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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Graduate Studies

Women Representation in Higher Education Leadership in Egypt: A Qualitative Study

A Thesis Submitted by

Eman Hamada Hazem Fouda

to the

Educational Leadership

Graduate Program

May 22, 2024

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate women representation in higher education leadership in Egypt. Currently, the representation of women in leadership roles in higher education is not proportionate to the percentage of women in Egypt, or even to the percentage of women employed in education. The importance of this topic arises from the implications of gender inequality. This research explores the perceptions of women in higher education regarding the social and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions. The discussion is in light of the social dominance theory and the cultural and social issues that stand as barriers between women and equal opportunity. It looks at concepts such as glass ceiling, statistical discrimination, preferential male treatment, gender stereotypes, and socially imposed gender roles. The study interviewed 12 women administrators assuming middle management positions at a private higher education institute in Egypt. The interviews showed policy, individual, behavioral and societal bias that disadvantage women.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this study to women who are fighting their way up the career ladder facing professional, personal, social and cultural obstacles but none the less are not giving up. I grew up with a mother who was hard working, career oriented, professional, persistent and made things happen; and with a father whose utmost priority was me achieving the highest possible levels of success on the professional and academic levels, It wasn't until later in life that I found out that the world is not as supportive and encouraging as my father. I observed the struggle of women who march through life trying to achieve their objectives without the presence of such support and I felt that they at least deserve that their story be told.

I extend gratitude to my family who was willing to take risks and challenge the status quo, to my mother who gave me the space to pursue my dreams even when they were different from the stereotypical dreams for girls, to my father who gave me the courage to step outside my comfort zone and challenge the established gender roles, and to my sister - my first teacher and mentor - who was always there to cheer me on in every small accomplishment and was always excited to hear my stories.

Working in the field of education is my passion, and I'm grateful that AUC offered me the job of my dreams and also supported me in getting an academic degree in the same field. I'm very grateful to have the opportunity to work with Dr. Adham Ramada, Dean of Graduate Studies and Associate Provost of Research, Creativity and Innovation. He fosters the spirit of fairness, motivation and productivity in his team and has always encouraged me to pursue my professional, academic and personal goals. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Ibrahim Karkouti for being my thesis

supervisor, for all the time and effort he invested into helping me develop an academically viable research. I would like to thank all the participants in this research who were happy to share their experiences, insights and ideas for the benefit of this research, and the thesis committee members- Dr. Heba El Deghaidy and Dr. Daria Mizza – for the time they invested into reviewing my thesis and their valuable input.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The purpose of this research is to discuss women representation in higher education leadership in Egypt. This research explores the perceptions of women in higher education regarding the social and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions. In Egypt, women represent 50% of the population. Education is a main industry that employs women, nonetheless the representation of women in higher education leadership is limited. Women employment share of the education industry is 59% and it comes second after social work (Women Economic Empowerment Study, 2018). Looking at the leadership roles in higher education –which are defined here as the roles of president, vice president, provost and dean positions at universities and higher education institutions– as illustrated below the representation of women in leadership position is not proportionate to the percentage of women in Egypt, or even to the percentage of women employed in education. According to CAPMAS (2023) report, females represent 48.5% of the population, and represent 52.5% of the labor force in the education sector.

Here we will investigate some examples from the main public universities in Egypt: Cairo University, Ain Shams University and Alexandria University. Cairo University for example, the president and three vice presidents are men. There are 25 deans or acting deans, out of which only six are women (Cairo University, 2023). Ain Shams University is another example where the president and the two vice presidents are men, and one vice president is a woman. There are also 20 deans, only six of them are women (Ain Shams University, 2023). As for Alexandria University, while the president

and two vice presidents are all men, 11 of the 22 deans are women, indicating a somewhat improved situation (Alexandria University, 2023).

The picture in the private universities is actually quite similar. Women representation in leadership positions at the American University in Cairo (AUC) is comparable to Ain Shams University and Alexandria University. The president and the provost of AUC are both men, whereas the senior leadership team is composed of eight members, four of them are women (The American University in Cairo, 2023). Only once in the history of AUC that the position of university president was filled by a women during the period 2011 –2015: Lisa Anderson (The American University in Cairo, 2024). Misr International University is another private university where the president is a man and among seven deans, only one is a woman (Misr International University, 2023). Given the above, one can conclude the position of the president is dominated by men. Apparently, women can reach the position of vice president or dean but the percentage is low. Out of 82 positions of the universities mentioned, only 29 were assumed by women.

Problem Statement

The problem discussed is the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership which results in losses of skills, lack of talent optimization, gender inequalities, negative perceptions of university's culture and values, and lack of mentors for other women. This in turn leads to underrepresentation of women thus causing a vicious circle of underrepresentation and unequal access to opportunities (Seo et al., 2017). Limited access of women to leadership positions deprives the organizations from the talents and skills of those calibers, leading to structural and financial losses (Seo et al., 2017). A research conducted by Mckinsey & Company in 2019 studied 1,039

companies with revenue more than \$1.5 billion from 15 countries: Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Norway, Denmark, India, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The study showed that companies with gender diverse leadership teams were 25% more likely to perform financially better than companies with less diversity. The study also showed that companies with more than 30% female representations on leadership teams were 48% more likely to perform financially better than companies with 10-30% female representation in leadership (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

There is also the image of the organization as discriminatory as it prioritizes gender when promoting employees to leadership positions rather than performance. This impacts the perception of the employees of the organization, discourages them from performing and promotes a negative culture of inequality (Seo et al., 2017).

The absence of women from leadership positions removes the role model that female employees can look up to and aspire to become, and also eliminates the opportunities for mentorship (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2021). Research shows that the presence of women in such higher-level positions gives girls a role model to look up to and encourages them to learn and progress (Eleraqi & Salahuddin, 2018).

On the other hand, there are particular benefits that organizations gain from empowering women leadership. For example, literature explains that women leadership bring on a positive influence to the organization due to certain characteristics that are commonly exhibited by successful women in the workplace such as exceeding performance expectations, and surpassing men in certain behaviors and values such as honesty, intelligence, compassion, and being more extrovert (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2021). Women

commonly adopt the transformational leadership style which demonstrates collaboration and empathy; they are more democratic, involve others in decision-making and make effort to inspire their subordinates which in turn creates more employee satisfaction in the workplace (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2021).

In terms of higher education leadership, women represent less than 10% of the leadership positions in higher education leadership institutes Egypt and 7% in the Arab world (Eleraqi & Salahuddin, 2018). This lack of representation is not due to lack of skills, qualification or poor performance but rather due to biases and social concepts. A research conducted in 17 Arab countries– including Egypt- showed positions such as the university presidents are appointed by political leaders, not as a result of career progression or election (Eleraqi & Salahuddin, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Women face significant and complex barriers that inhibit their ability to reach leadership positions. These barriers can be a result of individual discrimination, institutional discrimination, or behavioral asymmetry. They could also be a result of cultural and social issues that dictate certain roles and responsibilities which impact women's ability to progress. Failure to address these barriers will lead to the continuation of imbalance in the structure of leadership and the inability to benefit from the type of leadership demonstrated by women.

