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Relationship between Gender and Whistleblowing Intentions among Employees in Public Universities in Kenya.

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ABSTRACT: *Whistleblowing in Kenyan public universities is rare. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of gender on whistleblowing intentions among employees in public universities in Kenya. Correlational research design and primary data collected using questionnaires were used. Descriptive statistics were obtained using frequencies and percentages and the data was analyzed using Chi-square. The target population was employees from public universities in Kenya and a total of 395 randomly selected employees were sampled and filled questionnaires. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference in whistle blowing intentions among males and females. Females were more inclined to take into account the opinions of their peers when making whistleblowing decisions (p-value 0.034) and would report wrong doing even if the perpetrator would end up losing their jobs (p-value 0.009) as compared to males. On average, males showed higher whistleblowing intent compared to females (β = 0.96, p-value = 0.007). The study offers useful insight into policy and practice surrounding ethical conduct in public universities. The study recommends formulating policies and directing practices that enhance institutional support which can bolster ethical values and offer protection for whistleblowers in each capacity within which they act.*

KEY WORDS: *Gender, Whistleblowing, Whistleblowing Intentions, Universities, Employees*

I. INTRODUCTION

Whistleblowing helps bring to the limelight any hidden mischievous acts or plans and can be a means through which losses due to damage, theft or misappropriation of resources may be abated. According to Saud (2016), Whistleblowing is the unearthing of violations to parties within the organization (upper management), external agencies, and the general public while Culiberg & Mihelič, 2017 believes that whistleblowing entails drawing the attention of the public to perceived wrongdoing, unethical conduct, and misconduct. Among the unethical conduct and misconducts or wrongdoing may include corruption, fraud, health and safety violation, bullying, cover-ups and discrimination, or abuse of public office among others. Whistleblowing may occur either inside or outside an organization. Vandekerckhove & Lewis (2012) believes whistleblowing is the most effective method for fostering an ethical workplace culture since it aids in stopping unlawful activities or careless behavior that might hurt others. Some of the elements have a detrimental impact on whistleblower's intentions, while others impact positively on revealing wrongdoing. Unambiguous indicators of wrongs reported or evidence is key to allow for investigations and the revelation must not be motivated by malice or by a personal grievance against a specific corporate policy or person. Whistleblowing in itself is a very dangerous engagement and studies show that it is nearly impossible to undertake studies or engagements of that nature. A more easily attained goal is to understand the whistleblowing intentions instead.

Despite rising calls for study and legislation to address the widespread public disobedience, as well as despite the execution of very pertinent public sector reforms, the literature on whistleblowing in third world countries, notably in the continent of Africa, remains scarce (Schuppan 2009; Onyango 2018b). Since anti-corruption tools have evolved through time to become essential components of contemporary public administration, it appears that little has been done by the public sector to comprehend ethical decision-making around whistleblower behaviors.

Personal cost is seen as a detriment to whistleblowing and the higher the personal cost of the act the lesser the likelihood to whistle blow (Alleyne 2016, Dalton & Radtke 2013)

Ways of reporting also affects whistleblowing intentions. Studies shown that women prefer anonymous venues to report crimes; hence this conclusion may be influenced by the reporting method (Kaplan *et al.*, 2009a). There is not much consensus from past studies about gender differences for whistleblowing purposes. While many studies have found little to no differences between men and women in justifying whistleblowing

(Cassematis & Wortley, 2013; Fatoki, 2013; Soni, Maroun, & Padia, 2015), an equal number of studies have also revealed disparities among males and females in exposing unethical behaviors, including a tendency to engage, impacts on reporting techniques, anticipations and intensity of retaliation together with career progression (Cho & Song, 2015).

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between gender and whistleblowing intentions among employees in public universities.

III. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The study sought to test the following null hypotheses arising from the objective

H_{O1}**:** There is no statistically significant relationship between gender and whistleblowing intentions among employees in public universities.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender is the distinction between the sexes in terms of a one's conduct and how one is reasoning (Widya, 2016). In the larger society there has been a belief that men tend to have a moderately high sense of heroism in various things, one of which is being courageous in taking risks, being able to work under duress, being able to manage situations, and being much more able to prevail over difficult situations in comparison to women. There has been a rise in the understanding of how males and females respond to corrupt practices. This has triggered the need to create anticorruption policies that are gender responsive (UNDP and UNIFEM 2010). This coupled with the necessity of whistleblowing has resulted in creation of reporting channels that are gender sensitive.

