

## CAREER ADVANCEMENT & CAPACITY BUILDING FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### INTRODUCTION

The University Grants Commission guidelines in the XI plan have mentioned that Women academicians all over the world, particularly in management are highly underrepresented and the male culture still prevails. As we climb up the ladder from assistant professors to associate professors to Professors, the number of women in senior positions and especially in administrative positions significantly decreases and the male dominance still prevails despite the large pool of women being recruited and waiting in the wings to go up. The global picture in higher education indicated men out numbering women with about five to one in middle management and twenty to one in senior or top management. Even in the Indian scenario it is about ten to one at the senior management levels.

It becomes thereby important to look at what factors become responsible for such a scenario. With so much of stress being laid on women empowerment and development, and the UGC having a special program to develop the capacity of women managers in higher education it becomes imperative to look at factors that hamper this development and solutions that could solve this imbalance.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

Singh(2002) has categorised three perspectives to explain the dearth of women in senior administrative positions, namely, 'person centred', 'structure centred' and 'culture centred'. The 'person centred' focus attributes the paucity of women to the psychosocial attributes, attitudes and behavioural pattern of women themselves. Women's tendencies are found to be more generous, helping out and taking over additional tasks not recognised in career terms, less ambitious and lacking motivation, often due to inadequate social support, nature of perception of women's role, reinforced by society which is inherently patriarchal, and other factors. 'Structure Centred' or 'Institutional Centred' paradigm is a result of the disadvantageous position of women in the organisational structure – few women at top, less power, limited access to resources, bias in recruitment and promotion, and so on. The 'Culture Centred' approach relates to the process of socialisation, carrying irrelevant gender based roles to the workplace, women's role at work place being seen as secondary to her role as homemaker and nurturer, and 'overt' and 'covert factors' that obstruct women's career paths.

The focused goal of Indian Higher Education is to acquire, generate, supplement and transmit knowledge that builds up leadership qualities. It has already to some extent empowered women to compete better, perform with precision and efficiency and achieve excellence in multi-tasking. Empowered women challenge men in their workplace and are visible in all forms of powerful corporate positions. Politically and economically women are now in a more commanding situation than fifty years ago. Indian women have made their presence felt in industry, technology, literature, art, banking, insurance and pharmaceutical centres. Educated women are also there in international business and administrative roles. Women's instinctive approach, which encompasses humane concerns, finds its reflection in their ability to combine justice with compassion, concern with rationality. Our vision of a better India free from multiple maladies can only be achieved when educated empowered women take up the mantle of responsibility and commit themselves to restructuring and advancing the development of India.

The government data shows that there are 5.8 million women employed in our country in the organised sector. This comprises 20% of the total workforce in the organised sector. The World Economic Forum Gender Gap survey 2013 ranks India at 101st, the lowest among the BRICS(

Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) economies. According this survey, even among its immediate neighbours, India was lower than Srilanka(55th) and Bangladesh (75th)

. According to Marschke *et al.* (2007), lack of opportunity and mentorship underlies, in large part, why women do not advance as quickly as men in higher education as well as why they are more likely than men to “leave the occupation altogether”

In many countries women are underrepresented in the university's academic staff, particularly in the higher ranks. In European nations women accounted for <20 per cent of the most senior positions in academic institutions in 2004 in all EU Member States, except for Latvia, Romania, Portugal, and Finland. The Netherlands performs below the EU average. In 2008, almost 12 per cent of the professors in the Netherlands were women, 20 per cent of the associate professors and a little over 30 per cent of the assistant professors. Over time, however, substantial improvements can be noticed, particularly in the higher ranks. In 1990 only 3 per cent of the professors were women, 5 per cent of the associate professors and a little over 15 per cent of the assistant professors (VSNU, 2009).

A wide range of factors is affecting career advancement for women in higher education and there are reported gender differences in promotion probabilities. One body of knowledge refers to the relationship between career progression and employer-provided policies, sometimes called cultural factors, such as policies concerning human resources management (HRM), hiring and promotion, work-life balance, preferential treatment, or diversity (e.g. Winchester *et al.*, 2006). Another body of knowledge relates career progression to women's individual attitudes and behaviour with regard to the choices they make concerning family building, their expectations of career opportunities, their perceptions of employer's policies, their self-assessed chances of being successful in higher level positions, and how subsequently these perceptions affect their behaviour (e.g. Groeneveld, 2009). A third body of knowledge assumes that career progression is dependent on sex differences in publication rates, e.g. male researchers who held research and faculty positions in the life sciences departments of British and Australian universities had higher rates than women (Symonds *et al.*, 2006). A fourth body of knowledge elaborates the contextual factors, specifically the impact of the sex-segregated organizational context on women's careers (e.g. Charles, 2003).

In India 14 % of senior management positions are occupied by women while globally the figure stands at 21% and in south east Asia the figure is 32%. Despite some emerging trends which

show some women taking top positions in the senior management positions, the number of women Professors, women vice chancellors, women chief secretaries of state, women chief ministers, this number is very small.

