

A longitudinal research about women situation in universities in Iran (1991-2021)

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ABSTRACT: During the last decades, measurable improvements have occurred in women conditions in Iran. Some of the areas of improvements are: Women's life expectancy and literacy rate, acceptance at universities, and rise of gender-adjusted index of human development. However, their representation in university management and leadership has been constantly low. A longitudinal study has been conducted in three large universities in Iran: Tehran, ShahidBeheshti, and AllamehTabataba'i Universities. The findings of this cross-sectional research, at four sections (1991, 2001, 2011, and 2021), reveal that during the last three decades, this deficiency has been a continuous trend in our universities. This means that women presence in managerial and leading positions has not caught up proportionately with their other improvements and still is very low. The article ends up with some suggestions in order to improve women situation in Iran universities.

Key words: *Longitudinal research, Motherhood and family responsibilities, Dual roles of a housewife and a professor, Meritocracy, Gender divide, Gender metaphors, Outsider-within, Queen-Bee phenomenon, Equity plan*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Article XXI of the Constitution, the government is committed to create appropriate opportunities for the growth of women and the support of their identities. In addition the 8th Clause of Article III defends Iran citizen's participation in political, economic, social and cultural activities without prejudice against women. Although measurable improvements have accrued in some areas such as: women's life expectancy, literacy rate, women acceptance at universities and rise of gendered-adjusted index of human development, but in further education leadership, figures are disappointing. The frustration of Iranian well educated and experienced academic women with this situation is intensely felt. The leadership talents and creativity of women in higher education are not considered worthy of being exercised for the implementation of development programs and progress of Iran.

In order to recognize the situation of academic women in Iran and their real and actual participations in key roles in the universities, a longitudinal research has been conducted in a thirty year period.

11. RESEARCH GOAL

The ultimate goal of this longitudinal research was to recognize the changes in women representations in university leadership during the last three decades.

Hypotheses and scope of research

The hypotheses of research were:

1. There is not an effective use of the existing workforce of women in universities.
2. Gender is a determining factor in selection for key positions in universities.

The first research was conducted in 1991 and covered three mix universities in Tehran: Tehran university (TU), ShahidBeheshti University (SBU), and AllamehTabataba'i University(ATU).

The ultimate goal of this research was to recognize the situation of women academics in Iran, their real and actual participation in the executive, educative, and research activities in the universities, and to understand how they are being used and how they can attain key roles in the universities to provide the necessary basis for increasing their participation.

111. METHOD

The basic method of enquiry was gathering data about the basic hypotheses through questionnaires, interviews, observation, and review of documents and records. Questionnaires contained 30 questions and were sent to all women faculty members of three universities.

After completing the data, they were classified and analyzed so as to find the causal relationship between variables. Finally, the results of the research were presented in a report. This process was repeated four times (1991, 2001, 2011, 2021).

Results

Since there were many questions in the questionnaire, the most important findings are described:

1-Age

At 1991, the highest percent of women faculty members were in the age range of 30 to 35 and now at 2021, the highest percent are in the age range of over 45 years old. This means that most women faculty members are of an appropriate age to accept responsibility because they have good work experience and also have enough energy and potential for occupying high-level positions. Although they are older and have more working experience, they have not occupied high levels of university managerial positions.

2-Education

While in 1991, the first section of our research, about 62 percent of women faculty members had a Master degree, now in 2021, 96 percent of them have a PhD and 4 percent have a post doctoral certificate. This means that they have earned more education and more capabilities.

3-Marital status and family responsibilities

In 1991, about 72.1 percent of women academic members were married and this has increased to 90 percent in 2021. The findings of our research show that the number of married women and those who have children, have increased through last 30 years. At first stage of our research, 64.5 percent of women had children and in 2021, this has increased to 78 percent. This means that in spite of their very important motherhood and family responsibilities, which are deeply emphasized in Iranian culture, women are willing to continue to contribute to the wider society. They are performing dual roles of a housewife and a professor and so they deserve to be better protected.

4-University rank

In 1991, about 64.5 percent of women faculty members were lecturer and the number of professors were very negligible. Now in 2021, 62 percent are assistant professor, 28 percent, associate professor and only 6 percent are full professors. The number of women professors is very limited, this means that the higher women get to the university hierarchy, the gender barriers make it harder for them to rise up. We can see some similarities in other countries too. According to Hauser, women in United States and in Europe, in order to raise to higher status in university ladder, face with some difficulties (Hauser, 2019). Academic women are often building their careers later than their male colleagues, and are less likely to have a traditional trajectory starting as a lecturer and then progressing through the ranks to senior lecturer, associate professor and full professor (Burkinshaw and White, 2017).

