

The Effects of Workplace Discrimination on Women in Education Leadership: A Case of Waterberg District in Limpopo Province

Seanokeng Julia Madela*^a, Percy Sepeng^a, & Elias Tsakane Ngobeni^a

* Corresponding author

E-mail: madelasj.2@gmail.com


a. Central University of Technology, Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of employment discrimination on female leaders in the educational sector, with a particular emphasis on South Africa's Limpopo Province. The goal was to investigate the impact of such prejudice at the stages of recruiting, selection, and progression to higher positions. The study included 100 female participants and used a convergent parallel research technique that included quantitative and qualitative methodologies. All participants filled out a structured questionnaire, and a group of ten was chosen for a focus group interview. Audio recording was used to aid with data collecting. This study's theoretical foundation is built on Feminist Theory, which holds that workplace discrimination against women in educational leadership arises from a gender power differential. For the questionnaire data, statistical techniques were used, and theme analysis was used for the interview data. The findings show that, although women are given interim leadership positions within the Limpopo Department of Education, their possibilities decline dramatically throughout official appointment procedures. As a result, the research argues for strict monitoring of workplace discrimination against women in educational leadership posts, as well as the implementation of applicable laws throughout the recruiting, selection, and appointment processes.

KEYWORDS

The effects of workplace discrimination; women in education leadership; schools, circuit; district.

INTRODUCTION

The Basic Education (BE) sector in South Africa (SA) is characterized by multiple forms of the effects of workplace discrimination despite the government efforts through legislative prescripts such as the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, which aims to “...remove discrimination, implement affirmative action and to promote equity, equality, opportunity, remuneration and development for all employees in the workplace”, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 to “regulates labour practices and sets out the rights and duties of employees and employers”, and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2002, which “It prohibits unfair discrimination by the government and by private organizations and individuals and forbids hate speech and harassment” (South African Legal Information Institute, 2019). The effects of workplace discrimination of women in education leadership is the topic of this study, with a case study in the Waterberg district in Limpopo Province. According to the Commission of Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration (CCMA), the legal definition of workplace discrimination is:

“to show favour, prejudice or bias for or against a person on any arbitrary grounds, for example on the basis of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language and birth by an employer.”

Background of the Study

The South African government has put several legislative and administrative tools in place since 1994 to address the issue of the effects of workplace discrimination of women in education leadership, the causes, and the best way to deal with the issue, and ensure that the rights of all citizens are not violated (Sinden, 2017). However, in South Africa, workplace discrimination of women in leadership is a widespread problem and alarming (Khumalo, 2017; Langeveldt, 2023). Many relate to the cultural beliefs that “the man is the head of the house, and the wife is the firstborn child in the household” (Musavel et al., 2011). This is also influenced by the Christian belief which is the dominant religion in Limpopo Province whereby men are regarded as heads of families.

Statement of the Problem

Workplace discrimination of women in the Department of Education in Limpopo is triggered by different factors such as treating employees unfavourably because of disability, age, genetic information, pregnancy, race or skin colour, national origin, religion, or gender (Musetsho, Isac, and Dobrin., 2017). The study focuses mostly on gender discrimination of women in education specifically when higher or leadership positions for promotion are advertised. According to Tshenko (2015), promotion could be defined as being raised to a position that holds greater authority and status than the current position that the employee is in. Preference is given to males as compared to females. The main intention is to address the underlying factors behind workplace discrimination of the promotion of women in leadership, focussing on the Waterberg

Education District, and to understand why the problem persists despite intervention and legislative prescripts.

