LADDER TO LEADERSHIP: A STUDY ON CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN HEIS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose-The purpose of this paper is to report certain factors which challenges women to take up leadership positions in HEIs. Although many studies examine women's inclusion in the world, still there is a lack of studies regarding women in leadership positions in Indian Higher Educational Institutions. This paper aims at gaining an insight into certain organisational, societal and personal factors which challenges women to take up senior positions in HEIs

Design/methodology/approach-This research was done using semi-structured interviews with women academicians who are working in HEIs in India.

Findings- It was quite evident during the research that women in academics are somewhat excluded from various opportunities due to certain factors such as organisational, societal and personal factors. The majority of the participants in the survey did not believe that men are better at holding up top leadership positions in academia or any other organizations. The research results in this paper suggest that there are factors that women academicians encounter in HEIs and their impact on their career development.

Implications- This study looked into the perception of female academicians towards women inclusion in leadership roles in higher educational institutions. Overall, the interviews suggested that females experienced a number of challenges that could have an impact on their job obligations and ability to work in the HEIs.

Originality/value-This paper found the barriers to women's advancement, especially in academic institutions.

Keywords- *academicians, career development, glass-ceiling, leadership roles, qualitative, top positions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's work environment, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are being given increasing attention. Amongst the various dimensions of DEI, the inclusion of women in the workplace has occupied a special place. While organizations have made significant strides in including women in the workforce yet the results are limited to their wide participation at the lower levels of the organizations. Their inclusion in the upper echelons of management is still lacking and is faced with a lot of challenges (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). For the development of any country, it's very much important to give importance to women's inclusion in the workplace. Especially inclusion of females

for senior posts in higher education is gaining momentum as well as recognition. This paper draws attention in response to concerns about the lack of women in senior leadership roles in HEIs

As per past studies, conditions are more severe in South Asia and particularly in India, making inclusivity of women in Higher Educational Institutions a management concern (Banker & Banker, 2017). A global statistical picture of female vice chancellors reveals that Hong Kong has the worst performance, as none of the universities have had a female vice-chancellor, same is the case with countries like Kuwait, Japan, India and Turkey (Morley, 2014). According to a poll performed by India's Higher Education Department, around 42 per cent of doctoral recipients have been women, indicating that women are becoming more interested in education. However, women are rarely found at the top or in senior positions in academia. Women still make up only 66.22 per cent of middle management jobs (Banker & Banker, 2017). Senior posts such as Vice-Chancellor, Director, or Dean, however, account for only 6.67 per cent of the total (Banker & Banker, 2017). The first All India Women Vice-Chancellors Round Table lately held in Ahmedabad noticed participation from women vice-chancellors of prestigious universities in India which highlighted the role of women in HEIs. In that discussion, it was stated that even though Indian women account for 48% of overall enrolment in higher education, the country is showing a downward trend in terms of women in leadership positions (Alliance University).

India has 1043 universities in total which includes 410 Universities which are privately managed, 453 are State Universities, 126 are Deemed to be Universities and rest 54 are Central Universities (University Grants Commission, 2022). Exclusive universities for women are widespread in India comprising four in Rajasthan, two in Tamil Nadu and one each in Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Assam, Karnataka, West Bengal, Orrisa and Maharashtra (Govt. of India, Ministry of Higher Education, 2020). Out of all of these women universities, one in Mumbai (Maharashtra) named Smt. Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT) University is the first women's university in India which has turned 100 in the year 2016. Indian universities with a female vice-chancellor are just fewer than 7 per cent (The Hindu Business Line, 2021). Out of these 17 universities, 6 universities include women-only universities, in which the posts of vice-chancellors are mandated to be filled up by the woman only as per the ordinance. Traditionally, it has been seen that the positions at the top like Vice-chancellors, Head of Management, Dean of Students and many such top management categories have not been filled by the women. As per Banker and Banker (2017) study, which states that, among 810 HEIs, 54 universities had female deans which is 6.67 per cent. It has also been found that there are 130 Institutes of National Importance (INIs) in India as of 31st March 2021 (Ministry of Education, Government of India) in which there were 4 women directors which is about 5.2 per cent of women inclusiveness on top positions. These institutions also include a list of 7 AIIMs, 23 IITs, 20 IIMs, 25 IIITs, 29 NITs and few others as well, but it came to sight that none of these institutions holds to have a female director. The majority of India's central institutions have never had a female vice-chancellor. Also, if we talk about the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, for the very first time in history after 74 years Kashmir got the opportunity of having the first women vice-chancellor in Kashmir University (The Indian Express, 2022).