Terracol, (2018) defines whistleblowing as reporting any wrongdoing that one encounters at work place which is a risky idea. The risks vary from forms of workplace retaliation which comprise of social isolation, legal actions, blacklisting, violations of contracts among others. It is important to consider reasons as to why people refuse to report misconduct. According to UNDP, 2014 one of the reasons might be gender discrimination.

The reporting channels must be accessible and reliable to ensure that any form of retaliation is counteracted in order to build the confidence of the whistleblower (Khoshabi, 2017). In order for whistleblowing to be effective, there is need to be sensitive to the mechanisms put in place to facilitate reporting of any wrongdoing due to the fact that males and females react differently to corruption as well as whistleblowing. As per ILO, "whistleblower protection mechanisms need to assess and consider the gender dynamics within workplaces that may incentivize or discourage women's and men's equal participation in reporting misconduct" (Chalouat *et al.* 2019).

According to Tilton (2017), research on real whistleblowing does not provide enough response to the question of whether females or males are generally more inclined to report wrongdoing. In conclusion, gender disparities in reporting wrongdoing and facing reprisals need for more theoretical and empirical study. As Tilton (2017) noted, the research on gender variations in whistleblowing-related concerns is inconsistent, showing numerous potential narratives that occasionally clash. Such discrepancies highlight why more research especially in lower and middle-income nations where gender's involvement in whistleblowing has had less consideration needs to be undertaken (Culiberg & Mihelic (2017). According to Martadinata, Pasek, & Wahyuni, (2023) gender has no significant difference for males and females when it comes to whistleblowing and gender also has no moderation of the whistleblowing intentions.

Puni, & Hilton, (2020) conducted a study to find out the effect of power distance culture on whistleblowing intentions by scrutinizing the moderating effect of gender on the causal relationships. The study adopted a descriptive and cross-sectional survey design and used primary data analyzed using correlational and hierarchical regression techniques. their findings showed that there is a significant relationship between power distance culture and whistleblowing intentions, and gender is a moderator of the relationship.

In these nations, females frequently face more obstacles to equality, making the need for measures to advance women even more urgent (United Nations 2020). Males are more conscious to financial benefits linked with whistleblowing than females, however the link between gender and whistleblowing is usually complicated - for example, females are more inclined to feel obliged to report than males (Tilton 2017). According to research done by (Culiberg & Mihelic 2017), there are general systemic differences on how females and males report wrongdoing.

In low- to middle-income nations like Brazil, gender inequality is still deeply ingrained (United Nations 2020). In comprehending gender disparities in whistleblowing, it is important to take into account the cost and consequences of blowing the whistle, a key factor in the prosocial organizational behavior model

(Miceli *et al.* 2008). For example, studies shows that whistleblowing is significantly predicted by fear of reprisal (Mayer *et al.* 2013).

Women react more strongly than males to potential whistleblower ramifications, according to Kaplan *et al.* (2009), and females oftenly consider the consequences of reporting within the organization as being higher (Mitchell 2016). Past research suggest that females consider secretiveness and anti-retaliation provisions more than males do, supporting the idea that whistleblowing is too demanding for women (Tilton 2017). But none of the aforementioned helps us understand why benefits and costs may perceived differently for females and males. Amalia (2019) did a study on how gender, provision of reward and legal protection towards intention to do whistleblowing in the Faculty of Universitas Islam Indonesia, the study adopted quantitative research design. In the study 100 female students participated where purposive sampling was used. The research showed that there were no significant gender disparities between male and female students on the subject matter.

Studies support this idea by demonstrating that women's high-performance assessments are more dependent on their being "lovely people" (Correll & Simard 2016). In other words, in comparison to males, their employment results and abilities are less important. The above study used literature review while the current study used primary data for analysis.

Employees are unlikely to report wrongdoings if the perpetrator occupies a higher position in authority than them (Gao *et al.* 2015). Given that there are fewer females than males performing management roles, "the numbers come out to make it more probable that a witnessed infraction will be by someone higher ranking than a female observer" (Tilton 2017). As a result, women's lower level of authority inside organizations ought to be another factor in their relative reluctance to disclose misconduct.

According to Davis *et al.* (2020), there is a link between PSM and altruistic behaviour for whistleblowers and is consistent with this theory. As a result, higher PSM should be linked to higher intents to report misbehavior by workers. PSM is strongly correlated with both whistleblowing intent and actual reporting of wrongdoing, according to the work done by (Prysmakova & Evans 2020). It is significant to note that the gender of the potential whistleblower has received minimal consideration in prior PSM research on whistleblowing. While some researches (Cho & Song, 2015) do not account for participant’s gender in their analyses, others just utilize gender as a control variable (Potipiroon & Wongpreedee 2020).

