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WOMEN AT WORK: ARE THE STEPS TO THE TOP FRAGILE? AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN THE SRI LANKAN PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

In the Sri Lankan public education system, school and government educational administrative positions are those in which a teacher can advance in his/her career path. Though women teaching at public schools in Sri Lanka comprise of more than three-fourths of the total teaching population, female representation in school administration as well as in government educational administration is low when compared to female representation in the teaching profession in Sri Lanka. By exploring afore mentioned context through this study, it exposes the issues and problems that block advancement opportunities for women in administrative positions in the public educational system. Primary data of the study were generated through conducting ten in-depth interviews with women who are currently employed in the public educational sector. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis and three theoretical concepts, namely, the Glass Ceiling, the Glass Escalator and the Queen Bee syndrome were when interpreting the analyzed data. Findings of the study reveal that women face many obstacles when attempting to gain administrative positions, mainly due to gender bias which results in certain sociocultural and behavioral barriers. Therefore, indirectly, this context has created an advantage for men when they compete for these administrative positions in the public educational system in Sri Lanka. Thus, the

researcher argues that the fragility of career steps occurs due to certain features of Sri Lankan culture which is based on patriarchal values, where the notion of "womanhood" is largely shaped by men and is built up within the socialization process of women.

Key words: Administrative Positions, Career Advancement, Glass Ceiling, Glass Escalator, Queen Bee Syndrome

INTRODUCTION

According to the 'population and housing census 2011' women represent the majority of the population, being 51.60% of the total population. The privilege of free education is provided in Sri Lanka to both men and women. Sri Lanka is a high performing nation in the field of Human Resource Development and in the year 2010, Sri Lanka satisfied the Millennium Development Goal of 'Universal Primary Education'. According to demographic statistics, women represent 52% of the total population of the Island. However, where the participation of women in decision making and legislation of the country is concerned, extremely few are in decision making positions in the country. Since it had only 5.78% representation of women in the lower house of Parliament in Sri Lanka, based on data from 190 countries collected by the Inter-Parliamentary Union as of 1 April 2015, Sri Lanka was

ranked 130th out of 139 countries, a very low rank indeed. Leadership in trade unions, which have some degree of political clout, has traditionally been male dominated (Asian Development Bank, 2015: 6; original emphasis).

When it comes to the context of women in teaching and administrative positions in the Sri Lankan government school system, once a teacher has progressed through the Sri Lankan Teacher Education Service grade levels, further career advancement leads from the classroom to administrative positions such as that of a principal. Other careers pathways open to teachers include: in-service advisor, working in a particular zone and providing in-service skills training to teachers; and becoming a teacher-educator in one of the colleges of education. Teachers and principals with the necessary qualifications and experience can apply for posts in the Sri Lankan Education Administration Service or to become a Commissioner in the Examinations Department after qualifying in a competitive examination. According to the Sri Lankan Educational Statistics (2016) the representation of women as teachers in government owned primary and secondary schools in Sri Lanka is 75% of the total teacher population. However, their representation as principals and educational administrators is 32% and 57%, respectively. Though the representation of women in teaching/pedagogical positions in public schools in Sri Lanka is more than three-fourths of the total teaching population, statistical evidence clearly reveals that women are underrepresented in school administration as well as in other educational administration spheres compared to women's representation in the teaching profession in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this is identified as a significant gender related scenario in the Sri Lankan public education system. In this context, this empirical study intends to explore the reason/s for women's underrepresentation

in school and educational administrative positions when compared to women's representation in the teaching profession in the Sri Lankan public school education system, by identifying the barriers that prevent opportunities for the advancement of women into administrative positions which are available to them during the latter part of their teaching careers. Subsequently, the researcher has evaluated the applicability of 'feminine' qualities and matriarchal norms to women teachers' advancement to and performance in administrative positions in the Sri Lankan public education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women and gender related studies have a vital place in interdisciplinary fields of study and it is identified as an important category which has links to various spheres such as the socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres as well as to the contemporary work context. Gender is a phenomenon which has been defined variously by many scholars, feminists among them, since it does not have an exact definition. Gender is not only a grammatical term. To talk of persons or creatures of the masculine or feminine gender, meaning of the male or female sex, is either a jocularity (permissible or not according to the context) or a blunder (Fowler, 1940). According to Scott (1986), in its most recent usage, 'gender' seems to have first appeared among American feminists who wanted to insist on the fundamentally social quality of distinctions based on sex. The word 'gender' denoted a rejection of the biological determinism implicit in the use of such terms as 'sex' or 'sexual difference'. The literature asserts that 'sexism,' which refers to the belief that one sex is innately superior to the other, has frequently emphasized that the man and masculinity is somehow more elite and more honored than woman and