Keeping in view the above background, the study aims to investigate:-

(i) Factors which challenges women to take up leadership positions in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

(ii) Perception of female academicians towards women inclusion in leadership roles in higher educational institutions in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

The study's findings are anticipated to have an effect on women's participation in positions of leadership at Higher Educational Institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "inclusion" points out to the level where all personnel in a company feel respected, known for their distinct traits, and simultaneously in the workplace are encouraged (Shore et al., 2011). In 1994, in Salamanca, Spain, at the World Conference on Special Needs Education, "Inclusion" was offered as a possible new educational strategy (UNESCO 1994). Previous studies have shown that an inclusive atmosphere can have a good influence on the workplace, such as greater job satisfaction, dedication to work, retention, a stress-free environment, fewer conflicts, and other benefits (Brimhall et al., 2014).

There are fewer women in top-level positions than there are in mid-level jobs, full-time professorships, and other positions, according to previous studies (Mayuzumi 2015). As per reports generated by the Government of India in 2019, total females at the senior level roles in HEIs is 18.4% (Ghara, 2016). It has been quite evident that the women's inclusivity in the top leadership roles at higher education institutions (HEIs) is very slow. 'The gender diversity benchmark for Asia 2014,' where Indian females inclusion for the leadership roles is among the lowest (Vernon, 2014). Also in the 'Global gender gap report' (World Economic Forum, 2017), India was placed 87th in terms of gender equality. India has seen significant growth when it comes to the count of females getting graduated (University Grants Commission, 2018) which further results in women holding up careers in different sectors but as per the reports by Catalyst (2018) in India, women's inclusion on the top positions is negligible.

Although many studies examine women's inclusion in the world, still there is a lack of studies regarding women in leadership positions in Indian Higher Educational Institutions. The past literature has given an insight into certain organisational, societal and personal factors which challenges women to take up senior positions in HEIs. The following section discusses the factors.

Organizational Factors
At the organizational level, several issues have been identified, such as how patriarchal organisational cultures and institutional procedures lack women in leadership roles (van den Brink & Benschop, 2010). This alludes to the lack of understanding of women and their needs, as well as concerns regarding gender discrimination in Higher Educational campuses. Following are the past studies that indicates these factors: -

1. It has been noted that women's career advancement is hampered by organizational factors like lack of mentoring, networking, unfair hiring and promotion practices, and gender equity (Alotaibi, 2020).
2. Appointment and promotion procedures for positions of leadership have been criticized for being political, lacking transparency, and exhibiting gender biases (Morley & Crossouard, 2016).
3. At the organizational level, certain factors like recruitment, selection and promotions are typically associated with the images of successful managers. In Indian higher education institutions, these images are stereotypically masculine. The characteristics of successful organisations and successful managers are quite similar and go hand in hand with strength, aggressiveness, productivity, sustainability and competitiveness (Alotaibi, 2020).

Societal Factors
The societal stereotypes are being induced from the very beginning of childhood and we get enclosed in the respective behaviours. It's the socialisation that plays a major role and thus mends the mindset of children, hinting them on what they should be and what they have to do in future as they will be evolving themselves onto adulthood. If shared responsibilities for family

management begin when the children are young, it may have an impact on women career development in the firm (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Past studies also indicate: -

1. The main societal factors that act as a hinderance to the progress of females in HEIs are stereotyping, social norms and views and cultural clash (Alhalwachi & Mordi, 2021).
2. Cultural and conventional views have caused us to identify characteristics like competence and authority with individuals on higher positions, creating a link between gender and higher-ranking positions in the organisations (Berger et al., 1974).
3. Childcare, domestic work, and other structural constraints have all impacted women's ability to challenge conventional and stereotyped attitudes. (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017).

Thus, it is quite difficult for females to achieve same merits and compete. Sociocultural issues may, directly or indirectly, stymie their career progression. It has been found out by the focus group discussions (FGDs) that how society views men and women differently when it comes to their work. Respondents in FGDs marked that women are expected to look after the household chores. Gender stereotyping is the main issue that prevails over the last many years (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017).