5-Publications

The amount of women's publication has raised considerably during the last thirty years. Most women faculty members have published books, articles, course materials, and texts. They have conducted so many researches and managed different seminars and conferences.

6-Training facilities

One of the questions of our questionnaire was about how training facilities were distributed among women and men. In the early stages of our research at 1991 and at 2001, findings showed that at 1991, about 15.1 percent at 2001, about 16.3 percent of women have received training facilities. This means the uneven distribution of these facilities. After twenty years, at 2011, the number of women who have received scholarship, fellowship, sabbatical leave or other training privileges has been increased to 33.3 percent. But at 2021, it decreased again to 22 percent. To redress long-standing inequity and to compensate for the shortages of the past, it is time to do some favor to academic women by providing special quotas for scholarships, sabbatical leaves, and relevant training courses, in an accelerating rate. This would enable them to update their knowledge and competence, increase their potentials and perform their responsibilities to a higher standard.

7-Feeling secure

About 64 percent of women feel secure in their jobs. This means that most women know that they are needed and their work is necessary, even when unacknowledged. About 36 percent of women response was negative, this means that still there are a large number of women faculty members who feel insecure in their jobs.

8-Difference between genders

Some women believe that there is a kind of duality: when it comes to paying tax, duties, pension deductions, and so forth, the differences between women and men does not being recognized, but for receiving rewards, bonuses and some other beneficial payments, the authorities pay less to women on the grounds that men have

more financial responsibilities. If there is any justification for paying less to women, then why, when it comes to paying duties, customs, commitment for services, and so forth, should women pay the same as men?

At the first section of our longitudinal research, about two thirds of women thought that the university facilities were not equally distributed between women and men. Eighty-five percent of women had never received any scholarship, fellowship, sabbatical leave, or other privileges. Ninety percent of women were never been appointed as a formal delegate of their university. At 2001, 71 percent and at 2011, the percentage has decreased and about 55.6 percent of women thought that there are some differences in the distribution of university facilities. Now at 2021, the fourth section of the research, still 56 percent of academic women think the same.

9-Legal support for being a housewife and a professor

There are so many women who are playing a dual role - motherhood and employment - simultaneously. Sixty-five percent of our research sample, in addition to having the responsibility of being a mother and running a household, continue to work in universities very effectively, so they deserve appreciation and legal support so as to be able to rear well-balanced children and also help to produce qualified students. They need a legal framework to enable them to gain some advantages like flexible working hours for returning mothers, especially those who are breast-feeding, nurseries, allowances for the spouse and children after the death of a mother and so forth. Such provisions will motivate and empower women to work more effectively.

10- Offering the key jobs

Most women thought that men are given priority in selection and in occupying the key executive positions at the top levels of the university.

At 1991, about 96.8 percent of women believed that even if women have higher qualifications and more experience, again men have priority. At 2001 this percentage has decreased to 76.3 and at 2011, to 70.4 percent. Although at 2021 the percentage decreased to 50 percent, but this high percentage supports the hypothesis that gender has still a very significant role in university selection.

IV. DISCUSSION

The situation of academic women in different societies show that the number of universities in which both genders enjoy the same position and status is very low. According to UNESCO Report, regardless of the encouraging statistics on women's access to higher education, there are obstacles when seeking to occupy key academic positions at universities, participate in relevant research and assume leadership roles (UNESCO, 2021). Stereotyped notion about women constitute major barriers. Women in industrialized societies as well as those in developing world still suffer from the myth that women are too emotional or illogical for senior management, or best suited to the domestic maintenance aspects of administration. It does not make it any easier that women frequently share these stereotypes and accept uncritically roles which leave them marginalized and with limited career prospects (Tadesse, 2019). In fact, gender and race are the strongest social bases upon which we stereotype others (Eaton, et al., 2020). There is a suggestion that the job candidates submit materials that do not include their fullnames, but only surnames, which are inevitably present in citations of publications and presentations. This may reduce the operation of gender biases in the evaluation of candidates' materials. Caplan paints a blank picture of the status quo in North American universities: discrimination, overwork and harassment are a reality for many women. She refers to myths and unwritten rules that construct an intensely male environment from which few women academics escape unaffected (Caplan,1997). Despite significant cultural shifts in the United States, stereotypic beliefs about women's and men's traits, roles, occupations and physical characteristics have remained highly stable (Haine et al., 2016).