femininity. Simone de Beauvoir (1949), in her groundbreaking work "The Second Sex" examines the reasons why women have been forced to accept a secondary place in society compared to men. She questions why women are considered to be secondary persons, despite the fact that women constitute half of the human race. She supports her arguments with data from biology, physiology, ethnology, anthropology, mythology, folklore, philosophy and economics, and documents the status of women throughout history, from the age of hunter-gatherers to the mid-20th century. Butler (1990) problematizes the difference between sex as a naturally given category and gender as a socio- culturally constructed category. She argues that sex is also a socially constructed category which exists as part of social and cultural practices and exists in the context of a discourse that has a history and its own social and political dynamics.

Areas such as mentoring, networking, power, sexual harassment, the glass ceiling and sex-based discrimination, career-advancement, corporate mobility, opportunity structures, personal development, relational development, work-life balance, career interruptions, women's leadership, organizational turnover, and human resources policies have all become well-known study areas in the broad category "women and career". The study done by O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoira (2008) identifies patterns that cumulatively contribute to the current understanding of women's careers and the associated paradoxes emerging from these patterns. They conclude that male-defined constructions of work and career success continue to dominate organizational research and practice. Theory building and testing of women's career development continues to draw heavily on frameworks and conceptions derived from male constructions of work and careers (O'Neil et al., 2008). The study of Powell,

Butterfield and Parent (2002) supports O'Neil et al. (2008), while uncovering some other modern career patterns and paradoxes which are associated with women's careers. According to Powell et al. (2002), stereotypically masculine traits are still equated more with sound management practices than are stereotypically feminine traits. Powell's argument is highly applicable to the context of Asian cultures as well. Patriarchal societies are generally male dominated. Many women in male dominated societies actually prefer to be controlled by men. That preference has been ingrained in them through early socialization processes. According to Ragins (1998), women in managerial positions are forced to develop managerial styles that are not particularly masculine or feminine, but rather, are acceptable to male colleagues, supervisors and subordinates.

When it comes to administrative positions in public school education systems, men are allocated higher positions while women occupy the lower ranks (Addi-Racah, 2002). In spite of the intense feminization of the teaching profession and the perception that teaching is a female occupation, men nonetheless have received a higher status than women within the educational system, and there is a clear ranking of jobs, with men being preferred for positions of principals of schools (Addi-Racah, 2002). Though school teaching has become a largely feminine occupation, men have preserved their dominance and hegemony by moving to positions of leadership, leaving women as simple teachers (Addi-Racah & Ayalon, 2002). As per Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2014), while there seem to be no gender based difference in features such as family responsibilities, lack of aspiration to management positions, lack of mobility, female educators' fitness to hold management positions and lack of

supportive networks being the main barriers to female educators' promotion in school management positions, gender based differences exist in other factors such as lack of support from male colleagues, gender stereotyping, and female educators' uncertainty about their own abilities to manage. Stereotyping, culture and tradition, low level of women's education, perceived lack of confidence/self-esteem, and lack of mentorship are identified as the factors which affect underrepresentation of women in positions as principals (Mogra, 2013). There are three sources of gender inequality in educational administration. The first pertains to the individual level, such as ambitions, ability, or concurrent responsibilities; the second to the organizational or occupational context in which a person works, such as screening procedures and occupational vacancies; and the third source is related to the wider social context such as the labor-market structure or sex role stereotypes (Reihl & Byrd, 1997 cited in Addi-Racchah & Ayalon, 2002). Women in educational workplaces can be uplifted by facilitating better environments for women in the educational workplace, by highlighting the way gender functions in the school administration by discussing these issues widely, by changing the way language is used, by positively encouraging women to apply to positions of power, and by supporting women in those positions of power; and when women are given spaces to thrive, it is certain that the education system will be much more diverse, nuanced, and conducive to equality (Harrison, 2014). How have women shaped leadership in education? What do women principals, superintendents, deans and directors do with their relatively recently acquired power? What can they do? And on what must they keep a vigilant eye to maintain this toehold in educational leadership? These questions are even more important in light of some recent global

changes in societies as a result of the far-reaching economic crisis (Grogan, 2010). The related literature supports the thesis in order to restate and justify the phenomenon which the researcher intended to the study.

