

Obstacles Women Face in Participating Effectively in Trade Union Membership and Leadership

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Abstract

This study tried to identify obstacles women face in participating effectively in trade union membership and leadership and make recommendations aimed at enhancing women's participation and leadership of trade unions. A descriptive survey method was used. 200 respondents (169 male and 31 female), drawn from Kenyan public universities using equal proportionate stratified sampling design, took part in the study. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting members of the UASU executive committee. Data collected using questionnaires and interview schedule. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed in data Analyses. A One Way Analysis of Variance was used. ANOVA was chosen in order to prove or disprove the Patriarchy Theory. The study revealed that: women are viewed as equally efficient and even more committed compared to their male counterparts; however, they are viewed as moody; 33% of the respondents feel that women in leadership positions face stiffer challenges compared to their male counterparts and that 62.5% of the respondents are of the opinion that women in decision-making committees are given equal hearing and participation opportunities by their male counterparts.

Keywords: attitude; equality; gender; leadership; leadership styles; patriarchy; perception; stereotyping.

INTRODUCTION

The study investigated factors influencing the participation of women in trade unionism, focusing on UASU and the relative importance of these factors in determining the accessibility of leadership positions to women in trade unions. An unfavourable position reflects poor investment returns in female human capital which, in turn, may constitute a barrier towards female participation in leadership within the trade unionism movement.

The Objectives are to;

- ❖ Identify obstacles women face in participating effectively in trade union membership and leadership.
- ❖ Make recommendations aimed at enhancing women's participation and leadership of trade unions.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Scholars can use the information from this study as a basis for further investigation and subsequent research on women's issues. The study will be useful to women's organizations and those organizations which deal with women's affairs in that it will enlighten them on the position of women within higher levels of management. As a result, they may be able to set up policies for the optimum benefit of women. In addition, the government and/or authorities may be provided with systematic evidence on the need for special policy measures to correct any gender imbalances that may come to light. The society in general will benefit because the study will

create awareness of the constraints that affect women's full participation in development projects. This may result in bringing about the society's change in attitude towards women leaders.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- ❖ The study was concerned with gender issues in leadership. Since gender is a multidimensional phenomenon, the study concentrated on women. Factors under consideration included: public image of unions, women's awareness of the benefits of unionism, the ability of women to express their opinions and views in union fora, the visibility of women in unions, whether the union runs specific projects like training for women, the existence of specific policies on women (for example, affirmative action).
- ❖ Although UASU was taken as a case study, it is hoped that the findings of this study have implications for other institutions in Kenya.
- ❖ Given that the study was conducted with a focus on UASU, generalizations of findings will apply to these particular institutions.

Kenya, like many African societies, is a patriarchal society. Although there are still many gender related challenges facing the country, a few strides in form of policy developments and enactment of key legislation has been undertaken in the recent past geared at gender equality and protection. These include the Sexual Offences Act; the passing of Gender Policy Bill and a Presidential Decree of 30% affirmative action in terms of formal appointees to public posts.

The country is also committed to international conventions such as Millennium Development Goals, and Education for All.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of Patriarchy

Patriarchy can be defined as social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line. It may also be called the control by men of a disproportionately large share of power (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy). Other definitions include: a social system in which the father is the head of the family and men have authority over women and children and family, community or society based on this system or governed by men (www.answers.com/topic/patriarchy). It's not so much that a definition is hard to come by. It's more that a definition does not give us the full meaning. A useful definition goes beyond linguistic and conceptual accuracy.

Walby (1990) identified six locations of patriarchal relations: sexuality, the household, male-on-female violence, paid employment, cultural institutions and the state. These are not mutually exclusive sites of exploitation. For example, historically, the state has tolerated male-on-female violence within the household. Explanations and interpretations vary from the biological (women are weaker) to the economic (women provide domestic support for the working male and/or a cheap army of reserve labour) to the cultural (masculinity and traditional masculine skills are valued above femininity and traditionally female skills). Patriarchy describes the structuring of society on the basis of family units, in which fathers have primary responsibility for their welfare, such as a family. In some cultures, slaves were included as part of such households. The concept of patriarchy is often used, by extension, to refer to the expectation that men take primary responsibility for the welfare of the community as a whole, acting as representatives via public office. Women can vote in most countries of the world and they outnumber men in higher education in many countries. In terms of academic achievement, international education figures from 43 developed countries, published by the organization for economic co-operation and development (2003), showed a consistent picture of women achieving better results than men at every level, particularly in literacy assessments (Craig et al., 2004: 269-284). However, heads of state, cabinet ministers and the top executives of major companies are still largely male in gender. Also, women's average income is still significantly lower than male average income.