In United States, while women represent just over half (52.9 percent) of assistant professors and near parity (46.4 percent) among associate professors, they accounted for barely over a third (34.3 percent) of professors in 2018 (Catalist 2020). In Canada, although 41 percent of full time university teachers are female, only 28 percent are full professors (Association of Canada University Teachers, 2019).

In Europe, women academics hold 41.3 percent of academic positions across the 28 countries of European Union (EU-28). European women hold few positions in academic leadership, in the EU-28, women were only 21.7 percent of heads of higher education institutions in 2017 (European Commission, 2019). For example, although Sweden has taken comprehensive measures to decrease the gap between men and women in academic arena, yet today only 27 percent of faculty members in the rank of professors in Sweden are female (Madison, 2020). In Germany, Maume refers to glass escalator for white men that provide different opportunities for upward mobility in part due to varying institutional rules and work organizational logics (Maume, 1999).

In India, women are hardly visible in university leadership positions. Underrepresentation of women in senior leadership in academia is a major concern in this country and is observed at each level of the education system in India (Mayya & et al. 2021).

According to Global Gender Gap Report, which tracks progress on relative gaps between women and men on health, economy, and politics, the highest rank belonged to Iceland 1, Norway 2, Finland 3, and Sweden 4 (GGGReport, 2020).

Glass ceilings, glass walls, glass cliffs, glass funnel, and glass escalators are some metaphors to refer to gender discrimination in different countries.

V. CONCLUSION

Our longitudinal research raised some important facts: women comprise almost half of university entrants, the number of female students and faculty members have been raised considerably. Iranian women broadly have lifted their presence in academic arena. Although the share of women in universities has been increased, their advances in the academic leadership and high managerial positions has been very slower than men. The most important fact is that there are only very few women in leading and top managerial positions in our academic environment. According to Kerfoot & Whitehead, the 'boys' culture does still proliferate. This suggests that in higher education environment, the majority of women are performing 'dirty jobs' of middle management in a highly insecure and frustrated environment (Prichard et al, 1998). As Morahan says, a major challenge is that there are few women in leadership positions for other women to look up to (Krupa, 2012).

The low representation in academic leadership contrasts with the boom in female students in past thirty years in Iran. Women have expressed repeatedly their interest and readiness in taking high responsibilities. The findings of our cross-sectional research show that, academic women in Iran universities have demonstrated their ability and capability, and although they face enormous barriers and discriminations, most of them have proven their strong interest in participating fully in university leading and high managerial status.

Most women believe that in the present situation, femininity has not brought any privileges for them, and they think that if they were men they would be in a higher position. According to their responses, they believe that the rules and regulations are applied less rigidly to men.

Women have to reach higher levels of achievements than men in order to be appointed to the same academic rank or positions.

To summarize, women have demonstrated their ability by passing the university entrance examinations and graduating from universities. They have also proven their strong interest in participating and contributing to the development of our society by continuous efforts. Unfortunately, after thirty years of the first section of our longitudinal research, still academic women have a long way to go. In spite of legal guarantees in the Constitution, still women face enormous barriers and discriminations in our society. Many questions naturally come up at this point, among them:

- Why is the Constitution not upheld?
- Why are there so few women representatives despite women having had the vote for many years?
- Why are women 'outsiders' in politics and in high managerial positions?
- Why women are expected to implement men's decisions but are not allowed to hold decision-making and key leadership positions?
- Why are women hired for positions of technical expertise but have to wait much longer than men for promotion to managerial levels?
- Even in other Islamic countries (e.g. Malaysia, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt), women have more access to the highest levels of the executive suite; why do women in Iran not have similar access?

According to the findings of our research, inequality in our academic arena is obvious. As Maddison puts it, equality between sexes is reasonably defined as equal performance based on equal ability, whereas preferential treatment that leads to different ability actually causes inequality (Maddison, 2020).

Following are a group of suggestions in order to bring the society and our academic arena, closer to the promised equality in the Constitution.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Establishing merit system

Meritocracy means the distribution of duties and responsibilities according to personal qualifications and accomplishments. In merit system, selection, promotion, distribution of job benefits and existing facilities should be according to one's merit and performance. In a meritocratic society, the winners must believe they have earned their success through their own talent and hard work (Sandel, 2020). The person who is best qualified should be selected, and the merit system should be controlled by both genders. In order to foster meritocracy a special committee might undertake the responsibility of reviewing the rules and regulations related to selection and remove the potential source of discrimination. If women would not be excluded from the beginning, they would obtain their proper status in the leading and top managerial positions.

