lack of support, and masculine stereotyping in executive positions. Inadequate management education initiatives that do not adequately prepare women for leadership roles are further barriers to women's professional progression. inadequate access to chances for training and development, impeding their ability to advance professionally, systems of compensation that are unjust and unequal, strict work schedules that don't take work-life balance into consideration, The difficulty of juggling work and personal obligations is made worse by the absence of laws and programs that promote work-life balance (Mattis, 2001).

Globalization, IT advancements, and recent social and economic crises provide several difficulties for modern enterprises. The changing demographic environment, especially the growing number of women, is one of the major issues facing the workforce. Women make up 63% of the workforce in the European Union, but their presence in management jobs is much lower, and their progress into leadership positions is still slow (Senden & Visat, 2014). In the EU, men still hold between 61% and 70% of management posts in all commercial sectors (Senden & Visat, 2014).

Despite initiatives aimed at promoting women's careers through targeted recruitment, mentorship programs, and flexible work arrangements, substantial barriers persist. Key obstacles include a lack of mentorship opportunities, limited access to networking, and inadequate training and development programs, all of which hinder women's career progression and perpetuate the glass ceiling (Higgins & Kram, 2001), lack of access to professional and informal networks, and gender stereotypes (Oakley, 2000).

Objective Of The Study

To find out the effect of Organizational barriers on womens career advancement in leadership positions at school level.

Research Question

What major barriers do women face at Organizational level to their career advancement in leadership positions at school level?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Men are usually viewed as the heads of households in Pakistan, a traditional, male-dominated society where they make or approve decisions pertaining to women's education, careers, and other private affairs. Women were mostly restricted to household duties and unpaid labor for generations. But the number of women going to college and working for a living has significantly increased during the last 20 years. Despite these developments, once women secure jobs in their desired sectors, they encounter new kinds of prejudice. Because colleges have historically been male-dominated establishments, women have historically been underrepresented there. The prevailing academic meritocracy often reflects masculine values and practices, with the typical academic career path favoring long hours dedicated to research and teaching, aligning with a male perception of success. Consequently, academic environments may perpetuate masculine norms, making it challenging for women to succeed in these settings (Van Den Brink et al., 2010; Remler & Perma, 2009).

Mentorship

Senior women's mentoring is still underused despite its advantages. Just 63% of women have had a mentor, according to a global survey on business mentoring (Neal, Boatman, & Miller, 2013). Gender stereotypes are reinforced by the dearth of female leadership role models. Mentoring women has particular difficulties. According to Hoyt & Simon (2011), Compared to elite leaders, mentees are more likely to relate to non-elite female leaders who think outside the box. According to O'Neil et al. (2018), there is a disconnect between junior women's expectations and the assistance that senior women mentors offer, which causes feelings of loneliness for both parties.

Organization Culture and Dynamics

According to Lundy and Cowling (1996) and Martins and Terblanche (2003), organizational culture is a reflection of "how things are done here" and includes the fundamental beliefs, values, customs, and appropriate conduct in the workplace. It is influenced by the founders' cultural ideology, organizational traits including history and structure, leadership styles, and environmental elements (Szczepańska & Kosiorek, 2017). Because men have traditionally occupied leadership positions, many firms have created masculine cultures (Rodgers-Healy, 2008). The national cultural backdrop of masculinity versus femininity is often reflected in workplace leadership approaches (Janićijević, 2019; Ünal, 2017). This leads to a lack of women in senior roles, especially when combined with traditional masculine social standards (Lee, 2011). Bergdahl et al. (2018) list a number of problematic organizational climates that may be created by macho cultures, including toxic leadership, assault, discrimination, and gender inequality.

