SO FEW WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION , EXPERIENCES FROM A UNIVERSITY IN ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT

In Zimbabwe and most probably the rest of Africa, the occupational and leadership status of women in higher education leadership is still suffering a wide gap as there is unequal representation in leadership positions between men and women. Although women have made substantial gains in higher education learning institutions, they have not achieved parity with men. Women in Zimbabwe higher education are particularly underrepresented at higher levels of leadership and the percentage of female executives decline with increasing organizational rank. Despite the fact that women constitute the majority of work force in universities in Zimbabwe, they remain poorly represented in high level leadership positions. Where women have attained high level leadership positions, they remain disadvantaged, their progress remain impeded due to parenthood responsibilities. Despite the fact that in Zimbabwe today women earn the majority of college and university degrees, they are less likely than men to experience benefits associated with leadership and promotion and they continue to represent a smaller proportion of leadership positions. This study derived from a qualitative case study undertaken at a university in Zimbabwe was conducted to establish challenges faced by women in higher education leadership. The research findings indicated that cultural and social barriers continue to grow and pose a formidable barrier to women in leadership positions. The researchers argue that organizational structures, parenthood and culture make it difficult for women to rise into higher levels in leadership positions.

Key Words: Higher education, Education leadership, Women, Parenthood, Family

INTRODUCTION

If the scarcity of women in higher education leadership positions cannot be attributed to personality differences between women and men, perhaps it may be due to women's greater domestic duties, particularly child care, parenthood and housework. Certainly, women have the bulk of domestic responsibilities in the family. The question is how do such family responsibilities at home interfere with women's leadership, commitment at work and their desire for advancement? The challenge for women in higher education leadership positions is to balance the demand for agency and to remain in the office beyond working hours or weekends

required of the leader role and the demand for communion work required of female roles. Thus for women in higher education leadership positions, gender stereotypes create a double bind: highly communal female leaders may be criticized for not being argentic enough, but highly argentic female leaders may be criticized for lacking communion and parenthood (Amondi, 2011; LaRaoque, 2007; Martin, 2011; Stromquist, 2006). Gendered roles continue to influence the ''polices, practices and beliefs in the academe'' largely through established narratives and ideologies in society (Martin, 2011 p.109). It is against this background that an examination of the challenges faced by women in higher education leadership is necessary and timely. The aim of this paper is to examine the major challenges faced by women in higher education leadership and our study is structured in four parts, drawing on the literature, the first part unpacks the literature review on women in higher education leadership. The second section focuses on the study methodology. The third section presents the findings of our study, while the fourth section provides the conclusions.

Women and higher education leadership

Ideologies of male supremacy are so ingrained in the Zimbabwean psyche that they are taken as the natural order of things, while suggestions to establish new definitions are rejected as indecorous, illogical, or an attack on the cultural norms. As a result of increasing enrolment of women in all levels of higher education and various fields of employment and aspects of public life in Zimbabwe, since the attainment of independence witnessed a growing participation of women in leadership positions and in high level decision making in public and private sector., personal and cultural challenges that impede their operations and effectiveness as education leaders. In the past, men were deemed as central to the purpose of academic work and as creators of knowledge, while women were relegated to more supportive private roles (Martin, 2011) as wives mother centered on the home and family. While more women are finding their way into higher education leadership as departmental chairpersons, deans and directors, they continue to feel alienated and marginalized. The road towards successful academic leadership remains a fraught and painful path for women due to parenthood responsibilities and other related challenges (Amondi, 2011). While overt gender discrimination is no longer as prevalent in higher education careers, it is replaced by more subtle forms of institutional discrimination in the form of institutional practices, structural arrangements, and gendered roles that recreate patriarchal ideologies like parenthood that are oppressive to women (Jaschick, 2006; Rampton, 2008; Martin, 2011; Amondi, 2011). According to Baumgarner et al., (2011) institutional discrimination refers to the policies, practices, norms and traditions of the dominant racial ethnic, or gender group and the implementation of policies that disadvantage one social group for the benefit of another group. In society or organizations there are structural discriminations and actions that are neutral in intent yet they disadvantage women or other social groups (see Pincus, 2003). Women in higher education struggle with an unfamiliar elitist culture, a lack of mentors and role models and tensions between work, family and community (Amernti, 2004; Cooper et al., 2007; Wolfinger et al., 2009). On the other hand Martin (2011) argues that class discrimination is closely linked with gender and race discrimination as many women in lower socio- economic groups lack the power, competence and academic capacity to navigate through the system of higher education. Women often strive "to achieve a work/ life balance", a term