The Glass Ceiling and the Glass Escalator

The "Glass Ceiling" and the "Glass Escalator" are ubiquitous theories used by researchers examining women's careers, women and leadership, women's career development, and women and work. According to Burke (1997), women in all developing countries face a glass ceiling to advancement to senior management in medium and large organizations. The term "Glass ceiling" refers to "the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps women from rising to the upper rung of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements" (Mishra, 2014). In other words, the concept of the 'glass ceiling' refers to the various barriers that prevent qualified women from advancing upward in their organizations into management positions (Chauma & Ncube, 2010). The barriers that prevent women from ascending to senior management positions in large corporations have often been described by the metaphor "glass ceiling", which is a transparent barrier which prevents women from moving up the corporate ladder past a certain point (Morrison et al. 1987 cited in Jayawardane and Sajeewani, 2015). According to Williams (1992), when men and women compete for the same position, men have an advantage even in a female-dominated occupation like teaching. Many of the men perceived their token status as males in predominantly female occupations as an advantage in hiring and promotions (Williams, 1992). Williams (2013) revisited her argument on the concept of the 'Glass Escalator' related to males in female dominant professions and identified two major limitations of the

concept: (1) it fails to adequately address inter-sectionality; in particular, it fails to theorize race, sexuality, and class ; and (2) it was based on the assumptions of traditional work organizations, which are undergoing rapid transformation in our neo-liberal era. The glass escalator assumes stable employment, career ladders, and widespread support for public institutions (e.g., schools and libraries), but those conditions rarely characterize the job market today (Williams, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

The nature of the research question, the researcher intended to explore directed him to locate his study in the interpretivist paradigm of the qualitative approach to researching. An interpretivist researcher aims to see the world through the eyes of the people being studied, allowing them multiple perspectives on reality, rather than the one, unshakeable reality espoused by positivism (Greener, 2008). Further, this study undertaken through the qualitative approach deals with the personal experiences, feelings, emotions, values, and perceptions of the participants and the researcher as well as with the social phenomena being studied. According to Silverman (2000), the methods used by qualitative researchers exemplify a common belief that they can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data. In this study, the researcher we adopted the case study design focusing on a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of underrepresentation of women in administrative positions in the education sector in Sri Lanka. The researcher selected the case study design in order to gain insight through a deep exploration of the phenomenon under study and to deal successfully with the complexity inherent in it. Moreover, the case study design provides an opportunity for a specific aspect of the problem to be

studied in depth within a limited time. Also, the inductive approach is adopted which leads to the subsequent theorization of the results from the data analysis, discussion and findings. When the predominant research strategy is qualitative, a case study tends to take an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research (Bryman & Bell, 2010). Yin (1994) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined.

The participants were selected from four zones of four administrative districts in Sri Lanka. The Dimbulagala zone in the Polonnaruwa district in the North Central province, the Balangoda zone in the Ratnapura district in the Sabaragamuwa province and the Piliyandala zone in the Colombo district and the Horana and Mathugama zones in the Kalutara district in the Western province were the locations selected. The population of the study was all female teachers, principals and education directors in the Sri Lankan public school education system. By using the purposive sampling technique, ten women who are currently occupied in pedagogical and administrative positions in the system were selected as the sample. According to Greener (2008), in purposive sampling, the researcher uses his/her own judgment to select a sample. In qualitative research, purposive sampling is often used when the samples and populations are small. This qualitative, case study research also used a small sample, targeting an in-depth interpretation by using the information gathered from the participants. Data were collected from primary and secondary data sources. The primary data for the analysis was gathered via one to one and a half hour semi structured in-depth interviews conducted with each and every participant.

Interviews are one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research (Mason, 2002). The secondary data were gathered mainly from the Data Management Branch of the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. The thematic analysis technique was used as the data analysis technique. Thematic analysis is an approach where meanings and concepts are extracted from the data and includes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the research process, the researcher was conscious about adhering to all the necessary ethical considerations.

DATA ANALYSIS

Four female school teachers (Shiromala, Chandrika, Manel and Jayanthi), four female school principals (Neela, Srma, Kumariand Mahesha) and two educational directors (Kusum and Anula) were selected as the sample in order to gather primary data using semi-structured in-depth interviews. When analyzing the qualitative data gathered from these participants, thematic analysis was utilized as the method of analysis. This involves categorizing ideas frequently expressed by the respondents and identifying meaningful themes and patterns that emerge. Three main themes were identified through the interview records (transcripts), and under the third theme, the researcher identified eight sub themes which exposed the barriers which hinder women from getting into administrative positions during their career paths. All the themes were comprehensively analyzed and critically discussed by applying theoretical models to understand real life scenarios in order to provide an understanding of women in the public education system in Sri Lanka, to identify significant behavioral patterns of these women and to identify the problems they face when advancing into administrative positions.

Women's perceptions of their current positions in their careers

One theme focused on participants' points of view on the position that they currently occupy and their preference, or otherwise, to advance to administrative positions in their career. Their attitudes to the position in which they are currently occupied were sought by the researcher during the interview.

