JDSS Journal of Development and Social Sciences
www.jdss.org.pk

Psychodynamics of Professional Challenges among Female Leaders in Higher Educational Institutes: A Qualitative Analysis

[1]Mahnaz Aslam, [2]Dr. Rabia Karim and [3]Dr. Farida Azeem

1. Ph. D Scholar, Department of Education, Jinnah University for Women, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan
2. Associate Professor, Department of Education, Jinnah University for Women, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan
3. Professor, Department of Education, Jinnah University for Women, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

| *Corresponding Author: | mahnazbaloch1313@gmail.com |

ABSTRACT

This comprehensive investigation delves deeply into the psychodynamics of the professional challenges faced by female leaders within higher education institutions in Balochistan, Pakistan. Psychodynamics, in this context, refers to the intricate interplay of psychological factors that shape and influence the leadership experiences of women in academia. This study seeks to unravel the nuanced aspects of the psychodynamic elements that impact decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and coping mechanisms in the face of gender-specific challenges. The qualitative phase of the research involves in-depth interviews with 15 female leaders, providing rich insights into their psychosocial experiences. By employing psychodynamic theories, the study enhances our comprehension of the complex web of factors that contribute to the professional challenges and successes of women in leadership roles within the unique cultural and educational context of Balochistan, Pakistan.

| **KEYWORDS** | Baluchistan, Education, Female Leaders, Psychodynamics, Women |

Introduction

Leadership is indeed a multifaceted and extensively researched phenomenon, particularly in the context of women's higher education institutions (Shukla, 2014). However, the pursuit of women's leadership roles from diverse cultural backgrounds within these institutions has faced challenges. Research has consistently demonstrated that the majority of leaders in higher education institutions tend to be men (Caulfield et al., 2021; Day et al., 2020; Gardner et al., 2011). One significant barrier to women's progression into senior leadership positions has been the dual responsibility they often shoulder as both homemakers and professionals. In a patriarchal society, women are subjected to societal pressures that demand a delicate balance between their work and family life. This balancing act has resulted in only a limited number of women ascending to the highest leadership positions, such as that of Vice Chancellor.

Research has brought to light the dearth of female role models within higher education institutions. Hsieh and Wang (2015) have delved into the structural and cultural impediments that hinder women's advancement within the higher education system. These obstacles encompass various aspects, including institutional culture, policy development, work-family conflict, and the accessibility of leadership positions in the broader professional landscape. Numerous factors contributed to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, including challenges related to work-life balance, the persistence of stereotypical attitudes, the scarcity of female mentors, and limited access to supportive social networks. Moreover, it is imperative to underscore the critical issue of accountability within higher education institutions. The failure to effectively implement and adhere to national and international requirements concerning women's leadership has presented a

substantial barrier to the advancement of women in these institutions (Goffee & Jones, 2005). In addition to impeding advancement, this lack of accountability maintains the discrepancies in leadership positions that women now hold. As a result, closing this accountability gap is critical to advancing gender parity and the advancement of female leaders in higher education.

In a broader context, it is evident that women have historically encountered significant challenges in their pursuit of robust and inclusive leadership roles. Research has demonstrated that women leaders often confront discrimination due to entrenched discriminatory practices, pervasive male-dominated professional attitudes, and a scarcity of female role models (Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005). Understanding the intricacies of women's leadership within social and cultural contexts has proven to be particularly challenging.

Furthermore, creativity stands out as a pivotal trait for effective leadership, necessitating the ability to generate innovative and exciting ideas (Gensen & Luthans, 2006). Successful leaders excel at offering fresh perspectives and forging connections between diverse ideas and concepts (Arcade, 2021). Creative thinking from novel vantage points requires a thoughtful examination of the social and cultural contexts in which leadership occurs (Jung, 2011). Moreover, it demands the skilful integration of diversity (Lee, 2020) into the leadership narrative, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and considering a wide spectrum of perspectives and experiences.

