Information

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Beyond the Glass Ceiling:
work/home conflict, networking and mentoring as determinants of females' career path to academic leadership in Nigerian Universities.

Adepeju Oti and Adetoun Oyelude

Adepeju Oti is a Ph.D. student of the Department of Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan. She earned her B.A. in French from the University of Lagos and her M.Ed in Sociology of Education with a thesis on 'Relationship Between Gender Role And Occupational Choice Among Secondary School Students in Ibadan, Nigeria'. She has taught in secondary schools and is actively involved in research and advocacy for the girl child and women's empowerment. She runs an NGO (Action Research Training And Development Centre - ARTDEC)s, which has mentoring programme for in-school adolescents. Her current research interests focus on gender equality, girl child education and women in higher education systems.

Adetoun Oyelude works in the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan. A researcher in gender anthropology, she has published articles in librarianship and womens' studies. Her current research interest is in indigenous knowledge gathered and preserved by women. She is interested in documenting women's lives. Her recent publications include *Academic Libraries: The State of the Art* (Evi-Coleman Publishers) and *Professional Women's Information Needs in Developing Countries: ICT as a catalyst* (IFLANET)

Abstract

Researchers have eulogized the fact that women have indeed broken the glass ceiling as far as being represented in 'enclaves' thought to be the exclusive preserve of men. These enclaves had hitherto included positions of leadership, politics, and boards, professions such as engineering, sciences, technology and indeed higher education. Many of the women who have broken the glass ceiling, have through 'thick and thin' gone a long way to prove their worth in managing positions such as that of Vice-chancellors, deputies, Deans in higher education, politics and so on, but researches have, found out that the 'Top' is still a 'chilly climate' for women who aspire to be leaders especially in the academic environment. Even though women are being represented, the numbers are not significant and this makes the academic environment a masculine one. Many researchers have considered the areas of gender differences as key factors responsible for the dearth of women in leadership. In spite of gender, many women have managed to break through the glass ceiling, and are faced with challenges and experiences different from those of male colleagues. The paper seeks to find out what is happening after the glass ceiling. For women who are already there, what are the influences of home & work, networking and mentoring to their career path to leadership? What are the consequences of the presence

or absence of these variables? The research generated data through in depth interviews with 25 female lecturers from different faculties and on different professional career cadre. Strong mentoring of women by women and committed men, creation of informal networks, ability to cope with executive stress and supportive home fronts are some of the strategies suggested.

Keywords: Women in higher education, Glass ceiling, leadership, Nigerian Universities.

Introduction

Many researchers have asserted that women's access to higher education continues to improve by the years. In some countries, entry level has reached parity between the sexes.

It has been noted however, that women are grossly under-represented in higher education management and globally 'men outnumber women about five to one at middle management level and at about twenty to one at senior management level'. (Chesterman, 2005) A resolution of the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education was that woman's active involvement at policy and decision making levels within higher education and society should be increased (UNESCO 1998), but contrary to this, academic institutions in Nigeria are yet to see gender issues as crucial and urgent, when the institutions are still grappling with issues such as autonomy, good governance and accreditation of the courses. (Odejide, 2003; Farayola, 2006; The Guardian, 2006).

Women and Under-representation: the glass ceiling effect

Women in tertiary institutions are under-represented in high status and leadership positions, both in the faculty and in university administration, and are clustered in the lower ranks of both categories, (Humm, 1996; Kettle, 1996), despite increasing enrolment of female students at tertiary level. (Dunlap, 1994). This global pattern is reproduced in South Africa, where only 11% of incumbents in the two highest ranks of tertiary executive administration in 1998 were female (De la Rey, 1998) Chandra, (2003), and International Labour Organisation, (2004) posited that since the entry point to teaching, research and management in higher education is the studentship position, it is expected that as the student number increase (both female and male), these numbers will also reflect in the number of University teachers. This self fulfilling prophecy has come to be more real for males than for females.

