

THE IMPACT OF GENDER STEREOTYPES ON WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Women continue to encounter multiple hurdles despite diversity and equity initiatives by the Government and policies. Women have made tremendous strides in the workforce but are still in a minority in administrative positions worldwide in multiple sectors, including corporate sector, government, medicine, education and military. Gender stereotypes continue to exist which promote gender prejudice and discrimination among women at workplace. In India the work participation rate of women in workforce stands at 30.0 percent in 2023, their representation at the top level is negligible according to Catalyst report, 2022. In the 'Global gender gap report' (World Economic Forum, 2025), India ranked low at the 131 positions in terms of gender equality and slipped two places from its position in last year. However, a significant body of research illustrates that women's upward mobility has been concentrated in middle management position. Hence, what are the reason that have restricted women to reach at higher level positions is needed to be enquired. This paper outlines different aspects of gender stereotyping and their impact on women's administration in Higher Educational Institutions. However, there is still progress to be made to close the gap, especially in senior-level positions. There are subtle barriers like bias and stereotypes unfavorably encumbering women in administration and often used to explain the lack of women in leadership positions.

Keywords: Gender stereotype, Women, Challenges, Administration, Higher Education.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Women are making successful advancements in the workforce across all sectors of economy. Even while women are outperforming males in terms of education, there is still persisting gender inequality in positions of authority means in administrative level. Despite progress in diversity and equity initiatives, women continue to face significant barriers in many domains, which restricts their participation in administration positions. Numerous factors, such as under-representation in decision-making, gender bias, a lack of sponsorship and participation, work-life balance, and compensation differences, contribute to this ongoing disparity. Women encounter more resistance as they rise through the ranks. Additionally, psychological research has consistently shown that one of the biggest barriers is to women in leadership positions is unconscious or implicit bias (Akram, 2018). Implicit bias is the inadvertent tendency to associate specific characteristics with specific groups (Baer, Heiligt, & Samandari, 2017). These Biases influences our decision-making aspects, information processing and strategy-building processes. All people, regardless of gender, have implicit gender prejudice because

they are exposed to stereotypes through similar socialization experiences (Rogus-Pulia, Humbert, Kolehmainen, & Carnes, 2018).

Discrimination, whether overt or covert, persists despite historical rules and regulations (Akram, 2018). Because of this, women are forced to "direct while not being directive" (Rudman & Glick, 2001). They face social, economic, and psychological pressure to achieve argentic requirements while using the unthinkable prescription to be feminine. Women are particularly exposed to the effects of implicit bias since organizations are unaware of it. One major issue is that organizations are failing to challenge and alter widely held beliefs about what makes a suitable leader (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

In India, gender relations are characterized by a hierarchical structure and a prescribed code of behavior, such as brother over sister and husband over wife (Gupta & Sharma, 2002). During the family socialization process, parents (in a family environment) teach gender-appropriate behavior. Girls are taught that males have positions of authority and that it is crucial for women to submit to men's interests in the welfare of the family. At the early age, girls are taught gender-appropriate clothing and home activities (such cooking, serving food, cleaning, and washing clothes or utensils) to help them get ready for the role of wife or mother. Boys grow up in a world where men rule, and as a result, they have access to opportunities, freedom, and mobility. Expectations for gender-appropriate behavior in India are also articulated by religious and moral values, attitudes, and beliefs (Basu et al., 2017).

2.0 GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotypes are, as the name implies, presumptions about the traits that members of a specific gender should possess or the responsibilities that they ought to play. This is frequently observed in presumptions regarding the roles that men and women are supposed to play and the various traits that are thought to distinguish them. Gender stereotypes are one of the key barriers to women's advancement in leadership roles, leaving women with limited, conflicting, and unfavorable options no matter how they choose to lead (Costigan, 2007).