Rationale for the Study

The study has been conducted to provide more information to understand the workplace discrimination of women in leadership as a social phenomenon. This understanding should lead to new knowledge on managing and improving the situation. From a sociological perspective, the discrimination of women in the workplace is always shaped by the cultural norms, the historical and social contexts, and the expectations about gender relations, often put within power related situations. Understanding this is highly significant in the context where interventions and proactive legislative prescripts have been formulated, but the problem continues to escalate.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research study is to address the following primary question: "What are the effects of workplace discrimination on women in education leadership?" based on the aforementioned justifications. The following research questions served as the study's compass:

- What is the nature and extent of the effects caused by discrimination in the workplace?
- What are the root causes of gender-discrimination in the workplace?
- How does the effects of workplace discrimination impact on women in leadership positions?
- What is the nature of legal remedies available to victims of the effects caused by workplace

discrimination?

Aims of the Study

Investigating the understanding of the effects of workplace discrimination on women in leadership is the basic aim of this study. Specific aims and objectives of the study are:

- To identify the nature and extent of the effects caused by discrimination in the workplace.
- To find out the root causes of gender-discrimination in the workplace.
- To explore the effects of workplace discrimination impact on women in leadership positions.
- To recommend the nature of legal remedies available to victims of the effects caused by workplace

discrimination.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

Nielsen (2015) explains that a theory is a set of notions used to describe difficult phenomena to understand what they mean. Theoretical frameworks, which give insight into the occurrence of the agony of workplace discrimination of women in education leadership, do exist. Several theories account for the phenomenon of the challenges' women experience in the workplace,

which scholars often debate (Shaleh et al., 2022). In this study, theories that outline feminist, sociological, psychological, and religious explanations are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

For this study, the theories considered include participative theory, contingency, sex role theory, feminist theory, and trait theory. After careful consideration, the trait theory and feminist theory were selected to underpin this study in Limpopo Department of Education where the trait theory is built on inherent leadership characteristics that men have and women do not, and where the feminist theory serves as a critique of the patriarchal system to address structural inequality such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

LITERATURE STUDY

The literature review is the collection of data or information available from different sources. It is published by different authors in books, articles, journals, newspapers and other sources (Creswell, 2014). It gives a researcher an opportunity to relate to what has been done before, and to identify the gaps. It also assists the researcher or the writer to identify the research title, the problem statement, aim and objectives, research questions, and the thesis structure. "The review of literature can enlighten all the aspects of a research problem by providing a historical aspect of the problem, describing its contemporary status, supporting the purpose of the study, identifying gaps in the literature, becoming aware of the variables pertinent to the problem, identifying leading figures that contributed to the field of study, proposing useful theoretical aspects for the study, understanding the application of suitable methodological procedures and observing comparative studies that assist in analysing the data and interpreting the results" (Mamabolo, 2020). This section looks at previous theories and studies on gender stereotyping, leadership styles, and various barriers that make for women discrimination in their workplace. This study also analyses the LDOE and its legislative framework, specifically referring to the respondents participating in this research study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

Israel

In Israel, women are allowed to vote, but they also suffer from dual marginality. During the elections, women are not part of the influential positions (Sharma & Sharma, 2012). Morley (2013) identified a few issues related to gender-based discrimination and misrecognition in the leadership posts in the university sector. The author also believes that the opportunities are based on ideological and political aspects, not on fair and accidental positioning. There is no fair allocation or appointment of women in management positions, even if they qualify or are better off than their male counterparts are.

Australia

In Australia, managers are encouraged to display family-work balance and support working parents to avoid a situation where they feel abandoned and not supported at work (Singh, Zhang, Wan & Fouad, 2018). Furthermore, Fritz and Van Knippenberg (2018) support and promote leadership's desire for both genders; organizations can implement resourceful strategies to support work-life balance. Some of the initiatives include, but are not limited to,

childcare at workplaces, leave of absence can be granted based on motivation, flexible working hours, and promoting working from home. According to Jogulu and Wood (2011), in Australia, male employees are progressing faster than females. Although the opportunities are there, women are not receiving the same treatment and salary packages.

In the LDOE, traditional gender and stereotypes weigh more than anything else does. Women try to advance and study further, but they are not afforded the same opportunities as their male colleagues. In reality, women leaders are discriminated in their workplaces in schools, circuits, and districts in the LDOE.

