

Structural and Cultural Barriers for Women to Leadership: Case of Albania

Anisa Berisha

M.Sc. Business Administration

Keda Koldashi

M.Sc. Business Administration

Abstract

This research investigates the structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's career advancement, including mindsets, emotional intelligence gender culture, and how these differences impact leadership. This study found out that women face many difficulties during their career path due to multi-factorial reasons which have existed for many generations by making them deep-seated in society. Thus, this research focuses on the barriers of access to leadership roles that women have encountered during their path to success as well as the strategies to overcome the existing obstacles. To obtain the information is used a mixed methodology approach comprising of quantitative and qualitative data. In order to gain the required data, a purposive sample of 300 women who hold important positions in the municipalities, companies, ministries and other public entities is used. The study involved a self-completion questionnaire with closed and open questions, which included various questions in relation to the barriers that women face to advancement in leadership and the strategies that should be considered to improve their progress. This research found out that there are three main types of barriers: structural barriers, cultural barriers and mindsets that women encounter in their professional life and create difficulties for them to advance. For this reason, the study gives some recommendation for improvement of the situation and offers opportunity for further studies.

Keywords: Women's Success, Barriers, Leadership, Inequality, Career Path

1. Introduction

Brief Historical Overview

The role of women in the Albanian society has changed rapidly and dramatically in the last 40 years. However, the country still faces many challenges in terms of fully displaying and utilising the women's potential in the labour market and economy (UNDP Albania, 2018). In order to analyse the current situation, it is relevant to have a retrospective view of historical data that would give a better perspective of Albania's transitional period from the collapse of communist regimes until the recent governmental structural changes.

After the fall of communism, government began to have feminism and gender issues as part of the discussions in the plenary sessions. In that time, there are formed groups for public debate, social pressure and developed gender-oriented programs like the "Minerva" association, which brought in attention the gender issues (Calloni, 2002).

Since 1992 when Albania became a pluralist state, one of the basic objectives has been the EU Accession. Facilitating progress towards gender equality is a key component of the European Union's (EU) accession agenda of Albania as a mechanism of further democratic development (Kocaqi, Plaku, & Wittberge, 2016).

In 1994, it is ratified the "Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women", in which the main purpose was to define the discrimination against women and to come up with an agenda for national policy to end such discrimination (United Nations Treaty Collection, 1994). Still no major changes or improvements were recognized and women were still subject of different kinds of discrimination and hindered from any opportunity to succeed either in professional or social life. Their duty was to look after their family and their opinion was still irrelevant and barely taken in consideration. Many cities, especially in northern areas, were still obeying and accepting "Kanun of Leke Dukagjin" as a binding law, which is the first and oldest law in Albania (Vataj, 2016). The awareness of citizens for gender quality and

elevation of women's role was considered an important step; therefore in 2000-2002 government conducted a project called "Promotion of Social and Economic Status of Women in Albania" which was supported by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (Calloni, 2002). Slight improvements were noticed given that in 2005 for the first time a woman was appointed as the speaker of the Albanian Parliament, but in the general population, still was visible a large gender gap. Another progressive element in the society holds in the fact that during this period, a considerable number of women had a paid employment, apart from their family-based obligations. However, this working variation was partly negatively oriented as women were assigned to positions that were considered more appropriate and adaptable with females' traits such as assistant, secretary, sanitary cleaner, cooker or similar positions. This can be considered an institutional mindset including stereotypes and gender biases within an institution which usually makes comparisons between women and man role mostly based on congruent theory. Accordingly, women are less effective when the leader role is masculinised, and men are less effective when the role is feminized (Andrews, 2016).

The new era of development begins in 2008 with the first law on gender equality, Law No 9470 'On Gender Equality in Society' (Picari, 2008). In general, the law seemed well structured but it lacked guidance on the execution of the law and this is why its content remained mainly written rather than practiced. Women's participation in political and economic decision-making remained limited for a while until it progressed with improvements in electoral codes and processes. In December 2008, Electoral Code was revised for a better and fair electoral campaign which was expected to be held on May 2011. For the first time the quotas were presented which brought a progress to gender distribution candidates in political participation. Many organizations on protection of women rights were involved in the discussions of the Electoral Code draft amendments regarding the gender quota (UN Women, 2013). It claims that "at least 30% of the multi-name list and one of the first three names on the multi-name list shall belong to each gender". In case the parties do not act in accordance with the law, and if quotas are not reached, fines are to be applied. For parliamentary elections, a fine of 1 million Albanian Lek (approximately 7500 Euros) will be charged as well as additional sanctions such as adjustment of the list until the gender quota is reached (The Electoral Code of Republic of Albania, 2008). The approved amendments marked a positive step by firming the requirement for increment of women's political participation at the national level (UN Women, 2013).