Prysmakova and Evans (2020) did research on the Whistleblowing Motivation and Gender. The study used a sample population of 799 participants from a well-established local government in Poland. The results showed that females are less likely to report misdeeds of their bosses than males. Divjak, (2020) in his study on corruption and gender in Bosnia and Herzegovina found out that reporting of corrupt practices depended so much on age and the level of education of women. It also revealed that females would report the cases if they were victims only unlike men who would even do so when they were witnesses.

Males and females are motivated to report corruption by a number of reasons which are based on weighing the pros and cons and also by a number of factors like credibility, responsiveness of the reporting mechanism, safety, perceived relevance and accessibility (Florez et al 2019). It is important to understand the gender differences in reporting corruption. Among the reasons cited in some surveys is that there exists a certain negative attitude among women about potential reporting and in addition women tend to condemn corruption more but report less according to data from the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) 2019. The report further says that in Latin America and Caribbean nations females in most cases belief that reporting corruption may not yield any results.

According to Bullock and Jenkins (2020), females lack the necessary legal knowledge, resources and means to file or report corruption. Females are often valued in terms of their teamwork skills and communication in their place of work rather than for their technical contributions, Correll and Simard (2016). This makes them hesitant to report any wrongdoing and even to challenge their peers at work place. The so-called social judgement in some cases can be so significant and has made some researchers to argue that the most important factor that dictates willingness to blow the whistle is the overall perception by colleagues (Hunt 2016; Brown *et al.* 2014). The social stigma associated with women’s reputation especially on issues related to gender-based violence might prevent victims of who have been sexual harassed from reporting those attacks (Raab 2017).

The selective behaviour of women in reporting wrong doings especially those working in the public sector has been noted. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, females, particularly in rural and conservative areas, in most instances demand for justice when there is rampant misconduct in social sectors such as health and education (Divjak 2020). The role of the tradition and family here cannot be overlooked in shaping the attitude of women towards reporting unethical issues.

The challenges for gender specific forms of corruption such as sextortion are in most cases more. In many instances, there are often lack of safe and gender-sensitive channels that guarantees protection and support of victims of sexual abuse (Feigenblatt, 2020). Females rarely take the risk of whistleblowing due to the repercussions associated with it and this could explain why the likelihood of males reporting could be higher (Liyanarachchi and Adler 2011). Exposing malpractices is a risky affair for everyone but despite this fact women would always experience more stress and anxiety when they do so (Hunt 2016). In fact, some studies report that in Egypt, for instance, women will receive a serious punishment if they expose wrongdoings within the organization (Jurkiewicz and Grossman 2015).

4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the rational choice theory. This theory is used to simulate how people make decisions. It postulates that people weigh the predicted advantages and disadvantages of a certain course of action before actually taking it (Scott, 2000). Bulgurcu *et al.* (2010) provide a process to describe how a person comes to a logical conclusion by drawing on the research done by Paternoster and Pogarsky (2009) and McCarthy (2002). They contend that decision-makers should first consider other available options before choosing a particular course (i.e., potential responses) in a certain situation. They then consider the possible effects of each action. Each potential result of a particular activity may be classified either as a cost or a benefit to the affected party because the fundamental tenet of RCT says that individuals have preferences for various outcomes (McCarthy, 2002). Next, decision-makers group the results of a particular action in order to undertake an overall analysis of how much "utility" will be produced once those results materialize. Utility here might refer to the overall happiness or discontent one will experience as a result of the conduct. The affected persons may weigh the "good" of each potential route that can be taken and select the best option.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design. In addition to testing the hypothesis, the design also used correlation analysis and multiple linear regression as inferential statistics (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2011). This study also adopted a positivism research philosophy. The study targeted the 31,373 employees comprising both teaching and non-teaching staff. The sampling frame comprised of all the staff working in the thirty-one (31) public universities in Kenya. From the target population of 31,373 respondents, the researcher used proportionate sampling to select 395 respondents from the 31 public universities. The study employed a simple random procedure to identify the respondents who took part in the study from all the thirty-one (31) public universities in Kenya. The research made use of use of primary data collected using questionnaires whose validity and reliability were ensured. R Statistical software was used to clean and analyze the data obtained (version 4.3.2). multiple regression analysis was used to examine the connection between a dependent variable and the independent variables (Hair, 2014). The link between the variables as well as their relative strengths were shown by the multiple linear regression model. Tables and bar graphs from the descriptive and inferential statistics were used to display the results.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1. Descriptive statistics

This section provides an analysis of gender differences in whistleblowing intentions among participants in public universities and seeks to address the hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between gender and whistleblowing intentions among employees in public universities.