Significance of the Study

Naidoo and Kongolo (2004) argue that gender stereotyping has led to the overrepresentation of black women in social sectors like as education and health, where they are often allocated menial work. In contrast, there is a dearth of black women in high-level managerial roles. Research indicates that gender stereotypes have detrimental consequences that limit women's full potential and general well-being. This research also highlighted that society stereotypes pressure both men and women to disregard their own features, character, and distinctive attributes. These stereotypes impose conformity to cultural ideals of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. While women possess constitutional rights as citizens, they are not seen as equals. Women primarily bear the burden of their biological reproductive and home obligations, while their involvement in politics and community matters is deemed inappropriate.

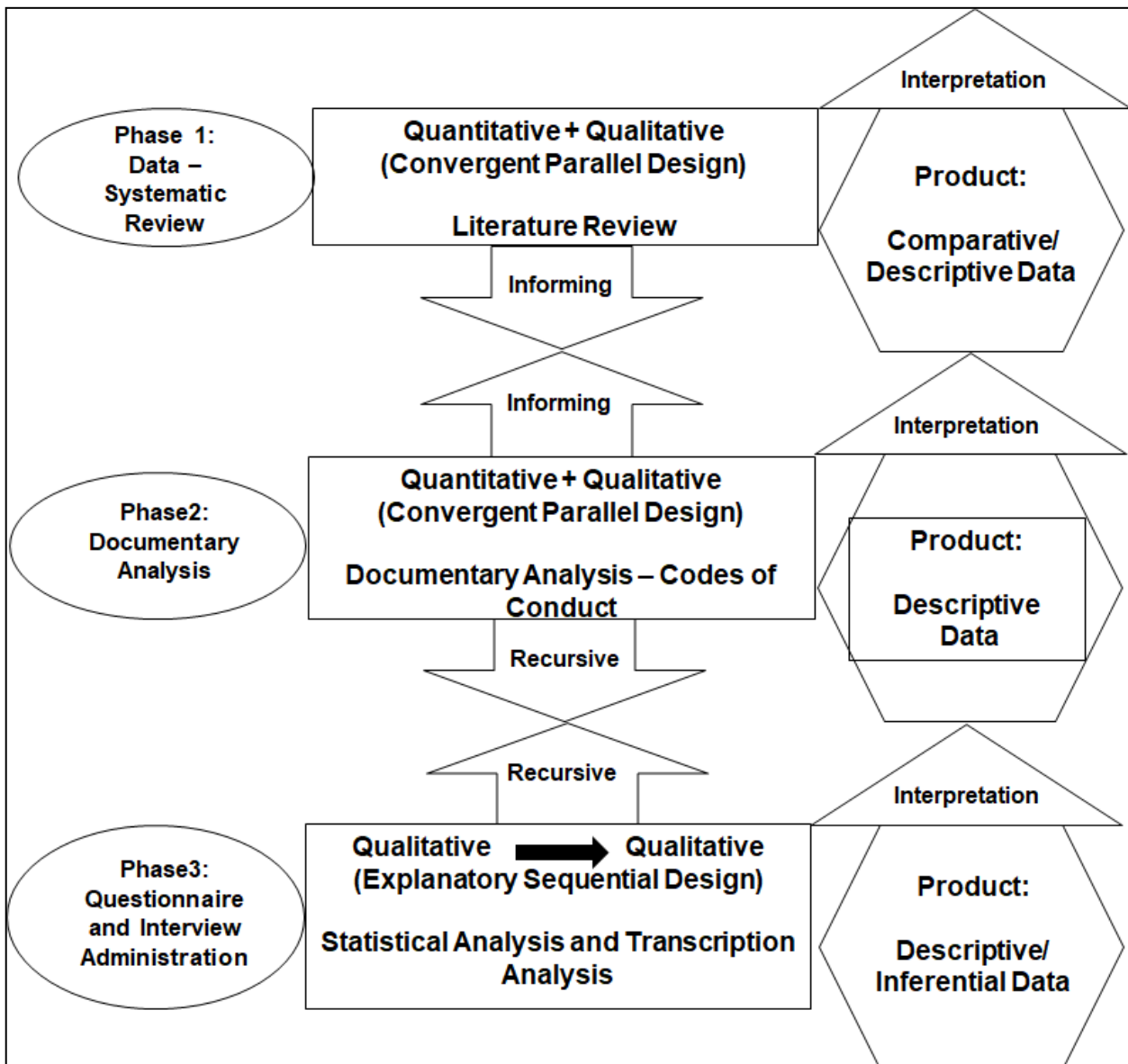
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The following design below incorporates complex procedures embedded in the sequential, convergent and embedded processes of combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Population and Sampling