Sabharwal (2015) discusses and asserts that the characteristics associated with males are also those of leaders. As a result, men appear to have the traits of a successful leader, and this patriarchy prevents other people from realizing the leadership potential of women. As was previously mentioned, a number of metaphors are frequently used to represent women's constraints, including glass escalators, sticky floors, walls, and ceilings. But because women's roles and difficulties have changed, these metaphors no longer accurately reflect the gendered dynamics in the workplace (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The implications of gender stereotypes on women in leadership also include promotion, hiring, firing, and positive performance evaluations. Specifically, women are found to be rated lower in workplace performance evaluations, which play a crucial role in moving up the management ladder. Findings suggest that raters who hold traditional stereotypes of women will associate ineffectiveness to women and often attribute ineffective performance to women (Bauer & Baltes, 2002). In addition to this, women are seen as less likely than men to be able to solve problems. By casting doubt on women's problem-solving competence, stereotypes limit their ability to build critical interpersonal power. In addition, a leader's problem-solving reputation is a key source of credibility with subordinates (Costigan, 2007). Thus, the negative stereotypes surrounding this

skill for women make it difficult to lead, especially in masculine fields. Given these points, there is evidence supporting the notion that negative reactions to successful women are provoked by the perceptions that these women have violated gender stereotypes (Heilman, 2012). The most common kinds of gender stereotypes that concern women are: (i) stereotypes based on the so-called ‘inherent characteristics’ of women; (ii) stereotypes based on the gender roles of women. These types of stereotypes are discussed below.

(i) Stereotypes based on the so-called “inherent characteristics” of women: Assumptions are held about the characteristics of men and women which are believed to be “inherent” to each group. These assumptions extend to their emotional, physical, and cognitive capabilities. There are few assumptions about the traits of women and explains why such notions are incorrect. Women are overly emotional, illogical, and cannot take decisions. But in reality, a person’s gender does not determine or influence their capacity for rational thought. Women are warm, kind, and compassionate. But in real perspective compassion is an acquired characteristic that is unique to every individual. Individuals of all genders can possess (or not possess) compassion. Women in workplaces are usually perceived as emotional, illogical and intuitive decision makers (Green & Casell, 1996). Gilbert, Burnett, Phau and Haar (2010) suggest that embedded social stereotype of women as intuitive decision makers could have been influenced by the different preferences women possess compared to those of men in a workplace setting.

(ii) Stereotypes based on gender roles: Society ascribes specific roles to specific genders, most often seen in the context of men and women. These gender roles are products of social construction and social understandings. For example, men are often believed to be more suited to professional jobs whereas women are believed to be more suited to care for their families. Even when women pursue professional careers, the social behaviour and characteristics expected of them in the private sphere (e.g., performing domestic tasks such as cooking or cleaning) continues to be expected of them. Women are also often expected to behave, dress, and speak in a manner that is compliant with the so-called ‘inherent characteristics’ of women and the corresponding gender roles. Any deviation from these gendered roles leads to social stigmatisation.

It is assumed that women are more nurturing and better suited to care for others but in reality, people of all genders are equally suited to the task of caring for others. Women are often socially conditioned to care for others from a young age. Many women are also forced to abandon their careers to care for children and the elderly. Indian working women are more vulnerable to gendered attitudes at work and home. When Indian women professionals try to straddle the roles of caregiver and provider in modern society, they are heavily burdened with centuries of social conditioning reinforcing regressive societal attitudes towards Indian women (Gowda & Rao, 2018). Societal attitudes are based on feminine subjugation espoused by the Manu Smriti (an ancient Indian religious text dictating the functioning of Indian society) (Chakravarti, 2018; Chaudhuri, 2016) and the perception of the role of Indian women as self-sacrificing mothers and devout wives (Desai & Krishnaraj, 2004). It is believed that work is still the man’s primary responsibility, and family is the primary responsibility of women (Sahu & Rath, 2003).

Another assumption is that women who are also mothers are less competent in the office because they are distracted by childcare. But in reality, women who have “double duty”, i.e.,

work outside the home and raise children are not less competent in the workplace. However, women are still tasked with the responsibility of playing a dual role both at home and in the workplace as it is almost impossible for them to break through the patriarchal and familial social contexts (Srinivasan, Murty, & Nakra, 2013). This has resulted in many Indian women preferring to defer their marriage and motherhood plans until they feel settled in their careers.

