



ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Leadership Through the Lens of Gender Norms and Identities

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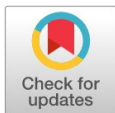
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Abstract— Gender norms and identities play a significant role in either supporting or demotivating the leadership development of individuals in their careers. Even in this era of globalization and development, the contemporary world is experiencing communities and societies where gender stereotypes are deep-rooted. In one way or another, this hinders women from equally participating with their male counterparts. Such role expectations and profiling ultimately compel women to divert their focus from leadership development toward domestic affairs. In addition, women are considered perfect for house chores rather than leadership careers. This perception also affects women very negatively in developing their careers as leaders. This study considers the barriers women face during their careers while being in a leading position in their organizations. A narrative inquiry is conducted from the female school principals at the secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Gender discrimination, lack of proper mentorship, and old boys' network are the main barriers women principals face in working in a leading position in their schools. The study suggests that strong academic credentials, professional development, restructuring the organizational practices, and providing more opportunities to women can decrease gender bias.

Index Terms— Leadership, Gender norms, Narrative inquiry, Globalization, Gender discrimination

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Introduction

Leadership traits are both genetic and associated with the social environment. Traits like self-confidence, personality development, personal integrity, and organization are those leadership traits that could be developed through exposure (Khattak et al., 2021). Self-determination, intelligence, and adaptability are those leadership traits that could be learned from the social environment, including training and educational institutions (Fatima et al., 2017). These traits are not absolute but rather relative. Some traits could be found only in a charismatic personality. Leaders with charisma are rarely found with narrow vision or self-centeredness (Ali, Ahmad, & Saeed, 2018). However, leaders may not always be born; rather, they are built in the social environment (Farid et al., 2021).

In this era of modernization, due to more education and adaptation of the required skills and techniques, the number of women participating in different sectors of society has increased manifold not only in the general workforce but at the managerial level as well. However, still, they face discrimination in their social setups and families (Khan et al., 2022; Qadir and Afzal, 2019). With such a high participation rate, their problems also increase, particularly while achieving leadership roles in their careers (Khan et al., 2021). In the recent past, the number of women in leadership positions has increased, but they are still struggling with hurdles (Saeed et al., 2022). There is still a long way to go (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Zada et al., 2022). According to Kulkarni and Mishra (2022), only 10% of women occupy senior managerial positions globally in the top 500 companies. In third-world countries, the situation is even much worst. Only in

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India, the world's 2nd most populous country, only 2% of women in the presence of 100 economically active men take administrative and managerial positions (Kushal et al., 2006; Saeed, 2017). Although in many countries, women have considerable access to supervisory and middle management positions (Saeed et al., 2022). Gains for women as managers are not equal in industrialized countries (Khan et al., 2022). Furthermore, data analysis in the United States shows that despite the significant increase in women as managers and managers, female managers have less authority than male managers, even if the tenure in management positions and companies is consistent (Khan et al., 2022). In addition, the girl managers, at the same level as their male counterparts, have less access to higher level responsibilities and complex challenges that may lead to promotion to higher level positions (Eagly et al., 2003; Zia, Saeed, & Khan, 2018).

This study focuses on the gender norms and identities that shape leadership traits (Johar, Lestari, & Awada, 2020; Khattak, Saeed, & Tariq, 2018). The social setup in which a female grows makes the difference in developing leadership traits (Qadir, Saeed, & Khan, 2017). Gender is such an attribute that is role-centered, and it has a significant impact on the status of women in Pashtun society (Gul, Ali, & Saeed, 2021). Gender as an identity is socially structured, and it has been culturally patterned. Since a woman is known as a specific gender; therefore, role expectations are established based on gender, which has been influencing women in their everyday life (Nadeem, Saeed, & Gul, 2020).