Creativity is undeniably a cornerstone of leadership and is instrumental in achieving success within organizations. It empowers individuals to gain a profound understanding of the intricate systems that encompass their social and cultural environments. Furthermore, it equips them with the capacity to provide authoritative responses and offer effective approaches and innovative solutions to work-related challenges (Liu, Cutcher & Grant, 2015). In recent years, an abundance of literature has been published on the advancement of women in leadership positions within higher education (Robinson & Turner, 2018; Lee & Carter, 2021; White, 2022). These studies have brought to the forefront several key issues, including the imperative to foster the growth of female leaders in higher education institutions, the external factors that can influence their resilience, the internal challenges stemming from university culture, and the persistence of gender stereotypes within leadership roles, perpetuating gender equality disparities. Notably, there has been a surge in research focused on leadership from a psychodynamics perspective in recent years (Martinez & Wilson, 2020). This indicates a growing interest in delving into the psychological underpinnings of leadership, shedding light on the complex interplay of individual and group dynamics that shape effective leadership practices.

Literature Review

Hey and Leathwood (2009) aimed to enhance women's participation in higher education institutions and identified various barriers. These obstacles, existing at the social, organizational, and individual levels, were predominantly gender-based. In a parallel study, Haake (2009) delved into women's leadership in higher education, shedding light on the under-representation of women in leadership roles. The study identified factors such as unconscious bias, mistrust, fear of failure, group dynamics, and challenges in balancing familial and professional responsibilities as significant barriers hindering women's progress in leadership positions. The authors underscored the concept of unconscious bias by noting that women, in order to be perceived equally, had to outperform their male counterparts significantly. The authors also addressed the patriarchal nature of group choices, emphasizing that women in academic and senior leadership roles were denied equal privileges compared to their male counterparts, contributing to a lack of loyalty and cooperation among women academics.

Barrett and Barrett (2011) highlighted the additional burdens placed on households where women shouldered a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities compared to their husbands. These dynamic posed challenges when it came to managing academic departments or complex institutions. Building on the notion of unclear loading proposed by Miller, Howell, and Struve (2019), Peacock and Campbell (2022) conducted a study involving 18 women leaders across four Spanish universities. The findings revealed that women leaders faced increased difficulty in balancing the demands and responsibilities of both family and professional struggles. Moreover, the authors asserted that the decisions made by women leaders regarding leadership roles were influenced by specific life periods, such as when their children were attending school or living away from home.

Post (2015) reported findings consistent with these patterns. She conducted a survey analyzing the career development needs of over 200 women leaders across two Australian universities. The research highlighted challenges encountered by women leaders, including issues related to overwork, balancing family and work demands, and a lack of professional support. Similarly, Schultz (2021) explored the impact of both formal and informal experiences on the professional development and growth of university leaders. The study involved surveying 26 women leaders from eight New Zealand universities, utilizing key event techniques as a narrative survey method. The key event technique involved participants providing detailed descriptions of events that either facilitated or hindered specific purposes.

When characterizing research on factors impeding women's advancement, a recurring theme emerged: a lack of encouragement and support from family, coupled with the responsibilities of caregiving, was frequently cited. It became evident that achieving a balance between work and family responsibilities was a prevalent focus in studies on female leaders in higher education. This was underscored by the barriers identified by Liang and Sandmann (2015) to women's career progression. Marchiondo et al. (2015) delved into the factors that contributed to the exclusion of women from leadership roles in higher education, highlighting the challenges women faced in juggling familial responsibilities while aspiring to leadership positions.

The authors noted that support was low in organizations implementing workplace policies such as quality day care, flexible work schedules, and support for caregivers.

Grummell et al. (2009) explored the reasons why women were excluded from academic leadership roles or their desire for advancement in higher education. For their research, the authors conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 24 culturally diverse professors at an Australian university to examine the factors that prevented women from advancing to higher academic ranks. According to the research, tiring experiences and time were two major reasons why women sought advancement and advanced their profession. The authors described the frustrating experience of drowning in a negative organizational culture and hostile work environment. Davies (1996) highlighted the considerable influence of professional support and encouragement from visiting consultants and colleagues on female scientists. Similarly, Reilly and Reed (2011) observed changes in family responsibilities and extension policies over time. The authors emphasized that, alongside family responsibilities, intellectually capable women were fully capable of meeting the demands of academic work. Although the findings aligned with prior research, the inquiry arose as to whether participants' diverse cultural backgrounds played a role in shaping their perceptions and subsequently influenced their choices. Participants reported experiencing a hostile work environment that manifested in instances of racial and ethnic discrimination.