"I think the students are more attracted and close to the female teachers more than the male teachers. As a female teacher she can act the role of a mother within the school because the mother is closer to the children than the father". (Shiromala, a teacher)

"I feel proud of being a principal, because I feel I have taken over the responsibility of building the future of this country. Parents hand over their children to us to make them a resource. We enrich the student not only with subject knowledge, but also with skills and attitudes". (Srma, principal)

Here, the principal attributes qualities of a mother to the female teacher. A mother is the very first teacher of a child, and within the role of a mother she incorporates the role of a teacher. A mother enriches the lives of her children and guides them to a better future; teachers also enrich the lives of their students, imparting knowledge, skills and values, and attempt to ensure a better future for them as well. Therefore, the roles of mother and female teacher are sometimes interchangeable, and both can ensure the wellbeing of their children/students. Teachers, therefore, can necessarily be proud about their job role and its outcomes.

Significant characteristics of female administrators in the public education system

This section analyzes the significant characteristics of women in administrative

positions, specifically how women's inherent matriarchal characteristics help to ensure success in their careers.

"A female principal can act the mother's role in the school. Although society claims that the woman's brain is only the length of a spoon handle, I think women have greater ability to foresee the future than men. A woman has neatness, tidiness and the desire to see a successful end to a task... when she goes to school, she sees that the flowering plants are dying, that the physical assets of the school are thrown here and there, she feels it more than a man. Because even at home she carefully handles those things."(Neela, a Principal)

"When we go to schools which are administered by women, the surroundings of the schools are very attractive. Most of the time they plant flowers and you can see a clean environment. Also the working environment is peaceful. Female principals can show more mercy and lovely-kindness towards their teachers than men... I am the one and only female principal who administer a Maha Vidyalaya in this zone. I think I am much more progressive compared to male principals in other schools. My performance has been praised even in evaluation meetings at the zonal education office". (Srima, a Principal)

Generally, the working environment in schools which are administered by women is congenial. It is claimed that women are more peaceful, tolerant and less aggressive than men. Therefore, when a woman is administering a school, she is able to preserve the peace and perform successfully by using her inherent matriarchal and feminine values, even though it is generally assumed that success goes hand in hand with masculinity.

Problems female teachers face/d when they advance/d to administrative positions

Here, the barriers which women face when they attempt to advance to administrative positions are analyzed.

Through data analysis, it was possible to identify eight factors which hinder women's advancement to administrative positions in their teaching careers. These are as follows:

1. 'Cultural and social influence' is identified as a prominent issue which female teachers face when they attempt to advance to administrative positions. Here, the influence of the traditional, male dominant, patriarchal value system, inherent societal attitudes and gender stereotyping in society are taken into account.

"When I was appointed to the Maha Vidyalaya, some people had spread bad rumors that women cannot administer this school and they cannot perform much better. I think this attitude comes from our culture. Most people think that the administration must be done only by men". (Neela, a Principal)

2. 'Role conflict and familial responsibilities' is identified as another significant barrier. The study results reveal that women have to play multiple roles in their personal and career lives, much more than men, and the conflict among these many roles hinders women when they attempt to break into administrative positions in their teaching careers.

"I have a fear that I will not be able to look after my parents and husband's parents if I become busier. I have to look after my own child because she is at the age that she wants my affection and attention. My husband is a government officer. Every day he reaches home very tired after work. So I must look after him. Balancing all of these spheres I must be at school at 7.30 sharp in the morning because my little ones in school are waiting for me" (Jayanthi, a teacher)

3. 'Lack of sufficient family support' is identified as another prominent issue which pulls women down when they attempt to advance to administration positions. As per the results of the analysis, women do not have enough

family support from their spouses and children.

“Even in marriage, some men deliberately choose female teachers as their partners because as teachers they can teach their own children. And also after school they have more time to engage in housekeeping activities. In that context, such husbands never bother to encourage or support their wives to apply for administrative positions”. (Shiromala, a teacher)

4. Several women stated that they ‘do not have enough support or encouragement from the women who have already achieved elite positions in their career’. This attitude indirectly acts as a barrier to female teachers when they are trying to climb into the administrative positions which are available to them along the promotional ladder.

“I never had significant support from a woman who was already a director. I worked twenty five years as a school teacher. I had to undertake this journey on my own two feet”. (Kusum, a deputy Zonal Education Director)

5. Some women are ‘unwilling to undertake and perceive themselves as being incapable of shouldering the responsibilities attached to the position’. Unwillingness to devote time and effort to the duties and the responsibilities of the position is identified as another barrier that female teachers must surmount when they are trying to gain administrative positions.