Moreover, gender in the sensitive cultural setup keeps eroding women's social values and negatively affecting their social and economic status. Ali and Rasheed (2021) explain that most of the research on gender bias is male-centric, which needs further discussion from the perspective of women. From the literature mentioned above, this study considers the women in leadership positions in patriarchal Pashtun society. No worthwhile literature is available that considers the gender stereotyping of women leaders, especially school principals in Pashtun society. This study takes into account the women's leadership barriers from the perspective of their gender. This research is women-centric as it highlights the issue from the perspective of women leaders. This study discovers how women perceive their gender roles given by society. No worthwhile study has been conducted on women leaders' gender/societal roles in the Pashtun society. This is one of the initial studies conducted on this issue (Burki, Khan, & Saeed, 2020). The review on gender in the sensitive cultural setup is carried out in the succeeding passages.

Literature Review

Gender identity refers to a person's belief that he or she is male or female. It is the recognition of a person's biological gender to their sense of masculinity or femininity. Gender identity refers not only to a person's self-consciousness as a man or woman but also to the universal sense of masculinity or femininity (Freedman et al., 1993; Khan, Kaewsaeng-on, & Saeed, 2019). Gender identity refers to the self-position of a member of a sex or other identity that is behaviorally expressed and known by the person who possesses it (Fagot & Leinbach, 1985; Saeed et al., 2017). According to Kohlberg (1966), gender identity is considered a "cognitive self-categorization" of "boy" or "girl". It is considered a critical and fundamental organizer of sexual-contributing attitudes (Al Hassan, Fatima, & Saeed, 2019). Gender identity includes identifying children as boys or girls and a developmental change in the meaning of categories as children understand their gender base and consistency (Saeed, 2018). Gender identity refers in various ways to the first stage of the process, in which the child learns to stamp himself and others, the whole process accurately, and the end result also, which is consistent gender identity or gender constancy (Saeed et al., 2017; Zada et al., 2022).

According to the world economic forum (2015), that is well-documented that females engross top administrative positions in industry and politics less frequently than men. A study by Sidani et al. (2015) found that females represent 52 percent of all managerial roles and professional occupations of attorneys and physicians in the United States. The enrollment ratio of women in U.S universities increased as it represents 60% of the bachelor's degree, and the ratio of females in master's and doctorate are more than men (Khan et al., 2022). Sidani et al. (2015) argued that besides all that fact, women's representation in higher positions is still low as compared to men. Women in leadership positions believe that the most important strategy to achieve senior positions is to continuously exceed performance expectations (Younas et al., 2015). In other words, it is foremost for women to work extremely hard and for longer than their male counterparts. An excuse put forward by the male power structure is that female leaders have not reached the most powerful positions because few women have the right combination of training, education, and experience (Ali et al., 2021; Jakobsh, 2015). They are also treated as the "others," the "outsiders." Major deals are often taken in formal gatherings and meetings, and if women are not part of such meetings, they are denied the possibility of climbing the corporate ladder (Bushra et al., 2022; Jakobsh, 2015).

In this way, despite men and women who have attained the same education, experience, status, ambitions, and commitment to their careers, men progress faster than women, get higher status positions, and receive higher compensation in the form of salaries (Khan et al., 2022). So, men's association with male peers plays a significant role in their career advancement and rise to power and prestige (Khan et al., 2022). As men have a vast network, women traditionally have not been an integral force within corporations; that is why they have not developed the same networking system (Jakobsh, 2015; Ullah et al., 2022).

Eagly and Carli (2004) and Hoyt (2010) stated that women have to take care of their families and particularly their children, which interrupts their professional career, or they have to work part-time, which means that they have to work fewer and interrupt more, which

mean they do not have the required experience which slows down their professional growth within the organization. The study by Kaufman and Uhlenberg (2000) revealed that women having children have a less chance of participating in leadership and the labor market than women without children (Mohammad et al., 2021). In comparison, men with children have a better tendency toward the labor market and work for longer hours than men without children (Khassawneh, & Abaker, 2022). Chin (2011) compared men and women leaders and explained that women are good at employee encouragement and development. On the other hand, men are better off at decision-making along with problem solutions in crisis. Men are also believed to be encouraged and appreciated for their ideas, while women are ignored (Mohammad & Khassawneh, 2022). Top companies worldwide, like Amazon, JPMorgan, and Microsoft, have more females at the leadership level; that is why they solve problems more creatively. Racial diversity improves a company's overall productivity and performance (Khassawneh, 2018).