In the education sector the number of women that enter the workforce are large but those that climb the ladder to senior positions are sparingly few, the applicants being almost negligible. This more than often happens due to falling short of the eligibility criteria which includes upgrading qualification like a Ph.D. pursuing research, handling research projects and many more. The UGC Academic performance index, API norms have beautifully categorised the various criteria that shall be considered and the minimum points that must mandatorily be earned in each of the parameters. It however is surprising to find that when interviewed out of every ten women respondents only 1 knew of the constituents of the API and none had bothered to take it as a capacity building initiative to invest time, effort and skills in doing what is expected from an academician.

This brings us to a very unique problem that when capacity building initiatives as undertaken by the various sensitivity awareness and motivation programs and others would ever take us to the desired results at the rate as we aim to progress.

### **METHODOLOGY**

To identify the factors what are responsible for the lack of women in higher positions in education an interview technique was adopted. 10 women in higher education were surveyed through a structured interview technique selected through a judgemental sampling method chosen from both public and private universities.

A structured interview technique was adopted to seek answers to what could aid career progression among women in higher education and the in depth analysis of these has been done to present below the findings that could enable capacity building among women academicians.

### **FINDINGS**

The following three major factors have been reported to be best suited to women in higher education in Indian perspective that could enable career advancement and capacity building initiatives.

#### **Mentors**

Mentoring is considered to be one of the most important factors for explaining female academic career progression. Mentoring in organizations can be viewed as a developmental relationship

whereby managers provide assistance and support to particular subordinates (protégés) on an individual basis. The mentoring process can serve both career enhancement and psycho-social functions for the protégé. Career enhancement roles in mentoring include sponsorship, coaching, exposure, protection and provision of challenging assignments. The psycho-social functions include acceptance, counselling, emotional support and role modelling.

Female mentors are said to be “critical” because they serve as role models, as well as provide other women with support and information about how to break through the glass ceiling. Female mentees have expressed to prefer female mentors as they provide gender-related career advice. In addition, women mentors are seen as role models with whom women mentees can connect emotionally. Quite commonly, research suggests that cross-gender mentoring is often used due to a lack of female mentors. In a recent study on issues that women face in their careers, have noted that women need both male and female mentors in their career advancement.

### **Leadership and decision-making**

Another important dimension that emerged is that women experience the resistance of many men in leadership positions to concede power to women or to involve women in leadership and decision-making in the Indian context. While women describe that men openly invite and consider it very important to involve women in decision-making but in practical happenings this is more often not the case unfortunately. There is a lot of resistance. Women's roles and views even if taken are respected by men, but probably not considered. The female academicians feel men are often contradictory in that they suggest that women's views are “respected” but often not acted upon. This may be the result of some female academics having fought their way onto these committees only to have their views ignored or not considered. It is clear that there is a significant power differential between male (particularly older males) and female academics. Women academics regardless of hierarchy were more confident in sharing their views with management and their senior male academics.

A striking revelation women gave is that some men, particularly older men, see ambitious women as a threat to their power. It is definitely about power. The leadership has been there for ever and they don't want to lose control. Women are committed. However, some men think that women are less decisive and have too many family commitments and are not going to be around when key decisions have to be made.

### **Balancing work and family obligations**

A very important factor that could contribute to the career advancement for women is the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities. Regardless of cultural context, women of all hierarchical groups found it challenging to balance self, work and family. All women reported to face some level of work and family conflict. Though all women would employ domestic help and acknowledged that it was helpful in balancing work and family roles, there still remain many tasks that the women academics have to perform (for example, chauffeuring children to and from school, and attending children's social activities) From the female academics' perspective there seems to be a moral panic or guilt in perceptions of not being able to successfully fulfil their family and child-rearing responsibilities. Some of this guilt has its source in other people, particularly their parents and societal expectations. In many of the quotes there is some level of justification for their career choices:

### CONCLUSION

This paper provides guidance to all academics and university managers as to some factors associated with female academic career progression. Despite equal employment opportunity legislation in both the Australian and Mauritian contexts this paper provides some evidence to suggest that women academics still face significant barriers to career progression.

There are potentially important human resource management implications of the findings of this paper. Primarily, the process of induction of all new employees in universities should outline anti-discrimination legislation as well as affirmative action policies and organisational values of equity, access and fairness for all employees regardless of gender. Moreover, training and development programs should also encapsulate these important values and expectations of employees within universities. Training programs may target all employees that are considering promotion and managerial positions within universities.

The focused goal of Indian Higher Education is to acquire, generate, supplement and transmit knowledge that builds up leadership qualities. It has already to some extent empowered women to compete better, perform with precision and efficiency and achieve excellence in multi-tasking. Empowered women challenge men in their workplace and are visible in all forms of powerful corporate positions. Politically and economically women are now in a more commanding situation than fifty years ago. Indian women have made their presence felt in industry, technology, literature, art, banking, insurance and pharmaceutical centres. Educated women are also there in international business and administrative roles. Women's instinctive approach,

which encompasses humane concerns, finds its reflection in their ability to combine justice with compassion, concern with rationality. Our vision of a better India free from multiple maladies can only be achieved when educated empowered women take up the mantle of responsibility and commit themselves to restructuring and advancing the development of India.

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