This topic can be discussed in light of the social dominance theory. Social dominance theory explains that the human community has a hierarchical structure that consists of a dominant group on top and subordinate groups on the bottom, where the group on top enjoys a high social value that members of the other groups strive for

(Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Pierre van den Berghe identified different social stratification systems including age and gender, and gender mainly referred to as the patriarchy where males have access to social and political power that are not available for females (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Historically, women exclusion from the political and military power started 5,000 years ago. Some examples are available in ancient Babylon laws where women were punished for challenging the dominance of men. This in addition to the patriarchy spread in Islamic societies, Central and South America, Africa, and the ancient societies of Asia (i.e., China, India, and Japan) (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

According to the social dominance theory, social hierarchy is driven by three proximal processes: aggregated individual discrimination, aggregated institutional discrimination, and behavioral asymmetry. Aggregated individual discrimination refers to the small and subtle acts of discrimination taken by individuals against each other such as an employer's decision not to hire or promote someone from a disadvantaged group, or not to vote for someone from a minority group. The accumulation of these small individual actions over time lead to an outstanding difference in power between dominant and subordinate groups. Aggregated institutional discrimination refers to rules and procedures in institutions that lead to inequality between social groups, whether public or private institutions such as banks, hospitals, schools, retail outlets...etc. (Fischer et al., 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

The third proximal process is behavioral asymmetry, which refers to the difference in behaviors exhibited and expected from different groups and feeds into the ability of the members of the dominance group to oppress or control members of the subordinate groups. There are four main types of behavioral asymmetry: (a) asymmetrical

ingroup bias which refers to tendency to be ethnocentric and to favor members of their own group over others, (b) outgroup favoritism which refers to members of subordinate groups actually favoring dominant group members over their own group members, (c) self-debilitating which happens when subordinates exhibit levels of self-destructive behaviors that align with the subordinate group stereotype, and (d) ideological asymmetry which means that as one's status increases, so do beliefs that legitimize and enhance the existing social hierarchy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Marginalization from leadership can be a direct consequence of all three proximal processes. Equal opportunity plays an important role here. Having laws and regulations to ensure equal opportunity between men and women is not sufficient to address the unbalanced representation. There are cultural and social issues, such as patriarchy, that act as barriers between women and equal opportunity. In many societies, high-ranking prestigious positions are more likely to be filled by men, particularly the role of university president (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). The cultural and social bias against women holding prestigious leadership positions stems from the stereotype that leadership is a natural role for men, just as caregiving is considered a natural role for women. As a result, the characteristics associated with leadership exhibit masculine traits that perpetuate inequality and present women as less suitable for leadership (Kim et al., 2020; Lumby & Coleman, 2007). The gender stereotypes that emerge from the expectation that men take charge while women take care influence the way people are perceived regardless of the actual skills and individual differences between people; such perceptions are very hard to change, and accordingly men are automatically assigned characteristics such as independence, rationality, and assertiveness, whereas women are

automatically assigned characteristics of warmth, sensitivity and helpfulness (Kim et al., 2020; Northouse, 2016).

It is paradoxical how women are stereotyped as fitting into 'caretaking' roles and not being seen as suitable for leadership positions. Yet, they are criticized for lacking the confidence to apply for promotions or senior roles, resulting in gender under-representation. Additionally, women are often considered to be hesitant to make assertive career plans due to their domestic responsibilities and the challenges they encounter when trying to exhibit leadership characteristics typically associated with men (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). They are also criticized for being too manly if they exhibit tough and masculine characteristics in leadership (Kim et al., 2020; Northouse, 2016).

There are different social models other than patriarchy- where power is centralized with the white, male middle class majority- and there could be models of leadership based on values rather than muscular characteristics (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Transformational leadership, for example, is focused on inspiration and motivation, making it people and value-centered (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Research looked at the differences between genders in relationship to leadership styles, and found that women tend to be more transformational, have a more democratic approach, are more adaptive and produced better evaluations (Northouse, 2016).

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of women in higher education regarding the social and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions. To investigate this issue, the study answers the following research questions:

- What are the institutional discriminatory factors that prevent women from assuming leadership positions in higher education?
- What are the individual discriminatory factors that prevent women from reaching leadership positions in higher education?
- What are the asymmetrical behaviors that prevent women from assuming leadership positions in higher education?

Significance of the Study

This research explores the perceptions of women in higher education regarding the social and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions in Egypt. The importance of this topic arises from the implications of gender inequality, not only professionally inside academic institutions, but also how social and cultural gender stereotypes can impact women career progression. The findings of this research highlight factors that can subtly lead to inequality such as lack of access to opportunities, or lack of policies that support the different responsibilities and roles that women play. The discoveries will help explain how the work place in the field of higher education is designed to fit the persona of a man as accepted by the professional, social and cultural environment, while paying less attention to creating a work environment suitable for women despite women's participation in the work force.

The challenging and enabling factors identified in this research will enhance the capacity of women to advance their careers and assume leadership roles in higher education. Identified issues highlight the policies needed to support equal representation of women in higher education leadership in a way similar to representation in cabinet or parliament. This research highlights changes needed in the work place to accommodate

women's responsibilities; and changes in the cultural and social perspectives of gender roles to create more equality between men and women. It also uncovers other areas that need further research related to women empowerment.

Thesis Organization

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter which we have already covered included the introduction and background information. The second chapter explores previous research that covered this topic. The third chapter discusses the methodology and research design. The fourth chapter reports the findings. The fifth chapter discusses the findings in light of the theoretical framework and existing research; and provides recommendations for future research, policy and practice as well the conclusion of the research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter explores the hidden barriers that impede women's progress toward higher leadership roles, encompassing issues such as the glass ceiling, gender stereotypes, societal gender roles, and unequal access to opportunities. The researcher will look at research exploring issues that enable or impede the progression of women in higher education leadership on an international level, including Egypt. In addition to looking at the local culture and society in Egypt in terms of gender roles and expectations, labor statistics, related laws and their implications on the education sector.

Glass Ceiling and Gender Stereotypes

Men in almost all societies have an advantage over women in reaching higher leadership positions and positions of power. When women face restrictions in accessing these roles due to gender discrimination, it is referred to as the 'glass ceiling' (Fisher et al., 2012). The term glass-ceiling was first developed by Marilyn Loden – writer and diversity advocate- during a speech in 1978 and was later used by Gay Bryant in her book "The working women report" in 1984, where she explained it as the barrier that keeps women out of the top positions in any organization (Abbas et al., 2021). The glass ceiling is “the invisible barrier that prevents a qualified person from advancing” (Iverson, 2011, p. 83). The term explains that equal opportunity exists in organizations up until a certain level that women hit after which there is an invisible barrier that restrict women’s access to whatever is beyond it (Northouse, 2016).

The way organizations are structured and the ethos of the system make opportunities less accessible for women (Iverson, 2011). Robin and Robles (2019)

described the obstacles to women's progress in leadership in higher education. They used the well-known concept of the "glass ceiling" to describe the invisible barriers that limit leadership opportunities for women and the related patriarchal culture deeply rooted in organizational structures that perceive women as feminine and fragile, and as a result not fit for leadership (Selzer & Robles, 2019). The concept of the glass ceiling is directly related to the individual and institutional discrimination outlined in the social dominance theory as it reflects preference to hire or promote men into certain positions or certain institutional rules -whether documented or not- that prevent women from assuming certain positions (Fischer et al., 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

There are several factors that are directly related to and magnify the effect of the glass ceiling phenomena such as gender discrimination, work environment, societal male dominance, family responsibilities and gender roles (Abbas et al., 2021). Nonetheless, women are also criticized for not fitting their gender image when they display the behaviors expected from a strong leader (Selzer & Robles, 2019). This issue is referred to as "double-bind dilemma" where women face criticism either way. If they act in a way consistent with their gender stereotype, they are criticized for being too soft, and when they exhibit ambitious and authoritative characteristics, they are labeled as too tough (Catalyst, 2007).

Unequal Access to Opportunities

Another invisible factor is unequal access to opportunities and its impact on the organization's structure and culture, further perpetuating inequality in access. BlackChen (2015) discussed how excluding women from leadership positions in higher education results into the androcentrism of these roles, "We often hear of the old boys club, but

never of the old girls club. Men seem to mentor other men, especially in professional situations leading to a gate-keeping phenomenon” (p. 154).

