

Barriers for women leadership with special reference to Divisional Secretariats in Badulla District

W. M. G. Chamari*, **A. K. Anjala** and **I. M. S. Weerasighe**
*Department of Business Management, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka,
Mihintale, Sri Lanka.*

**Corresponding author: wijesundara.chamari@yahoo.com*

Introduction

Women play a significant role in economic activities including managing businesses and holding leadership positions. However, women are underrepresented in management positions with compared to men all over the world (Tai et al., 2005). Female managers, who are called “women managers”, are faced with strongly held negative stereotypes, distinguishing them from their male counterparts in the workplace (Thompson, 2000). Barriers are the factors that may be holding women back from achieving greater representation in the top leadership ranks; women are much more likely than men to point to societal and institutional factors such as the country not being ready to elect more female political leaders and women being held to higher standards than men in business and government. As suggested by the literature, there are mainly three types of barriers for woman leadership as individual level barriers, societal level barriers and organizational level barriers. For many women, in addition to the roles they hold in their companies, they remain the primary caretakers for their families (Hughes et al., 2009). Conversely, many women have voluntarily left their jobs due to family decisions (Baxter & Al A’ali, 2016; Wallace, 2015). Gurian and Annis (2008) found that many women lose their drive to excel due to the many obstacles met along the path of becoming a manager. These obstacles include discrimination, stereotyping, prejudice, family demands, and lack of opportunities (Emory, 2008).

Another main barrier is that the social perception of women as inferior (Kent et al., 2010). Mounting evidence suggest that there are negative gender stereotypes about women which make them encounter more barriers than men in the workplace. These negative stereotypes or beliefs are more apparent when women seek or hold managerial positions (Okafor, 2016). A number of obstacles hindering in the organization for women enhancement to higher leadership positions, the most significant of these obstacles were the negative official attitude towards leadership of women, the social norms and stereotype, sex discrimination against women for promotion to higher positions, as well as personal women's circumstances such as families' relations and husband lack of understanding of women roles and reluctance of employee to be headed by

women (Al Maaaitah et al., 2012). Even though there are number of studies in the international context there is still a literature gap in Sri Lanka. Thus this study is manly intended to investigate the barriers faced by woman leaders in Sri Lanka with special reference to women employees in Divisional Secretariats in Badulla District in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

As a quantitative explanatory study, the study is mainly intended to identify main barriers faced by women employees in Divisional Secretariats in Badulla District in Sri Lanka. The population of the study was all women employees who work in Divisional Secretariat offices at Badulla District, out of them 93 women respondents who work in Bandarawela, Haliella and Haputhale Divisional Secretariats were selected as the sample based on simple random sampling technique. The questionnaire was formed basically based on the literature and accordingly, women leadership was identified as the dependent variable and individual level barriers, societal level barriers and organizational level barriers were selected as independent variables. Researcher administrated questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Cronbach Alpha was used to test the reliability of the variables and descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis were used as the main data analyzing methods by employing Statistical Package for Social Sciences 20.0 version.

Results and discussion

Content validity of the questionnaire is ensured through the sound literature. Table 1 represents the reliability analysis result of the variables. Cronbach Alpha values of the all the variables are greater than 0.7 and indicate that the all the variables are reliable.

Table 1 Result of reliability analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Individual level barriers	.757	11
Societal level barriers	.809	8
Organizational level barriers	.779	16
Women leadership	.720	5

When considering the marital status of the women employees it was evident that 83 out of 93 women employees were married and only 10 were single. Under the descriptive statistics mean values, standard deviation were used and the mean values of individual level barriers and societal level barriers were 3.9 and 3.3 respectively. They indicate that the selected respondents have moderately higher level of individual level barriers and societal level barriers. Moreover the mean

value of the organizational level barriers was 2.4 which was less than the level of other dimensions. Further, the mean value of women leadership is 3.5 which indicates that women face barriers when holding leadership positions.