Table 4.1 includes various statements related to whistleblowing and the responses from both female and male participants, along with the p-values obtained from the Chi-square test for each statement.

The first statement addressed the willingness to report wrongdoing if the method of reporting was anonymous.

The results showed that 54% of males either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with this statement, while only 41.2% of females expressed the same intention. Although the difference did not reach statistical significance (p=0.057), it suggests a trend toward higher willingness among males to report anonymously. Participants were also asked whether they would consider reactions from peers before reporting wrongdoing. The findings revealed that 68.6% of females agreed or strongly agreed with considering peer reactions, compared to 55.1% of males. This difference was statistically significant (p=0.034), indicating that females may be more inclined to take into account the opinions of their peers when making whistleblowing decisions.

For the scenario involving consideration of family reactions before reporting wrongdoing, 26.1% of females agreed, whereas 36.9% of males agreed. This discrepancy was statistically significant (p=0.008), suggesting that males may be less influenced by family opinions when it comes to whistleblowing intentions. When asked if they would report wrongdoing even if the perpetrator is known, both genders exhibited similar intentions, and no significant gender-based differences were observed (p=0.554). This indicates that gender does not strongly influence the decision to report when the wrongdoer is identifiable.

Similarly, no significant gender differences were found regarding the intention to report a wrongdoing even if no reward or protection is guaranteed (p=0.881). Both males and females demonstrated a balanced distribution across response categories, suggesting that the absence of incentives does not significantly impact gender-based whistleblowing intentions.

One of the most striking gender-based differences emerged in the context of reporting even if the perpetrator may lose their job. The results showed that 66.7% of females agreed with this statement, while only 49.2% of males did so. This difference was statistically significant (p=0.009), indicating that females may be more inclined to report wrongdoing, even if job loss is a potential consequence.

VI. Table 6.1 Gender differences in whistle blowing intentions in public universities

Response	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**p-value**	**Mean (SD)**
I will report a wrongdoing if the method of reporting is anonymous.							
Female	41.2%	52.3%	1.3%	2%	3.3%	0.057	4.26 (0.935)
Male	54%	37.4%	2.7%	3.7%	2.1%		4.34 (0.915)
I will consider the reactions from family and peers before I report a wrongdoing							
Female	68.60%	10.50%	5.20%	12.40%	3.30%	0.034	3.44 (0.959)
Male	55.10%	11.20%	3.70%	22.50%	7.50%		3.18 (1.09)
I will consider reactions from family before I report a wrongdoing.							
Female	4.60%	26.10%	7.20%	55.60%	6.50%	0.008	2.88 (1.04)
Male	10.70%	36.90%	5.30%	38%	9.10%		3.25 (1.10)
I will report the wrongdoing even if the perpetrator is my relative							
Female	5.20%	28.80%	9.20%	51%	5.90%	0.554	2.67 (0.981)
Male	7.50%	33.70%	9.10%	42.20%	7.50%		2.82 (1.06)
I will report wrongdoing even if I am not rewarded or protected by the University.							
Female	7.80%	36.60%	4.60%	43.80%	7.20%	0.881	3.02 (1.20)
Male	10.20%	37.40%	4.80%	39%	8.60%		3.06 (1.23)
I will report the wrongdoing even if the perpetrator is likely to lose the job							
Female	2.60%	66.70%	8.50%	18.30%	3.90%	0.09	3.56 (0.855)
Male	8.60%	49.20%	15.50%	22.50%	4.30%		3.46 (0.922)

The analysis revealed a marginal difference in willingness to report when the method is anonymous, with a slightly higher percentage of males expressing this intention. While the difference was not statistically significant, it suggests that gender may play a limited role in anonymous whistleblowing decisions. The anonymity factor may provide a sense of security that transcends gender-related considerations. The intention to consider reactions from peers before reporting wrongdoing exhibited a significant gender difference. More females indicated their willingness to take peer reactions into account, reflecting a potential emphasis on social relationships and group dynamics. This finding aligns with existing research suggesting that females tend to prioritize interpersonal relationships and consensus-building (Martadinata, Pasek, & Wahyuni, 2023; Puni & Hilton, 2020).

The results regarding family reactions revealed that males were less influenced by family opinions in their whistleblowing intentions. This may indicate that males have a greater propensity for making independent decisions in this context. It is important to note that familial relationships and dynamics can vary significantly, and individual experiences may shape these responses. This is in line with other studies which outline that female individuals had a great sense of regard to their family members and dependants when it comes to whistle blowing (Naufal, Sofia, Prawira, & Apandi, 2020; Sachdeva & Chaudhary, 2022).