Preferred leadership style

Research has shown that women and men are generally similar in terms of learning, memory, reasoning ability, creativity and intelligence (Gibson, 2012). In a study of the preferred leadership style of male and female leaders in twenty seven countries, it was reported that female managers prefer participative and team oriented leadership dimensions more than men. These are dimensions which more suites the academic environment. Women are more likely to lead through inspiration, transforming people's attitudes and beliefs, and aligning people with meaning and purpose and this is a critical path to improving leaders' performance (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020). Now, based on the previous research findings, it is time to improve the old management models in order to increase universities productivity and effectiveness.

Selecting women as advisors, and board members

There are different boards in the university hierarchy which have very important role in running the university system for example councils, commissions, and committees. If occupying the seats of some of the boards is by election, the qualified academic women ought to accept the candidacy and through a democratic process obtain their adequate status in university hierarchy. If occupying is not by election, then appointing women to these boards prepare a proper foundation for them to participate in decision-making process.

Change the culture and cooperation of male and female colleagues

The most fundamental solution to inequality is to change the culture and reform the unrealistic image of women which permits only family roles for them, regardless of their political and leadership strengths. Besides the strategies and policies that governments imply to shadow on upper echelons of academic ladder, there are so many cultural barriers and factors of influence for academic women underrepresentation in leading and high managerial positions. When the necessity for change is seen, people's attitudes and perspectives will adapt, resulting in a change in behavior. Ruling bodies and high-ranking authorities can accelerate the rate of these changes by acting to promote women's statue and participation in society in general and in universities in particular.

There are many obstacles for women when they seek to occupy key academic positions and assume leadership roles among which is, institutional support and cooperation of male colleagues. Besides that, there is the impacts of Queen-Bee phenomenon which is a tendency among some women who have invested in their personal career success to be more critical toward junior colleagues, and less inclined to endorse measures that support women as a group (Faniko, 2017). According to Sheila Thomas, lack of institutional support, family and work conflicts and limited career advancement opportunities, continue to pose barriers as women seek positions in upper echelons of academic administration (Thomas, 2021).

Improving women self-image

An important factor in the perpetuating the imbalances of power in leading positions in university arena, is a reluctance to assume managerial responsibilities based on negative self –image and lack of self-confidence. Patriarch structures and socialization of girls discourage women from seeking leadership positions (Tadesse, 2019). This kind of feelings can be removed by training and education both in family and in society. Through proper training programs, women will gain knowledge and learn more about themselves and society and this would broaden their mind and horizon. Special tailor-made workshops and training courses should provide academic women with self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance and sense of security in leading levels and managerial positions.

Appointing a deputy from opposite sex

Academic women so far, have crossed the boundaries in education and gaining knowledge. In order to change the dominant present atmosphere in the higher levels of university structure, at least one deputy must be appointed from the opposite sex in every top and middle managerial level. This would help to use the potentials, aptitudes and initiatives of both sexes and would lessen the extremes of each sex to the benefit of the university atmosphere. It would also help to make women qualified and empowered.

Continuous effort and learning

To redress long-standing inequality and to compensate for the shortages of the past it is time to promote academic women knowledge and status by providing them special opportunities for sabbatical leaves, and different training courses, seminars, and conferences. This would enable them to increase and update their knowledge and competence and perform their duties and responsibilities to a higher standard. Female managers are watched more closely with the expectation that they will make mistakes. In this situation women must first fine-tune their awareness and knowledge about their duties and responsibilities. And second, they must try to

overcome the cultural resistance and incorrect bias against women's abilities, by increasing their skills and by paying special attention to performing at their highest capabilities.

Academic women need to stop being silent

The first step in reforming stereotypical views toward academic women is to change their own perspective and attitudes towards themselves. They must be aware of their managerial potential and to let their natural talents flourish, with self-confidence and self-respect. They must continue to gain knowledge, especially of the tools of management and leadership science. They must break their silence and become proactive. They should question the existing situation. Accepting of whatever "is" will never lead to what "should" be. Women should change their behavior from passive to dynamic. One reason for men going beyond their limits is that they define the boundaries themselves. Boundaries should be defined and faced very seriously in families, schools, universities, and other working environments by both genders.

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