Currently, there is still a huge gender gap in different sectors, whether political, economic or social. This mostly derives from the notion that men are considered more appropriate for high positions and do not need extra training. All this can be related in what is called "the glass ceiling", that refers to the invisible or artificial barriers that prevent women for further achievements or advancement (Johns, 2013). This consequently raises the research question of this paper: Which are the barriers that prevent women to leadership?

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This paper is an exploratory study based on quantitative and qualitative results of the open and closed questions in the surveys. The research is cross-sectional given that it studies a particular phenomenon (barriers of women to leadership) at a particular time (2017).

2.2 Study Population

The study population is comprised of 300 females who are currently in the decision-making position in the city of Tirana, Kukes, Durres and Korca. The target cities are chosen based on the study of INSTAT, according to which Tirana (capital of Albania) is ranked first as the city with the greatest number of females as entrepreneur, administrator and similar work positions. Korca (positioned in the southeast of Albania) has a relatively low number of women having high working positions and being followed by Kukes city (in the northern part of Albania) which is the least city having the lowest number of females holding leading positions. Meantime, Durres is a developing city, which according to INSTAT is considered to have many opportunities and job possibilities for females (INSTAT, 2017).

2.3 Research Instruments

Questionnaires were used to collect data. It was a self-completion questionnaire, which was designed to be completed by the respondents without the intervention of the researcher. It is composed of 10 questions (open and closed ones).

The questionnaire consists of 2 sections. The first one covers general information of the surveyed women such as: working city, working position, and qualifications. Second section covers the main questions related to the objective of the research about the barriers that women face, their perceptions about Albanian legislation support in regard with this issue, stereotypical views among the citizens and their suggestions for reducing existing gender gap. For the participant's selection process, a purposive sampling technique is used. The selected women had to fulfil the following criteria: (a) women serving in high administrative positions (i.e. directors, chief cabinet); (b) women working with men in the same office or environment; (c) women being involved in political decision-making positions.

2.4 Data collection & Analysis

There have been carried out 300 surveys in total, distributed in each city, Tirane, Kukes, Korce and Durres depending on the number of women who work in the respective cities. The survey is firstly conducted in Tirana where questionnaires are carried out among women in Parliament, public entities and big enterprises with females as owner/administrator. Same approach is followed also in Kukes, Korce and Durres. For local entities, a prior permission from the director/head was required and then proceeding with the survey. Helpful data that directed the sample frame of the survey are found at National Business Centre and INSTAT.

Identity of surveyed female participants and institutions where they work is anonyms in respect of their privacy and confidentiality.

The data of the questionnaire is generated by SPSS Program, for translating statistical data and charts.

3. Results and Discussion

This study aimed to investigate main barriers that restrain women in Albania to advance in professional aspect as well as stepping into leadership roles. Data gathered from the survey conducted in Tirana, Durres, Kukes and Korce are discussed and analysed as following.

Firstly, it should be emphasized that the majority of the surveyed women (37.3%) hold a doctorate degree, followed by 31.3% of women possessing a master degree, 24.2% graduated in bachelor degree while the result of the education of other women is omitted due to low percentage. However, the surveyed women are required to specify their current job position which is illustrated in the below chart.