In conclusion, patriarchy is a lens that keeps certain things out of focus. It is etiquette disguised as ethics,

a system of more or less arbitrary values masquerading as the natural and right order of things. It defines men as the standard for humanity and women as something slightly less than that, and therefore robs us all of our full humanity. Patriarchy is what makes women believe that they are supposed to serve the needs of men, and encourages men to accept this as their due.

Fiedler's Contingency Theory of Leadership

In the contingency theory of leadership, the success of the leader is a function of various contingencies in the form of subordinate, task and/or group variables. The effectiveness of a given pattern of a leader's behavior is contingent upon the demands imposed by the situation. This theory advocates for using different styles of leadership appropriate to the needs created by different organizational situations. Fielders' theory is the earliest and most extensively researched. Fiedler's approach departs from trait and behavioral models by asserting that group performance is contingent on the leader's psychological orientation and on three contextual variables: group atmosphere, task structure and the leader's power position.

This theory assumes that: leaders prioritize between task-focus and people-focus; relationships, power and task structure are the three key factors that drive effective style. Three factors are then identified about the leader, member and the task:

1. Leader-Member Relations: The extent to which the leader has the support and loyalties of followers and relations with them are friendly and cooperative.
2. Task structure: The extent to which tasks are standardised, documented and controlled.
3. Leader's Position-power: The extent to which the leader has authority to assess follower performance and give reward or punishment.

High levels of these three factors give the most favourable situation, low levels, the least favourable. Relationship-motivated leaders are most effective in moderately favourable situations. Task-motivated leaders are most effective at either end of the scale. Fiedler suggests that it may be easier for leaders to change their situation to achieve effectiveness, rather than change their leadership style.

This theory was used in this study as a guide to explain the qualities of effective leadership and how they affect women's' participation in union leadership. The implication is that education and training help the leader (male or female) improve their capabilities and efficiency as well as enhancing the leader's confidence. This in turn improves their leader-member relations and enhances the leader's common power.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A case study approach was adopted. Advantages of case studies include the fact that they are able to consider all pertinent aspects of a situation employing a group as a unit of study and intensively investigating it. A case study also gives clear insight into the phenomenon under study. It draws attention to the role of each independent variable in relation to others.

Target Population

This study involved both male and female members of the University Academic Staff Union in all the public universities in Kenya. This includes the deans of faculties, heads of department, professors, senior lecturers, lecturers and assistant lecturers.

Sampling Design and Sampling Techniques

A representative sample of members of the university academic staff union within the study was drawn from the research population. There are about 3,200 academic staff in all the public universities. An equal, proportionate stratified sampling design was used in selection of the study sample of academic staff so that men as well as women from all cadres of staff were represented – lecturers, senior lecturers, professors, heads of department, deans of faculties etc. In a proportionate stratified sample, the populations of sampling units are divided into sub-groups, or strata, and a sample selected separately per stratum. For the sampling to be proportionate, the sampling fraction (or interval) must be identical in each stratum. Proportionate allocation is used for two reasons:

1. To reduce standard errors for survey estimates.
2. To ensure that samples sizes for strata are of their expected size.

Sampling equal numbers from strata varying widely in size may be used to equate the statistical power of tests of differences between strata. Five public universities – Nairobi, Kenyatta, Egerton, Moi and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology - were included in this study. The population of UASU Members in each of the universities is as follows:

Table 1: Sample Population

Male	Female
University of Nairobi	
490	70
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	
215	25
Kenyatta University	
229	111
Egerton University	
366	66
Moi University	
356	32
Total	
Male 1656	Female 304

Source: UASU (provisional)

Therefore the sampling frame had 200 lecturers (approximately 10 percent of the total population). 40 lecturers were selected from each of the public universities.