Leadership Identity Formation

According to Humberd (2014), a woman's self-perception as a leader is a complex process influenced by her non-work identities, such as gender, which have an impact on her professional choices, goals, and leadership career path. According to the double-bind hypothesis, femininity is associated with appearance, yet women in executive positions are expected to exhibit male traits (Mavin, Grandy, & Williams, 2014). In order to fit in with a male-dominated company, a female boss adopted gendered symbols and competitive behaviors, such as a high-tech mobile phone, a luxury business car, and masculine reading materials, according to a research by Scholten and Witmer (2017). According to research by Drydakis, Sidiropoulou, Patnaik, Selmanovic, and Bozani (2018), women with masculine personality traits had a higher chance of earning more money and succeeding in fields where men and women predominate. These results are positive and point to the possibility of future advancements in gender equality in leadership positions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A research design is a strategy for collecting, evaluating, and interpreting data in accordance with the research questions of the study (Sekaran, 2009). The research was explanatory sequential in nature. In an explanatory sequential design, women's career advancement in leadership roles at the school level in Punjab is analyzed, with a focus on the impacts and obstacles, by first collecting quantitative data and then qualitative data.

Population

All the Headmistress working in Govt. Girls Secondary schools in Punjab were the population of the study.

Sampling & Sample Size

The sample was based on only Headmistresses of girl's secondary schools. 1658 Headmistress were worked on leadership positions in girls high schools. Therefore, 10% sample was selected randomly from 1658 which was consist of 165 Headmistress. Simple random sampling technique was employed for quantitative data.

Research Instrument: A closed ended questionnaire and structured interview schedule was used as a tool for this study

Quantitative Results

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of “Training & Development”

Sr#	Statement	SA	A	N.A/ N.DS	DA	SD	Mean	S.D
	Training & development							
1.	Training and development opportunities are not provided by the organization to enhance my overall achievement and performance	17.0	43.0	6.1	31.5	2.4	2.59	1.168
2.	Access to education, training and development initiatives are a major factor for my participation in leadership position	18.2	66.7	7.9	6.1	1.2	2.05	.783
3.	Training in gender equity are believed to be factors that positively influence women's advancement in organizations	17.0	61.8	9.1	8.5	3.6	2.20	.945
	Total	52.2 %	171.5 %	23.1 %	46.1 %	7.2 %	2.28	0.96

The preceding table's ($M=2.28$, $S.D=0.96$) led to the conclusion that the effect of training and development on headmistress in leadership positions was low.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of “Networking”

Sr#	Statement	SA	A	N.A/ N.DS	DA	SD	Mean	S.D
	Networking							
1.	I can gain access to leadership opportunities is through more effective networking	23.6	66.1	5.5	1.8	3.0	1.95	.798
2.	Networking can help me to get a great job in the society	23.0	60.6	9.1	3.6	3.6	2.04	.893
	I need networking ties with other women in order to career advancement	21.8	61.2	8.5	5.5	3.0	2.07	.891
	Total	68.4 %	187.9 %	23.1 %	10.9%	9.6 %	2.02	0.86

The preceding table's ($M=2.02$, $S.D=0.86$) led to the conclusion that the effect of networking on headmistress in leadership positions was low.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of “Inflexibility at the workplace & Workload”

Sr#	Statement	SA	A	N.A/ N.DS	DA	SD	Mean	S.D
Inflexibility in workload and workplace								
1.	Leadership positions still work better for men because men often hold more centralized critical positions in organization.	18.2	47.9	10.3	20.0	3.6	2.43	1.11 1
2.	Some women do not progress because moving into leadership positions brings additional stress	21.8	58.2	8.5	7.9	3.6	2.13	.966
	Total	40%	106.1%	18.8%	27.9%	7.2%	2.28	2.07

The preceding table's ($M=2.28$, $S.D=2.07$) led to the conclusion that the effect of inflexibility at the workplace and workload on headmistress in leadership positions was low.

Table 4: Descriptive analysis of “Negative stereotypes at the workplace”

Sr#	Statement	SA	A	N.A/ N.DS	DA	SD	Mean	S.D
Negative stereotypes at the workplace								
1.	Women who do take up leadership roles are often judged negatively by men and women alike	18.8	51.5	12.1	13.9	3.6	2.32	1.048
2.	Issue of stereotyping at the workplace still exists because men do not see it fit to help women in leadership positions	15.2	57.6	13.9	10.9	2.4	2.28	.934
3.	Stereotyping has blocked the progress of women by casting doubts over their leadership abilities	16.4	50.9	18.2	12.1	2.4	2.33	.971
4.	Women in administrative offices are underfunded as compared to the amount of work they do.	15.2	53.9	12.7	13.9	4.2	2.38	1.039
	Total	65.6%	213.9%	56.9%	50.8%	12.6%	2.32	0.99

The preceding table's ($M=2.32$, $S.D=0.99$) led to the conclusion that the effect of negative stereotypes at the workplace on headmistress in leadership positions was low.