“Most female teachers do not come to the administrative field because they need to work only between 7.30am- 1.30pm. “They do not like to sacrifice their personal lives for their careers. If I take my life, I depart from the house early in the morning at about six and I arrive at school at about six thirty. If one is a good principal, one must be at school before all the students and teachers arrive. Every woman cannot devote such dedication to their profession.”(Srima, a Principal)

6. ‘Lack of self-esteem and self confidence’ is identified as another key barrier. Some women have become satisfied with their current position and state that it was sufficient for them.

“I feel... this is enough for me. I have no big aspirations in my life. I like to live a simple life with my child and husband. My husband cultivates tea. His earnings and my salary from teaching is enough to provide a good education to my child and for us to have a fulfilling family life. So, now I do not feel the need to apply for the position of principal”(Manel, a teacher).

7. Some women believe that their personality is not compatible with the personality required of an administrator or a leader. The qualities that Neela claims are necessary for a principal are not in the makeup of many female teachers.

“I feel that I have good leadership skills such as dedication, ambition, vision...etc. and good virtues such as faith, credibility, honesty, and fear and shame ... all these personality traits are inside me.”(Neela, a Principal)

8. Some women believe that there should be a strong national policy to empower women to aspire to upper administrative positions. They believe that this type of policy is still illusive in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Sri Lanka not having well established policies is identified as another barrier.

“I had been waiting for twenty five years as a teacher to reach this position. I was promoted to this position through a competitive examination. But in those days there were no competitive examinations. People were assigned to these positions based on personal relationships and political affiliations. Due to this reason my career journey has been delayed”.(Kusum, a deputy Zonal Educational Director)

Therefore, the barriers that hinder female teachers in their career progress to administrative positions are the most

important finding emerging from the study.

DISCUSSION

A mother nurtures her children and guides them towards a better future; teachers also inspire their students with knowledge, skills and values, and guide them towards a better future. Therefore, a mother can easily play the role of a teacher and a female teacher can also sometimes play the role of a mother. According to empirical evidence from the study of Kelleher (2011), it is quite clear that there is a strong association between teaching as a profession and traditional gender roles that align themselves with women's long-held responsibilities in the domestic sphere, suggesting that while women may no longer be confined exclusively to this sphere, their role in the public sphere is very much influenced by it. Therefore, there is a close relationship between these two roles.

It is also clear that women who have reached administrative positions are putting their 'feminine' qualities to use quite successfully (for example, concern for others, devotion, caring, supportiveness, and emphasis on human interactions), and through them attempt to achieve better performance and success as administrators. It is a generally held belief that it is necessary to be aggressive in order to be successful (Singh-Sengupta, 2006). Stereotypically masculine traits are still equated with better management practices, more so than are stereotypically feminine traits (Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002). However, these women participants in the Sri Lankan public school administration system point out that feminine characteristics help in their job roles as leaders, resulting in successful administration. In school, women often occupy the positions of homeroom teachers, heads of departments, special

education teachers, and counselors. These positions deal mainly with issues related to pedagogy and the curriculum. Women are found less often than men in positions with an organizational orientation, such as principals or vice principals (Schmuck & Wyant, 1981). The teaching profession in schools is dominated by women while administrative positions in schools are dominated by men. A significant segment of gender based literature points to limited, or conditioned differences between the leadership behaviors of men and women. The different leadership behaviors are shaped by the different characteristics which are embodied in the men and women who occupy leadership positions. However, it is possible to identify some special and unique features of female administrators of schools when compared to their male counterparts. According to Addi-Raccah and Ayalon (2002), it may be argued that most female teachers occupy the position of homeroom teacher and are concentrated in pedagogic jobs because they prefer them because of their 'feminine' nature. Similarly, male teachers prefer administrative jobs because of their 'masculine' characteristics. Using the findings of Addi-Raccah and Ayalon, it is possible to initiate a debate on the 'masculine' and 'feminine' components of administrative positions in the education sector. It has been mentioned that women are fond of pedagogic jobs because their feminine characteristics matches those job roles and that men prefer administrative jobs because their masculine qualities fit in well with administration. However, the question arises as to whether a person with feminine characteristics can become a good administrator as well. Or, are masculine qualities vital for a good administrator? According to this study, women who are currently in administrative positions in the Sri Lankan education system have used their feminine qualities and matriarchal values to advantage in their positions and performed

successfully as administrators. The unique characteristics of a woman such as her gumption, acuity, wisdom, and skills in domestic spheres contribute towards coping with challenges when she occupies an administrative position. One of the participants explained how the network of students' mothers assisted her in overcoming some problematic situations. Another female principal explained that educational qualifications and other related qualifications were the essential requirements to perform well in an administrative position, particularly in the case of women.