3.0 WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

The Gross enrolment ratio of Indian women in higher education has shown a steady rise in the past two decades. It is increased by 500 percent in the last 40 years across the globe but access to higher education by women has not always translated into career opportunities. While Indian women constitute 48 percent of total enrolment in higher education, India shows a negative trend concerning women entering in the workforce despite increased literacy rate and GER of women in higher education. Social-cultural norms, economic factor, lack of family support etc. have resulted in this equity (Singh, 2021). In recent years, India has seen significant growth in the number of women graduating from colleges and universities (University Grants Commission, 2022), followed by a significant rise in women taking up jobs across sectors. However, according to the Catalyst (2023) report for India, while the work participation rate of Indian women in workforce stands at 30.0 percent. In the 'Global gender gap report' (World Economic Forum, 2025), India ranked low at the 131 positions in terms of gender equality and slipped two places from its position in last year. India has 54 public central universities, 441 public state universities, 295 private universities and 130 deemed to be universities, comprising a total of 875 universities. In a study by Banker and Banker (2017) on 810 higher education institutes/universities, only 54 institutes or universities are represented by women as their dean or director; that is, about 6.7 percent. There were only 4 female directors across the 73 Institutes of National Importance (INIs): about 5.4 percent of women leaders. These prestigious institutes (conferred special status by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)) are comprised of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs) and a few others, none of which was found to have a woman director. Major central universities in India have never had a female vice-chancellor. Jamia Millia Islamia got its first female vice-chancellor, Dr Najma Akhtar, in 2019, since the creation of the university in 1920. Delhi University was founded in 1922, but is yet to see a female vice-chancellor. Ambedkar University, Delhi (a public state university) has recently appointed Prof (Dr) Anu Singh Lather as its first female vice-chancellor. The reality is that women's participation at decision-making levels in any field is dismally low. Because they constitute almost half the population, they are very few in decision making process. The picture is the same in educational administration although women have gained access to higher education.

By and large, the outlook of male faculty toward women faculty in the higher education sector in India was no different from the rest of the society in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics disciplines (Gupta & Sharma, 2002). Gender segregation was often noticed in HEI. Male faculty expected women to be submissive, and assertive women who spoke their minds were considered "not normal." Married women faculty were respected than the single women faculty, and interaction with the male faculty was easier for married women than the single or the divorced. Men faculty viewed that women cannot excel in research primarily because they lack accessibility of contacts and have limited geographical mobility, and due to

lack of female mentors. Male faculty also expressed that women are not in the committee because they cannot chat, sit, or drink in the evenings during which names of faculty for committees are decided. Both male and female faculty believed time constraint (due to family commitments and family pressures) was the major hurdle for women to excel in the higher education sector. Women faculty considered male faculty insensitive to the special needs of women (e.g., male faculty was not happy when female faculty went on maternity leave). Marriage and motherhood affected their research productivity alone and not their job involvement. Indian female faculty were less keen on having paid help during their motherhood as they believed those providing paid help may be untrained or illiterate. However, some of the female faculty received spousal support, although their mothers-in-law were not happy to see their spouse helping them in the household chores (Gupta & Sharma, 2002).

The imperceptible barrier that keeps women out of leadership roles in gendered organisations and institutions. There are other invisible barriers that prevent women from achieving higher level positions, such as implicit bias, gender stereotypes, and gender bias. Important obstacles like gender stereotypes are extremely troublesome since they emphasize the inherent disparities between men and women, which tends to oversimplify reality (Costigan, 2007).

Gender stereotypes prevent women from advancing in leadership because they cause them to be disregarded, undervalued, and underutilized at the workplaces (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Job segregation between men and women can also be explained by emotional labor. The "softer" feelings associated with tasks including nurturing and loving behaviors are referred to as emotional labor. Clerical workers, administrative assistants, receptionists, secretaries, and those in the education and para-professional fields, as well as those in the public sector (health and human services, for example), consider these emotions to be crucial.

4.0 IMPACT OF GENDER STEREOTYPING ON WOMEN IN THE ADMINISTRATION

Stereotype threat is the unpleasant realization that one may be evaluated according to a negative stereotype or that one may even seem to validate a negative stereotype because it seems personally relevant, possibly by offering an apparent justification for one's actions or experiences (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). To put it another way, stereotype threat occurs when someone expects to be negatively assessed or treated because of the unfavorable opinion of their group (Kumar & Dutt, 2008).

Preconceived biasness: Cabrera, Sauer, and Thomas-Hunt (2009) use role congruity theory to examine the impacts of stereotyping and explain why different Indian cultures may have different perspectives on men and women leaders. Perceptions of the incongruity of women's qualities with those associated with leaders lead to lower expectations for women's leadership potential and assessments of the actual behavior of female leaders. The most significant governance issue currently confronting management, directors, and shareholders of contemporary firms is the gender, ethnicity, and cultural composition of the board of directors Zahidi and Ibarra (2010).