Access does not only refer to access to information or to apply for specific opportunities, but also refers to coaching and professional development opportunities. Selzer and Robles (2019) pointed out that men get assigned to projects that improve and expand their skills which facilitates their progression up the organizational ladder which is an advantage not available for many women who are cornered in middle level positions and often give up on progressing their careers any further. In addition, women are pressured to balance work outside of home as well as home chores which is another barrier against developing their careers (Selzer & Robles, 2019). The opposite is also true. Some women who do not want to compensate their careers choose not to form families, which is a choice that men do not have to make. Many women in the education sector want to have a family but decide not to pursue it as a result of the fear that this may impact achieving their career ambitions (BlackChen, 2015).

Mentoring, coaching, and sponsoring are among the factors that enable career progression. Mentoring and coaching involve providing training and advice, while sponsoring is getting the support of an influential person of authority in the organization. Although mentors help enhance the skills of employees, it's their sponsors who advocate for and support their promotion. Women do not have equal access to such sponsorship compared to men (Selzer & Robles, 2019). The social dominance theory categorizes the unequal access to opportunities, coaching or mentorship between men under the behavioral asymmetry which refers to giving preference and favoring members of one's

own group over others, where men allow other men this access which is not available for women (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Research Related to Women Representation in Higher Education

This section looks at specific cases related to women representation in higher education. The study “Women in Higher Educational Leadership: Representation, Career Progression, and Compensation,” by Cañas et al. (2019) investigated the University of California to identify differences in leadership representation, pay and career progression based on gender. Although this study is conducted in the US, we are exploring it as it gives an idea about the issues women are facing in real life in the higher education leadership on an international level. The study explained that the number of men in university leadership is always higher than the number of women which is a result to discrimination in both the hiring and the promotion practices. With more men in leadership, and the pay gap to the advantage of men, the bias against women will continue in these organizations (Cañas et al., 2019).

In the same study, the researchers studied the assumption that women lacked the qualities needed for career advancement. The study found that the working environment did not encourage women to become leaders or pursue career progression (Cañas et al., 2019). The study findings reported that both men and men have similar career goals but woman face barriers that impede them from achieving those goals. Those barriers include office networks and politics, undocumented policies, and a work place designed for men. Another main obstacle that women face is the limited availability of mentors. 18% of the participants in the study stated that they had mentors, the majority of which – 58%- were men, and only 38% were women (Cañas et al., 2019). The invisible rules discussed and

the preference in hiring or promoting men reflect individual and institutional discrimination outlined in the social dominance theory (Fischer et al., 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

The image of the ideal worker is another obstacle that face women. The image of the ideal worker applies to men more than women as it describes someone who can work full time, doesn't mind working overtime, doesn't have to attend to other responsibilities outside work, and doesn't require long leaves (e.g., maternity leaves for women). On the other hand, for women to be successful they need to live two lives: ideal employee at work and a housewife at home. Accordingly, changing the traditional work structure and creating more inclusive structures are needed to support women as the traditional structure only apply to men's life style in a patriarchal society (Iverson, 2011).

The issues women face in the work place are not related to one country or culture in specific, but are rather widespread across the world. To have a more global perspective, Morley (2014) conducted a study to investigate the under representation of women in the academic world globally. She conducted a survey among 20 women employed in the education sector from the countries: Australia, China, Egypt, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Turkey. The participants served in diverse roles such as vice chancellors, deans and middle management. The survey investigated what is attractive and unattractive in leadership for women, what enables or hinders women from reaching leadership positions, and what would encourage or discourage them from taking leadership positions (Morley, 2014). Some of the barriers pointed out by the participants included not being developed for leadership, balancing between work and home

responsibilities, and being assigned to dead end jobs. The study highlighted that the concept of rewarding talent, commitment and hard work was not implemented in cases that would result in women assuming leadership positions; which is a clear indication of injustice and prejudice (Morley, 2014). Some participants pointed out that despite the reward of reaching a leadership position, it was not something they were eager to achieve as it meant their exclusion from both men in leadership positions and women in middle management, and that they would be identified as a “third sex” (Morley, 2014, p. 125).

Research Focusing on Egypt

Although research on gender discrimination in higher education leadership in Egypt is limited, Khedr (2017) discussed the glass ceiling in general. According to Khedr, although the Egyptian Labor Law No. 12 of 2002 and the 2014 constitutional amendments guarantee that women are entitled to assume senior management roles, these laws are not supported with the necessary enforcement policies or regulations, and employers often maneuver to surpass them.

Social norms encourage discrimination against women in the labor market and in assuming leadership positions since according to the social norms men have superiority and are the breadwinners, while women should be obedient to their husbands (Moussa, 2022). For a woman in Egypt to work -according to social norms -her husband needs to permit it (Hoodfar, 1997). Husbands can also restrict their wives work to certain jobs or specific hours. For example, in Egypt, industries such as education, health and social work have more female workers, whereas industries such as construction or manufacturing are dominated by men (Khedr, 2017). In fact, there are some legal restrictions on women working in jobs such as in the mining, construction, and

manufacturing sectors due to the perception that they are difficult or dangerous for women (Nazier, 2019).

In addition, in the Women Economic Empowerment Study sponsored by the World Bank in 2018, employers explained in focus groups that although they have no preference in hiring men or women; nonetheless they feel that certain jobs or work environments are more suitable for men such as jobs that require physical effort. They have also mentioned that some jobs are more suitable for women such as jobs that are detail oriented; and that they found female employees to be more trustworthy and have less corruption tendencies (Zeitoun, 2018).

Khedr (2017) discussed the negative attitudes that men have towards working women, as they fear that they will be looked down upon if they allow their wives to work or that their wives would abandon them if they become financially independent. Some women also had such negative attitudes and were not supportive of the success of other women (Khedr, 2017). This was indicated in the social dominance theory in one of the examples of behavioral asymmetry where the subordinate group members favor the members of the dominant group over the members of their own group (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Some employers even voiced their opinion that men are the providers of the family and are responsible for the households, which is why they tend to pay them higher salaries or select them for promotions. In addition, they are reluctant to invest in women for fear that they will leave once they get married or have children (Zeitoun, 2018).

Female employment in the public sector shows more alignment with social norms, as it offers more benefits for women such as fewer working hours – 6 hours vs 8 hours in

the private sector- and longer maternity leaves – 4 months vs 3 months in the private sector (Nazier, 2019). Nonetheless, women who are employed in the public sector pointed out invisible barriers to promotions even when competing with men with less qualifications and experience (Khedr, 2017).

Currently, Egyptian women participation in the labor force is as low as 15%, according to CAPMAS (2022). The Women Economic Empowerment Study sponsored by the World Bank in 2018 assessed the factors that lead to ongoing low percentage for labor force participation of women in Egypt. The World Bank report pointed out that the percentage of women filling management positions is a clear indicator for women empowerment. In 2016, women in Egypt filled only 7.1% of the management positions which is very low compared to other developing countries such as the Philippines (49%), Brazil (40%), and Malaysia (20%) (Zeitoun, 2018).

A recent study conducted in 2021 focused on researching discrimination against women in the field of academia in Egypt outlined a number of barriers that hinder women representation in faculty such as heavy teaching loads, long working hours, claims of low productivity and growth of masculine authority (Moussa, 2022). In this study, the researcher conducted interviews with 40 female academics in 4 public universities in Egypt from various disciplines such as business, science, education, pharmacy, nursing and medicine. The respondents explained different factors that lead to preferential treatment of men that they have experienced in the work place such as ratio of 1 female to 11 male counterparts, promotion committees and heads of departments being mostly men, heavy teaching loads that are beyond their capabilities especially with duties outside

of the workplace, and even having their leadership styles ridiculed by male counterparts (Moussa, 2022).