Women who are occupied as teachers in public schools in Sri Lanka meet with several almost insurmountable barriers when they attempt to climb into the administrative rungs of their career ladder. The culture and society of the country they live in influence these women when they are advancing to administrative positions. The participants mentioned that patriarchal social values and stereotypical beliefs about women negatively impacted their career progress. A patriarchal social system, in which men have power and authority over woman, is one among many different mechanisms that are responsible for women's discrimination (Powell, 1999). Asian societies are patriarchal, and therefore, men's role is perceived to be that of breadwinner (to earn for the family), to be authoritative (dominating) in nature and to be responsible for the economic role of developing the country; developing society falls within the bounds of duty of women. Further, in Asian societies, men are perceived to be assertive and commanding, whereas women are expected to comply, obey and be submissive and docile (Singh-Sengupta, 2006). When teaching became a 'feminine' occupation, men preserved their dominance and hegemony by moving into positions of leadership in the educational sphere, leaving women as mere teachers (Addi-Raccah & Ayalon, 2002).

Shakeshaft (1987) mentions that one of the impediments to women's promotion to administrative positions in schools relates to men's dominance and hegemony in key positions in society and the prevalence of patriarchal norms that strengthen and emphasize gender differences. Singh-Sengupta (2006) points out that men endeavor to preserve their privileged status even in work places and that they were always more enthusiastic in advancing to top positions in their careers than women. When a woman enters a situation having internalized the belief that "most people" expect more competent performances from men, even if she does not personally endorse this stereotypical belief, she may still leave the situation with a lower assessment of her ability compared to a male performing at the same level, due to the biases of others' expectations (Correl, 2001). Society has built a myth that successful leadership characteristics are actually men's characteristics and that to be male is to be successful. It would seem that in terms of everyday perceptions, traditional masculine values are routinely privileged in assessments of what makes an effective leader (Hopfl & Matilal, 2007). Society in general, including women, perceives that effective leadership is determined by traditional masculine values. The feminine values are considered to be soft or mild and therefore unsuitable for leadership positions. Some scholars argue that this kind of stereotypical belief affects women's self-efficacy negatively, and they believe that they are incapable of holding an administrative position. On the other hand, most males in a patriarchal society feel threatened when women become empowered and assume the reins of leadership, because then, men's hegemonic power will weaken. Plato speaks of the major threat to men being women and madness. This fear of women and the supposed disorder they bring with them remains a crucial element in

understanding the role of women leaders. The fear of women and their ability to rob men of their potency has a long history, and plays a key role in psycho-analytical theories of male sexuality (Hopfl&Matilal, 2007). When the powers of society are being funneled towards women, some segments of society fear that it will be detrimental to everyone. According to the predictions of the Social Learning Theory, the development of children's gender stereotypes are based on a number of assumptions about the importance of cultural and social variables in the socialization process (Albert & Porter, 1988). Gender stereotypes are built up from childhood and (wo)men do not try to overcome the psychological boundaries which are firmly established during their early socialization processes. These cultural and social factors influence women in Sri Lanka as well, and prevent them from advancing to the administrative positions available to them in the public education system.

Woman working in the Sri Lankan education sphere are likely to give priority to their familial roles and responsibilities compared to attempting to achieve administrative positions. Lack of professional commitment exists among women because of their domestic commitments, and this lack of commitment has consequent effects on their prospects for promotion (Singh-Sengupta, 2006). They sacrifice opportunities to advance because they consider the accomplishment of family responsibilities as being more important. Conflicts between job roles and familial responsibilities of a woman is a pressing issue that women face when they are promoted to administrative positions in the education sector in Sri Lanka. Addi-Racciah(1997) points out that the difference between the genders is that women are seen as less committed to outside jobs that require effort and investment of time, because of the roles

they play both in the family and in the workplace. A traditional Sri Lankan woman's life is divided between her job and her family responsibilities at home. The traditional apolitical role of women has been seen as originating in patterns of childhood socialization that define a women's roles and concerns as being limited to the private sphere of home and family, and that assign the public sphere, within which politics is located, to men (Kearney, 1981). Traditional Sri Lankan society perceived and still perceives the woman as an object that should be dedicated to the family and to family-related responsibilities. The responsibilities of housekeeping (cooking, washing, cleaning...etc.), rearing children, looking after parents and parents-in-law and fulfilling the needs of her husband are all expected from the woman. Inculcation of these particular responsibilities happens from the early childhood socialization of a woman. While the man in a family is considered as the bread winner, the woman has to handle all responsibilities inside the home. According to Hoyle(1987), while the various roles women play lessen their motivation to take on demanding administrative jobs, men, on the other hand, being the main breadwinners of the family, are interested in holding positions which are both prestigious and economically rewarding. The challenge for women seems to be finding the balance between keeping their family happy and handling the responsibilities that come with holding a school management position, while such a lack of the balance explains why female teachers seem to have given up the aspiration to apply for school management positions (Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2014). Bain and Cummings (2000) note that women may be as capable as men at conforming to organizational requirements, but many women have strong commitments to their families and thus are unable to devote the