Odejide (2003) found that University staff in Nigeria were more likely to be male, a phenomenon which can be explained by the pattern of access to higher education within the country. She reported that the gender distribution of staff at the University of Ibadan (the oldest University in Nigeria) was in a lopsided position. In 2001 nearly 80% of academic staff and 70% of senior administrators were male; also 88.1% of professors, 78% of senior lecturers and 75% of junior lecturers were male. This trend was also the

same in Sri Lanka (Chandra, 2003). There the number of male academic staff was as follows: Professor 80%, Associate Professor 77.3%, Senior Lecturer Gr.1, 72.3%, Senior Lecturer G.II 65.8%, Lecturer 61.9% Vice Chancellor 92.3%, Dean 85.7%, and Heads of Departments 75.4%.

Morley et al. (2005) noticed that the number of female undergraduate students in selected Commonwealth Universities seemed to be increasing, yet the percentage of women staff, particularly in senior posts, had been slow to increase.

Data from African Universities resemble general international trends in universities showing a low proportion of women staff, with wider gap at senior academic positions. Research conducted by the Association of Common Wealth Universities (Lund, 1998; Singh, 2002) again indicated that women were seriously under–represented in all sections of employment in higher education.

The few who have broken the glass ceiling going through 'thick and thin' have been proving their worth in management positions such as of Vice-Chancellors, Deputies, and Deans in higher education. The top is still a 'chilly climate' in spite of the successes, and the academic environment is still mainly a masculine one.

Women and work/home conflict

These researchers believe that though the number of women in management in higher institutions is few, they are not insignificant, but they have paid the price to be counted among the privileged who have broken through the glass ceiling. When and after women have broken through the glass ceiling to arrive at university managerial positions such as of Vice-Chancellor, Professor, Associate Professors etc, expectations are very high and they are faced with challenges and experiences different from those of their male colleagues.

Aryee et al. (1999) and Ng et al. (2002) identified work-family stress as a major problem for women who are managers and at the same time mothers. This study targeted female married professionals who had children and examined their work-family conflict experiences and their coping strategies. Similar work had also been done by Ferber and O'Farrell, (1991); Hochschild, (1997); and Pleck, (1977). Pleck submitted that excessive work time was the major culprit affecting women as far as work-family balance was concerned. Calson and Perrewé (1999) identified the different challenges experienced by senior women as lack of social support, which leads to work-family conflict experiences.

Lo, Stone and Ng, (2003), in their study of the kinds of work-family conflict experienced by married female professionals with children in Hong Kong and the coping strategies they have adopted, found out that out of the 50 respondents they interviewed 41 rated work-family conflict as either 'intense' or 'extremely intense', and only nine characterized this conflict as either 'mild' (5) or 'non-existent' (4).

Raddon (2002) was of the opinion that there was a basic contradiction between discourses of the 'successful academic' and the 'good mother'. The successful academic should be totally dedicated and undistracted (David et al., 1996; Goode, 2000). Currie et al. (2002) posited that women academics are caught between two greedy institutions – the extended family and the university. Many of the informants in the work of Morley *et al.* (2003) commented on how academic life was incompatible with motherhood and wider domestic responsibilities. This was a recurring theme in the literature.

Finding a balance between work and family is a problem for women. Even though the glass ceiling has been cracked there is still the home/work conflict. How can the problems be solved? After the glass ceiling has been broken, what next? Is the glass ceiling removed? This has been a contentious issue among scholars.

Grisanti (1991) stated that one reason the glass ceiling remained was because most corporations were still organized around a traditional family structure. Where the men in important senior jobs had a wife at home that gave him the freedom to stay late, to be relocated, work on the weekends, and be devoted to the company if he so chose, women who have tried to emulate that model (and in some cases have been successful) achieved this, but commonly by not having children or by having their marriages fall apart (Chovwen, 2003).

Many reports from the west suggest that promotion did not exonerate women from work/home conflict but noted that they have their peculiar culturally relevant coping strategies. Lewis, Carrolls, Sylvie and Bruno (2005), in a study on commissioned female police officers, found that majority of their respondents agreed that balancing the job with personal and family life was one of the toughest challenges. Some women may postpone having children, while others may lament lack of personal time for the other side of their lives. This is similar to the findings of Lo, Stone & Ng (2003) among Asian women, for whom optional childlessness was definitely not an option; rather employment of a domestic helper played a key role in the coping process. Other strategies were spousal support and/or depression of their career ambition after having considered that their work organization required time to be readily available for overtime work and for going on business trips.