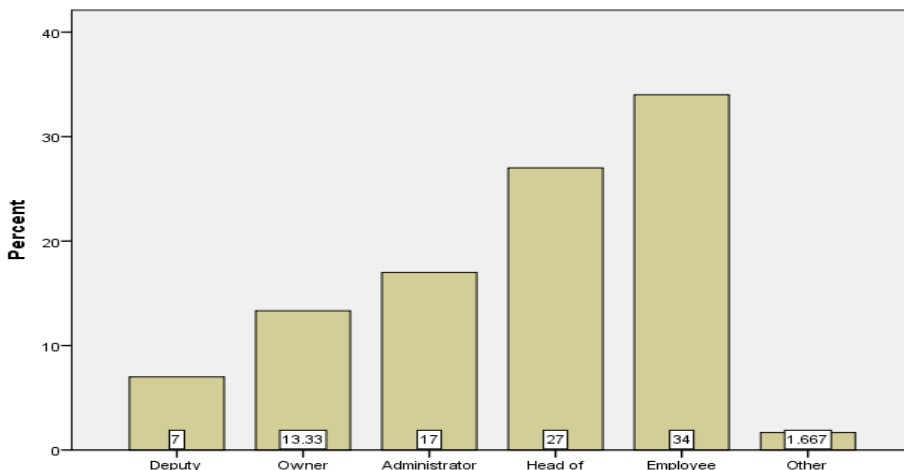


Figure 3.1: Current job position of the surveyed women

As it is evident from the chart, even though the majority of the surveyed women possess a doctorate degree, 34% of them still work as simple employees, without having a leading or decision-making position. However, only 27% of them are head of any department depending on the company or institution that they are surveyed. This is followed by 17% of women being administrator or chief executive of the company while a very small percentage (13%) of women being owner or founder of

companies. It should be emphasized that even though we could survey only 7% of the female deputies, the number of the females in the Albanian Parliament in 2017 is only 39 out of 140 deputies, which is quite smaller compared with men as deputies. Still, this is the highest number of female deputies since 1992 (Lumezi, 2017).

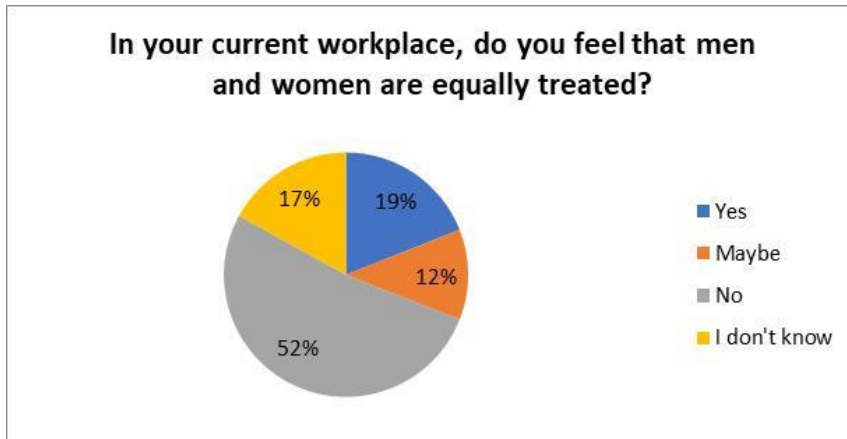


Figure 3.2: Gender Equality

Another aspect worth of discussing and helpful for revealing important findings in the study, was the treatment that women get in the same working environment compared to men. According to the survey, 52% of the surveyed females feel unequally treated compared to men co-workers, even though they work at the same environment and similar positions. Resultantly, even though they have satisfying position in the workplace, they do not consider being treated equally as men. Subsequently, the respondents were asked to argue in regard with unequal treatment in the work environment. Majority of them related it with the pay gender gap given that 64% of them assert that are not paid same as men, meanwhile 32% claim that do not have freedom in terms of expressing their opinion or flexibility in the work without being subject of gender-based discrimination or harassment. These are considered great obstacles for further development or having a sustainable career.

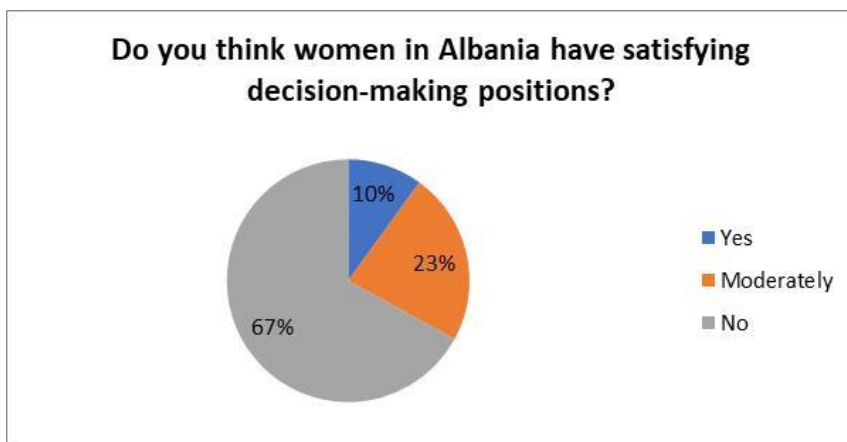


Figure 3.3: Women's decision-making power

It was considered important to perceive the opinion of women about themselves which is a significant element in a democratic regime. Even though nowadays women are more visible in public life compared to 20 years ago, still the majority

of the surveyed women (67%) do not think that women in Albania have satisfying decision-making positions. Despite of many efforts, this indicates that Albania still has features of a patriarchal country which needs progress in regard of women empowerment and elevation.