used by Morrissey and Schmidt (2008) to describe the conditions of engaging in purposeful careers and the pursuit of leadership while struggling to curve out time to pursue personal goals with family or friends, also contribute to their community, or invest in personal development (p.1400). Female university leaders especially with children encounter numerous dilemmas as parents and Professors. Armenti (2004) describes the irony women in university leadership face as their child bearing years parallel with their journey in university work. Family care issues especially parenthood has a more negative impact on promotion, tenure and leadership for women than for men since women have a disproportionate share of domestic duties (Co-oper et al., 2007) resulting in less time for research than their male counter parts. For example Schiebiger and Gilmartin (2011); Dzuback (2003) discovered that gifted women scientists are trading research time for domestic chores. Martin (2011) argue that women in higher education leadership positions frequently subordinate their academic careers to support their partners or assume childrearing responsibilities by accepting contingent positions or by interrupting their career altogether. Both these actions,(Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011) have a delirious effect on the achievement of tenure and such interruptions in academic cycle can serve as indications to the promotion committee that the female academic is not serious or committed to her career. Arment (2004) remarks that, in addition to interruptions women are more likely to leave the academic work due to child care issues and less likely to achieve tenure if they have young babies. For women in leadership positions who place strong family care responsibilities creates serious barriers to their leadership. Al- Shaddi (2010) studies in Jordan established that women face many challenges that stand in the way of their success in leadership. Of the results of studies conducted in developed and developing countries, there are indications to the multiple challenges facing the woman in her leadership of educational institutions. Studies by Lawson (2008) showed that challenges facing Palestinian women's leadership in the educational institutions are legal, political, social, familial and administrative challenges. Also studies by Al- Douri et al., (2010) indicated that most of the challenges facing women's leadership roles are social, followed by political and personal. Another study by Al- Hussein (2011) found that the leading women in the Ministry of Education in Jordan faces some challenges to reach higher leadership positions, most important are: the negative stereotype of the women in the mind of both males and women the women's limited ambitions, lack of confidence in herself and her abilities, and discontinuity in her work place due to family responsibilities. The study conducted by Wolfinger et al., (2009) concluded that leadership challenges facing the African American women in education leadership are balanced between the house and work responsibilities, ethnicity, gender, low respect levels of their colleagues, under-representation of women at work, and lack of confidence of both the workers and community in the women's leadership.

Organizational barriers to women's leadership

The social structure and culture of organizations often create challenges to women than to men. The challenges can be (Martin, 2001) embedded in organization's formal roles, rules and procedures as well as their tacit rules and norms of conduct. In both structure and culture, organizations present women with many impediments to advancement and operations (Tanya 2008). On the other hand. Amondi (2011) shows that many aspects of organizations implicitly favour men's leadership because traditionally many men and very few women held leader roles

in most organizations. The long hours required to advance to high levels also present a particular challenge to families especially to women, who have the bulk of domestic and child care responsibilities, and the increasing pressures of intensive parenting. Reconciling career and family obligations is much easier for men than women. The time constraints that women face in managing career and family make it especially difficult for them to participate in networks with colleagues. The social capital created by networking helps facilitate career success. (See Schiebringer, 2005)

Women leadership opportunities are obstructed in part because they possess less social capital than men do (Tanya, 2008). Studies indicate that women have less extensive and powerful career networks than men do (Amondi, 2011; Dzuback, 2003; Martin, 2011). This is because men hold the bulk of leadership positions, and powerful networks tend to be male dominated. Martin (2011) remark that, networks generally are gender segregated because people tend to affiliate with others who are similar to themselves or in more or less similar positions. Altogether women's careers benefit from having connections with men (Hunter et al., 2007) and such connections are difficult to form. Women also find it difficult in fitting with the culture of their organizations.