In addition, both genders displayed similar intentions when it came to reporting wrongdoing, even if the wrongdoer was known. This gender neutrality suggests that the decision to report appears to be driven more by the perceived severity of the wrongdoing and ethical considerations rather than gender-related factors. Similarly, both males and females demonstrated comparable intentions when it came to reporting without the promise of rewards or protection. This suggests that individuals in this study, regardless of gender, are motivated by ethical principles rather than external incentives when deciding to blow the whistle.

Previous studies shows that incentives play a significant role in motivating employees to report misconduct or unethical behavior within organizations (Dewi, Sujana, & Wiguna, 2020; Utami, Irianto, & Prihatiningtias, 2020). Studies consistently demonstrate that the provision of incentives, whether monetary or non-monetary, can enhance whistleblowing reporting(Utami et al., 2020). Financial rewards, job security, protection against retaliation, anonymity, and the opportunity to contribute to organizational improvement are all recognized as powerful motivators. However, scholars also emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance between incentives and an employee's ethical motivation to blow the whistle, with ethical considerations, like a sense of duty, being the primary driver(Babatunde, Lateef, Olanipekun, & Babalola, 2021). The organizational culture is a crucial factor, as organizations with a strong culture of transparency and ethics may rely less on incentives, while those with a culture of secrecy may need them

6.2 Test of Hypothesis

The study sought to test one null hypothesis arising from the objective.

H_O: There is no statistically significant relationship between gender and whistleblowing intentions among employees in public universities.

Linear regression model was fitted as shown below:

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$

Where: Y = whistle blowing intentions; β_0=y-intercept (constant); β_1=Beta coefficient; X_1=Gender and ε= Error term.

The findings revealed that 68.6% of females agreed or strongly agreed with considering peer reactions, compared to 55.1% of males which was statistically significant (p=0.034). In addition, for the question of consideration of family reactions before reporting wrongdoing, 26.1% of females agreed, whereas 36.9% of males agreed and the difference was statistically significant (p=0.008). One of the most striking gender-based differences emerged in the context of reporting even if the perpetrator may lose their job. The results showed that 66.7% of females agreed with this statement, while only 49.2% of males did so. Linear regression model fitted to determine the relationship between gender and whistle blowing showed that males reported as shown in table 4.15 below.

VII. Table 46.2 Relationship between whistle blowing intentions and gender

Predictors	*Estimates*	*std. Error*	*Confidence Interval*	*p-value*
(Intercept)	13.99	0.26	13.47 – 14.50	**<0.001**
Female	Reference			
Male	0.96	0.36	0.26 – 1.66	**0.007**
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.22 / 0.19			

The intercept term indicates that the average whistleblowing intent, when all predictors are zero, is 13.99. The gender variable (Male) shows a positive coefficient of (β = 0.96, p-value = 0.007) indicating that males have, on average, a higher whistleblowing intent compared to females. This effect is statistically significant, suggesting that gender influences whistleblowing intent. The model's coefficient of determination statistics indicate that the predictors explain 22% of the variance in whistleblowing intent (R^2 = 0.22), suggesting that additional factors beyond gender may also play a role in determining whistleblowing intent. Overall, these findings suggest that gender is a significant predictor of whistleblowing intent, with males exhibiting higher intent, on average, compared to females.

The regression model fitted was:

$Y = 13.99 + 0.96X_1 + e$

From this analysis we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a statistically significant relationship between gender and whistleblowing intentions among employees in public universities.

VII. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Summary

This study explored gender differences in whistleblowing intentions among employees within public universities. Analysis of the data showed that both men and women concur that the inclination to blow the whistle within these institutions remains consistent irrespective of gender. Furthermore, the research demonstrated that a high proportion of whistleblowers choose to remain anonymous. Notably, gender-based distinctions emerged in scenarios where the whistleblower risks job loss.

7.2 Conclusions

This study found that there are statistical gender differences in whistle blowing intentions among employees in public universities. The results from the data found that men and women both agree that the intention to blow the whistle in these public institutions is the same regardless of gender. Moreover, the study illustrated that more workers whistle blow anonymously, which makes it difficult to pinpoint their gender. This study found that gender-based differences were evident when it came to cases where the perpetrator would lose their job.

7.3 Recommendations

Based on the finding that there is a significant difference in whistle blowing among employees in public universities, it is recommended that all genders be educated on the importance of whistle blowing including providing incentives for those who whistle blow. Protection should also be given to whistle blowers to encourage more whistle blowing.

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