same amount of time as men. This is why some women elect to interrupt their careers during the early child-rearing period or take a break from work to attend to other personal responsibilities. Therefore, it is clear that women interrupt their careers due to child rearing or other personal responsibilities because these responsibilities seem to be the more sacred inheritances of a woman's life. Women's extreme devotion to their familial duties and responsibilities leads them to shy away from applying for administrative positions during their careers.

The traditional man in this society expects a woman to have an occupation (to provide economic support to the family) and also have the freedom to accomplish family responsibilities while the man is working hard to earn money for the family as the breadwinner. Before marriage, some men plan their future and expect to provide a good education to their children in addition to having a small contribution from their wives to the family economy. The common factor that has been identified in this study is that all six women participants who are in administrative positions have had a great deal of support from their husbands when they were applying for administrative positions. Female teachers whose husbands are principals are more likely to advance to positions as principals. It is clear, then, that support from the husband in the way of shared familial responsibilities and encouragement is a catalyst which often propels a woman into an administrative position in her career.

According to the data analysis of this study, it was found that the majority of female teachers do not receive enough support from the women who are currently occupied in administrative positions in their career. As per Airin (2010), female principals are the key individuals for female teachers who want to proceed to leadership positions because they need other females to motivate and guide them

so they can feel encouraged. Women educators do not receive the same kind of social messages which men do concerning promotions to the positions of principal. All the women participants believed firmly that support from the women who are currently occupied in administrative positions was necessary for other qualified women to gain administrative [positions]. This can be discussed by referring to the "Queen Bee Syndrome" which poses the paradoxical question "does a woman hinder the progress of other women?" The queen bee syndrome concerns a situation in which women who succeed in male dominant work settings attempt to prevent other women from developing and being promoted to similar positions (Paniko et al., 2016). The "Queen Bee" refers to women in high positions who have achieved their professional goals in organizations dominated by men by distancing themselves from other women and at the same time expressing behaviors that lead to their gender stereotyping (Sobczak, 2018). The female teachers in this study did not have adequate support to be able to conquer administrative positions in their career from women who have already advanced to these positions. This lack of support acts as a barrier to the aspirations of these women, and can be analyzed with reference to the Queen Bee Syndrome.

The unwillingness of women who are in a teaching career to devote themselves to serious duties and responsibilities can be identified as another barrier preventing them from gaining administrative positions in their careers. There are two main reasons why female teachers are unwilling to take on the heavy duties and responsibilities of an administrative position. 'The degree of domestic commitment of a woman' and 'the degree of development of her attitudes to commit herself to her own career' influence 'the degree of dedication to her career'. Women's first challenge is to reorient their

thinking from management to leadership. Not only do they have to assume the role of leadership, switching from implementation to initiation, focusing on outcomes and taking risks, but they also need to adopt leadership strategies and styles suitable for hierarchical school organization (Ministry of Education Sri Lanka, 2009). The problem of being 'unwilling to devote themselves to the serious duties and responsibilities of an administrative position' is identified as an issue dependent on these women's other commitments. Participants explained their ideas on this particular issue with reference to factors such as the family, alternative roles, the environment, society and culture.

Some women had given up expectations to advance in this career because they felt that it was unnecessary for them. These women suffered from a lack of self-esteem, and due to this lack of self-esteem, they were not interested in advancement. According to some other women, most women in teaching underestimate their ability to perform in administrative positions and suffer from an irrational fear (lack of self-confidence) that they will not be able to perform as well as their male counterparts. Lack of aspiration is a critical barrier to women's promotion into school management positions, and dealing merely with this lack of aspiration is not likely to yield the desired results if society does not change the way it views women's role in society and their abilities to perform in school management positions (Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2014). Gunasekare and Ratnayaka (2015) point out that women's lack of understanding of their self-strengths hinders their career advancement, and this sense of underestimating their own strengths leads to an unawareness of advancement routes and career paths which are available to them. Most women are also afraid of failure. This is a definite barrier to their engaging in leadership roles (Yulaelawati,

1998). A perception of not having a personality compatible with that of an administrator or a leader causes some women to hesitate from applying to administrative positions. Traits such as dedication, ambition, and vision and suitable virtues such as faith, credibility, honesty, fear and shame, impartiality, frankness and ability to exercise human resource management skills including interpersonal skills were demonstrated as the prominent traits which should be possessed by a successful female administrator.

