

Women's Academic Achievement and Research Excellence: Issues and Challenges

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Academicians face a lot of barriers to achieve excellence. Women are the most affected population worldwide who struggle a lot to achieve the academic excellence. Gender bias is one of the reasons for this struggle. These barriers can influence the career of women. Many studies report that the existence of "impostor syndrome" among women as one of the barrier. It means that women often feel inadequate and intellectually being marked as incapable. There might be other strong reasons for women to suffer with problems related to achievement of research and academic excellence. It is important that we find out the reasons and help women to face those barriers with effective strategies to overcome the challenges. Many developed countries like the United Kingdom have developed programme for helping women to achieve academic excellence. It requires a lot of funding and other resources. Relatively very little is known about the life experiences and problems of women as leaders and achievers. An article written by Merida.L.Johns (2013), titled as "breaking the ceiling: structural, cultural, and organizational behaviors preventing women from achieving senior executive positions" reports that some of the barriers for women to achieve senior executive positions as societal, governmental and business related reasons.

A case study was conducted by Matangi et al., (2012) in an African university for women among female students. The main goal of the above stated study was to ascertain the societal obligations, challenges and coping mechanisms adopted by them. The study reported that their obligations militating against their education were spousal role, raising family, community and work related responsibilities. Some of the challenges for educational achievement listed by female students were paying tuition fees, life style changes, welfare needs at university and family quality time.

A study on gender imbalances as grounded in behavioral differentiation, states confidently that due to women's low self-esteem, they diminish themselves and face failures in interviews or do not wish to apply for higher positions (Princeton 2013).

Madsen (2012) stated that the role of female academicians is an advantage as they bring out their ways of knowing and share their experiences than their male counterparts. But their stories are not taken into account for policy making and decision making systems.

All the above studies documented the issues related to academic excellence in women. All of these are from western counterparts and lacks from Indian Context. Hence the studies must be done to explore and describe the challenges and barriers faced by Indian women to achieve research and academic excellence. Various strategies have been developed by universities and educational institutions to help women to achieve their goals.

Some strategies documented to achieve academic excellence are structural change in institutions, gender equality and excellence. The focus should be on developing special programmes for women, example providing women with the power and authority to lead research teams and leadership positions as per their qualifications and experience. The policies of an institution for research and academic promotions should be transparent and equal to both men and women.

Meanwhile social support systems for women need to be reconsidered. As we find women struggling more to look after children and family responsibilities. Facilities like child care centers in educational institutions can help the women a lot. Maternity and paternity leave policies should also be available to women who aspire to achieve academic excellence. Funding is another big hurdle for women to achieve their higher educational qualifications. We also find that the academic and research excellence can be motivated among women if good role models are available. There are some

personal qualities which would help women to achieve excellence. Some of those are being responsible, accountable, independent, resilient to change, self-awareness, tolerant to potential situations and appreciation.

To conclude higher education to women can be considered as one of the way to gender equality. Even though nowadays we find more women than men applying for higher education, but still remain a step back than men in assuming leadership positions either in educational or research setup. Global literature suggests that men and women are placed differently in higher education settings in different leadership positions, but still women are being under-represented which requires academic and research excellence.

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