The structure and norms of organizations implicitly favour men. As noted before the demand for long hours at the work place is more challenging for women than men because of their typically greater domestic responsibilities, the unfriendliness of many co-operate cultures and male networks and the frequent denial to women of desirable associations. These obstacles block women's advancement and contribute to their relative absence from leadership positions.

Women leadership styles

Research indicates that women have somewhat different styles of leadership than men do. Female leaders adopt a more democratic and less autocratic leadership style than male leaders do. Women compared to men are slightly more interpersonally oriented, emphasizing maintaining harmonious relationships (Angezo, 2010). Women, more often avoid the autocratic (or directive) style of leadership, the style that people evaluate less favourably in women, and instead manifest styles that are more collaborative and participative. Martin (2011) show that women adopt a style that motivates and develop followers and thereby increase their ability to make valuable and contributions to their organizational development and improvement. This leadership, also called transformational leadership, involves being an excellent role model who inspires trust in subordinates and in future oriented and innovative (Bass, 1998). Transformational leaders also mentor and empower followers by encouraging them to develop their full potential. However as this description of transformational leadership suggests it is neither masculine nor feminine when considered in its entity but instead culturally androgynous (Martin, 2011; Jaschik, 2006; Morrissey et al., 2008). Yet because of some of its elements, especially the mentoring and empowering of subordinates, it appears to be slightly more aligned with female than the male gender role (Bass 1998; Martin, 2011). Likewise, women leaders'

greater use of contingent rewards and democracy likely reflect their response to pressures to temper their assertiveness and authority with a measure of communion.

Research into leadership styles found that women are slightly stronger in relationship- oriented supportive style, while men score high in instructive and controlling styles (Avolio et al., 2004; Hopfl, 2007). Eagly et al., (2003), for example, offered a quantitative synthesis of 45 studies on transformational, transactional, and laisser-faire leadership styles, comprising women and men. They found that women scored higher than men in transformational leadership and contingent rewards, whereas men scored higher than women in active and passive management by exception and on laissez- faire leadership. Moreover, women produced considerably better outcomes than men on all of the three outcome measures that the multifactor leadership questionnaire investigated the extra effort they inspired from subordinates, the.

Finally, a number of writers, researchers and advocates of the women's leadership summarized the challenges facing women's leadership roles in the educational institutions as follows: Organizational challenges; factors related to the administrative organization that may hinder the academic leadership to achieve the objectives of the institution (Al-Miquash, 2007; Abu Khaider, 2012; Al-Halawani, 2002). Under-empowerment challenges, which are factors that limit the ability of the academic leadership to effect, taking the right decisions and eliciting the change required to realize success in her leadership roles (Abu-Khaider, 2012; Al- Kubaisi, 2004). Cultural challenges refer to a number of prevailing cultural concepts and beliefs concerning the view of women as leaders, whether in the eyes of men colleagues, her subordinates or women colleagues as well (Abu- Khaider, 2012). Self-Challenges which include personal factors and characteristics that have negative effects on practicing her leadership roles successfully (Al-Shihabi, 2008). Physical and technical challenges which include the other obstructions related to the physical work environment, and technical supplies that limit the ability of the women leader to achieve the objectives assumed to her (Al- Minqash, 2007).

Based on the review, it is concluded that women in higher education leadership face multiple challenges that limit their effectiveness and prevent them from achieving leadership potential. These include organizational structure, culture, parenthood, organisational policies and practices as well as individual factors. Using this literature review as a conceptual framework, this study examines the challenges facing women in higher education leadership positions with specific reference to a university in Zimbabwe.

Broad aim and research questions

The broad aim of the study was to understand the challenges facing women in higher education leadership at a selected university in Zimbabwe.

- What are the challenges facing women in higher education leadership?
- What are the cultural and structural challenges affecting women in higher education leadership?