It was therefore our intention in this research to consider female executives' situation in Nigeria regarding work/home conflict, as culturally Africans believe so much in having children and would probably not give it up for anything. We also considered the roles of mentoring and networking which have emerged as successful interventions and as keys to development for women seeking more senior positions,

Mentoring: a key to development.

A key factor affecting women in their career path to the top is mentoring. Mentoring as a form of staff development is gaining widespread recognition. It provides support and guidance, with mentors seen as critical friends, in environments that are experienced as

alienating or mystifying. Mentors are seen as sponsors, protectors, research coaches, and role models (August and Waltman, 2004). The importance of mentoring and role modeling for women's professional development was widely reported in Morley *et al.* (2005).

Yearnshire (2002) reiterated that there were barriers of lack of access to networks and information sharing across gender relationships. Women were best to have the support of a good mentor, who would prepare, direct or advise them, thereby significantly contributing to their career and education as to how to overcome obstacles. Unfortunately, the very fact that the mentee could be a woman may create jealousies. Even more if the mentor were be a man, as senior people are likely to be, there could be allegations of impropriety. Not all men are willing to face suspicion and innuendo and may therefore avoid regular mentoring of females especially in one-to-one situations.

Research elsewhere however points to what institutions, especially in UK, USA, Nordic countries, South Africa and Australia are doing in the area of mentoring and how these interventions are working out, especially for women in management. One such is the Local Academic Women's Network (LAWN). LAWN is a conglomerate of some universities in the United Kingdom. It makes a conscious effort to focus in particular on seminars with highly regarded and successful female academics that offer an insight into the more personal side of their careers to date. These have given more junior members a valuable insight into the idiosyncratic career paths of successful female academics (Local Academic Women's Network, 2004). ATN-WEXDEV is another mentoring network that is to be credited with mentoring Australian women academics.

Networking as a vital tool for information sharing.

Networking is a vital tool for information sharing. It is described as the ability to link up with and interact with colleagues and superiors for mutual benefit. Literature has supported the fact that men generally benefit more from networking than women, and that they also have more informal networking avenues. (Allison, 1994; Kanter, 1997; Yearnshire, 2005).

In management, overt and covert agendas are perpetuated not only in the work place but also through men only or male dominated clubs, groups and male participant sports such as golf, tennis, squash and so on. Yearnshire (2005) posited that women were often excluded from these places, and were therefore unable to recognize power play, power holders' agendas, and when to participate as a key player.

Zoltic and Clark (1993) found that men used networking for the purposes of getting jobs and this has long been the strength of the male career development. Luke (2005) submitted that weekend and evening functions were often out of bounds for women and so they missed out on networking opportunities or the kinds of social events where important 'insider' information gets passed around over a drink, or over a game of golf. This is part of the informal cultural milieu that can make women invisible. Schein (1994)

suggested that alliances and influence networks are important for professional success but that organizational members do not openly admit this. Networking has been very useful in bringing people together and providing the opportunity to meet and learn from others' experiences.

The Research Project

The researchers sought to find out the challenges women faced after they have managed to break through the glass ceiling, to examine the peculiarity of their challenges and to determine how home/work conflict, networking and mentoring have influenced or impeded them on their path to their present positions.

Purposive sampling method was employed, as the respondents were basically female Professors, Readers, Associate Professors and Senior Lecturers in the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. Twenty-six interview questions were drawn with the relevant variables incorporated. Some of the questions were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools and qualitative interpretation.

Twenty-five respondents were targeted from the female senior academics in the University. Efforts were made to interview all those who had, at one time or the other, had administrative duties to perform apart from their normal teaching schedules.

Face to face interviews were conducted with them. Each interview lasted not less than twenty minutes and in some cases about fifty minutes if the interviewee was ready to expand on certain touchy issues.