Tokenism: Bilimoria, Godwin, and Zelechowski (2007) state that tokenism is one of the negative consequences of gender stereotyping. The authors found that male counterparts still

act tokenism toward women in senior positions. Tokenism is impacted by assimilation, polarization, and discriminatory visibility, according to the authors. Women managers who rise to higher levels are more likely to experience tokenism, and the first woman to progress often encounters bias and stereotyping from the majority group, according to Gatrell and Cooper's (2007) analysis of the relationship between gender stereotyping and tokenism.

According to Heilman (2001), women are frequently viewed as emotionally unstable, weak, and timid, while men are perceived as emotionally strong, assertive, and achievers in the workplace. Research by Zafarullah (2000) that examined the position of women in Bangladeshi workplaces discovered examples of these attitudes. The impression that women are less physically, cognitively, and emotionally equipped to handle particular problems, are temperamental, and lack ambition are only a few examples of the discriminatory views the author saw pervasive throughout the organization.

Women are risk-averse: Gupta and Dass (2010) claim that it is a common belief is that women are risk-averse but argue on the basis of their findings that women are in fact not risk-averse, but are able to embrace risk. The authors found that women are seen as risk-averse as risk-taking is unrecognized because they mitigate costs when undertaking risk. Role-congruent behaviour contributes to the perception that women are risk-averse.

Women are known for their intuitive approach to decision-making: Men are thought to demonstrate gender-neutral reasoning and decision-making, while women administrators are perceived as emotional and illogical in the workplace (Green & Casell, 1996). The idea that female managers are more intuitive than their male counterparts is refuted by a study on intuition and women managers by Hayes et al. (2004), which found no difference in intuitive decision-making between male and female managers. In support of this claim, Robbins and Judge (2007) note that, in contrast to the notion that women make intuitive decisions, women often overanalyze issues before making choices. It is tempting to conclude from this that the embedded stereotype of women as intuitive decision makers is influenced by the differing preferences of women and men in workplace settings.

Leadership is frequently viewed through a male lens- Schein (2007) highlights how one of the most prevalent stereotypes in the workplace that promotes bias against women in managerial selection, placement, promotion, and training decisions is the Think Manager–Think Male viewpoint. According to the author, one of the biggest obstacles facing women in management worldwide is the enduring misconception that links management to men. By creating an index with 92 descriptive categories and guidelines to examine the connection between gender role preconceptions and necessary management traits, Schein (1973) started the investigation into the Think Manager–Think Male mindset. The study's conclusions demonstrated that, particularly among male respondents, there is a connection between perceptions of necessary managerial traits and gender role stereotypes. This suggested that people usually associate men candidates with managerial roles and that therefore women face biased treatment when seeking to enter and advance in management positions.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Women have historically faced numerous prejudiced beliefs and stereotypes, impeding their access to fair and equal treatment within society. Women face real contradictions in the professional world, including blatant and subtle sexism, discrimination, and sexual harassment. By consciously avoiding the use of stereotypes in decision-making and stereotype promoting language, the government policies can foster an environment where gender equality is upheld and respected. Words matter, as they shape narratives and influence societal attitudes. The use of more inclusive language can help break harmful patterns of thinking.

Women are breaking ground on fundamental issues that for years have brought them down. They are surpassing men in higher levels of education. However, the obstacles are still present. The leadership gap has proven to be stubbornly persistent. The understanding of subtle invisible barriers in organizations such as implicit bias, gender bias, second-generation gender bias, and gender stereotypes need to be understood and addressed. It is time to challenge the disparities women continue to face and focus on ways to break down structural barriers. So, in order to achieve gender equality and representation of women at higher positions, women need to develop confidence to take up leadership roles rather than waiting for the positions to be offered to them. Women require mentors and role models to enhance their self-worth. Mentoring seemed to have a positive impact on the career paths of women who strive to advance to higher positions. In conclusion, women in leadership positions need networking, mentors for the purpose of sharing contacts and information as well as providing moral support. Women also need to negotiate with their partners in terms of sharing parenting and home responsibilities so that they may not shy away from taking leadership roles because of not wanting to be seen to be neglecting their social responsibilities. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from organizations, policymakers, and society as a whole. Strategies to promote gender equity and support women's advancement include implementing inclusive hiring and promotion practices, establishing supportive work environments that accommodate caregiving responsibilities, and advocating policy reforms to address systemic barriers.

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