- What are the major differences in leadership styles between women and men leaders
- What leadership styles are adopted by women leaders?
- In what ways are parenthood factors affecting women in higher education leadership?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design, which is naturalistic, exploratory, descriptive and interpretive was used to understand the meaning participants made of their really world and their experiences as women in higher education leadership positions (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Berge, 2009; Silverman, 2014). The qualitative approach seemed suitable to interrogate for a deeper understanding of the challenges women face in their leadership positions. Qualitative evidence was collected from twelve women in leadership positions selected through purposive sampling and we ensured adequate dialogue with the participants to collaboratively construct meaningful reality (Silverman 2014; Shava & Ndebele 2014). We adopted the qualitative research design on realising that the leadership field is significantly reliant upon a single research method for its findings and it is not surprising that Hunter et al., (2007) and Friedrich et al., (2009) refer to the questionnaire based approach as the typical leadership study, thus, the need to change and adopt a qualitative method which encourages a diversity of theoretical positions and exploration of a great variety of research context and settings (Bryman, 2014).

Purposive sampling for information rich cases (Shava& Ndebele 2014), facilitated the identification of participants and semi structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method because of its ability to capture experiences of participants in their words an approach highly consistent with constructivist position (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2009). Interviews were conducted in person by the researchers. The qualitative interview managed to yield data that was analysed using qualitative thematic textual analysis, discourse analysis and narrative analysis. The data generated was amenable to different kinds of analysis. The qualitative study involved the researchers spending an hour with each of the interviewees. During this time the participants referred to as DC1 to DC6 for department chairperson and D1 to D6 for directors and deans were requested to participate in individual, open ended interviews with the researchers. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. We decided to limit the number of interview questions to five to enable the participants to focus completely on the research questions. The questions focused on the key concepts being investigated. All interviews were semi structured to provide a basis for comparison across departments and allowing sufficient flexibility for context based variables. Since participants were all based at one campus, interviews were conducted through face to face based on the five prepared interview questions. It is acknowledged that in a small scale of this type generalization of findings to a national picture are difficult to make given the fact that one university was selected for the study and only women in leadership positions were interviewed. More so, purposive sampling of participants where the largest number of employees is women were present meant that these women were by definition not representative of the population of women in the university. The

fact that the selected women were in leadership positions may allow us to make tentative generalization to theory with regards to women in higher education leadership. Interviews were conducted in the month of October after obtaining the necessary ethical clearance from the National University of Science and Technology.

Following the period spent with each participant, the various interview notes were subjected to data analysis process that relied on various analytical strategies. The analysis reported here focus on the interview data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Qualitative analysis was conducted using a coding framework consistent with both grounded theory and qualitative content analysis (Charmaz, 2000:2006; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Silverman, 2014). Once the interviews were transcribed, the open coding of our data commenced. This process involved an intensive reading of each transcript and identification of key themes and phrases that connected the participants' accounts of their experiences in leadership positions (Groulding, 1999: Holton, 2010). During this stage, we went beyond descriptions and looked for interpretations and reflections. We coded the findings according to emerging themes and this also involved the cross- case content analysis Furthermore data triangulation, prolonged engagement, member checks and debriefing (Borgdan and Knop 2002) enhanced the authenticity of the data collected from participants.

While evidence from the interview data indicated that women in higher education leadership serve longer periods in these positions, they however encounter multiple obstacles emanating from family responsibilities, family attachments, parenthood responsibilities and organizational challenges. Such challenges to a great extent affect their operations in leadership positions. Comments made by participants on each question were more or less related and were in line and congruent with what was established in the study literature review. It became quite clear from the findings of the study that women in higher education leadership positions face challenges that affect their operations in these positions. The responses from participants of the study on each of the questions asked during interviews are presented briefly.

Challenges facing women in higher education leadership

Responding to the question on what are the challenges facing women in higher education leadership, the overall summary of results showed the following challenges:

- Structural challenges which involve the low level of participation in drawing strategic plans of their institutions.
- Poor representation of women leaders in committees, boards and meetings at the corporate level.
- The centralisation of decision making which is done by men.
- Limited powers granted to women leaders.

