

# Challenges that are Significant in Affecting performance of Women in Managerial Positions in Kenyan Public Universities. A Case of Selected Universities in Kenya.

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## Abstract

Over the recent past the number of women managers has been on the rise. Their experiences and impact on the work place have been the subject of much discussion, investigation and theorizing. While women are joining the managerial ranks in increasing numbers, few women are managing to reach middle level management or above. Albeit this there are a number of challenges that seem to bewilder these women. Of the challenges that women face there are those that are significant. The main objective of the study was to determine the challenges that are significant and are experienced by women in managerial positions in Kenyan public universities. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in Three Kenyan public institutions of higher learning i.e. Kenyatta University, Nairobi University and JKUAT. The study population consisted of all women in managerial positions in all the public institutions of higher learning in Kenya. Stratified and systematic random sampling methods were used to sample the research population consisting of 15 women managers in Kenyatta University, 18 women managers in Nairobi University and 9 women managers at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology. The main research instruments used was questionnaires. A statistic test was carried out using chi square to establish the important variables that affect performance, it was established that sex discrimination, stereotypes, job/family conflict, sexual harassment, unfair pressure, working experience, professional training and organizational policies are significant factors that affect performance of women managers in public universities in Kenya.

**Key Words:** Challenges, Gender stereotype,

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## INTRODUCTION

The aspirations of men, women, boys and girls in any given society in terms of their career development and leadership roles depend on the socio-cultural, economic and political environment. Women and men have grown in a social cultural context where certain values and norms are assigned to either gender. The feminine roles traditionally assigned include childcare, home care and passivity. The male roles assigned to men include being responsible and in charge. Therefore due to these issues female leaders in this case managers, are expected to accept without challenge, day to day interference and requests that by-pass their leadership to the lower echelon and this seriously impairs their day today operations. While women are joining the managerial ranks in increasing numbers, few women are managing to reach middle level management or above (Fagenson, 1993).

Top management positions remained the domain of men. In 2000, only 9.0% of vice chancellors and presidents were women of the senior management team, comprising, deputy VSs, Deputy Presidents, registrars, special advisers, only 19.8% were women. Women were more visible in position of head/directors of academic departments/centre, with overall nearly 18% of women in these posts. Of all the professors in the

survey, 13% were women. Women had made greatest advances in taking up some second level management positions, taking responsibility for personnel, public relations, equity, international affairs, quality assurance and staff development. Women occupied about 30% to 40% of these positions. Generally women status in African universities left much room for improvement.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Attracting and retaining women executives is not just a matter of speaking out on the virtues of diversity but organizations that have successfully cultivated female managers have embraced work life balance and other issues vital to women as strategic initiatives. More fundamentally, they view women as strategic assets. Thus the effectiveness of Kenya's development efforts and the ability to sustain them is dependent on the full utilization of all human resources (both women and men).

The problems of women managers are grounded in historical traditions, which include the socialization of women in the home, the devaluation of women's work and the employment of women in traditionally undervalued female positions and occupations. Many women managers hold positions that are excluded from job ladders that lead to senior management posts and most of them have minimal jurisdiction or authority over others (Dobbins and Platz., 1986). In general, women managers have few subordinates, make few final decisions, have little control over substantial resources and have few to no male subordinates.

#### Job and Family responsibility

It has been frequently observed that extensive family responsibilities those involving marriage, children and household activities can impede women managers' career achievements (Guttek, et, al 1987). Involvements in the family domain produce extensive work-family conflict to which women respond by reducing their employment involvement, which in turn, restricts career opportunities and advancement. Based on long held stereotypes, organizations often assume that married women (especially those with children) will and should pay attention to their family; therefore such organizations are unlikely to invest in the development of their women managers inform of training.

#### Stereotypes

(Schein, 1989) states that the single most important hurdle for women in management in all countries is the persistent stereotype that associates management with being male. The task of this study is to establish whether or not gender stereotypes exist in Kenyan public universities.