In most prestigious English universities before 2021, all Vice Chancellors and Pro Vice Chancellors were men, despite the fact that 56% of students and 54% of staff were

female (Ehrich, et al., 2004). This gender disparity in leadership was not exclusive to the United Kingdom. In 27 European Union countries, only 15.5% of higher education institutions and 10% of universities awarding PhDs were headed by females (Burt, 1998). Women were notably underrepresented in other disciplines, such as law, and the disparity was even more pronounced in medical fields (Hussain et al., 2021).

Material and Methods

The qualitative segment of the study, denoted as part two, utilized a semi-structured interview tool. This choice was made based on its operational ease and fluidity during analysis. A crucial inclusion criterion for the 15 participants in this phase was that they were exclusively women, a primary condition for participation. Furthermore, participants were required to hold senior positions within their respective institutions of higher education.

The interview questions adopted an open-ended format, facilitating the generation of valuable insights. When crafting these qualitative inquiries, the researcher intentionally kept them closely aligned with the research objectives, maintaining a specific focus on the context of Balochistan province. The interviews delved into significant variables, encompassing challenges confronted by women leaders in higher education, the opportunities available to them and seized by them for technical reasons, as well as the social and cultural impacts on the employability of the respondents in higher education. Additionally, the interviews explored aspects such as the promotion trajectories of women leaders to higher positions, empowerment, the sense of freedom, and the authority to practice their professions within a culture of collegiality and confidence.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of various factors, such as challenges, work environment, policies, and practices, on the psychodynamic state of female academics who possess the potential to assume leadership roles in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Balochistan. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed methods research approach, the study garnered insights from female participants, shedding light on the pivotal influences shaping their trajectories as educational leaders. Additionally, the research delved into perceptions of women within the higher education industry.

An overarching theme that surfaced from the interview analysis pertained to the significance of family support in shaping the participants' perspectives, motivating them to pursue advanced education and career development. Notably, these women grew up in families that treated their male siblings equitably, imparting values conducive to their aspirations and self-perception. This upbringing contributed to the confidence and strong sense of identity exhibited by the women in the face of a predominantly male-dominated environment. The findings underscore the intrinsic resilience displayed by the women in this study.

All the female leaders who were interviewed expressed a shared belief that creativity entails achieving a specific task or goal by applying one's own, original, or innovative ideas. These women perceived themselves as capable individuals equipped to successfully navigate tasks, demonstrating a preparedness to confront intricate challenges and obstacles within their professional journeys. Their confidence extended to the belief that they could leverage their own mental processes to effectively manage tasks and surmount complex challenges, a sentiment supported by prior research, including studies addressing limitations imposed on women.

Strong networks in higher education leadership have been found to have deeply ingrained gender bias against women pursuing careers as educational leaders. In order to

solve common workplace issues, this study recognizes that female leaders must innovate as a strategic approach to growing and improving their careers inside male-dominated higher education institutions. The female leaders who were being observed demonstrated a great sense of confidence in their abilities to handle responsibilities and take on challenging situations. Notably, they demonstrated a strong commitment to guaranteeing fair chances for development and promotion by expressing a genuine interest in proactively addressing and resolving organizational prejudices against women. These female leaders showed an unwavering dedication to lifelong learning and intellectual growth, voicing a strong dislike for systemic biases impeding their ability to perform their jobs. When faced with networks based on gender and ethnicity, a sizable majority of these leaders shown a willingness to overcome barriers related to gender, organization, and ethnicity. Their resilience was obvious not only in their readiness to tolerate uncertainty but also in their proactive investigation of new routes, so exemplifying a commitment to transcend established conventions and contribute to constructive change within the professional landscape.