- Lack of clarity of structural vision and overlap between women's and men's sections.
- Lack of empowerment.
- Lack of rehabilitation programmes for women leaders and poor preparation for them before they are assigned leadership roles.
- Poor management skills necessary to exercise leadership roles.
- Lack of management experience on the part of women leaders.
- Limited opportunities for training and skills development.
- Cultural challenges.
- Prevailing beliefs about men having higher capacity and management skills.
- A reluctance to accept the authority of women's leadership by their subordinates.
- Difficulty of dealing with male colleges and superiors.
- Difficulty of balancing between professional responsibilities and family obligation.
- Sense of isolation in the administrative position.
- Sense of stress and tension due to the difficulty of balancing the needs of subordinate structural goals.
- Difficulty of travelling if required by work conditions because of family and personal circumstances.

The issues highlighted above identify differences in the types of challenges facing women leaders in higher education leadership positions according to their personal and professional characteristics. The study further established that the lack of authority to lead effectively and make decisions and centralization of authority in highest positions dominated by men limit women's ability to lead effectively and to make decisions, even those decisions that concern their own departments or levels they are leading. The majority of participants concurred that the wider cultural perceptions and positions of women as dependents on men and that women's careers were affected by parenthood challenges. Such parenthood challenges have shown some interference in their operations. One participant who is a director (D2) commented in this regard:

Yes my current position is director but I still feel that I am locked into restrictive cultural and traditional roles of a mother, and parent who is responsible for the family. I like my work as a director but the moment I think of my children at home I get carried away, I feel like leaving the office to go and see if they have been bathed and feed. I face difficulties balancing between my professional responsibilities here at work and my family obligations. I am trying to coupe but it's not easy. I enjoy being with my children at home.

Another woman dean (D6) commented to say:

I am isolated in this office which is so demanding some ladies share offices, I spend most of my time alone and working on the computer, by the time I leave this office I am so tired as a result of the demands of this office and fail to give enough time and attention to my kids at home. I try to take some of my work home but because of the responsibilities I have at home as a mother most of the work that I carry home will not be done. At home I have a young kid and I need to have enough time with my little kid. I cannot travel even if required by my

work conditions because I have a small kid who needs my attention, I have never trusted my kid in the hands of a maid, and they are very irresponsible and at times rough with our children.

These findings show that women in higher education leadership are continually affected by a number of factors which inhibit their operations and these range from cultural perceptions, organizational perceptions and sometimes their negative self-perceptions. Oftentimes, their operations are affected by parenthood and this has led to fewer women taking leadership positions despite several strides that have been made on gender equality due to feminist ideologies, affirmative action and global initiative on gender parity, there are still embedded gender biases and stereotypes that perceive organizational leadership as a masculine activity. Findings from the first question of the study summarized the major challenges women in leadership positions in general posited a view that because women tend to be nurturing, and caring was a major hindrance to their operations in higher education leadership positions. This affirms theoretical assertions that in traditionally conservative societies such as in most higher education institutions in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole (Tanya, 2008: Angezo, 2011: Amondi, 2011), women in leadership positions continue to encounter paternalistic and parenthood obstacles in their quest to advance and effectively operationalise in senior leadership positions. Zimbabwean women are largely considered as befitting the major role of parenthood and housewife, who are meant to take charge of domestic duties in the home hence given less opportunities to exercise leadership roles in higher education or in work places in general. However, the few women who have benefited from affirmative actions and global initiatives on gender parity, they still are affected by stereotypes and the issue of parenthood which is a major responsibility for women.

Our second research question focused on cultural and structural challenges affecting women in higher education leadership. In this question we wanted to understand if at all there are cultural and structural challenges that affected women who held leadership positions in the university. The study findings demonstrated that, multi-faceted cultural and structural variables are affecting women in higher education leadership. Socialised stereotyping of gender roles, and the associated attitudes of both males and females, are evidently the major factors underlying the variables which function at individual, organizational and societal levels compounding and negatively affecting women in higher education leadership. Efforts to cause change at any organizational levels or structural conditions would, of necessity affect inherent and fundamental life philosophies and thereby also the cultural and structural norms, values and standards associated with gender issues. Major findings from this question are summarized as:

- Lack of clarity of structural vision
- Overlap between women's and men's sections
- Limited powers granted to women leaders
- The centralisation of decision making
- Decisions made by women not taken seriously
- Lack of material and moral incentives

- Poor representation of women leaders in committees, boards and meetings at corporate level
- Prevailing beliefs about men having higher capacity and management skills
- A reluctant to accept the authority of women's leadership by their subordinates
- Weak professional culture by some subordinates
- Difficulty of dealing with male colleagues and superiors
- Poor self confidence
- Fear of responsibility
- Failing to balance between professional responsibilities and family obligation
- Isolation in the position of administration

Historical narratives and findings from our study reveal that women in higher education leadership encounter multiple cultural and structural challenges on their way up the leadership career. Difficulty of dealing with male colleagues and failing to balance between professional responsibilities and family obligations emerged as clearly major barriers to women leadership in higher education. All participants were in agreement that cultural perceptions and structural barriers were major factors affecting their leadership in the university. This was also summarized in the responses from one of the department chairpersons (DC2) who said in this regard:

> *Culturally men and even some women do not accept that women can lead them. Most of these positions were previously dominated by men and the moment you take over from a man, really there is a problem, even your women counterparts do not listen to you. I am told some men in this department were saying that they cannot be led by a woman it's like a home under the leadership of women (umuzi kamazakela) in Ndebele meaning a single women's home.*

The above responses suggest that while cultural factors are seen to impede the operations of women in higher education leadership, men feel that they cannot be led by women. This is worse in a situation where the department was led by a man and operations were moving well under the leadership of a man. However, there are a lot of changes including economic factors that may affect the achievement of organizational goals and this may be attributed to poor leadership provided by women. These responses clearly demonstrate the dilemma women in higher education leadership face when it comes to leading departments that were led by men before. There is a tendency of comparing how the department was operating before without considering other factors that may be currently affecting the operations of the entire institution. Although it was not clear from this study whether men were comparing the operations of women leaders with that of men, it was apparent that the element of comparison existed either with how the department was operating under the leadership of a man or how the department compares with other departments that are led by men. Cultural and structural factors can present major challenges to women leaders due to managerial and organizational practices, as a result women managers in Zimbabwean higher education institutions are often found in lower management positions that give them little access to power and authority. Based on these findings, it can be seen that women leaders face cultural and structural challenges that limit their effectiveness and prevent them from achieving their leadership potential. Moorosi (2008); Diko (2007), and

Chisholm (2001) also blame the underrepresentation of South African women in educational leadership and management on institutional culture and argue strongly that unhelpful cultural expectations about women prevail to the present day. Men are socially constricted so as to have the upper hand in areas of power.

Differences in leadership styles between women and men

Leadership in organizations in general has been associated with men and male traits of behaviour, and as a consequence the perception of a leader is dominated by male stereotypes. However, Agezo (2010) advanced a different view that there is a gender difference and that women leaders bring different qualities to leadership and management practices, which help organizations maintain a competitive advantage. The study findings also established that female leaders in higher education tended to manage in different ways than men. The study established that female higher education leaders were more interested in transforming people's self-interest into organizational goals by encouraging feelings of individual self-worth. When participants were asked whether there were differences in leadership styles between women and men, the following issues were raised:

- Women leaders were capable of sharing power and information with their colleagues.
- Women leaders adopted distributed leadership of recognising that there are multiple leaders and that leadership activities should be widely shared with and between organisational members.
- Women in leadership positions are concerned with instructional improvement.
- Women leaders acknowledge the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice.
- Women leaders adopt shared decision making processes in their leadership.
- They adopt active participation of all members in decision making.
- Female style of leadership is often motivational than the masculine style of leadership which tends to emphasize individualism, duty and rules.
- Women leaders usual have good relations with their members of staff.
- They are efficient organisers.
- They have self-discipline and have the ability to bring about positive change often democratically.
- Women leaders were said to be keen in promoting professional development and providing incentives for learning