An understanding of the root causes of gender stereotyping is necessary if this problem, which marginalizes women in society, is to be addressed in any meaningful and constructive manner.

According to Jane Skinner et al (1988) stereotypes cannot be demised lightly even when they are wrong, because they affect people's expectations. Femininity is associated with values of passivity, submissiveness, politeness, humility and obedience. Masculinity is associated with values of strength, competence, power and leadership. These stereotypes are borne and nurtured by society and greatly influence the way men and women behave in workplaces. The study therefore examined whether gender stereotyping in Kenyan public universities affects women's performance in management.

#### Level of Management

According to (Boyd, et al, 1990), women managers have been recruited primarily to manage other women and, like the women they manage, they are crowded into lower and middle hierarchical levels. Women rarely manage men. In general, women have few

subordinates, make few final decisions, have little control over financial resources, have few to no male subordinates and are over represented in smaller enterprises. (Boyd, et al 1990). Women are rare in senior management posts. This is due, I suggest, to the normative masculinity of management. Despite women's influx, managerial work remains normatively the job of men, whom can do-devote fulltime to the job and who can rely on their wives to take care of children, marriage and home. Because of this, women have less legitimacy as managers, especially when the position brings with it power and authority over men, substantial resources and major decisions.

#### Commitment to Career

Career decision is the conscious commitment to advancement over the long-term. Guttek and Larwood (1987) studied differences in career paths of successful men and women in major institutions in USA. They found out that overall, men had higher professional standing and higher positions within their departments than women. Unlike men, women are not accustomed to planning their lives very often they remain in jobs with no prospect of promotion because they have never given much thought to their future. Many women let themselves to 'drift' in the work: they do not make conscious about which jobs they apply for and at what stage of their lives. They are not assertive when it comes to career decisions.

The requirement for continuous employment is another characteristic of the managerial career that conflict with women's family roles in every country. It has been argued that, contrary to the stereotype, turnover rates are not significantly higher for women than for men, but women and men leave for different reasons, men to pursue career options or further training women to care for the family. Upon their return to the labour force, from the perspective of the same or the same or the next employer, men's leave will have enhanced their human capital; women's leave is generally perceived to have resulted in their professional obsolescence. (OECD, 1985).

A typical career path (ladder) assumes that the person on the path works full time all their life and is free to move around to get experience in different kind of areas and job and can devote long hours to work. Most women are not in a position to fulfill such requirements because of domestic responsibilities or obligations. (Jane Skinner and Celia Robison, 1988)

Morgan (1994) in analyzing the plight of women managers worldwide found out that although women constitute over half of world's population the proportion of women holding managerial positions falls far short of that of men and that women have been negated as a source of managerial talent. They emphasize that no systematic evidence exist to prove that are ineffective as managers and conclude that the barriers to female advancement are both structural (legal, educational, cultural, social and historical) and psychological.

Clusler, (1984) notes that when women managers have problems regardless of the nature of the problem or how its handled, it is inevitably impacted upon all aspects of a person's life including work, relationships with co-workers and overall productivity of the organization.

Management being a patriarchic environment there are very few women have made it up to management positions in public universities. The few women in management in the Kenya public universities experience hurdles that adversely affect their performance at the workplace and for any meaningful progress or development to take place in Kenya, organizations should take advantages of utilizing 100% of our population (women and men), therefore there is need to understand some of the key problems facing women bosses. What are these problems that women experience while in such male dominated environment? Previous studies have not provided conclusive answers to these questions; this therefore provides rationale for the study. The study endeavored to assess the specific challenges affecting women's performance in management in relation to the unique characteristics they posses in a hitherto- male dominated management environment.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This is a descriptive survey study design was adopted for this study. This method seems to have a clear advantage of being an effective way of collecting data from a large sample cheaply and faster. The study was carried out in Three Kenyan public institutions of higher learning i.e. Kenyatta University, Nairobi University and JKUAT. The study population consisted of all women in managerial positions in all the public institutions of higher learning in Kenya. This includes all women in these institutions with titles such as Administrator, Head of Department, Dean, Supervisor, Executive, Manager, Assistant Manager, Principals, Director, Vice Chancellor and Chancellor. In Kenya there are six public universities, the study was conducted in 50% of the public universities (3 universities). That is Kenyatta University, Nairobi University and JKUAT. Then from each of these selected universities stratified sampling based on management level and systematic random sampling of women managers in each level was used to select 15 women managers in Kenyatta University, 18 women managers in Nairobi University and 9 women managers at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, who were expected to complete the questionnaires. In total the sample size population was 42 respondents. The main research instruments used was questionnaires.