Kenrick et al. (2015) quoted some psychologists that women lack the inherent abilities needed for effective leadership. After the marriage and particularly giving birth to babies, their responsibilities increase at home, which might affect their abilities as they cannot give proper attention to their subordinates (Mohammad, 2019). On the other hand, Krishnan and Park (2005) conducted a study on the percentage of women in the top 1000 companies globally and their financial performance from 1998 to 2000, where the researchers found that companies having a large percentage of women in their top management had far better performance financially.

It is also believed that about 34% of American believe that women leaders are more trustworthy and honest with their organization, while only 3% of them claim that men are better at it. In the same survey, about 30% of Americans believe that women can provide fair pay and good benefits, while only 5% voted in favor of men. Regarding guidance and mentorship to young employees, about 25% believe that women can do it efficiently, while only 7% believe the other way favors men (Perrin, 2015; Mohammad & Darwish, 2022).

Tyagi (2018) stated that when women become equal financial supporters of their families, it will also relieve the pressure on the fathers and give time to their children at home. In this way, it will reduce the risk of behavioral problems in the children. Regarding hardship faced by women in leadership, it is stated that women tried very hard to demonstrate their abilities better than their male counterparts. It is stated that about 79% of women believe that they have to prove their mettle more than their male colleagues, which is a weakness most women leaders have. At the same time, 7 in 10 women and about half in ten men believe that women must do more to prove themselves. In comparison, six in ten women believe that gender discrimination is a major obstacle to female leadership in every walk of life (Horowitz, 2018).

To understand the prime barriers and hardships women face in leadership, concepts such as the "Glass ceiling" are widely used. The term "Glass ceiling" is generally described as the unseen barriers that block the chances of women in various sectors from advancement. It is an indirect obstacle that blocks women's path in their career advancement (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). Among the prime causes responsible for women's glass ceilings is occupational isolation. The executive positions in various organizations remain segregated by the top management based on gender. Women in various organizations are lemmatized to positions like personal or private secretary, public relation officer, and in some cases, finance specialist (Jakobsh, 2015).

Elmuti et al. (2009) stated that the link between barriers like discrimination, marital life demand, bias, and stereotyping of women are major hurdles women face in leadership. It is also indicated that women are more encouraged than men. In almost every walk of life, women do not have equal opportunities in capacity development and upward mobility in organizations. Education, training, and other skill development programs can help women achieve higher positions in their respective fields. The statistical evidence from many studies recommends that there are gender inequalities in terms of pay and promotions. Among the other barriers, Rincon et al. (2017) stated that traits associated with men's leadership have been highly valued compared to women's traits.

As women have much more household responsibilities than men, it is believed that women are less motivated to take leadership roles. Thus they have a scarce presence in leadership. Rincon et al. (2017) quoted González et al. (2015) that in the selection and recruitment process, men perform better than women in a leadership position, as it is a general rule that the traits of leadership are associated with masculinity. Hoyt (2010) also put forward the idea of gender stereotyping and prejudice against women in leadership positions. Heilman (2001) also supported the same argument faced by women leaders in organizational positions. Gender stereotyping and prejudice are one of the major hardships faced by women, which are halting the career development of women in senior management (Rincon et al., 2017).