Twenty-five female academics interviewed were randomly selected from nine of the thirteen faculties in the University of Ibadan. These faculties were Science, Basic Medical Sciences, Law, Agriculture, Education, College of Medicine, Social Sciences, Arts and the Institute of African Studies.

Only academics from Senior Lecturer upwards were chosen. 6 (24%) Professors, 5 (20%) Readers and 14 (56%) Senior Lecturers made up the population of study. Their ages ranged from 41 to 61 years and above.

Table 1. Age range of respondents:

Age	35-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61+	Total
No	Nil	9	4	2	5	5	25
%	0%	36%	16%	8%	20%	20%	100%

Their marital status was as follows: 21 (84%) married, 3 (12%) widowed and 1 (4%) separated. All of them had children: 2 (8%) had two children, 7 (28%) 3 children, 13 (52%) four children and 1 (4%) 7 children (4 biological and 3 adopted). Respondents

within the age range of 51-61 had grownup children who did not depend on them any more. Of those in the category of 61 and over, the youngest child was 21 years. Of the 41–45 year olds, one of them had a one year old child.

In answering the question on the years of service, it was found that some had put in as many as 37 years and the least had put in four years in service of the University.

Table 2. Ranking of years of service:

No of years	35-37	27-30	22-25	13-19	4-10	Total
Ranking	3	4	4	7	7	25
% Score	12%	16%	16%	28%	28%	100%

Table 2 above shows that 56% were in the prime of their career, thus it can be inferred that there was a younger generation of women in the University system, who still had years before them to make an impact and influence the system.

On their average working hours, two of the respondents said it was difficult to quantify as they often work long hours. One (a scientist) revealed that she sometimes stayed overnight in the office when monitoring experiments. None of them worked less than six hours a day. Others worked between 7-18 hours, and often continue academic/official tasks at home. The Deans and Heads of Departments among them worked 18 hours minimum.

Research Questions

Three research questions were raised in order to explore the objectives for the study. They are the following:

1. To what extent would home and spousal support have positive influences on female academics' career path?
2. To what extent would formal and informal networking influence female academics' mobility to leadership positions?
3. To what extent would institutional and informal mentoring influence females' academics' career path?

One major challenge that was common to all respondents was child care management and balancing of home and work. The major constraints that linked all of them were:

1. Managing time, home and work.
2. Working twice as hard as their male counterparts.
3. Raising children and other domestic constraints.
4. Politics in the various faculties and departments.

5. Inadequate facilities, resources, and equipment, and capacity building.
6. Paucity of information flow in the areas of training and further studies.
7. Subtle gender discrimination.
8. Not fulfilling the promotion requirements when due, and lack of focus at crucial stage of career.
9. Some seniors make things tough. There is a 'pull her down' (PhD) syndrome.

Home-Work Conflict

In response to Research Question 1: To what extent would home and spousal support influence female academics' career path?, respondents rated conflict between home and work as follows: 8% said it was extremely intense, 20% said it was intense, 44% said it was mild, and 28% said it was non-existent. (See Fig. 1). This was contrary to the findings of Lo, Stone, and Ng, (2003); O'Farell, (1991); Hochschild, (1997); and Pleck, (1977). However, it should be mentioned that all the women interviewed had support systems in terms of live-in household help, extended family members' support, such as live-in mothers-in- law, and extended family members who assist with child care and house chores.

Figure 1 Intensity of Work/Home Conflict
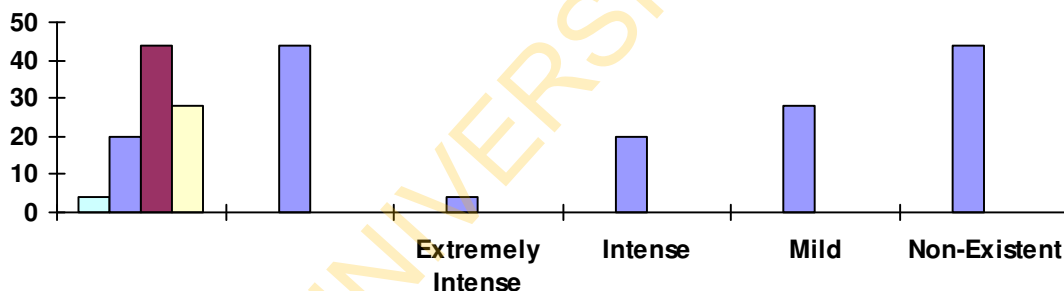
This validates the work of Perrewé, (1999). Those who found it non-existent had passed the critical stages of childcare and child rearing. All agreed that conflict was intense when their children were young and that it affected their career mobility. Those with young children had not got over the conflict.