### **RESULTS**

The first element was sex discrimination. On sex discrimination 48.7% of the women said that it was not important in affecting their performance. 41% was fairly important, 5.1% important and 5.1 very important. This indicates that in public universities sex discrimination is not common because of EEO legislations. Therefore sex discrimination is no longer an issue of concern.

Also from the findings we see that insubordination is also import in affecting performance of women managers, which was represented by 41% of the respondents. Those who said it was important were 5.1. % which are some exceptions.

On Stereotypes majority (41.0%) of the women said that if it was important in affecting the performance, this might imply that most of the women have learnt to live with the social perceptions that are there in struggling to enter the male domain, because majority of them agreed that gender stereotyping is still firmly rooted in the management structure of the institutions.

On job/family conflict 38.5% of the respondents said it not important, 43.6% fairly important, 10.3% important and 7.7% said it was very important, this indicates that women managers have developed mechanism of balancing work and family now that most of them are married and have children.

On sexual harassment 43.6% of the respondents said it was important in affecting their performance, this percentage was the highest, this indicates that state laws on such issues have taken effect in institutions therefore it is no longer an issue of concern to women managers.

For working experience majority of the women managers 43.6% agreed that it was very important in affecting their performance and 15.4% said it was not important. This can be deduced from the fact that majority of the women have taken over 15 years in their current positions; therefore we can say from the findings that experience is a contributing factor to performance.

Majority of the women managers from the findings regarded professional training as very important in affecting performance ( 53.8 %), this is supported by the fact majority of them as earlier shown have attended management development training programs. On organizational policies 10.3% said it was not important, 17.9 fairly important, 15.4% important and 56.4% said it was very important. This indicates that institutional policies play very important in determining the performance of women; there it should be women friendly.

Finally the last element was the relative importance of attitude in affecting performance. 41% said it was not important, 17.9% fairly important, 10.3% important and 30.8% said it was very important. This implies that attitude is not considered as an important factor in affecting performance as suggested by the majority of the women managers.

#### Chi- square analysis

Factor	Chi-Square	Degree of freedom	P-Value (Significance value)
Sex discrimination	25.103	3	0.000
Insubordination	10.744	4	0.013
Stereotypes	20.103	4	0.000
Job/family conflict	16.282	3	0.001
Sexual harassment	18.949	3	0.000
Double standards/unfair pressure	13.821	3	0.003
Working experience	17.282	4	0.002
Professional training	21.205	3	0.000
Organizational policies	21.000	3	0.000
Fear of Incompetence	0.282	3	0.963
Assertiveness/aggressiveness	3.359	3	0.340
Level of education	0.154	2	0.926
Attitude	8.692	3	0.034

According to chi-square analysis a factor is said to be significant if its p-value is less than 0.01 at 1% level of significance. As such the factors considered as significant are:-Sex discrimination, Stereotypes, Job/family conflict, Sexual harassment, Unfair work pressure, Working experience, Professional training and Organizational policies.

#### CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that sex discrimination, stereotypes, job/family conflict, sexual harassment, unfair work pressure, working experience, professional training and organizational policies are significant challenges that affect performance of women managers in public universities in Kenya. These challenges have to be dealt with if women are to succeed as managers in public institutions on Kenya.

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