All in all participants echoed that women in higher education leadership advocated transformational leadership, participative decision making and other forms of leadership that were more consistent with evolving trends in educational reforms such as empowerment, shared leadership and organizational learning. This was summarized in the response from one of the department chairpersons (DC2) who said in this regard:

> *We ladies are keen to improve the general operations of our departments, yes we have weaknesses but we are efficient organizers, we like to see progress, we also like to see progress, we are helpful, kind sympathetic, interpersonal sensitive, nurturing and gentle, we want piece at work and this is why we encourage commemorating co-workers' birth days and we behave democratically by allowing subordinates to participate in decision making.*

Most of these views raised by women leaders were confirmed by our study literature which established that women leaders compared with men enact their leadership role with a view to. From the views of the study participants we can conclude that women leaders are capable of sustaining organizational development and improvement despite multiple challenges emanating from structural and cultural entrenchments in their operations as higher education leaders.

Parenthood factors affecting women in higher education leadership

The research findings clearly indicate that women in higher education leadership encounter many barriers as they work their way up the administrative career ladder. Childhood responsibility is clearly one of the reasons women fail to gain leadership position or effectively operate in these positions. The interviews with women leaders revealed that the prejudice stems from their parenthood responsibilities confirming to their gender role as mothers can produce a failure to meet the requirements of their leader role and conforming to their leader role can produce a failure to meet the requirements of their gender role in the home. The gender roles of women leaders spill over to influence their leadership behaviour in organizational settings. While the best person for the job of leadership in higher education is a woman, most women leaders fail to effectively operationalize in these positions due to parenthood responsibilities. A lack of sufficient number of quality day care centres for mothers closer to the university, dual responsibilities of traditional and professional roles, balancing traditional and professional roles and family obligations as a wife and a mother for childbearing and child rearing affected women in higher education leadership positions. One of the study participants who is still young with only one child (DC4) had this to say:

I am failing to exercise a positive leadership role, the moment I think of my child I am lost. I don't know how can go about it. I need a good day care for my child near the university so that I can constantly monitor my child. My child is growing up in wrong hands and this worries me day and night

From this response there is an indication that women leaders find it difficult to leave their children and go to work. The study revealed that because of the dual role of being a mother and administrator in the university are impacting on the operations of women in leadership positions. Based on the views and arguments raised by women leaders it is concluded that women leaders face multiple challenges that limit their effectiveness and prevent them from achieving their leadership potential.

CONCLUSION

While the advancement of women in the public sphere and the leadership in higher education institutions is an important goal given the implementation of the eighth development plan and the millennium development goals (MDG) that strongly emphasize the need for women empowerment, women leaders in universities in Zimbabwe face many challenges that limit their effectiveness and prevent them from achieving their goals. These challenges as established from our study and many other studies conducted in Africa and the world over include organizational structures, culture, parenthood, dual roles of mother and administrator. All these challenges to a great extent impede their effective operations as leaders in higher learning institutions. Culture as reflected in the set of beliefs and practices associated with the university community, as well as in the work environment can adversely affect the operations of women occupying leadership positions in higher education leadership and their ability to exercise a positive leadership role. No wonder why they are so few women in higher education leadership positions where as women constitute a majority of the university population. They are treated like a minority group due to multiple challenges they face in leadership positions. At the university covered by this study there is an under representation of women in the ranks of administrator. Males hold more leadership positions even though women comprise sixty percent of the employees, the group from which senior administrators are most often drawn. The logical assumption would be that in a profession represented largely by females, there would be numerous women in leadership positions. Women prevail in total number, but men dominate in leadership positions and power. The study further conclude that women frequently serve longer in universities but they however encounter more obstacles in leadership positions. The findings of this study have shown that women leaders in universities in Zimbabwe are continually affected and in some ways inhibited in their leadership potential by negative male perceptions, cultural perceptions, and organizational perceptions and sometimes by their negative self-perceptions. Our study thus posited a view that because women tend to be nurturing, democratic, caring and communicative, they offer a diverse leadership style for enhancing the achievement of goals. Such transformational and transactional approaches to leadership may be critical in higher education environments where processes and practices desiring socialization and intensive team work are seen as crucial.

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