Table 5: Descriptive analysis of “Discrimination at the workplace”

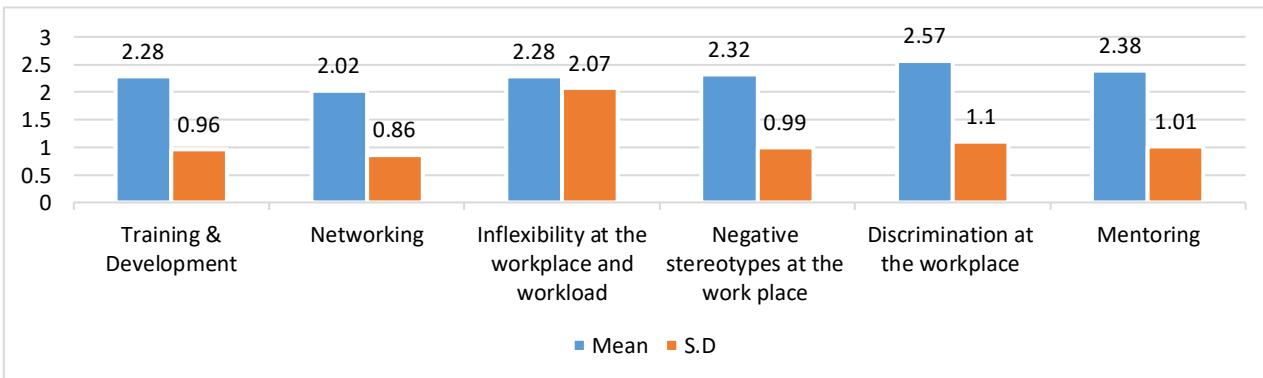
Sr#	Statement	SA	A	N.A/ N.DS	DA	SD	Mean	S.D
Discrimination at the workplace								
1.	Discrimination of women is also found at the level of payment.	15.8	44.8	10.3	24.2	4.8	2.58	1.159
2.	I often find myself subjected to several kinds of discriminatory behaviors, attitudes and policies	15.2	48.5	13.3	20.0	3.0	2.47	1.068
3.	My access to equal jobs is still discriminatory	9.7	46.1	15.8	24.2	4.2	2.67	1.077
	Total	40.7 %	139.4 %	39.4 %	68.4 %	12 %	2.57	1.10

The preceding table's ($M=2.57$, $S.D=1.10$) led to the conclusion that the effect of gender discrimination at the workplace on headmistress in leadership positions was low.

Table 6: Descriptive analysis of “Mentoring”

Sr#	Statement	SA	A	N.A/ N.DS	DA	DA	Mean	S.D
Mentoring								
1.	Lack of mentoring and career counseling programs affects my career advancement	17.0	54.5	10.9	15.8	1.8	2.31	.992
2.	Traditional mentoring is lacking in my institute	13.3	55.8	9.1	18.8	3.0	2.42	1.037
3.	The senior educators' willingness to support junior educators is lacking.	13.9	55.2	10.3	17.6	3.0	2.41	1.029
	Total	44.2 %	165.5 %	30.3 %	52.2 %	7.8 %	2.38	1.01

The preceding table's ($M=2.38$, $S.D=1.01$) led to the conclusion that the effect of mentoring on headmistress in leadership positions was low.



Qualitative Results

Training and Development

Women's career advancement into leadership position is greatly aided by training and development. Mentorship, skill-building seminars, leadership development programs, and other professional growth efforts give women the skills, information, and self-assurance they need to get past the obstacles they frequently encounter on their way to becoming leaders (Wright, 2003).