According to the correlation analysis both individual level barriers and organizational barriers were 0.271 and 0.242 respectively and that was significant at the levels of 0.05. But the societal level barriers were not significant at 0.05 levels. It indicates that only two independent variables are statistically correlated with the dependent variable namely individual level barriers and organizational barriers.

Table 2 represents the result of regression analysis. According to the results, R squared value (R^2) value of the model is 0.209 which explains that 20.9 percent variation in the women leadership is explained by h individual level barriers, organizational barriers and societal level barriers.

Table 2 Result of regression analysis

Model	Regression Coefficient	t	Sig.
(Constant)		-.789	.432
Individual Level Barriers	.301	3.093	.003
Societal Level Barriers	.237	2.209	.030
Organizational Level Barriers	.411	3.852	.000

*Dependent Variable: women leadership ** Significant at 0.05 level*

The regression coefficients of individual level barriers, societal level barriers and organizational level barriers are 0.301, 0.231, 0.411 respectively and significant at 0.05 level. Resulting, in Sri Lankan context, individual level barriers, societal level barriers and organizational level barriers significantly effect on women leadership at Divisional Secretariat offices in Badulla District.

Conclusion and recommendations

The result indicates that the individual level barriers, societal level barriers and organizational level barriers are affecting women leadership in study area by supporting the finding of previous studies (Elmuti, 2009; Ajhal, 2014; Jayathilake, 2012; Shin, 2013). Based on these findings, study recommends that organizations should focus on enhancing the skills and abilities of woman employees by exposing them to training and human development programs. Moreover, it is important to spread positive attitudes in order to break the traditional misperceptions and conceptions regarding women. At the same, time there should be policies that are directed to reduce discrimination against women in recruitment and appointment to higher positions (promotions). Finally, it is recommended that woman should be actively involved in decision making process. Women should be viewed as an important employment of the success of the organization.

References

- Ajhal. (2014). Factors that affect women participation in leadership and decision making position . *Asian Business Consortium* .
- Al Maaitah, R., Oweis, A., Olimat, H., Altarawneh, I., & Al Maaitah, H. (2012). Barriers hindering Jordanian women's advancement to higher political and leadership positions. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 13(5), 101.
- Baxter J., & Al A`ali H. (2016) Women Leaders in the Middle East and the West. In: Speaking as Women Leaders. Palgrave Pivot, London
- Elmuti, H. J. (2009). Challenges women face in leadership positions and organizational effectiveness. *Journal of leadership education* .
- Emory (2008). Is this the year “equal pay for equal work” is addressed? *Knowledge @ Emory*, 11 September. Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. 18 July 2017, retrieved from <http://knowledge.emory.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1175>
- Gurian, M., & Annis, B. (2008). Leadership and the Sexes. *Using gender science to create success in business, San Francisco, CA*.
- Hughes, R. L., Ginnett, R. C., & Curphy, G. J. (2009). Leadership: Enhancing the lessons of experience (6" ed.). *Boston: McGrawIrwin*.
- Jayathilaka, V.K, K. P. (2012). Women Managers and Their Personal Barriers for Upward Mobility in Private and Public Sectors.
- Kent, T. W., Blair, C. A., Rudd, H. F., & Schuele, U. (2010). Gender differences and transformational leadership behavior: Do both German men and women lead in the same way. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 6(1), 52-66.
- Okafor, E A. O. (2016). Barriers to women leadership and managerial aspirations in Lagos,Nigeria:an emperical analysis. *African Journal of Business Management*.
- Shin, H. Y. S. C. (2013). What are the top factors that prohibit women from advancing into leadership positions at the same rate as men?
- Tai A, Sims OF, Randi L (2005). The perception of the glass ceiling in high technology companies'. *J. Leadership Organ. Stud.*, Fall issue.
- Thompson, M. D. (2000). Gender, leadership orientation, and effectiveness: Testing the theoretical models of Bolman & Deal and Quinn. *Sex roles*, 42(11-12), 969-992.
- Wallace, T. (2015). Increasing the proportion of female superintendents in the 21st century. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 35, 42.