Summary

This chapter explores the hidden barriers that impede women's progress toward higher leadership roles. Women face certain restrictions in accessing these roles due to gender discrimination, which is referred to as the 'glass ceiling. The term explains that equal opportunity exists in organizations up until a certain level that women hit after which there is an invisible barrier to access. Access does not only refer to access to information or the freedom to apply for specific opportunities, but refers also to coaching, mentoring, sponsorship and professional development opportunities. Some studies found that the working environment did not encourage women to become leaders or pursue career progression and that the image of the ideal worker fits men more than women: being someone who can work long hours, is dedicated and focused on work inside the office only and doesn't need to take long time off work. This image doesn't fit women who have domestic responsibilities outside of work and often need to take maternity leaves.

As for the culture in Egypt, men are considered superior to women, are the breadwinners, and women should be obedient to their husbands. For a woman in Egypt to work, her husband needs to permit it. Some employers even argued that men are the providers for the family and are responsible for the households, which explains why they tend to set them up for higher salaries or promotions, which in turn leads to bias in hiring and promotions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the study's design, sampling approach, method for data collection, interview procedures, data analysis methods, and study limitations. The concluding section provides an overview of the research trustworthiness, along with the outlined procedures for protecting human subjects.

Research Design

This research is a qualitative phenomenological case study that discusses women representation in higher education leadership in Egypt. Specifically, this qualitative research was conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions as the purpose was to explore and gain insight into participants perspective and experiences (Clark & Creswell, 2015). The candidates were purposefully sampled to make sure we were interviewing individuals with the right type of experience that address the purpose of the study (Knott et al., 2022).

Participants and Setting

This study interviewed 12 women administrators assuming middle-level management positions at a private higher education institute in Egypt. Generally, a sample of five to 50 participants is an adequate number of interviews in qualitative research (Dworkin, 2012). Research suggests though that 12-20 interviews provide the saturation point, which is the point at which no new input is provided (Knott et al., 2022). Accordingly, interviews were conducted with 12 women who are employed in higher education in middle-level management who have been in their position for over five years. The objective of the interview was to explore their views on equality in reaching

higher education leadership positions and the personal and professional challenges that they are facing with regards to career progression.

The research setting is a private university in Egypt that has been operating for over 100 years. The institution is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in USA and by the Supreme Council of Higher Education in Egypt. It offers over 30 undergraduate and 50 graduate programs in the fields of sciences, engineering, social sciences, humanities, and business. The institution has a student body of approximately 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The institution emphasizes in its mission statement that it targets building a culture of leadership based on equal opportunity, diversity and fairness. Accordingly, the institution where the study was conducted represents a potential environment that could foster women excellence to leadership positions based on merit and allow in-depth exploration of the barriers against that.

Background information about women in leadership positions was gathered and potential participants were contacted for an interview. The participants were briefed about the research's objectives, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any point. Finally, to ensure their anonymity, the participants are referred to in this thesis by acronyms. Below is a table demonstrating participants' characteristics.

Table 1 Participants' Characteristics ($N=12$)

Participants	Degree	Age	Years in higher education	Rank	Academic vs non-Academic
AD	PhD/ Doctorate	45-50	24	Director	Non-academic
DA	Bachelor	45-50	15	Senior Director	Non-academic
DR	Masters	45- 50	18	Director	Non-academic
GS	Masters	45-50	15	Senior Director	Non-academic
HS	PhD/ Doctorate	65-70	40	Director	Academic
MR	Masters	45-50	20	Senior Director	Non-academic
NS	PhD/ Doctorate	45-50	24	Director	Academic
NN	PhD/ Doctorate	45-50	30	Director	Academic
RH	PhD/ Doctorate	45-50	14	Director	Academic
SS	Bachelor	51-55	13	Senior Manager	Non-academic
SE	PhD/ Doctorate	51-55	9	Senior Director	Non-academic
SA	PhD/ Doctorate	45-50	18	Director	Academic

Data Collection Tools

The data was gathered through interviews that sought to explore the perceptions of women in higher education regarding the professional, social and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions (see Appendix 1). In the interview design, the researcher made sure that the questions are open-ended so as to allow the participants to elaborate and share stories and examples about their experiences. The

interview questions are not the same as the research questions. The research questions represent what the researcher is trying to investigate within the theoretical framework of the study, whereas the interview questions address the experience and perception of the participants. The analysis of the input shared by the participants shed light on the research questions (Magnusson& Marecek, 2015). In this study, the research questions investigate the institutional discriminatory factors, the individual discriminatory factors and the asymmetrical behaviors that prevent women from assuming leadership positions in higher education. One of the studies that were consulted was the PhD dissertation “Underrepresentation of Women in Leadership Positions” submitted by Marchelle Lee to Liberty University School of Business in 2021.

The population of this research comprised women administrators assuming mid-level leadership positions at a private higher education institution in Egypt. The researcher approached female middle-level managers and requested to set up interviews at a time that is mutually convenient for the interviewer and interviewees, whether face to face or via video call. The interviews were guided by a protocol, and were recorded to improve transcription accuracy (Mack et al., 2005).

Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Researchers need to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings from qualitative research by making sure to address the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability —similar to the rigorous measurement of reliability in quantitative research (Nowel et al., 2017). The technique to enhance credibility of this research is the prolonged engagement (Williams et al., 2022). As the researcher, I am engaged in the context of this study as I myself am a middle manager in the field of

higher education and I was employed in the relevant institution for more than 5 years, which are both factors that build trust with the respondents and minimize distortions due to my presence.

Transferability will be facilitated by providing clear description of the context of the data gathered and drawn conclusions. This will enable identifying the results that are transferable to other contexts, and results that are unique to the specific context of this study (Williams et al., 2022). To ensure dependability, an independent auditor – my thesis supervisor- reviewed the research activities and outcomes. The auditor reported on the logic, methods, and results reached and how careful the researcher was in conceptualization, data collection, as well as interpretation and reporting of findings. The more consistent the researcher is throughout the research process, the more dependable the results are (Williams et al., 2022). Confirmability of the study is supported and strengthened by the literature review provided and findings of other empirical studies presented in this paper that are conducted by other researchers (Williams et al., 2022).

Data Analysis

The interviews were audio recorded. Following the interviews, manual transcription was performed. Transcription of the data means typing the content of the audio recording and the notes taken during the interviews, which should happen as soon as possible after data gathering (Mack et al., 2005). Transcribing an audio recording is listening to the recording and typing everything that is recorded including laughter, pauses, the translation of any data that is collected in Arabic (Mack et al., 2005). In this research, the researcher performed the transcription herself.

The typed transcripts of audio or text were coded as per participants' responses to each question and the most prevailing themes emerging across the interviews (Mack et al., 2005). The data was reviewed several times to ensure familiarity and to identify recurring topics, ideas, or patterns (Clark & Creswell, 2015). A list of coding categories was developed to identify main themes that contribute to drawing conclusions about participants' perspectives, knowledge, and experiences (Clark & Creswell, 2015).

Protection of Participants

The privacy of the participants was protected through assigning them acronyms instead of mentioning their real names and positions. The participants were asked not to reveal any personal or private information during the interviews. They signed a consent form for their participation in the study, which includes a clause that they can withdraw from the study at any point without any of the information they shared being used (Appendix 4).

AUC follows a strict process to ensure the protection of research participants. This research involves completing a training from the National Institute of Health prior to getting approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for all research that involves human participants. The researcher completed the required training and was approved by the IRB (Appendix 2).