Table 2: Sampling Frame

	Male	Female
University of Nairobi	35	5
Kenyatta University	36	4
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	27	13
Egerton University	34	6
Moi University	37	3
Total	169	31

Purposive sampling was employed in selecting members of the executive committee of UASU. In purposive sampling, the researcher selects participants based on preselected criteria. In this case the women in the UASU executive committee were interviewed.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

A combination of various research instruments were used in this study for complementary purposes. These included: questionnaires; interviews and document analysis. Data collection instruments were developed from the reviewed literature obtained from both primary and secondary sources. This enabled the researcher to identify gaps that were supposed to be filled by the study. The main survey instrument for this study were structured questionnaires (see Appendix III), accompanied by a letter to the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of multiple choice questions and Likert-Type Scales containing statements of opinion pertaining to various factors affecting women’s progress at work.

The questionnaire contained six major sections: personal information: cultural attitudes; nature and structure of work in management; low levels of education of women; low levels of employment opportunities for women and personality traits of women. The following aspects were also examined: election of women to managerial positions delegation of managerial duties to women and relevant managerial training opportunities for women. In order to overcome the limitations of the questionnaires, the researcher used an interview schedule. The interview was a face-to-face encounter, carried out among the union officials (union leaders and, in particular, the women in positions of leadership).

Document analysis was also employed. This involved reviewing the contents of the target documents with the aim of adducing some relevant secondary data (Leedy, 1974). These included the daily newspapers, union publications, documents from the International Labour Organization and other relevant materials. The researcher also surfed the internet for the purpose

of reviewing papers that may be posted on the internet from all around the world.

Validity of Research Instruments

A valid instrument contains content that is relevant to the study; in this case, relevant factors affecting women’s participation in leadership in Kenyan universities. In this study, content validity of the questionnaire and interview schedule was tested by the expert advice from members of the teaching staff in Moi University’s Faculty of Education. They assessed and determined the relevance of the research instruments independently. Adjustments were made to the questionnaires and the interview schedule to improve their validity according to the experts’ feedback.

Reliability of Research Instruments

The split-half-reliability method was used to calculate the reliability of the research instruments. It is used to determine the internal consistency reliability co-efficiency. Since such procedures require only one administration of a test, certain sources of errors of measurement are eliminated, e.g. differences in testing conditions, which occur in establishing a test-retest reliability. It is especially appropriate when the test is long.

To establish the reliability of the questionnaire and interview schedule items, pilot testing was done in KNUT branch, Eldoret Municipality. In the process of pilot testing, the questionnaire was administered to 30 members of KNUT in Eldoret Municipality. The interview schedule was administered to KNUT members who hold leadership positions. The procedure used to determine the Split-Half-Reliability Co-efficient for the items were weighted for purposes of calculation. The test was divided into two comparable halves or sub-sets. The approach used to divide the test items was by including all-even items in the first half and all-odd items in the second half. Each respondent, consequently, had two sets of scores (X scores and Y scores). The first or the X scores were for the even items and the second or the Y scores for the odd items. Fifth, Pearson product moment formula will be used to correlate the two sets of scores. The formula is as follows:

$$1. \quad r = \frac{N\sum XY - \sum X\sum Y}{\sqrt{[N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2] [N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

Where
 r = co-efficient of reliability
 N= total number of subjects
 X= rated value of one half
 Y= rated value of the other half
 Σ= Summation

The co-efficient obtained was then converted into an appropriate correlation for the entire test using the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula.

$$2. \quad r_{xx} = \frac{2r_{nn}}{1+r_{nn}}$$

Where: r_{xx} = reliability co-efficient of the original test
 r_{nn} = split-Half-Reliability co-efficient.

In this study, reliability co-efficient of 0.5 and above was accepted as a good measure of reliability.

