WOMEN LEADERS ON ACADEMIA: GENDER, FAMILY, AND INDIVIDUAL ISSUES[*]

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Abstract

In this research, concepts such as leaders, academic leadership, women's place in these and the obstacles women encounter in higher educational institutes are emphasized. Studies in which these issues were talked about and intersect were obtained through literature review, and the findings were interpreted by descriptive analysis method by subjecting them to content analysis. The history of the notion of leadership in different areas was mentioned superficially, the rate of women academicians in different positions in higher educational institutes, and the three main sources of obstacles women face when attaining higher ranks and positions in academia were discussed. These three main sources are: Gender Related Issues, Family Issues, and Individual Issues. As a result of the study, it is concluded that even though women are occupying higher positions more than before, there seems to be a long way to equality in both quality and quantity. The responsibility, however, is on everybody.

Keywords: leadership, academic leadership, gender bias, academia, women leaders.

AKADEMİDE KADIN LİDERLER: TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET, AİLE VE KİŞİSEL MESELELER

Özet

Bu araştırmada liderlik, akademik liderlik, kadının bunlardaki yeri ve kadınların yükseköğretim kurumlarında karşılaştıkları engeller gibi kavramlar üzerinde durulmuş; bu konuların tartışıldığı ve kesiştiği çalışmalar literatür taraması yoluyla elde edilmiş ve bulgular içerik analizine tabi tutularak betimsel analiz yöntemiyle yorumlanmıştır. Liderlik kavramının farklı alanlardaki tarihçesinden yüzeysel olarak bahsedilmiş, yükseköğretim kurumlarında farklı

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pozisyonlardaki kadın akademisyenlerin oranı ve kadınların akademide üst sıralara ve pozisyonlara gelirken karşılaştıkları üç ana engelin kaynağı tartışılmıştır. Bu üç ana kaynak şunlardır: Cinsiyetle ilgili sorunlar, aile sorunları ve bireysel sorunlar. Çalışmanın sonucunda, kadınların eskiye göre daha yüksek pozisyonlarda yer almalarına rağmen hem nitelik hem de nicelik açısından eşitliğe giden uzun bir yol olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Sorumluluk ise herkese aittir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: liderlik, akademik liderlik, toplumsal cinsiyet yanlılığı, akademi, kadın liderler.

Introductıon

Leadership is a universal phenomenon. While it can go back as far as the hunting and gathering period of humankind life, it also starts at the very beginning of our personal lives with our mothers being our leaders in our early childhood (which they still are). As we grow and as our social circle expand, how we think and act as both leaders and followers are still affected from our childhood experiences and dynamics with our parents (Bass, 2009). As a result, the concept of leadership is as natural and as default in our lives as breathing. It is no surprise that the behaviours, roles and actions of leaders and the concept of what is acceptable and expectable in leadership position changed as the time, location and culture changed but we consistently see the leadership concept stays still regardless of these. During the hunter gatherer era, the leaders had to be physically strong and independent to protect their group from possible natural threats (Lipman-Blumen, 1996). In the early myths and legends (as non-written leadership portraits) it can be seen that the leader image is rather heroic, big, almost extremely skilled and distant from common people. Religious studies offer leaders as examples, idols to be followed (Bass, 2009). From a philosophical aspect, in sixth century B.C.E Confucius expressed the must-do for leaders to be moral example for their followers. "*Govern the people by regulations, keep order among them by chastisements, and they will flee from you, and lose all self-respect. Govern them by moral force, keep order among them by ritual and they will keep their self-respect and come to you of their own accord*" (Platts, 1994). All these in one hand, returning to our initial expression, with all the differences about leadership in different areas, Lewis (1974) suggested that anthropologically there are no known societies without leadership, even though this leadership might not be in the same extent in terms of singular force, there is still an overall leader that's on top of decision-making mechanism.

"...leadership and coordination are not an automatic, instinctual, or customary matter, but one that involves elements of personality differentiation, interaction dynamics (as males jockey for power or cooperate with each other in coalitions), and the requirements of particular activities" (Lewis, 1974)

In today's world, arguably the most problematic part of leadership studies is the definition of it. According to Burns, (2010, p.2) "leadership is one of the most observed and least understood

phenomena on earth". For every industry, company, and person the defining characteristics of the leadership changes as it is a very broad term. The roles vary and the leaders need to adjust the way they communicate, plan and act. From the educational aspect, Leithwood and Riehl defined leaders in schools as people who "provide direction and exert influence in order to achieve the school goals" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 2). Academic leaders (such as associate and full professors, department chairs, deans etc.) motivate and challenge academics in universities as well as create an environment to help them prove and improve themselves. They promote knowledge production in their institution, administer and supervise projects. What makes academic leadership concept unique and different than business leadership is that the academic leaders' acts do not only affect the business -in this case the university- but also the society with their knowledge and their scope of research (Esen, 2021). Especially woman academicians can influence and represent broader and more different areas than their man colleagues and their perspectives will surely bring depth to any topic given. Moreover, these women can serve as a role model to younger women during their career paths and to leadership. Thus, it is lethal to acknowledge that existence of these leaders not only aids to their peers, but also to future generations.