Limitations

As with any research, this study has its own limitations. The research was conducted in one higher education institute in the private sector. It would be useful to extend the research to institutions in both the public and private sectors to generate more comprehensive data that covers different types of higher education institutions. Also, all

interviews in this research were conducted in English which represents a segment of the population from a specific socio-economic background.

This research collected data from middle managers. It would be useful to collect data from women in leadership positions to get more feedback on their experience as it includes learned lessons regarding enablers and barriers that they faced throughout their careers. Also, further analysis of workplace policies and practices is necessary to ascertain whether they protect against or inadvertently perpetuate gender discrimination.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of the qualitative data analysis for the 12 interviews that were conducted at a private higher education institution in Egypt with female middle managers. To answer the research questions, the participants were asked to answer a series of nine interview questions that aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the factors impacting the progression of women to leadership positions in higher education institutes in Egypt (Appendix 1). The first 3 questions aimed at gathering context information from the participants and drawing an image about the reasons why they joined this field, for how long and their career aspirations. The fourth question is a general question about being able to achieve their career goals, and enabling factors or barriers to get non-guided information that can make the data analysis more objective. The fifth question explores social and cultural issues not related to the professional environment but can have an impact on career progression for women. The sixth, seventh and eighth questions explore bias practices in the work place that reflect individual discrimination, institutional discrimination or behavioral asymmetry.

Interviews Findings

In narrative paragraphs, this section illustrates the perspectives of women administrators regarding the barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions in higher education and outlines the recurring themes extracted from the data sets. The researcher systematically analyzed the transcripts based on interview protocol questions, identifying shared themes and variations in responses. Within each theme, representative quotations that reflect some of the participants' significant responses are presented.

Career Aspirations

The researcher looked at career aspirations for women as it gives insight into how the professional environment that does not accommodate the needs and responsibilities of women could hinder their career progression. Respondents talked about education being a female-friendly working environment, which still – as we will see in the below sections- exhibited signs of bias against women.

Five respondents emphasized that the reason for selecting a career in higher education is that this sector accommodates the needs of females and mothers in specific. NN explained that her mother was her role model and she was also working in teaching. Another respondent, SS, shifted her career altogether from software business development to education as she wanted to have a calendar that matched with her kids' school calendar. As for SE, she explained that she needed a job that is less time consuming than jobs in corporates because she had just had her son and needed to spend more time at home.

Throughout the interviews, none of the participants indicated reaching leadership or a certain title or making money as the ambitions they had for their careers. All 12 participants indicated ambitions that are related to pursuing their passion and achieving personal growth rather than materialistic gains.

Among the mentioned ambitions and career goals were helping other people to develop and grow. According to MR “mainly to find a way to support other people find their passion; helping them to learn and evolve and to thrive through the different life endeavors, that was my main goal.” There were other reasons such as fulfilling the passion for teaching and delivering value to the community. As SS put it, “it’s quite

rewarding when you see that what you are doing has a direct effect on the students.”

Working for a meaningful industry was also pointed out as a significant factor. DA explained:

In general, I like to work for a cause not just of the sake of working and I found that higher education is one of the industries serving a great cause, that’s why I chose to join the world of higher education.

Seeking a job or shifting the career to the education sector to accommodate family responsibilities, together with pursuing a passion or helping others as career goals, can serve as a self-imposed barrier that stops women from pursuing higher leadership positions if their current job fulfills their career aspirations and at the same time provides sufficient flexibility.

Family Responsibilities

Family responsibilities was mentioned as a factor impacting career progression for women from 11 out of the 12 participants. Such responsibilities always came as the number one priority, and as a result, some compromises needed to be done on the career front. According to SS:

I don’t want it to sound negative but the kids and the house were weighing me down. With each career decision it was always at the back of my mind if that would be a good fit for my kids and home responsibilities. If it wasn’t for that, I don’t think I would’ve shifted my career at all.

Sometimes the situation becomes more complicated if the mother is the sole provider for the household or a single mother. SE explained:

My priority in life in general is being a mother. And I am a single mom so I have lots of responsibilities that I cannot compromise. If my job requires me to work late or at night, I don't mind doing that from home where I can be with my family, but I cannot do this from the office or attend late meetings. I will not do it. Being a mother did not only have negative impact on career progression, for some it was a positive impact and an inspiration. As DA explained:

In higher education you are catering for a diversified audience, and one of the audience groups is students and there could be an age gap, but being a mom and being surrounded by my kids and their friends, it makes me understand their mentality and their taste and gave me very good insights for my job.

For others, being busy with their kids and home along with their careers was a challenge they were ready to accept. As NS put it:

Having kids actually helped me enormously by being competitive not with anyone else but with myself. I didn't want my life to be only about staying home with my kids so when I started working and trying to get my research published my main challenge was time management so I became very organized and worked with a very strict schedule to be able to manage my kids and work responsibilities.

Policy Bias

Participants expressed their opinion regarding the presence or lack of policies to accommodate women lifestyle which could subject women to unfairness. SS for example talked about the remote work policy that was available but later got abolished. Such policy helped women fulfill their work requirements while at the same time manage some

of their domestic responsibilities. According to SS “this policy needed to be more wide spread and implemented correctly and transparently, rather than abolishing it. It helped a lot of women.”

Another policy that unfortunately is not available but has been mentioned by two of the participants is regarding the clock for tenure. RH explained:

This is a policy that is implemented in the US but not here. There is a seven years deadline to apply for your promotion, but when a female faculty gets a child the clock stops for two years, so the deadline for her is 9 years instead of seven.

The same point was mentioned by another participant, HS, regarding tenure:

We don't treat people as people at this point, we treat them as a subject that is going to tenure. It doesn't matter if your dad dies, your mom lives, you give birth, your house is burnt down, it's all totally irrelevant so we deal with people as if they are not human and that is the worst thing we can do.

Sometimes the policies are undocumented. Some leadership positions are off-limit altogether for women. As AD recounted:

I was appointed as a part of a project to assess the effectiveness of procedures in some public universities, and I discovered that women are prohibited from heading certain departments such as the surgery department in schools of medicine in all universities, except Al Azhar Faculty of Medicine for Women of course because they have no other option.

On a more positive front, DA talked about the anti-discrimination policy and being able to whistle-blow if you feel you have been subjected to gender discrimination. DA stated that the presence of this policy allows women a fair chance at career

progression. The same concept was also expressed by NS who said, “I’m living at the right time in the right place, because I’d be invited to take part in a committee with diversity requirements, and I tick two boxes because I’m from the Middle East and I’m a woman.”

Behavioral Bias

Witnessing or being subject to gender bias from colleagues or supervisors is common as indicated by six of the 12 participants. Even when there is not a clear case, there is an unsaid vibe as explained by SS “There is sensitivity of women being in a leadership position and older men reporting to her, they don’t take her seriously or maybe even she gets harassed”. The same point was elaborated further by AD through a personal experience that she shared with us:

I was appointed head of assessors in a project and there were two quality control managers who were men of an older age who did not accept me being in this position, were always fighting against me and causing a lot of trouble.

In some cases, gender bias appears in little details that women find offensive, like taking meeting minutes for example. As SA pointed out:

I want to see a man once take meeting minutes. I don’t know if they even know how to do it. But if there is four of us in the room and I’m the only woman and someone needs to take the minutes they always look at me, and I respond with ‘why me!’.

Sometimes men are just preferred by management even by women supervisors. As GS explained “I have seen cases around me where even women prefer to hire men. I have heard reasons such as they are more devoted, more flexible and can work longer

hours”. Giving preferential treatment to men could be in situations other than hiring, for example RH mentioned that she was once overlooked by her department for participating in an academic conference for the benefit of a man who was seeking participation in the same conference.