Reliability Analysis - Scale (split)

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 10.0 N of Items = 2
 Correlation between forms = .6249 Equal-length
 Spearman-Brown = .7692
 Guttman Split-half = .7627 Unequal-length
 Spearman-Brown = .7692
 1 Items in part 1 1 Items in part 2
 Alpha for part 1 = 1.0000 Alpha for part 2 = 1.0000

Administration of Research Instruments

First, the researcher requested for a research permit from the office of the president to conduct research. This was done to give the study a legal status. The researcher delivered a covering letter requesting the respondents to participate in the study plus the questionnaires to all the selected respondents. The questionnaires were responded to and collected immediately. Completed questionnaires were checked by the researcher to find out whether they were fully and appropriately responded to.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected was analysed by the use of mean scores, percentages and tables in order to test whether there was any correlation between the men’s and women’s responses. To test whether there was any difference between the university male and female teaching staff regarding moods, commitment, acceptability and efficiency, a One Way ANOVA was used. ANOVA was chosen in order to prove or disprove the Patriarchy Theory.

RESULTS

Perception by Society of Women and Leadership Roles in the Public Realm

One of the reasons advanced as to why women do not participate in union membership and leadership is that stereotyped ideas persist about women’s abilities, preferences and roles (ILO – ICFTU Survey, 2000). Therefore the first research question sought to test the perception by society of women and leadership roles in the public realm. The results of the test are reported in table 3 below. The findings of this research question revealed that 42.9 percent of the respondents agreed that the female colleagues are more efficient, 42.9 percent of the respondents disagreed that the female colleagues are more efficient while 14.3 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed that the female colleagues were more efficient.

When it came to acceptability, 12.5 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that the female colleagues are less accepted, 12.5 percent of the respondents agreed that the female colleagues are less accepted, 50 percent of the respondents were undecided that the female colleagues are less accepted, 12.5 percent disagreed that the female colleagues are less accepted while 12.5 percent strongly disagreed that the female colleagues are less accepted. When it came to commitment, 12.5 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that the female colleagues are less committed, 12.5 percent of the respondents agreed that their female colleagues are less committed, 50 percent of the respondents disagreed that their female colleagues are less committed while 25 percent strongly disagreed that their female colleagues are less committed.

With regard to moodiness, 62.5 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that their female colleagues were more moody, 25 percent of the respondents were undecided as to whether the female colleagues were more moody while 12.5 percent of the respondents disagreed that their female colleagues were more moody.

Table 3: Perception of Women in Leadership Positions

Female colleagues are:	Percent				
	SA	A	U	D	SD
a) More efficient		42.9		42.9	14.3
b) Less accepted	12.5	12.5	50.0	12.5	12.5
c) Less committed	12.5	12.5		50.0	25.0
d) More moody	62.5		25.0	12.5	

Women are viewed as equally efficient and even more committed. The widespread view and opinion is that they are moody. Such stereotyped ideas that persist about women and their abilities, preferences and roles may serve as a barrier to women's participation in union membership and leadership.

To test whether there was any difference between the university male and female teaching staff regarding moods, commitment, acceptability and efficiency, a One Way ANOVA was used. ANOVA was chosen because of its versatility and wide applicability. The following hypothesis was tested: *There is no significant difference between the perception by male staff and female staff of women in leadership positions.*

Results show that:

- (i) For moods, $F(1, 15) = 0.003, p = 0.960$
- (ii) For commitment, $F(1, 16) = 1.429 = 0.249$
- (iii) For acceptability, $F(1, 16) = 7.538 = 0.014$

At the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance, none of the values was significant. Thus, there is no evidence to suggest that there is a statistically significant

difference between male and female staff regarding stated variables.