One of the respondents said:

> I was promoted HOD of my faculty at a time I was pregnant. Male colleagues frowned at this, wondering if I could cope. In order to face the challenge, I forfeited my maternity leave, resumed work after one week of delivery, and had to strap my baby at my back to give lectures.

Another one of them stayed in one position for ten years without promotion, because during those years she did not write papers. This corroborates the findings of Raddon, (2002); David et al., 1996; Goode, (2000); Currie et al., 2002; Morley, (2003).

The respondents gave the following suggestions to help women in their mid-career. 32% said that time management and prioritizing of activities was crucial for success, 44% advocated adequate spousal support for a smooth career path. 12% advocated crèches in all Faculties. 8% advocated females mentoring females. All of them advocated hard work on the part of the female academics.

Networking
In response to Research Question Two, To what extent would formal and informal networking influence female academics' mobility to leadership positions? one major finding was that there was information hoarding by academics in the area studied. They seldom shared information.

The accepted models for information sharing are tabled below. (See Fig. 2). 20% said it was the internet, 8% used person to person contact, 24% did not know of any avenue on campus, 12% said it was through workshops, seminars and academic associations.

Figure 2. Avenues for information sharing on campus
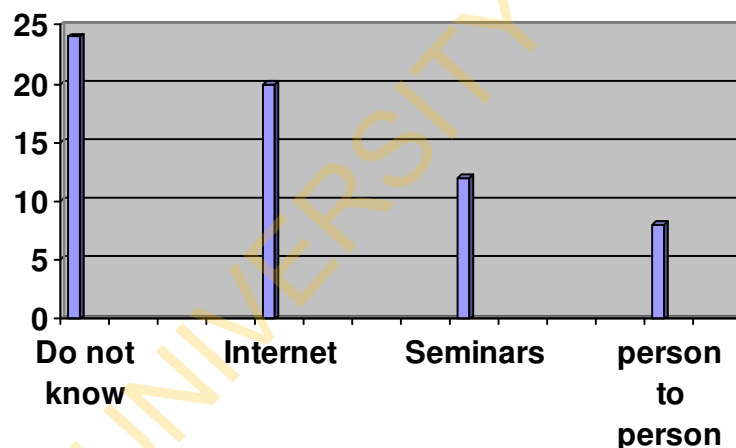
On whether they had benefited from networking and information sharing on campus, 48% said they had not benefited from networking on campus, 32% said they had benefited and 20% had no comment.

**Figure 3. Level of benefit derived from Networking on Campus.**
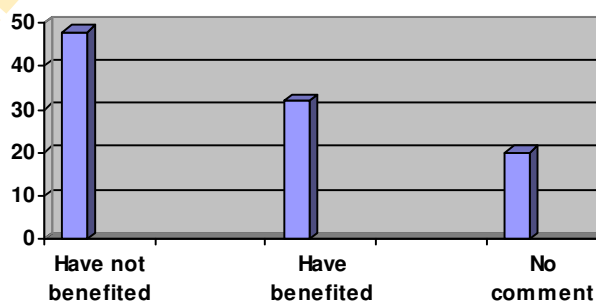
It should be mentioned that, although the University had gone the extra mile in making internet facilities available for a token both to lecturers and students, at the time of the study the power supply was very erratic on campus, thus making it difficult to use the facilities.