Misconceptions About Women’s Leadership Skills

One of the concepts that were repeated in the data gathered from the interviews was the misconceptions about women’s abilities and skills when it comes to taking leadership positions, and how leadership is viewed as a masculine trait. SA elaborated on the difference between middle management positions that are open for women, and leadership positions that are dominated by men:

Woman can become department chair or director, or even reach a dean position because all of these positions are internally looked, such as doing schedules, serving students, coordinating faculty; whereas higher level jobs such as provost; they have an external message and a growth scope, those types of jobs don’t go to women.

According to SA, jobs like the president, provost or their vices are viewed as masculine, aggressive, opportunistic, and thus are considered carefully when given to women. On the other hand, jobs that have a servicing dimension are usually given to women to benefit from their multitasking skills.

Another dimension was raised regarding the characteristics of women who actually make it to leadership positions, that she either demonstrates masculine characteristics to fit in the old boys’ club, or is obedient and a follower. According to SE “sometimes it all makes sense when you look at the personality of women who reached

leadership positions. You will see that they exhibit male characteristics or that they are obedient followers for an autocratic supervisor.” SE actually mentioned that once a supervisor told her directly that although she is an excellent employee but she doesn’t have what it takes to reach leadership as she is not flexible enough, not extroverted and doesn’t play work politics.

Misconceptions about women in leadership extend to their competencies and decision-making abilities. SS elaborated on this “there is always the feeling that women should not hold this senior position, that she will be too emotional, that she will be a feeler not a thinker and that she will not make the right decisions”. Same issue was expressed by DR as she explained that she felt pressured to act in a certain way otherwise she would be considered fragile, and that it takes a lot of effort of prove her competencies while not changing who she really is.

Societal Gender Bias

Societal gender bias here refers to bias that takes place outside of the work environment. It is the bias against women that takes place in the community itself as a differential treatment between men and women; which in turn could have an impact on women career progression or lead to career compromises. Seven out of the 12 participants expressed being subject to this cultural gender bias in different forms. First is the pressure imposed on some women who want to pursue certain careers not approved by their parents or spouse, which is a battle that men do not have to fight. This battle is a drain of time and effort as well as a psychological pressure that can lead some women to give up on their careers altogether, or just settle for choosing jobs accepted by their husbands and families. This prohibition of certain jobs or travels impacts women’s

capacities, competencies and experience which can impact their career progression. In addition to the years that could be wasted in such battles which otherwise would be invested in their chosen careers and increasing their opportunities for career progression.

As HS explained:

When I decided to go to the US for my PhD, I was the first woman in my family who decided to do that, and I had to go through all the arguments and the discussions and the yelling, but at the end I was able to do it.

This is actually quite common as GS expressed a similar story. According to GS:

I come from a pretty conservative family and they think women cannot work like men. That's why they were always pushing me for academia so that I can have more time for my house and kids. When I got my first fulltime job I did not even tell my father until it was the first day of the job, and the deal I made with him is that eventually I will go to academia.

Some of the societal gender biases are not clear out arguments like the cases mentioned above. In some cases, the bias is about unfair expectations from women.

According to DR "Society has changed so much but the gender roles of the old institutions remain the same. If women are asked to spend money in the house, then men should be responsible for chores as well, but this is a discussion that the society doesn't want to have". Women being responsible for the household and children responsibilities as we discussed earlier makes them less available and devoted to work as compared to men, who are viewed as flexible, willing to work more hours and devoted to work. This makes men more preferred by employers in terms of hiring or promotion which encourages bias against women and impacts women career progression. As RH puts it:

There is always pressure from the society that women should dedicate more time to family and children, Men would be traveling or staying in the office till mid night and everyone would be praying for him that God bless him, but for women it's a sin. Once I had to teach an evening graduate class and I would make it back home by 11:30 PM, my parents gave me hard time about how can I do this to my children, and who will prepare dinner for them or put them to bed.

In some cases, the pressure of societal bias could be subtle but still impactful. The pressure could be through criticism of work-life balance or where domestic responsibilities fall in the priorities list for women. It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy, women are criticized when they prioritize work and are pressured to prioritize the family, and when they do they face bias at work and preferential treatment is given for men since men are more devoted to work, which negatively impacts women's career progression. NN talked about the pressure she faced from her family "I would say most of the concerns came from my mother who always told me that I shouldn't give priority to work and that I should never forget that home is my number one priority". SA also shared her experience in that regard:

Sometimes my work requires travel, and I find people telling me to stay home a bit. I'm always self-conscious, and I always say that I'm a mom first and that my job is my second priority, but in my head it's not like that, but this is how I communicate to my social circle.

Participants' responses varied between supportive and unsupportive husbands, and husbands who did not support their wife's work at the beginning then changed overtime. NN said her husband was very supportive and encouraged her to send their kids

to nursery instead of taking maternity leaves that could harm her career. Another example was mentioned by GS who explained that prioritizing work changed over time for her husband:

My husband didn't mind me working as long as the house was my number one priority, but as I became more engaged at work we had a lot of going back and forth but at the end the house was not the priority anymore.

Another example came from NS whose husband was supportive of her work but some people in their social circle were pressuring him to be less supportive. She was teaching an undergraduate class when a friend of the family tried to convince her husband to stop her. As she put it "He told my husband how can you let her do this? How can you agree that she teaches those young boys? They might try to flirt with her. Can you imagine he said that to my husband?".

On a different front, SE shared a more radical experience where her husband's view of her work and studies made it very difficult for her to pursue the career progression that she sought:

Although I got engaged while I was pursuing my PhD, after I got married I had to take extreme measures to be able to continue with my PhD. I used to sleep for two hours and then wake up when everyone else was sleeping to study till four or five AM, just to avoid the accusation of being too consumed in my studies and delinquent at my domestic responsibilities. I completed my PhD in hiding actually.

Summary

Research finding showed that higher education is considered a sector that is preferred by females and mothers since the calendar matches that of their kids' school calendar and is less time consuming. Titles and money were not really the reason why women were pursuing their careers, but rather they had ambitions that were related to pursuing their passion, achieving personal growth and benefiting the community rather than materialistic gains.

Study findings showed that family responsibilities came always as the number one priority for women and in turn some compromises needed to be done on the career front. This was especially true due to absence of policies to accommodate women life styles such as remote work policies or extension of deadlines, which created unfairness in the work place. Nonetheless, the presence of antidiscrimination policies created a sense of safety and re-assurance against gender bias which was a common experience in the work place.

Having a masculine persona for the ideal employee or leader appeared in the responses of the participants, and that women who actually make it to leadership positions either exhibit such masculine characteristics or are obedient and followers. Some leadership positions were off-limits for women altogether.

In some cases, gender bias appeared in little details that women found offensive such as being expected to undertake secretarial tasks regardless of your actual job just because you're a woman. Sometimes men were preferred by management for reasons such as being more devoted, more flexible and can work longer hours.

The findings also addressed the societal gender bias which is the differential treatment between men and women. Several examples were mentioned such as the pressure imposed on some women who want to pursue certain careers not approved by their parents or spouse, the societal bias of unfair expectations from women and criticism of work-life balance.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

This research explores the perceptions of women in higher education regarding the social and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions. The problem discussed is the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership. Study findings show that women face significant and complex barriers that inhibit their ability to reach leadership positions. Specifically, this study looked at these barriers in light of the social dominance theory (Figure 1) which suggests that discrimination can happen on three levels: individual discrimination, institutional discrimination, and behavioral asymmetry (Fischer et al., 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The patriarchal culture grants social and political power predominantly to men (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999); which is reflected in the gender roles and responsibilities assigned to women, impacting their career progression.