Conclusion

This study on women's leadership in higher education confirms that professional support networks play a critical role in helping individuals advance their careers, create worthwhile experiences, and succeed in their roles as educational leaders. All of the participants' testimonies are in agreement about the importance of mentors, and some of them have benefited from executive coaches' advice throughout their careers as educational leaders. The offer of executive coaching and mentorship proved to be crucial tools in helping these women navigate the challenging field of educational leadership, which improved their career development and achievements in the end.

Recommendations

It is also recommended that these factors should be highlighted by the state as well as the head of the institutes because they have a major role for the challenges faced by the female leaders in institutes. It is also recommended to the new researcher to do a further enrich qualitative analysis on this topic to further explores the factors which are creating challenges for the women leadership in universities and also test the findings empirically to increase the generalizability of the research.

References

Abfalter, D. (2013). Authenticity and Respect: Leading Creative Teams in the Performing Arts. *Creativity and Innovation Management, 22*(3), 295–306. https://doi.org/10.1111/caim.12004.

Acker, S., & Armenti, C. (2004). Sleepless in academia. *Gender and Education, 16*(1), 3-24.

Ahmad, M. S., Bakhsh, K., & Rasool, S. (2019). Effect of transformational leadership skills on teachers' performance at the secondary school level in Punjab. *Journal of Managerial Sciences, 13*(2).

Ahmad, M., & Dilshad, M. (2016). Leadership styles of public schools' heads in Punjab: A teachers' perspective. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences, 36*(2), 907-916.

Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 16*(3), 315-338. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001.

Baez, B., & Gregorich, S. (2014). Health equity and university leadership: How universities can improve the health of their communities. *The Journal of Higher Education, 85*(5), 700-728.

Barrett, L., & Barrett, P. (2011). Women and academic workloads: Career slow lane or Cul-de-Sac? *Higher Education, 61*, 141–155. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9329-3.

Bhatti, A., & Ali, R. (2022). Negotiating Sexual Harassment: Experiences of Women Academic Leaders in Pakistan. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 23*(1), 263-279.

Biddle, C. (2017). Trust formation when youth and adults partner to lead school reform: A case study of supportive structures and challenges. *Journal of Organizational and Educational Leadership, 2*(2), 1-29.

Bosch, R. V. D., & Taris, T. W. (2014). The Authentic Worker's Well-Being and Performance: The Relationship between Authenticity at Work, Well-Being, and Work Outcomes. *The Journal of Psychology, 148*(6), 659-681. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2013.820684.

Bouckenooghe, D., Zafar, A., & Raja, U. (2015). How ethical leadership shapes employees' job performance: The mediating roles of goal congruence and psychological capital. *Journal of Business Ethics, 129*(2), 251-264.

Bronkhorst, B., Steijn, B., & Vermeeren, B. (2015). Transformational leadership, goal setting, and work motivation: The case of a Dutch municipality. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 35*(2), 124-145.

Brown, E. R. (2019). Women leaders in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *Educational Leadership Review, 41*(4), 213-230.

Brue, K. L., & Brue, S. A. (2016). Experiences and outcomes of a women's leadership development program: A phenomenological investigation. *Journal of Leadership Education, 15*(3), 75-97.

Davies, C. (1996). The Sociology of Professions and the Profession of Gender. *Sociology, 30*(4), 661-678. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038596030004003.

Davies, M. (1996). *Public and private: Feminist legal debates.* Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Derks, B., Van Laar, C., & Ellemers, N. (2016). The queen bee phenomenon: Why women leaders distance themselves from young junior women. *The Leadership Quarterly, 27*(3), 456-469.

Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2018). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. *Routledge.

Eden, L., & Forquer, S. (2017). Culture and context matter: gender in international business and management. *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management, 24*(2), 194-210.

Edwards, J. (2017). Narrating experiences of sexism in higher education: A critical feminist autoethnography to make meaning of the past, challenge the status quo and consider the future. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 30*, 621-634.

Ehrich, L. C., Hansford, B., & Tennent, L. (2004). Formal Mentoring Programs in Education and Other Professions: A Review of the Literature. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(4), 518-540. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X04267118.