The researcher focuses on women in leadership in schools, circuits, and districts. The participating women in leadership were selected across the Waterberg District. There are fewer women in leadership because these groups are the most affected ones whom the researcher would like to generalize the results of the study. The ten (10) participants responded to a face-to-face focus group interview and the 100 questionnaires were administered to capture the 100 respondents' biographical data, views, perceptions, facts, stories, and experiences on the agony caused by discrimination of women in the workplace in schools, circuits, and district premises and working environment. The population under study consisted of 21 schools, 9 circuits, and 5 districts in Limpopo Province.

Figure 1.
Mixed Method Design and Procedure.



Source: (Punch, 2009)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINDINGS

The results and findings of this study from the focus group interviewed participants are discussed below and the following sub themes were raised: The nature and extent of the effects of the workplace discrimination on women in education leadership, legal and policy prescripts in current context of the effects of workplace discrimination on women in education leadership, experiences and observations about the effects of discrimination on women in the workplace and legal remedies to be used in assisting discriminated women in education leadership.

Discrimination of women in leadership

PRS 1: *I applied for curriculum advisor posts, and there was no response. The SGB also misled me to act as the principal in a high school, but when the post was advertised, I was never*

shortlisted. They wanted a puppet on a string. I decided to return to my HOD post.... (I rather teach than be a play-ball).

According to South Africa records, Booysen and Nkomo (2010) state that women are certainly absent from leadership positions. The authors also indicated that this obstacle could be eliminated only if women's discrimination in workplace is addressed. The major challenges that women still experience in their workplaces are less promotion, sexual harassment, salary scale differences, intolerance, and fear of asking for a salary increase. Women are trying to balance their lifestyle and work by providing financial stability, birthing and raising children, finding time for exercise, preparing healthy meals, time with friends, and the occasional moment of relaxation. They are still being oppressed at workplaces. "The government must empower women to participate in all social issues. Freedom can only be reached if females are no longer being oppressed" (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010).

Causes of gender discrimination in the workplace

PRS 2: *Gender equity is the best policy where women are prioritized. All stakeholders must be involved in recruitment, selection, and appointment processes. Affirmative action is key, and women need to be given such chances and opportunities.*

According to Naidoo and Kongolo (2004), gender stereotyping has resulted in the disproportionate employment of black women in social sectors like as education and health, where they are assigned lower-level tasks. Conversely, there is a scarcity of black women in top management positions. According to the research, gender stereotypes have negative implications that restrict women's complete capacity and overall welfare. This study also emphasised that both men and women are compelled to neglect their individual personality traits, character, and unique qualities due to societal stereotypes, which impose adherence to cultural notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Although women are entitled to constitutional rights as citizens, they are not seen as equals. Women's responsibilities are mostly linked to their biological reproductive and domestic duties, whereas participation in politics and communal affairs is considered unsuitable for them.