Figure 1 Findings in light of Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999)

Individual Discrimination	Institutional Discrimination	Behavior Asymmetry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity of women being in leadership positions. • Fighting or being problematic when working with a female leader. • Expecting women to carry secretarial tasks regardless of their role. • Preference to hire or promote men. • Perceiving women as not having leadership skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of remote work policies to accommodate women domestic responsibilities. • Unavailability of extension of tenure deadline in case of maternity. • Undocumented prohibition of women filling certain roles. • Antidiscrimination policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needing approval from a patriarchal figure for career decisions. • Women fully responsible of household chores even if they work and contribute financially • Women pressured by society to prioritize home over career. • Women criticized for spending more time at work while men applauded for it.

Individual Discrimination

Aggregated individual discrimination refers to minor discriminatory actions and behaviors done by individuals such as not hiring or promoting women (Fischer et al., 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The data analysis showed that its common for women to witness certain acts of discrimination in the work place that can have an impact on their career progression such as the preference to hire men who can work longer hours or show more commitment, or the preference to promote men to senior position under the claim that women are too emotional or won't take rational decision. Studies have shown that some employers reject applicants based on gender even before meeting them (Heymann et al., 2023).

New technologies have even enabled employers to target only males with their job announcements to avoid receiving applications from women altogether (Heymann et al., 2023). There is also the filtering of CV's for higher paying jobs to give preference to men, while for lower paying administrative jobs the preference is given to women to match the established gender stereotypes (Heymann et al., 2023). The concept that certain jobs are connected to gender stereotypes as in they require masculine or feminine traits - and accordingly how much the individual applying matches the traits required- influences the hiring and the promotion decisions. Accordingly, if the job is characterized as male in that it requires ambitions, independence, aggressiveness, authority and control, males are preferred to fill in such jobs, and females are preferred to fill job that require female traits such as warmth, kindness, empathy and service (Bisom-Rapp & Sargeant, 2016).

The individual bias was clearly present in the research findings like for example the participant who was appointed as head of a project but was resisted by her male

subordinates, the participant who was asked to take the meetings minutes despite being at the same seniority level and scope of work as the rest of the meeting male attendees or the participant who was overlooked in conference participation for the benefit of another male colleague.

Institutional Discrimination

Institutional discrimination refers to rules and procedures in institutions that lead to inequality between different groups (Fischer et al., 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Anti-discrimination policies came up in the data analysis as a positive factor from institutions that help combat discrimination against women. On the other hand, lack of empowering policies that accommodate women characteristics and responsibilities also create discrimination. For example, lack of or abolishment of remote working policy and lack of extension of promotion deadlines in case of having children or care taking responsibilities overlooks other duties that are required from women.

There are non-documented policies that lead to women discrimination in the work place, for example the prohibition of filling certain leadership roles by women, such as the head of surgery department as mentioned by one of the participants in the research findings. This is not an official policy but it is a practice adopted by institutions which is not challenged by management. The same is true for gender pay gap. Studies have, in fact, documented discrimination in pay, hiring, promotions, and performance evaluations against women (Heymann et al., 2023). There is no policy that documents variances in pay for men and women assuming similar positions, nor is there a streamlined policy that ensures equal pay among all employees at the same level, to ensure such gaps do not exist. The lack of certain policies came out in the findings of this research as an enabler

of institutional discrimination such as lack of remote working policies or extension of deadlines to accommodate domestic responsibilities of women.

In addition to developing the necessary policies to combat documented and undocumented institutional discrimination, we have to understand that these policies are implemented by individuals, hence the overlap between institutional and individual discrimination. The findings of a research conducted in 2023 about factors affecting gender equality in public organizations in Egypt reinforced this idea. Participants in the mentioned research agreed that institutional rules dictate the behavior of the employees in terms of who they empower and who they constrain (Halim et al., 2023).

Asymmetrical Behaviors and Patriarchy

Asymmetrical behavior refers to the variance of expectations between different groups to the advantage of the dominant group and the repression of subordinate groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This corresponds with the point mentioned earlier where jobs with stereotypical female traits such as service are automatically assigned to women (Bisom-Rapp & Sargeant, 2016). This also aligns with our research findings as observed by the respondents that women who reach higher leadership positions either exhibit masculine characteristics or is a follower and obedient as per the female stereotype.

The patriarchal society is a social system where men have power over women through their social role as a father or husband and through the retention of wealth; and in this context, women are expected to manage household responsibilities, raise the children, maintain the household, and accommodate the demands of men (Littrell & Bertsch, 2013). The impact of the patriarchal culture on the career progression of women was expressed by the respondents in several occasions such as fighting for a career not

approved by the father or husband, being criticized for giving priority to work or spending long hours or traveling for work, and having to hide the passion for work not to be judged by the husband or the social circle.

As per identified gender roles, the husband holds the highest authority in the household, is the main decision maker and provider for the family, while the woman is obedient, respectful, caring for all members of her family and responsible for all the house chores (Muñoz et al., 2013). These gender roles are the main reasons why several of our participants indicated choosing education as a career, since education is a generally an approved sector for employment for women as it is less demanding than other industries, and also aligned with the children's school calendars. As a matter of fact, the education sector has 59% female employment and comes second after social work (Women Economic Empowerment Study, 2018).

While women are now working outside the households, and contribute to the household income; they are still generally responsible for all the house chores (Roque, 2019). Women were able to change their roles to accommodate both their jobs and their homes, while men's roles remain unchanged (Roque, 2019). This allows men to demonstrate more commitment, flexibility and devotion to their job as they don't have domestic responsibilities, and in turn receive preferential treatment from employers leading to bias against women. In the research conducted in 2023 mentioned earlier about factors affecting gender equality in public organizations in Egypt, participants agreed that social norms are main factors that lead to gender bias in organizations (Halim et al., 2023).

Women's Leadership Style

The world perceives men as more appropriate and effective for leadership roles, and that women are not prepared for leadership (Meza-Mejia et al., 2023; Fauzi et al., 2024). Generally, women face two level of bias in terms of leadership perception. First, they are seen less favorable than men in leadership positions, and this perception only changes based on their actual behavior, whereas men in these positions are favored only based on masculinity. Second, men are only expected to show strength as leaders whereas women are expected to show both sensitivity and strength (Fauzi et al., 2024).

Paradoxically, when a woman adopts a masculine leadership style she is criticized for violating her gender social image (Fauzi et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2020; Northouse, 2016).

It is necessary to change the image of leadership from the competitive and strong masculine leadership to include the transformational type of leadership that consists of vision, goals, accountability, encouragement, empowerment and role model; which is the type of leadership commonly practiced by women (Meza-Mejia et al., 2023). Some research analysis indicate that women lead in a way that is more suited for the modern societies as they rely on communication and participation rather than autocratic and task-oriented type of leadership generally adopted by men (Northouse, 2016). When looking at the effectiveness of the styles of leadership of men and women, studies have shown that both are equally effective as long as the role they acquire is aligned with the nature of their gender, for example women would be more effective in leadership roles in the government, social organization and education where as men would be more effective as military leaders (Northouse, 2016).

Recommendations

It is crucial to develop policies that consider women's needs and address discriminatory practices that can hinder their career progression. Equally important is for organizational management to understand the rationale behind these policies and how they can be effectively implemented (McElhaney et al., 2019). This includes policies that put the needs of women into consideration such as remote working, part time arrangements, extension of deadlines, and policies that combat undocumented discrimination practices such as equal pay for employees on the same scale regardless of gender, quotas for women representation in committees, departments, functions, and senior positions.