1. Women In Academia

As the nature of it, raising questions is a crucial part of any scientific research and lack of women academicians in the frame highly affects the corresponding research as those question women will raise, are not asked and therefore the findings are also affected. As a result, whole higher education suffers (Curtis and West 2006, p.5). According to National Center for Education Statistics' 2011 report, in US, in 2009-2010 education year women took up 57% of bachelor's, 60 % of master's and 52 % of doctoral degrees in total. However, women constitute 28 % of full professor positions, while occupying 41 % of associate professor, 48 % of assistant professor, 55 % of instructor, and 53 % of lecturer positions. These numbers clearly shows that women tend to stay in entry level faculty positions such as lecturer or instructor which are often the least paid and least recognized positions. A closer examination also reveals that even though the numbers seem like showing an almost equality in terms of quantity of women academicians (except full professorship), there is a deeper nuance behind this. A 2011 study revealed that at doctoral universities which are the highest and most valued institutes only 8 % of women had full professor rank while as the rank of the institution decreased, the number of women professors increased. The same pattern continues with associate professor ratio being 10.4 % and assistant professor being 10.7 % respectively, in the doctoral universities (AAUP 2011, p. 33). The situation does not differ greatly in other countries. In UK, in the 2013/14 academic year, women compromised of 45% of academic staff but the percentage of full professors were only 22.4% (ECU, 2015). In EU in 2010, across 27 countries only 15.5% of higher education institutions

were led by women, and the women rectors were only 10% of the pool. In 2017 the percentage of women as heads of higher education institutions increased to 21.7% and to 23.6% in 2019. Similarly, being the head of the university percentage increased to 14.3% in 2017 and 18% to 2019 (European Commission, 2012, 2019, 2021). Therefore, even though the overall numbers may give the perception of "woman problem" has been solved in academia, it can be said that the truth is far from it. This perception can be dangerous to achieve true gender equality in academic leadership. In a 2015 survey in Stanford University, when participants were asked if the leadership positions in the university are equally attainable by both genders, nearly all men and almost 50 % of women answered yes; in spite of the fact that in the same survey it was stated between the years of 2000-2014 there were no woman presidents and provosts elected, followed by women being only 36% of the deans, 22% of associate deans and 18% of department chairs between the same years (Stanford University, 2015). Undeniably women are still fighting with obstacles deeply embedded in academic sector which their men colleagues are not.

2. Gender Related Issues

Eagly noted social role beliefs and expectations as more than beliefs about the attributes of genders, but norms believed to be desirable for each gender in her 1987 social role theory presentation (Eagly, 1987). In social role theory there are two kinds of norms, or expectations. Cialdini and Trost (1998) defined these norms as descriptive norms (stereotypes), which are expectations of a group of people about their actual acts and behaviours and injunctive norms, which are expectations about what the same group should do ideally. In this context, the term gender role consists of sum of both norms about expectations of men and women. People believe each gender has typical traits that are different from each other and most of these beliefs relate to communal and agentic characteristic attributes. Communal characteristics are mostly related to social relationship establishment and maintenance such as being friendly, kind, helpful, sensitive, communicative etc. which are more assigned to women. On the other hand, agentic characteristics, consisting of traits like aggressiveness, confidence, controlling, dominant, fierce, logical etc. are assigned to men.

Role congruity theory is based on social role theory and in this context, its importance for women leaders. The prejudice against women leaders feeds itself from the gender roles assigned to women and the dissimilarity between the requirements and expectations for and from a leader and a woman as an individual of a society (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This case is no different in academia. Leadership in academia has been imprinted with agentic traits which are assigned to men and as result, men dominate the academic leadership positions (Blackmore, 2014). An interesting study of 14 million reviews from the website Rate My Professor on the US was combined together and made into an interactive chart where people can see precisely how often different words are used to describe

men and women academics. It was found that men are described as 'smart' 40% more and described as 'genius' 130% more than their women colleagues. Words like 'star' and 'cool' and 'great' are also highly notable for men academicians. On the other hand, women academicians are rated as 'bossy', 'strict' and 'unhelpful' (Schmidt, 2015). In a 2015 study conducted by Macnell, Driscoll and Hunt at North Carolina State University, a male and a female lecturer gave four different online lectures where students hadn't seen or heard both teachers. This way after teaching the course as their own genders, in the second run both female and male lecturer switched genders, with woman pretending to be a male lecturer and male lecturer pretended to be a female lecturer. When the students were asked to evaluate the lecturers, both in the case of female lecturer and male lecturer pretending to be a female one, were graded lower than the lecturer students believed to be a man (Macnell et. al, 2015). With all these invisible barriers and extreme expectations, women are pressured not to be too much within or too far outside social norms assigned to them such as being assertive enough to be a leader but not too assertive to seem like masculine. This creates a no-win situation for women as there is an extremely small grey area of two ends.