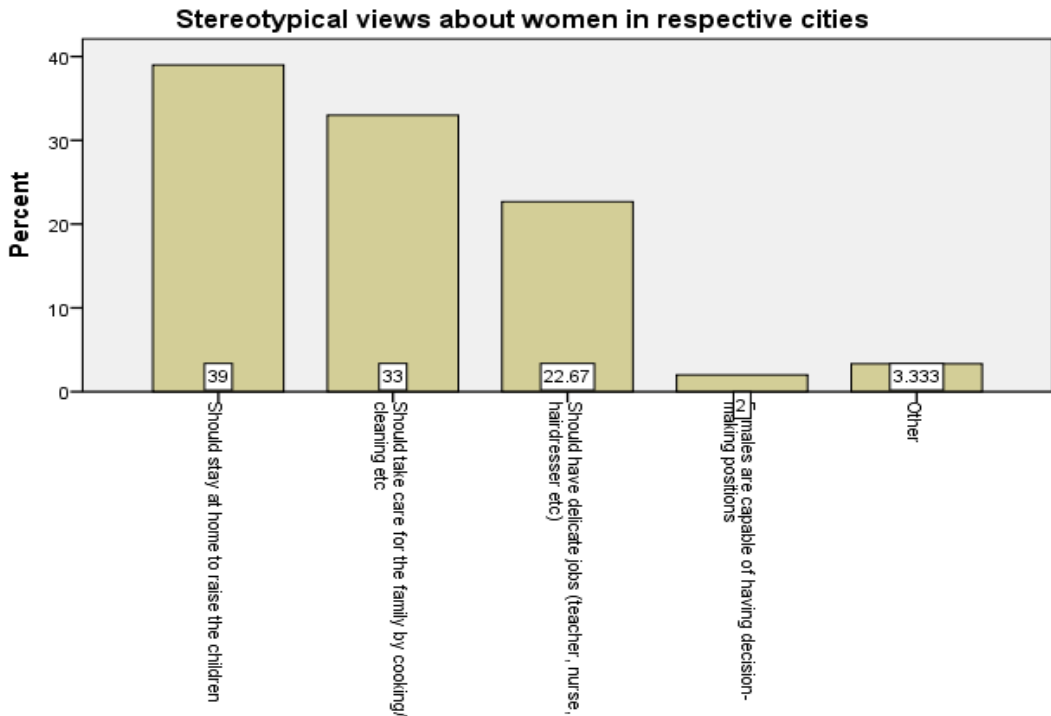


Figure 3.4. Stereotypical views about women

Among many years, Albanian culture or mentality has continuously empowered males as successful leaders which made it very difficult for women to fit into masculine archetypes of leadership. Every time a woman succeeds in her career, she is seen as the exception and often as socially and/or professionally deviant. Can female leaders escape from these role-traps?

This is the reason why it was considered crucial to understand stereotypes that exists in respective Albanian cities as the main barriers that prevent these women to express themselves and succeed in their career.

This study found out that in our society and culture is still present the mindset according to which women should stay at home to raise children (39%); take care of the family by cooking and cleaning (33%) and only 2% might really consider women capable of having decision-making positions. As it can be noticed, these stereotypes associate the image of women with duties and obligations within family framework. Hence, female is considered as fragile and incapable of doing other jobs rather than those limited inside the family framework. This may come as result of individual or institutional mindset which consists on thoughts, beliefs or gender biases which are deep-seated in society by consequently constraining women empowerment and elevation to leading roles. Ultimately, the fact that these role-traps continue to thrive in our collective unconscious and is daily faced by all, means that Albania still have too much work to progress in gender equality and abolishment of such stereotypes can be achieved only by giving to females the voice needed to be heard in social media or different awareness programs.