Women's respond that...,

I've come to the realization that, as a woman hoping to progress in my work, having access to appropriate training and development programs is essential to determining how I develop into a leader. If these initiatives are inadequate or inaccessible, they have the potential to either create barriers or provide avenues for growth.

When I was able to engage in leadership development programs, workshops, or skill-building sessions, I felt empowered. These programs gave me the tools, confidence, and leadership abilities I needed to take on more difficult assignments. I felt confident that I might supervise teams and contribute to long-term organizational goals after learning about decision-making, negotiation, long-term strategy, and effective communication.

I have, however, also come across situations when women did not have equal access to these training opportunities. Male coworkers sometimes seemed to have easier access to leadership development programs, either because they were seen as "future leaders" or because they had more time for after-hours training.

Networking

Women's ascent to leadership positions is significantly influenced by organizational networking connections. Building professional connections with coworkers, mentors, senior leaders, and peers from different departments is the essence of networking in the workplace. These relationships offer a crucial avenue for gaining exposure, finding work, and getting support for leadership development. But women often struggle to build strong organizational networks, which may prevent them from rising to positions of high leadership (Waberg, 2016).

Women's respond that...,

I've experienced both the advantages and disadvantages of networking on my journey to leadership as a woman seeking to progress in her career. Although networking can lead to leadership opportunities, women like me often face unique obstacles that make it challenging to fully benefit from it.

My career benefited when I was able to establish a strong professional network. Having connections with other professionals, especially women in leadership roles, has given me priceless counsel, direction, and encouragement. I've learned how to handle workplace politics, stand up for myself, and gain insight into leadership roles from these exchanges. Networking has provided me with information about job openings and chances for promotion that I would not have discovered otherwise.

However, establishing and sustaining a professional network has not always been easy for me. One of the most difficult issues is that many networking events and informal gatherings occur after work hours, which frequently interfere with my family obligations.

Inflexibility at the Workplace and Workload

Two important obstacles that have a big influence on women's career advancement into leadership positions are workplace rigidity and an overwhelming workload. Women frequently balance work obligations with caregiving and family commitments, therefore flexibility is essential to their professional development. Women are disproportionately impacted by companies that lack flexibility and place high demands on workers, which hinders their advancement into leadership positions (Moodly & Toni, 2019).

Women's respond that...,

As a woman, I am witnessed how a rigid work environment and an overwhelming workload can seriously impede professional growth, particularly for those aiming for leadership positions. Juggling work and family responsibilities has often seemed like an endless struggle, and the lack of flexibility at work only prevents women like myself from rising to leadership roles.

The lack of flexibility in the job, which includes rigid working hours and limited options for working remotely, has been a major barrier for me. I have occasionally had to take care of my kids, deal with family issues, or take care of household duties, but the rigorous work schedule did not allow for these demands. This gave me the impression that I had to decide between being a nice wife or mother and being a good headmistress. I sometimes missed important projects, meetings, or opportunities for leadership growth because I couldn't stay late or work extra hours.

Leadership positions frequently involve long hours, availability outside of regular work hours, and the ability to handle pressure at any time. However, a woman balancing job and family may find this workload to be too much. I was occasionally given greater responsibility, but I was reluctant to accept it since I knew it would need more time and work than I could afford. It didn't seem possible to take on a leadership role and yet be expected to handle domestic duties.

Negative Stereotypes at the Work-place

Women's respond that...,

The existence of negative stereotypes in the workplace, especially when it comes to assuming leadership roles, has been one of the most discouraging and irritating barriers to my career progress as a woman. These stereotypes sometimes result in unfair judgments about my abilities, behavior, and leadership potential because I am a woman.

Sometimes, people have dismissed my worries and impassioned remarks about subjects as "too sensitive" or "overreacting." In the meantime, I've witnessed male coworkers display the same degree of emotion and receive recognition for their drive and initiative. In order to be taken seriously, I felt like I had to repress my emotions all the time, which added to my stress and caused me to wonder if I was "leadership material." The idea that women are less capable or decisive than males is another harmful stereotype.

I occasionally brought forward suggestions in meetings that were ignored, only to have them recognized later when a male coworker made a similar statement. This undermined my confidence to speak

up or take the lead on projects and made me feel invisible and underappreciated. I frequently thought that in order to demonstrate my abilities, I needed to put in twice as much effort.