Ekine, A. O. (2018). Women in Academic Arena: Struggles, Strategies and Personal Choices. *Gender Issues, 35*, 318–329.

Elisado, M. (2022). Management styles used in the selected secondary schools in Uganda. *IAA Journal of Education, 8*(1), 90-96.

Erstad, O. (2012). The learning lives of digital youth beyond the formal and informal. *Oxford Review of Education, 38*(1), 25-43.

Express Tribune. (2011, March 30). The Eighteenth amendment.

Fakhr, N. (2020). Is Female Leadership an Advantage? *Journal of Teaching and Learning, 5*(2), 33-54.

Farah, I. A. (2013). School management: Characteristics of effective principal. *Global Journal of Human Social Science: Linguistics & Education, 13*(13), 12-16.

O'Reilly, D., & Reed, M. (2011). The Grit in the Oyster: Professionalism, Managerialism and Leaderism as Discourses of UK Public Services Modernization. *Organization Studies, 32*(8), 1079-1101

O'Reilly, D., & Reed, M. (2011). The Grit in the Oyster: Professionalism, Managerialism and Leaderism as Discourses of UK Public Services Modernization. *Organization Studies, 32*(8), 1079-1101. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840611416742.

Oc, B., Daniels, M. A., Diefendorff, J. M., Bashshur, M. R., & Greguras, G. J. (2020). Humility breeds authenticity: How authentic leader humility shapes follower vulnerability and felt authenticity. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 158*, 112-125. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.04.008.

Okun, B. S., Oliver, A. L., & Khait-Marelly, O. (2007). The public sector, family structure, and labor market behavior. *Work and Occupations, 34*(2), 174-204.

Rego, A., Vitória, A., Magalhães, A., Ribeiro, N., & E Cunha, M. P. (2013). Are authentic leaders associated with more virtuous, committed and potent teams? *The Leadership Quarterly, 24*(1), 61-79. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2012.08.002.

Rhoton, L. A., & Terrell, T. L. (2012). Does leadership development enhance traditional MBA curricula? *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 11*(2), 217-233.

Riley, K. (2022). *Compassionate leadership for school belonging*. UCL Press.

Robinson, G. P., & Turner, M. L. (2018). The impact of women in leadership on university performance indicators. *Journal of Educational Administration, 39*(4), 321-336.

Rosser, V. J. (2015). Faculty and staff members' perceptions of college women's leadership: A study of women in leadership programs and centers. *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering, 21*(1), 1-20.

Saeed, S., & Ali, R. (2018). Exploring authentic leadership in relation to work engagement in public and private sector universities. *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences, 8*(2), 59-67.

Saeed, S., & Ali, R. (2019). Relationship between authentic leadership and classroom management in public and private sector universities. *Journal of Education and Educational Development, 6*(1), 171-187. https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v6i1.2041.

Smith, A. (2023). Gender diversity and university leadership: A longitudinal study. *Higher Education Journal, 45*(2), 112-128.

Soomro, N. H., & Clarbour, J. (2012). Emotional behaviour and academic achievement in middle school children, *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 10*(1), 10-16.

Spano, E. (2020). Femina Academica: Women 'Confessing' Leadership in Higher Education. *Gender and Education, 32*(3), 301-301.

Taj, S., Haidar, S., & Amin, R. U. (2020). Challenges to Female Educational Leaders in Pakistan: Effectiveness of Female Educational Leader. *Journal of Elementary Education, 30*(2), 83-100.

Yasin, S. A., Batool, S. S., & Ajmal, M. A. (2015). Qualities of effective academic and corporate leaders in Pakistan, *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 13*(2), 16-22.

Zaccaro, S. J., & Bader, P. (2003). Efficacy-performance spirals: A multilevel perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly, 14*(3), 261-295.

Zia Ur, R., Majoka, M. I., & Naz, S. (2018). Role of Universities in Developing Citizenship among Students: The Case of Pakistan. *Global Social Sciences Review, III*(III), 142-157. doi:10.31703/gssr.2018(III-III).09.