Criteria Used in Selecting Leaders within the Trade Union Movement

Reasons advanced as to why women do not join trade unionism membership and leadership include: the male-dominated culture or activities of the union or the hostile reactions from male members discourage women from joining and that women are said to lack confidence to join unions or to aspire to leadership positions (ILO-ICFTU Survey, 2000). This is why the third research question sought to establish the criteria used in the selection of leaders within UASU. The results are reported in table 4 below:

Table 4: Criteria for Selecting UASU Leaders

	Response	Percentage
Women who secure leadership positions have to be twice as good at the interviews	SA	20%
	A	13%
	U	-
	D	46%
	SD	20%

The responses to this research question suggest that 33% of the respondents feel that women in leadership positions face stiffer challenges as opposed to their male counterparts. As such, women may lack confidence to join unions or to aspire to leadership positions. To test whether there was any difference between the university male and female teaching staff regarding the criteria used in the selection of leaders within the trade union movement, a One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used. The following hypothesis was tested:

There is no significant difference between male staff responses and female staff responses with regard to the criteria used to select UASU leaders. The results of the test are reported below.

For qualification, $F(1, 14) = 10.348, p = 0.007$

At the 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance, this value was found to be significant. Thus suggesting there is a statistically significant difference between male and female staff regarding the stated variables.

Measures Put In Place to Improve Women's Participation in Trade Union Leadership

One of the major reasons advanced as to why women do not participate in trade union membership and leadership is that women do not understand or appreciate how unions can benefit them. Unions are also deemed to be insensitive to the needs of women workers.

Table 5: Measures to Improve Women's Participation in Union Leadership

	Response	Percentage
Women in decision-making committees are given equal hearing and participation opportunities by their male counterparts	SA	12.5%
	A	50%
	U	-
	D	31%
	SD	6%

62.5% of the respondents are of the opinion that women in decision-making committees are given equal hearing and participation opportunities by their male counterparts. In spite of this, the male-dominated culture or activities of the union or hostile reactions from male members discourage women from joining. To test whether there was any difference between the university male and female teaching staff regarding the efforts made by the union to improve participation and leadership by women within the trade union movement, a One Way Analysis of Variance was used. The hypothesis tested was: *There is no significant difference between male staff and female staff responses regarding the measures in place to improve women's participation in trade unionism leadership.*

For hearing in decision-making committees: $F(1, 15) = 21.000, p = 0.000$

At 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance, the value was found to be significant. This suggests there is a statistically significant difference between male and female staff regarding the stated variable.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Major Findings

Whereas women are viewed as equally efficient and even more committed, the widespread view and opinion is that they are moody. Such stereotyped ideas that persist about women and their abilities, preferences and roles may serve as a barrier to women's participation in union membership and leadership. The responses to research question two suggest that a majority of the respondents (43%) view women as not being ambitious. Religious and cultural norms and traditions prevent women from joining. Again, stereotyped ideas persist about women's abilities, preferences and roles. Women may not have time to join unions or participate in union activities because of conflicting family responsibilities and childcare facilities may be lacking or too expensive. The responses to research question three suggest that 33% of the respondents feel that women in leadership positions face stiffer challenges as opposed to their male counterparts. As such, women may lack the confidence to join unions or to aspire to leadership positions. The findings reveal that 62.5% of the respondents are of the opinion that women in decision-making committees are given equal hearing and participation opportunities by their male counterparts. In spite of this, the male-dominated culture or activities of the union or hostile reactions from male members discourage women from joining.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions and recommendations were made:

- ❖ Stereotyped ideas persist about women's abilities, preferences and roles. Not only should the focus be on the rights of workers and benefits

of collective actions, it is necessary to make women understand how individually their particular needs and concerns will be met.

- ❖ Women may not have time to join unions or participate in union activities because of conflicting family responsibilities, and childcare facilities may be lacking or too expensive. Efforts to raise awareness and sensitization about women's issues should be continuous. These efforts should also target male members, families and communities.
- ❖ Women may lack confidence to join unions or to aspire to leadership positions. Messages that women identify with and are motivated by should be formulated. Successes of the unions in dealing with gender equality and women's issues should also be widely publicized.
- ❖ The male-dominated culture or activities of the union or hostile reactions from male members discourage women from joining. Establishing an equality structure or women's structure within the union and ensuring that it has the mandate as well as financial and human resources to carry out its functions effectively is a measure unions can take to counter this. Also, efforts to ensure that women are adequately represented at all levels and in all structures of the union—especially at the highest decision-making bodies—through affirmative action measures, proportionality policies, quotas, targets, reserved or additional seats should be made.

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