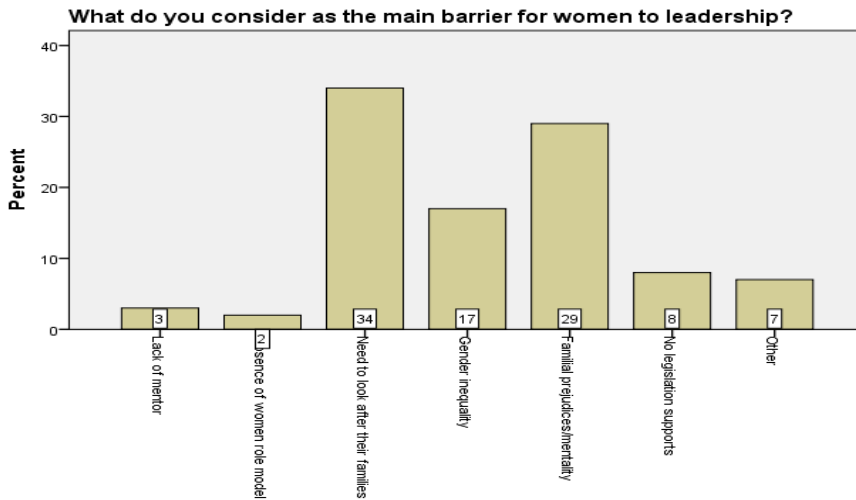


Figure 3.5: Barriers of women to leadership

Many factors are pointed out as barriers for women to leadership, as they are seen as vulnerable part of the society who are tied up to household duties.

Furthermore, this study resulted that main barriers for women to leadership are the need to look after their families (34%) and familial prejudices (29%). This is strongly related with the above-mentioned stereotypes which associate women image within family framework boundaries. They are considered only as housewife who should stay at home to take care for family and therefore are not assisted by their husband or partner. This makes it more difficult for them to find a balance between home and work life which consequently obliges women to make a choice between family and work. In the era of globalization and modernization, these mind-set barriers might be perceived as inappropriate by developed countries, as they genders equality obstacles might rely on the absence of a role model, unconsciousness bias etc. which are more coherent with the present progressive period (Parfitt, 2015). In general, these barriers seem of a different level compared to Albanian mindset - women in developed countries have very high perspectives and do not consider any more the option of being restrained within family framework duty.

An important obstacle that should have created facilities for women to empower during all these years is legislation and government policies. According to survey findings, 44% of women assert that legislation does not support them and this matter should be taken at a high relevance by entities or other public institutions

4. Conclusion

The overall result of the research has achieved the objective to identify the most significant barriers that women face during their path to leadership by referring to the cities of Tirana, Durres, Korca and Kukës.

To conclude, it can be claimed that women face huge gender gap compared to men, which is why they experience difficulties in the advancement of their careers. Albania is a developing country which needs to progress in certain aspects of the society where the empowerment and elevation of women should be considered as one of the most important features.

Some good recommendation may include:

- Promoting positive stereotypes related with females' role in the society since early age.

Considering that values and ideas start to be shaped since infant age, it is important for children to be positively educated regarding the women role in the society. This could be achieved with the support of Ministry of Culture and Education, who can prepare different awareness programs according to different age groups. This would serve to educate and guide

children about positive mindsets regarding women role in family, work and society and most importantly how they should be treated. Methods should be chosen carefully in order to effectively deliver the message and to give the proper definition of “powerful women” without being limited only to family framework.

- *The promotion of the women role models in social media*

Despite having a huge gender gap existing in Albanian society, still there are many women that have fought against barriers and stereotypes in order to have a decent place in the society where their work and contributions would be valued and appreciated. These women should serve as role models; therefore, their efforts should be promoted through different methods and channels in order to reach all women in Albania and inspire them to do the same.

- *Strengthening institutional frameworks for gender equality*

This country still needs to strengthen its institutional and legislative framework pertaining to gender equality and non-discrimination. Sweden, Norway or Finland can serve as good example for their strong legislation related to gender equality, which within a short time have achieved to lower gender gap. Government should improve monitoring and accountability of public offices towards women as well as ensuring gender mainstreaming in public policies.

It is important for government to put sanctions and restrictions in order to make laws more effective in practice rather than staying only as a set of written clauses. This could be achieved by strengthening the mechanisms and requiring accountability for gender equality or discriminations in the work environment.

In conclusion, Albania has still a long journey for improving current situation and increasing women participation and involvement in important decision-making positions.

Important is that all women should be aware of their values, importance and power as human being and future leaders of this country.

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