In order to ensure that policies are effectively implemented, it's crucial to conduct anti-discrimination and unconscious bias training workshops for all employees within the organization. Mechanisms for accountability must be implemented and managers need to be trained to spot their unconscious bias against women or other minority groups (McElhaney et al., 2019). In addition, universities have the role to become agents of change in the society. Community conversations and seminars addressing gender roles and stereotypes need to be held, encouraging students, staff, faculty, friends and families to attend.

In terms of research recommendations, this study was conducted at a private university. Therefore, the first recommendation is to expand the research to public institutes as well and to compare the findings between the public and the private sector. Second, this study collected data from middle-level managers; for further research, it is recommended to gather data from women in leadership positions to gain more insights

into their experiences, including the lessons they have learned regarding enablers and barriers they have faced throughout their careers. Third, it is recommended to collect data from male middle and senior managers to explore their perceptions of women in leadership positions and to understand the social and cultural stereotypes that need to be addressed. Fourth, further analysis of workplace policies and practices is necessary to determine whether they protect against or inadvertently perpetuate gender discrimination.

Conclusion

This research explored the perceptions of women in higher education regarding the social and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions in Egypt. There is limited representation of women in higher education leadership roles, such as the roles of deans, provost, president and vice presidents; despite education being one of the main sectors for women employment. After looking at a number of public and private universities such as Cairo University, Ain Shams University, Alexandria University, Misr International University and the American University in Cairo, we found that a small percentage of women can reach the position of dean or vice president position, but the position of the president is dominated by men.

This topic was discussed in the light of social dominance theory. As per the social dominance theory, three proximal process drive the social hierarchy: aggregated individual discrimination, aggregated institutional discrimination, and behavioral asymmetry (Fischer et al., 2012; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In addition, the cultural and social bias against women holding prestigious leadership positions stems from the stereotype that leadership is a natural role for men, just as caregiving is considered a natural role for women.

Men having the advantage over women in reaching higher leadership positions and positions of power while women encountering obstacles to access such positions due to gender discrimination is termed the 'glass ceiling'. Women also fall under the pressure to balance their jobs and their home responsibilities which is another obstacle against developing their careers.

The image of the ideal worker is another main issue that faces women in the workplace. This image is for someone who can work full time, doesn't mind working over-time, doesn't have many responsibilities outside of work and doesn't need to take long leaves. This is an image that applies to men only. On the contrary, women have to live double lives, employee in the office and house wife at home.

This research is a qualitative phenomenological case study that discusses women representation in higher education leadership in Egypt. It was conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions with 12 women administrators assuming middle management positions at a private higher education institution in Egypt. The data were gathered through interviews that explored the perceptions of women in higher education regarding the social and cultural barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership positions.

Research findings showed that higher education is considered a sector that is preferred by women and mothers. Family responsibilities came always as a number one priority and in turn some compromises needed to be done on the career front. The absence of policies to accommodate women life styles such as remote work policies or extension of deadlines create unfairness in the work place, which in turn prevents women from assuming leadership positions.

Also, some leadership positions are off-limits for women. Sometimes men are preferred by management for reasons such as being more devoted, more flexible and can work longer hours. Gender bias even appeared in little details that women found offensive such as being expected to undertake secretarial tasks that are not within their scope of work. In addition to the perception that leadership is a masculine job and that women are not fit for it.

On the other hand, lack of empowering policies that accommodate women characteristics and responsibilities also create discrimination. There are non-documented policies that lead to women discrimination in the work place, for example the prohibition of filling certain leadership roles by women and the pay gap. To combat such discriminatory practices it's crucial to develop policies that put women needs into consideration such as remote working, part time arrangements, and extension of deadlines; and also, policies to combat undocumented discrimination practices such as quotas for women representation in committees, departments, functions and senior positions as well as abolishment of pay gap. It's necessary to conduct anti-discrimination and unconscious bias trainings and workshops as well as community conversations and seminars that address gender roles and stereotypes.

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Appendix 1

Semi- Structures Interview Questions

- How long have you been working in the field of education, and higher education in specific?
- Why did you select this field in particular?
- When you started working, what was your professional aspirations? Medium- and long-term goals.
- Have you been able to achieve these goals? What factors impacted their achievement positively or negatively?
- What are other responsibilities you have that impacted your ability to reach senior leadership as a woman?
- Regarding the professional environment, can you tell me about policies or regulations that have a positive or negative impact on women access to professional opportunities or career progression?
- What are examples of gender bias from colleagues or supervisors that you have witnessed at your job?
- Can you tell me about social or cultural issues you felt have a negative impact on your career progression?
- Would you like to add any comments regarding being a woman assuming a higher education leadership position?

Appendix 2

IRB Approval

 **THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Case# 2023-2024-087

To: Eman Fouda
Ibrahim Karkouti
Nadia Fouad

From: Heba Kotb
Chair of the IRB
Date 17/12/2023

Re: IRB approval


This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP IN EGYPT

It required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. Your proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants. This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval. This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.



Heba Kotb
IRB chair, The American University in Cairo
2078 HUSS Building
T: 02-26151857
Email: hebakotb@aucegypt.edu





Institutional Review Board
The American University in
Cairo
AUC Avenue, P.O. Box 74
New Cairo 11835, Egypt.
tel 20.2.2615.1000
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Email: irb@aucegypt.edu

Appendix 3

CAPMAS Approval

الجهاز المركزي للتعبئة العامة والإحصاء	
الإدارة العامة للأمن	
رقم	٩٩٦
التاريخ	١٩ / ١١ / ٢٠٢٤
الموضوع	قرار



الموضوع :

المرفقات :

التاريخ : / /

السيد الأستاذ الدكتور / مستشار الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

تحية طيبة وبعد ،،،

بالإشارة لكتاب سيادتكم الوارد للجهاز في ٢٠٢٤/٢/١١ ومرفقاته بشأن طلب الموافقة على قيام الباحثة / أيمن حماده حازم فوده - المسجلة لدرجة الماجستير / قسم الدراسات التربوية بكلية العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية بالجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة - بإجراء دراسة ميدانية بعنوان: (القيادة النسائية في التعليم العالي)

وذلك وفقا للإطار المعد لهذا الغرض.

يرجى التكرم بالإحاطة بأن الجهاز المركزي للتعبئة العامة والإحصاء يوافق على قيام الباحثة / أيمن حماده حازم فوده - بإجراء الدراسة الميدانية المشار إليها بعلانية وفقا للقرار رقم (٢٠٢٤) لسنة ٢٠٢٤ اللازم في هذا الشأن وعلى أن يوافق الجهاز بنسخة من النتائج النهائية كاملة فور الانتهاء من إعدادها طبقا للمادة رقم (٦) من القرار .

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام ،،

محمّد إبراهيم بخيت
مدير عام الإدارة العامة للأمن

Appendix 4

Sample Consent Form



Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

Project Title: *WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP
IN EGYPT*

Principal Investigator:

Eman Fouda

emanfouda@aucegypt.edu

0100140332

*You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to investigate women representation in higher education leadership in Egypt, and it will be submitted as part masters' degree thesis. The findings may be published and/or presented. The expected duration of your participation is 1-2 hours.

The procedures of the research will be as follows:

- The setting of the research will be at the American University in Cairo.
- The data will be gathered through interviews.
- Interviews will be conducted face to face or via video call.
- The interviews will be guided by a script, and will be recorded to improve transcription accuracy.

*There will not be certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.

*There will not be benefits to you from this research.

*The information you provide for purposes of this research is confidential.

* Questions about the research, my rights, or research-related injuries should be directed to Eman Fouda at emanfouda@aucegypt.edu.

*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature _____

Printed Name _____

Date _____