Personal Factors
Personal barriers play a very crucial part in the career progression of females. Due to the lack of factors like organisational support and workload women academics often find themselves more burdened at work which leads to low research productivity (Peetz, Strachan, & Troup, 2014). Past studies also indicate: -

1. Personal issues include a lack of personality features, a lack of knowledge and guidance, as well as hesitancy and fear. (Bombuwela & Alwis, 2013).
2. Another barrier that women face in their personal lives is keeping a balance between work and family responsibilities (Alotaibi, 2020). It is the main reason that hinders women to obtain leadership roles. They either skip taking up top positions or are not recommended by the organisations for the top positions.
3. Females, according to research, because of their family commitments, they are regarded "poor fit" for top-level positions. (Edwards, 2016).
4. Women sometimes have a tough time managing work and home obligations, leading many to believe that they are not capable of taking on leadership roles. Women also leave their jobs to be wives and moms. For their children, some women take maternity leaves or request shorter workdays. (Hodges, 2017).
5. Women's jobs are more likely to be disrupted by maternity leave than men's (Acker and Armenti, 2004). Some of them are not able to attend extended hours of meetings due to the parental duties or are recruited to fewer experience jobs when compared with male counterparts.

3. Methodological Approach
The purpose of this study is to look into the challenges that women encounter in academics, and the participants are chosen in two different ways. So, to know the behaviour, opinion, and experience are frequently answered using qualitative research methodologies, which are difficult to get using a quantitative data collection methodology. In fields including anthropology, education, nursing, psychology, sociology, and marketing, qualitative data, usually in the form of words rather than statistics, has always been a vital component. The main research instrument used in this study is a semi-structured interview with various questions on respondents' interest in acquiring leadership positions in universities, career development, experiences to reach the leadership positions, and barriers and facilitators on their journey, as well as personal and family challenges. To begin with, respondents who are working at various levels of hierarchy, from Professors to Decision-Making posts. Second, one general university is chosen at random. The study's sample was drawn from fifteen

randomly selected faculties from the university. We looked at both male and female perceptions of faculties. The study conducts face-to-face interviews with various university faculty members.

The research is being carried out in the Jammu and Kashmir. A qualitative research approach was adopted for the study (Creswell, 2009). This was thought to be the best way to obtain a deeper knowledge of the challenges women confront on their path to leadership. Face-to-face semi-structured phenomenological interviews with open-ended questions were done based on a thorough review of the literature (Creswell, 1998). The questions were designed to elicit as much data about their jobs, careers, aspirations, experiences, obstacles, facilitators, etc. as possible. The semi-structured interview method with open-ended questions was utilized to collect data from respondents utilizing purposeful sampling (Berg, 2001). When only a small number of people were available to participate in the study, this sampling method was determined to be the most effective. As the data gathered from the respondents approached saturation, 13 professors were questioned using the methodology outlined above. To make the interviews and transcription process easier, a digital recorder was employed. Each interview lasted 15-30 minutes and focused on the themes outlined in the study questions. An in-depth investigation was conducted to determine what aided and hindered their progression to university leadership roles.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used in the study to identify the subjects within the data. The thematic analysis technique is commonly used for qualitative research. Thematic analysis can be applied within a variety of theoretical frameworks, and it has the advantage of allowing the researcher to apply the study's theoretical framework (Alotaibi, 2019).

5. Results

Demographic data

All fifteen participants include both males and females, consisting of Professors to the Head of the Department. Their ages ranged from 25-50 years, and all had a minimum of 5 years of experience in the university.

Themes

Out of all the themes (Table 1), three main themes emerged from the interviews reflecting challenges faced by women for the inclusion in leadership positions in HEIs: (1) Lack of Networking, (2) Lack of support from family and husbands and (3) Family responsibility and adolescent children (Table 2).