Discrimination at the Workplace

With advancements in gender equality, women still encounter discriminatory treatment, unfair assessments, unequal chances, and structural obstacles that impede their advancement into senior leadership positions (Schwanke, 2013).

Women's respond that...,

I know that how workplace discrimination may significantly impede my career advancement into leadership roles as a woman working in the education sector, especially at the school level. Despite my commitment and credentials, I have frequently believed that my gender affected how opportunities were allocated and how my abilities were viewed.

Unfair treatment when leadership positions such as principal, coordinator, or head-teacher become available is one of the most prevalent types of prejudice I have encountered. Even if I had comparable or superior credentials and experience, I have observed that male coworkers are frequently given preference or are given greater consideration for these senior positions. Leadership was perceived as a "man's job" at times, particularly when it came to handling a sizable workforce or making difficult decisions.

In addition, I've observed a bias where women are often assigned to duties that are perceived as more "supportive" or "nurturing," such as teaching in schools or offering pastoral care, rather than being encouraged to pursue leadership and administrative roles. Despite my appreciation for these responsibilities, it quickly became clear that they were not seen as stepping stones to leadership, which left me feeling stuck in my role. Preconceived beliefs about my responsibilities to my family have also occasionally caused me to get passed over for promotions.

Mentoring

Mentoring helps women overcome these challenges and become successful leaders in the workplace by providing guidance, support, and opportunities for professional development. As a woman working in education who hopes to hold leadership roles, mentoring has had a significant impact on my professional path. It has been a source of encouragement and a way to develop the skills and confidence needed to pursue leadership positions (Moore & Wang, 2017).

Women's respond that...,

It made a huge difference when I had the good fortune to have a mentor, particularly a senior woman in a leadership position. I realized that somebody like me could achieve those positions after witnessing another woman head a school with success. My mentor talked about her experiences with responsibility management, juggling work and family obligations, and overcoming obstacles including office politics and gender bias. Her advice gave me doable tactics to get past the obstacles I encountered. The confidence boost I received from mentoring was one of its most beneficial effects. I occasionally questioned if I possessed the abilities or determination necessary to assume a leadership position.

Another womens respond that...,

Additionally, I saw that finding mentoring opportunities wasn't always easy. In other institutions, the lack of women in leadership roles made it difficult to find a female mentor who truly understood the unique obstacles that women face in advancing their careers. I occasionally felt alone, worried that I was handling my career on my own, and didn't know how to progress. When there was no mentorship support, I often felt stuck in my circumstances. Without a mentor, I didn't comprehend the true criteria for leadership roles and was less motivated to pursue promotions. Despite my eligibility, I was hesitant to apply because of this.

DISCUSSION

Women's career development into leadership roles in Punjabi schools is severely hampered by organizational impediments. These obstacles include a lack of mentorship opportunities, restricted access to professional development programs, and gender prejudice in hiring and promotion procedures. Women's leadership potential is often underestimated or disregarded in institutional cultures that favor male leadership. Women's advancement is further hampered by inflexible work arrangements and insufficient assistance in juggling work and family obligations. Because of these structural issues, women are underrepresented in leadership positions in schools throughout the area.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, women's access to leadership roles in Punjabi schools is severely restricted by organizational impediments. The chronic underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is caused by a number of factors, including the existence of gender-biased policies, a lack of institutional support, and an unsupportive professional atmosphere. Deliberate legislative changes, gender-sensitive leadership development initiatives, and the encouragement of inclusive workplace environments are all necessary to address these issues. By removing these obstacles, Punjab's educational system may gain from a variety of leadership viewpoints and establish a more equal and forward-thinking learning environment.

In addition to limiting professional advancement on an individual basis, these obstacles deny the education sector of varied leadership capable of fostering inclusion and creativity. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates awareness and capacity-building programs, policy-level interventions, and the active promotion of gender equity inside educational institutions is needed to overcome these obstacles. Fostering a balanced and successful educational system in Punjab requires empowering women educators and establishing supportive settings for their leadership.

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