Some of the participants discussed policy related issues which suppress women from advancing into administrative positions in the educational sector as well as in the country as a whole. The problem is that there is no national policy to empower women and encourage them to advance to top administrative positions. The issues on recruiting and promoting to these administrative positions were also widely discussed. It is therefore necessary to develop policies to encourage women to take up management positions in schools and to remove any obstacles there are to women's participation in senior management (UNESCO, 2015).

The problems which have been identified are unique to women, and these issues affect women to a greater extent than they affect men, especially when these women are trying to climb the administrative rungs of their career ladder. Women who seek careers in educational administration find that, in practice, equality of the sexes is an illusion (Weber et al., 1981). The reason behind that illusion is that several hidden and unique problems exist which negatively impact on women's ability to advance in their careers. According to Harrison et al. (2014), while women are the overwhelming majority in teaching positions at the primary and secondary levels, they are extremely

underrepresented in administrative roles. Many scholars have described the barriers to entry that women face in the educational sphere, but have failed to describe these women's activities after attaining such positions. When discussing about the barriers faced by women when they are trying to reach administrative positions in their career, it is necessary to invoke the metaphor of the "Glass Ceiling". The Glass Ceiling refers to invisible or artificial barriers that prevent women from advancing pasting a certain level (Federal GC Commission, 1997). Although opportunities at the top can be seen by women, there is a barrier above them that restricts their arrival to those top positions. While business organizations are struggling to hold on to their best and brightest women, the persistence of the glass ceiling makes this difficult (Ragins, 1998). While female teachers are struggling with a series of barriers when advancing to the position of principal, vice principal or educational administrator because of their gender, this context creates an advantage for male teachers to slip past their female counterparts and move into these administrative positions quickly. This phenomenon can be widely observed in female-dominated areas like teaching. The situation can be further explicated with reference to the "Glass Escalator" theory. Williams (1985) asserts that male tokens do not experience the disadvantages of their minority status. In fact, the token men in nursing, and elementary teaching frequently spoke of actually feeling advantaged on the job. Therefore, in general, Williams claims that an advantage for males exists in every organization and job, even when those jobs are female-dominated.

The applicability of the concept of the Glass Ceiling is somewhat limited in the context of this study. The Glass Ceiling refers to "invisible or artificial" barriers that hinder women when they try to advance into the upper rungs of their

career ladders. With reference to this study, some of the problems faced by women when they try to advance to administrative positions, such as lack of self-esteem, lack of confidence and lack of self-efficacy are not artificial barriers because they are deeply embedded in the minds of these women, and the choices they make are their own choices rather than those forced upon them by structural or institutional barriers. Of course, sometimes, structural and the institutional barriers may lead to the creation of such kinds of mindsets. The researcher feels that it is necessary to initiate a discussion involving teachers, administrators and government authorities about the problems and issues faced by women when advancing to administrative positions in the public education sector in Sri Lanka that goes beyond the Glass Ceiling metaphor.

CONCLUSION

The cultural and social influence, role conflict and familial responsibilities, lack of family support, lack of support from women who have already advanced, unwillingness to devote themselves to the serious duties and the responsibilities of the position, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, personal traits-related problems, and policy related problems were identified as barriers which hinder the advancement of female teachers into school and educational administrative positions. It was found that while female teachers were struggling to surmount these barriers, male teachers were having a relatively obstacle-free path to educational administrative positions. Women who have achieved these positions successfully reveal their inherent feminine and matriarchal qualities (such as caring, supportiveness, love and compassion, devotion, tidiness... etc.) within their work place. The unique characteristics of women such as gumption, acuity, wisdom,

frugality, and skills in domestic spheres help them cope with problematic situations that arise when working as administrators. Another finding is that female principals face problems when searching for male role models among their staff to develop the personalities of their male students, because the representation of men in pedagogical position is very small compared to the representation of men in school administrative positions.

Women are disadvantaged in terms of their assignment to administrative positions mainly due to their gender which results in certain sociocultural barriers being erected to prevent their advancement to such positions. When these barriers act to disrupt as the disruptions of women's career advancement, it indirectly create an advantage for men in the public education system, many of whom do not fail to capitalize on it. It can be concluded, then, that sociocultural influences, gendered division of work in the family and work organizations, same sex jealousy and policy related problems have contributed to create an unfavorable context for many women who work in the Sri Lankan public education system.

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