3. Family Issues

Another barrier to women in academic leadership includes work and family balance. Women are still expected to carry most of the responsibility of a child in our society. So, it is heard that most women encounter questioning if they would perform well in their job if they were or planning to become a mother. As a result, many women hesitate to pursue a leadership position worrying about their family dynamics. In this case it can be said that women professionals feel like they are being held to different standards (Hannum et. al., 2014). Despite men's increasing expectation of responsibilities of family workload, women still proceed to take on a disproportionate burden. Clayton Spencer who is the president of Bates stated that if someone is forced to choose the best sake of their children or their job, more women are likely to choose their children than men who would choose their children (Rhode, 2017). Hewlett (2002) found that among high achieving women and men the primary responsibility mentality differs greatly. When asked whether taking time off from work when their child is sick is their primary responsibility 51% of women assumed it was, while only 9% of men answered yes to this question. Similarly, high achieving majority of men also do not see helping their children with their homework or organizing activities for them as their primary responsibility staying only on 9 and 3 per cents respectively. While these numbers are 37% and 61% for women in the same working levels.

A person with caregiving responsibilities by side is significantly challenged about running higher education's evenings and even weekends demand. Debora Spar said "*Think very, very hard about how you envision the other aspects of your future—those outside your corner office with a view.*

Do you want children? Do you want to eat dinner with them every night? Every other night? Or will you be happy with the nanny feeding them, feeling their foreheads for fevers and chaperoning field trips in your stead? Sixty-plus hour work weeks are often the norm" (Rhode, 2017, p.101). And these long hours of working are especially costly for women because the feasible years of career developing in academia almost perfectly overlaps with a women's childbearing years. It is not quite possible to choose to wait during the career building years of one's life and then catch up later in life to have a child.

Many times, women think that such highly demanding leadership positions are not suitable for them and their personal lives without even considering asking for the position's responsibilities to be altered a little or to be supported. In an interview conducted by Dunn et. al. (2014), a woman who stepped down from provost's position because she thought it would be hard to balance parenting and work, recalled this inability to balance as a great failure on her part because she loved what she was doing and if she had been able to find the balance then she would have liked to stay in that position for many years to come. The upsetting part of this statement is most likely that she believes it was her fault that she could not find the balance of family and work while perhaps there could be an arrangement and support from the institution. However, it is also known that when women ask for alterations and support, they are seen as insufficient or not committed enough to the role, therefore many women feel the need to go beyond ridiculous limits to prove they have what it takes to do their job properly. In a survey by Huang (2008), found very interesting examples to this statement. One participant recalled being asked by her boss if she was going to have any other children in a very concerning way, only two weeks after her child was born and she was already back to work and even after her working until 20 minutes before her labour. Another participant shared how she felt it was ridiculous to see a woman was giving lectures the same day she gave birth. She thought the institute should not have had allowed this at all.

All in all, this work family balance disadvantage is about culture and society and not biology. Although it might feel hard to find a common ground women, institutes and society should and could work together to change this culture.

4. Individual Issues

While these issues' roots are external like gender related and/or family issues, many women do not want to pursue a leadership position or even worse they do not believe they would actually reach such a position at all. It is not rare that women in in academic leadership claims they need to work harder and be better than their male colleagues just so they can be viewed on equal level with them. In the study conducted by Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak and White (2014), some women

interviewees realized they were being questioned about their several (sometimes unrelated) abilities of finances, athletics, and facilities. Rhode (2017) notes that in her 2015 email survey with Debora Spar, the president of Barnard College, Spar cited being questioned about her capabilities, her influence and all in all her potential to take charge/authorize. Women also frequently recalls feeling not being taken seriously as much as their male colleagues and that their voices are not as powerful at the table as their male counterparts (Hannum et. al., 2014). Hence, in order to "fit in" and gain credibility, women especially women of colour tend to be and feel overpressure to be overprepared and not to make mistakes because they do not have the luxury that their male colleagues do (Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

As a result of these discouragements, women are indeed discouraged. Susan Madsen found out that in her survey consisting of women university presidents, it was a common pattern that these women did not intend to end up as presidents. They did not look for these administrator positions (Madsen, 2008). In another study of self-reflection and analysis, one author stated that she feels like she "simply fell into positions" rather than having an actual career plan and map ahead. The other author recalled she did not want to be a leader and a key reason to that was not having enough female role models (Dunn, Gerlach & Hyle, 2014).