Methodology

This study is based on the personal reflections of the participants, for which narrative inquiry was the best tool to collect first-hand information. The primary aim was to know how female leaders see their leadership and what barriers affect their duties and responsibilities. Female principals with at least 8 years of experience as a principal at higher secondary schools have been selected. A total of six female principals were randomly selected, and they were interviewed with open-ended questions. Interview questions were designed with the help of research questions. The data thus collected were categorized for theme development and further analysis. The collected data was then analyzed through (Clarke & Braun, 2021; Laraib, & Hashmi, 2018) thematic analysis.

Discussion

Although women try their best to enhance their capabilities, the women in Pashtun society are yet to develop their leadership capabilities. It was discovered during the study that they face different barriers that ultimately affect their duties and responsibilities. In such a patriarchal society coping with such barriers is a much more difficult task for these women to fulfill their duties and responsibilities.

It was observed that gender discrimination starts at a very early age when women are confined to house chores. According to one of the participants, "In comparison to my brothers, I was expected to be doing the house chores. Therefore, I was being deprived of the opportunities that were given to my brother". Similarly, while performing their duties, gender discrimination becomes a barrier to achieving women's career goals in patriarchal societies. One of the respondents said that "most of the time, men are preferred to us." Thus, this gender bias may be intentional or unintentional. According to unconscious gender bias theory, sometimes an individual is against stereotyping but may practice it unconsciously (Madsen & Andrade, 2018). Madsen (2017) further explains that gender bias is normally practiced in one's mind, actions, and practices. Therefore, it can be concluded that the gender bias happening with participants of the study may be intentional or unintentional, which is happening to them through organizational practices and individual actions.

Besides gender discrimination, it was observed that women's most common issue is the lack of proper mentorship. As discussed earlier, from the very beginning, women's roles are defined, and the parents' focus is concentrated on the family's male counterparts. Women are rarely given such an opportunity; thus, they often have to make decisions independently without proper guidance and counseling. One of the participants said that "every decision I take is based on my own perceptions and analysis. It would have been much easier for me if I could have taken guidance or if there were any training or mentorship sessions". Gangwani and Kolokythas (2019) also support the idea of necessary mentorship for women leaders. Similarly, Waheeda and Nishan (2018) also believe that besides many hurdles to women in their leadership positions, mentorship helps their professional development. Maccombs and Bhat (2020) state that such mentorship is very much needed for minimizing gender bias and providing equal opportunities to women leaders.

Old boys' network is another hurdle that the participants during the survey have highlighted. Such practice is very common. Most men do support their friends and relatives while women are ignored. In patriarchal societies, such networks become stronger. Friends and relatives are favored while talent and merit are ignored. As per one of the respondents, "it happens very rarely that a man would not support his male colleague. We, women, are most of the time discouraged by them in meetings. If they feel a woman be more talented, they unite and discourage us in every possible way". The perceptions of other participants are somewhat similar. Zikhali and Smit (2019), while investigating the reasons for resigning from the principal school position, concluded a similar finding. It was observed that female authority was not obliged by the male counterparts, and there was no support from the colleagues. Ali and Rasheed (2021) also believe that Old boys' networks are a barrier to women's leadership development. On the other hand, it was observed that while men support men, women are also discouraged by their female colleagues. One participant said, "Our women colleagues do not even support us."

Conclusion

Women in patriarchal societies face multidimensional issues that sometimes affect their leadership capabilities. The participants of this study face somehow similar situations. The patriarchal setup affected their familial and social domains as well as their carrier. It becomes very hard for these women to achieve leadership positions in their careers while being victims of such gender bias. It is also hard for women to further develop and sustain their leadership capabilities. It is the need of the day to minimize this gender bias and increase women's participation in every sphere of life by providing them equal opportunities.

Limitations and Further Research

The scope of this study was limited to women principals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. During this study, further research gaps were discovered that need further investigation. These research gaps include the internal and external factors contributing to role expectations in women's leadership positions. Further, the scope of the study needs to be broadened in other segments of society where women are working in leading positions.

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