Discrimination impact on women in leadership position

PRS3: *During my time as a teacher, I experienced serious discrimination when I applied for promotional positions. There was a time when I applied to be a secondary school principal. The SGB appointed a primary school educator with no experience with secondary school and then not being able to do admin of secondary school required like timetables and that type of thing. In the second attempt, a deputy principal post was advertised in the same school I was teaching. I did not even apply because I was due for maternity leave and I knew I would never get the post, but I applied for the principal-ship post for the third time again, and I did not get it. It was once again given to a man.*

Wood and Newton (2006) shown in their research that the presence of family responsibilities, particularly children, acts as an obstacle for women in advancing to senior management roles. They further contended that organisations and institutions have the belief

that in order to be a productive worker, one is required to be present or remain at the workplace till 19:00 or 20:00. Working extended hours is a sign of ambition and dedication. Liff and Ward (2001) propose that moms and young wives have difficulties in balancing their professional aspirations with their familial responsibilities, which include caring for their children and spouses.

Legal remedies to victims of workplace discrimination

CM4: *Grievances and disputes must be dealt with to the latter. Labour unit personnel to be monitored on the outcomes of cases dealt with. Discrimination of women in leadership is destroying moral and confidence and belittling once dignity.*

The literature clearly demonstrates that the Employment Equity Act (1998) serves as a legal solution for individuals who experience workplace discrimination. The act's objective is to address the demographic imbalance in the South African workforce by compelling employers to remove barriers hindering the progress of marginalised groups, including blacks, coloureds, Indians, women, and disabled individuals. It also mandates employers to actively promote these groups in all leadership roles through affirmative actions. The degree to which equality and access are actively encouraged or hindered will define the form and level of social and class stratification and directly impact the character of South Africa's democracy, labour market, and social stability (CHE, 2000).

CONCLUSION

The data suggest that the United Nations principles on women empowerment can be utilised as solutions to support women facing discrimination in leadership roles. This can be achieved by establishing top-level corporate leadership positions to promote gender equality, treating all individuals fairly at work while respecting human rights and non-discrimination, ensuring the well-being and safety of both women and men in the workplace, encouraging education, training, and professional growth opportunities for women, implementing practices that empower women in enterprise development, supply chain, and marketing, promoting equality through community initiatives and advocacy, and publicly reporting on progress towards achieving gender equality.

Recommendations

Thorough and yearly training for women on gender equity

Being socially constructed, gender inequity is deeply rooted in cultural and societal practices therefore need to be uprooted through training and education. The fact that despite progressive gender legislation has not resolved many gender issues show that is not enough to have gender policies. The gender biases, stereotyping and attitudes cannot just be wished away. The best way is to establish a training program which must identify and deal with gender issues that serve as barriers for the appointment of women in leadership positions. The training program should be deliberately infused into the business and HR processes if it has to succeed.

Removal of observers from the interview room

It is argued that observers push the interest of their members at the expense of the quality of leadership required by an organization. Sometimes they are seen to be lobbying for their members who are not ready to lead, leak information about the recruitment process and promote labour disputes over promotion. At times they are alleged to support the appointment of women for different reasons. Once the targets and gender program are clearly communicated and appreciated by the interview panel, the need for observers is obliterated.

Correct interpretation of recruitment, selection and appointment policies

Apparently, the best interpretation for the organization will happen when gender issues are infused in business and human processes and are seen as part of the people who can add value to the organization. The human resources are therefore there to support an organization to achieve its strategic objectives which women are thereby capable of doing so.

Correct interpretation of levels of qualifications (REQVS)

The qualifications from different institutions must be scrutinized against the NQF levels, Credits and the inherent requirements of a position that needs to be filled. Failure to place candidates in their correct level will inadvertently lead to the exclusion of women with leadership potential.

Correct appointment of capable candidate

The consequences of making a wrong appointment are too costly and affect an organization in different ways. The best way is to appoint Interview panel members who are matured, trained in identifying and who can make bold decisions. Apart from that, HR as a custodian of the process should be vigilant and ensure that line managers do not compromise the whole chain.

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