According to a recent study conducted by Gillard and Okonjo-Iwela, (2022), claim it is impossible to know how much the presumed lack of owning ambition is inherent in the internal look of the women leaders, and how much is an acquired response because they have faced the fact that ambitious women are viewed negatively. They suspect even the women themselves could not identify that. Moreover they found that women are unlikely to apply for a position if they do not meet all the criteria that have been stated. In a study conducted by Mohr (2014), it was found that women professionals were more likely to say they did not take the chance or step forward to a position because they thought they did not check all the boxes of qualification requirements. This distrust is not actually about their inability to get the job done but the chances of them to be chosen in the first place. What is more that women say twice as much than men that they did not step forward because were following the rules and requirements of application. They do not think the hiring process as a debatable, communication based one, rather as a strict rule based one. Women also seem to not want leadership positions as they see other women who are in those positions being more harshly criticized than their male peers (Hannum et. al., 2014). These intolerant criticisms can be especially crucial because one wrong step in such a high position can cost a career (Garcia, 2009). So, women may avoid these positions that bring risks, worrying they will be judged harshly. Fear of being labelled as pushy, bossy, problematic or as straight up bitch silences women, as they do not believe they receive equal respect and behaviour (Huang, 2008).

"Many women also internalize prevailing stereotypes and discount their own leadership potential. Lack of confidence can keep women from even aspiring to top positions or proactively shaping their careers to lead there" (Rhode, 2017, p. 98).

Women do not take chances and limit themselves because most of the time they do not believe in the possibility to be a leader if they do not act or have a character of a certain way that is not their true self. They doubt themselves and other women too because when they do not see women in leadership positions they tend to question if women are really a fit for those positions (Hannum et. al., 2014). As a result of this self-doubt and holding back, too much talent in idea diversity got lost in the career ladder.

Conclusıons and Recommendatıons

This study, which deals with the definition, position and problems faced by women leaders in academia in higher education institutions, was conducted as a literature review. The data of the study were analyzed through descriptive analysis and the following results were obtained.

In the study, it was seen that the concept of leadership is divided into academic leadership and business leadership. This difference is that academic leaders affect society with their knowledge and research, unlike business leadership. Moreover, it is claimed that female academicians can influence and represent wider and different fields than their male colleagues. However, in this study, it has been understood that female academics generally stay in less well-known and less-paid teaching positions in working life. In addition, it has been understood that women in the academic world lag behind men when they work in managerial and leader positions. The reason for this situation is explained as the gender roles assigned to them are effective. This outcome is also supported by Wirth's study. When management positions were observed, it was found that women are more likely to be located in lower-level management positions while men professionals were seen in higher level management positions more often. Even in typically women dominated industries and in industries where women leaders and managers are higher in number, it is still seen that men sat higher on the career ladder disproportionately (Wirth, 2004, p. 2-13).

The social roles attributed to women in the study are friendly, polite, helpful, sensitive, etc. While aggressive, self-confident, controlling, dominant, tough, sensible, etc. for men features were found. In the study it is seen that one of the biggest obstacles for women leaders in higher education institutes is their uneven responsibility of balancing work and family, their role in family life and carrying the heavier portion of parenting. Furthermore, it has been noted that the questioning of a woman who has such roles' ability to perform well, creates an impression of women are being held in different standards.

Women's assuming and accepting the role of mother, their individual beliefs, attitudes about self and confidence, is another result of the study that puts pressure on leadership. It was also understood from the study that women's belief in leadership stemmed from their thinking that they had little chance of being elected, not their own incompetence.

As a final result of the study, it has been understood that female leaders in academia are still struggling with invisible barriers and a male-dominated academic world. Hymowitz and Schnellhardt (1986), stated that the road to high managerial positions is blocked by organizational cultures and prejudices. What is more is, it is quite often being thought that women are lacking confidence, required abilities and commitment to the organization. The result creates an invisible glass ceiling over women professionals.

In the study, it is recommended to do the following:

Official arrangements can be made to give women leaders more chances in the academic field. (For example: At least 50% of the Managers in a University are women)

Social supports can be provided to encourage women in leadership.

Education from an early age is a must when it comes to leadership being related to personality and there is no difference according to gender.

A compulsory paternity leaving can be arranged by governments. This way, it would not matter if the employee were a woman or a man since both parties would have to have a leave in case of a newborn.

Women can talk to other leaders in their network and try to sort of take a guideline of their challenges they faced along the way.

Women should be encouraged to be persistent to crush the stereotypes and prejudices among the society.

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