Table 1. Themes for Experiences and Challenges for Women Inclusion in Leadership roles in HEIs

Classification	Themes
Experiences	Performance parameters are the same
	Balancing work and home
	Gender imbalance in leadership positions
	Non-transparent selection policy
Organisational Challenges	Absence of diversity and inclusion
	Academic fulfilment
	Lack of mentoring and networking
	Biased selection and promotion practices

Societal Challenges	Lack of support from family and husband
	Responsibility for household chores
	Negative attitude for leadership roles
	Presence of Stereotyping mindset
Personal Challenges	Family responsibilities and adolescent children
	Lack of networking
	Time constraints
	Family income

Theme1

Lack of Networking

Out of all the fifteen participants majority described challenges related to a lack of networks, which is an essential requirement to reach for the leadership positions. One of the participants related that networking was an issue that was a potential barrier to women's inclusion in leadership roles:

> *""Women face obstacles in networking that are a barrier to their career progression, less inclusivity in top-level roles, and biased selection and promotions. If you have to look up to for vice-chancellor, there are very few females. This is because of the strategic participation that they have to make like handling top-level roles, they usually lack experience, networking and mentoring. Half of the time most females do not know whether what they have to achieve, because they lack networks. Many of the points you cannot achieve without networking."*

Challenges linked with networks plays vital role in facilitating career progression for academic women. Pre-existing networks dominated by men, or 'old boys' at the top level, are tough to break into (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull 2016). Networking is one of the crucial things to consider because networking is important for improving managerial career growth and influencing an individual's success in the workplace (Singh et al., 2006). Another participant confirmed that:

> *"I think what men are good at like they are very good at networking, they will network. So, women are somehow shy and hesitant in doing good networking. So, I think what women also need apart from communication skills and what they were taught during their courses and leadership skills, what women also needs to learn is good networking like how to put their word that yes, I also have the desired qualifications, I also have desired capabilities so; I should also be considered for the top positions. Men have associations with men so because women they are not at the top so much so probably pulling other women is not that easy and that possible."*

As mentioned by various researchers (Fisher & Vilas, 1991; Roane, 1993; Kramer, 1998; Barton, 2001; Wellington & Catalyst, 2001) networking entails joining professional organisations, attending social functions, and participating in social activities. As a result, networking can be encouraged to produce information, resources, and opportunities for female and male counterparts within and outside of the company. Therefore, networking helps in improving managerial career development and success of the workplace. Proper networks structure helps women to be successful and also helps in boosting up their determinations. The network structure consists of network size, composition and density (Moser & Wolf, 2009). In terms of network structure, some study indicates that men and women differ in the structure of personal networks as well as the rewards obtained from personal networks (Stallings, 2008). On the one hand, in male-dominated commercial systems, women must

make themselves known in men's networks as well in order to obtain possibilities. Men, on the other hand, have greater opportunities to advance to positions of leadership as a result of their network links than women. As a result, this organisational challenge has a greater influence on women's professional success (Ibarra, 1997). As a result, as Ibarra suggests in her study, women are frequently less likely than males to hold top level positions in organisations because of the women's ability to build significant societal networks. Men, on the other hand, are not subject to the same restraints.

Theme2

Lack of support from family and husbands

Five of the participants noted difficulties connected to cultural and familial issues, which necessitated striking a balance between job choice and family needs. One of the participants shared his/her personal experience of one his/her colleague:

> *"If I take my case or my female friend's case also. Many of them started their career in university but as I remember there are 3 or 4 friends of mine who left their jobs once they got married because reallocate to another place or where her husband is working"*

Another participant confirmed that:

> *""I think the reason for this is that there are fewer women running for academic positions and that could be because of the societal pressure that women have to face, orientation and mindset and also the family back ground. Women generally lag behind because of the kind of support, they get from their family members, spouses and other economic factors too."*
>
> *"As a result, there is fierce competition today, and as you noted, men tend to hold the top positions. So preferred men around as they have pre conceived notions about women that they don't want them to be at the top positions. Women on the other hand they shy for taking top positions because they prioritize their family."*

Women generally lack leadership qualities due to the personal barriers they face in their day to day lives. It is also argued that women are unsuitable to fit the image of leadership positions, because a leader has strong decision-making power to implement/change many policies, which most women lack. Women without such powers may be competent but unlikable as leaders or organizational representatives (Bombuwela and De Alwis, 2013) and (Eagly and Carli, 2007) discovered comparable trends in their research. They went on to say that if women appear excessively strong and masculine at work, they may be perceived as competent but unlikable; if they appear too feminine, they may be perceived as liked but incompetent (Eagly and Carli 2007; Bombuwela and De Alwis 2013). Societies establish behavioral norms for individuals in particular. Some of them also shared:

> *"For women's overall development, both careers and professional lives are crucial. We cannot live without a family but its very important that (being confident while speaking) in the pursuit of happiness while we are raising our family we should never forget that we have our own individuality, so we have to work on that also."*
>
> *"We are nurturing our family but by the end of the day we have our own capabilities which are far better than male who are working in the same field. So all women and all girls they should focus on their interests and happiness and they should always move forward with that goal in life. Both are important but both are you know have their own places also."*

Another participant quoted different viewpoint:

> *"Women are very good at managing multiple tasks, so once you are married, your*

priority will be on your children rather than your career. So, 90% of the women they give first preference to the family then second preference would be given to the career. In my family my husband is supporting and maybe that's why I'm at this position today"

On the contrary, the majority of male participants favored women being nominated to leadership positions, believing that they would make significant contributions to the country's progress. Some participants reported:

"I have both types of male and female friends and coworkers in this organization and I see the urge of working more creatively and harder among the female members far more than men at least in academic, they are more creative and corporative than men. Women can be multi-tasking, emotional, compassionate, relationship-oriented, consensus-based, collaborative, and communicative and if given the opportunity to lead, they will lead better than men because they are relationship-oriented, which is the main difference between management and leadership in my opinion."

Another male participant added

"Because of the type of support, they receive from family members, spouses, and other economic factors as well, women typically lag behind. This is also because we have problem in our system as well, a well system need to be made for women in academia as in some percentage of seats should be reserved for women in academia. Whether my boss is a woman or a man makes no difference to me because I believe women to be better team leaders and to be more supportive and caring."

Therefore, the societal pressure from "being home-maker" to emerging attitudes like "and if given the opportunity to lead, they will lead better than men", states that women have potential to lead on the top if given proper support from their family and husband. This shows that males in the state are beginning to have a different understanding of the place of women in society.

Theme3
Family responsibility and adolescent children

Balancing work and family responsibilities is considered to be a challenging obstacle for women seeking leadership positions. Thus, some of them do not seek top positions due the lack of family support. That's why our society consider women for familial roles than for leadership roles. During the pandemic as well where the extent and amount of work has increased for working women due to their participation in domestic chores, increased caring of dependents, children's studies and extensive cleanliness. This made them juggling their work and family roles more difficult and stressed. Working mothers in the UK were found to be 40% more stressed than the average person, according to a recent study (Chandolaet al., 2019). According to some participants:

"In our families, it is the responsibility of women to care for their children. It is not, however, up to women to decide whether or not they want to have children; a number of factors must be taken into consideration before this can be determined."

Many academics have discovered that because of their family responsibilities, women are a "poorer match" for leadership positions (Edwards, 2016; Buckalew et al., 2012). Furthermore, the fundamental issue with women is the difficulty of managing professional and familial duties, which leads many to believe that they are incapable of taking on leadership roles (Hodges, 2017). One of the male participants in support of women quoted

"Where primary care is required for children, men should step up and provide it. If one arm is going outside, the other should provide support. Responsibilities should

be shared."

Managing job and family is difficult, but when men and women share equally in the care of their children and other family members, balancing the two tasks becomes easier. And when governments and employers implement family-friendly policies and procedures, workers with family responsibilities benefit. As the new vision of today's world, the society should offer flexibility when it comes to responsibilities on women. These responsibilities should be shared equally.

6. Limitations and Implications

It is critical to recognize the study's limitations, which call for caution in interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted solely in one university of Jammu & Kashmir, therefore conditions may differ in other universities of Jammu & Kashmir. Additional research

should endeavor to seek perspectives from other areas. Second, higher officials like Vice chancellors of the university were unable to participate in the study, therefore their perspectives were not included. As a result, future research that examines the problems of women academicians from other universities and higher authorities' viewpoint would be advantageous.

7. Conclusion

This study looked into the perception of males and females academicians towards women inclusion in leadership roles in higher educational institutions. Overall, the interviews suggested that females experienced a number of challenges that could have an impact on their job obligations and ability to work in the HEIs. Three themes emerged: (1) Lack of Networking, (2) Lack of support from family and husbands and (3) Family responsibility and adolescent children (Table 2). The availability of males and females academicians was strongly supported as a result of interviews. More research is needed to investigate the difficulties faced by females working in the field of HEIs in Jammu & Kashmir.

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