Other avenues identified for networking by respondents included the following: Intercom 12%, Nigerian Association of University Women (NAUW) and University of Ibadan Women's Society (UIWS) 8%, internet and newsletters 16%, Academic Associations 28%, person to person 4%. 20% gave no suggestions. Some of the women were pessimistic about joining women's associations; they saw them as avenues for gossip, and would rather not join any.

On rating their experience of information sharing and exchange, 4% said it was very good, 24% said it was good, 32% said it was fair, while 44% said it was poor. Overall, information exchange practice is poor and there is need for intervention. The first and second categories emanated from the Faculties of Law and Agriculture, and these Faculties have a good proportion of female academics at various levels of decision-making.

Figure 4: Information Sharing and Exchange in Study Area.
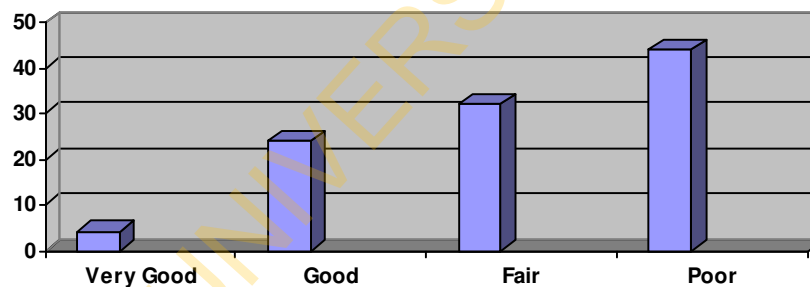
One 'very good' rating came from Computer Science. Here, the female was a lone ranger. She was Head of Department as well as President /Chairman of the Computer Professionals Registration Council of Nigeria. She was operating in two milieus dominated by the masculine gender, yet getting the best of information sharing and exchange.

On informal networking avenues, the women were asked how often they visited the staff club and coffee rooms for possible informal networking. None visited very often, 4% visited often, 52% visited rarely and 44% did not visit at all. This goes to support the finding by Schein (1994), that women rarely visited such male-dominated informal places, where jokes fly, and important information is shared over a glass of beer. One of them said:

> 'I don't go to the staff club unless I am accompanied by my husband or a male colleague. One's presence may be misconstrued.'
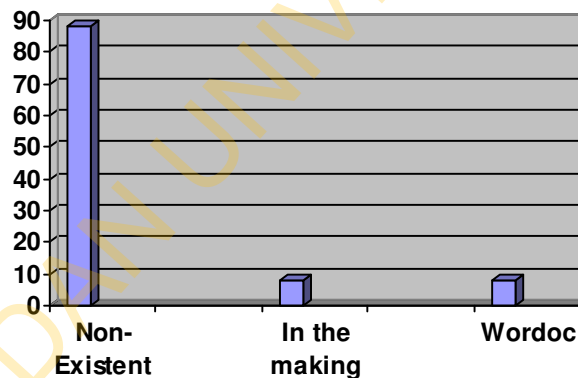
Mentoring

In response to research question three, To what extent would institutional and informal mentoring influence females' academics' career path? the following were elicited from respondents: 4 (16%) had no mentors on their job; 5 (20%) were of the view that their mothers influenced them most; 10 (40%) said that they were most influenced by male mentors who were their superiors; 10 (40%) said they were most influenced by female mentors who were their superiors. Some of the women indicated that they did not have good and mutual rapport with their female superiors.

On gender preference for mentors, 3 (12%) were not sure which gender they preferred, 7 (28%) said either, 6 (24%) said they preferred male mentors, while 5 (20%) preferred female mentors and 4 (20%) did not comment. Generally, there was greater preference for male mentors. More research still needs to be done in this area.

All the respondents however admitted that they had been making efforts at mentoring. About 40% of them had mentored over 20 people each. The younger academics were making efforts to mentor their students, as only a few of them had mentors themselves and felt the lack. Those who had no mentors at all (4 of them) were very enthusiastic about mentoring, because they did not want others to make the same mistake they made. They all agreed that mentoring was a mutual thing and depended on the mentee being ready.

Figure 5. Availability of Institutional Mentoring in the University of Ibadan.

Institutional mentoring in the University of Ibadan according to 20 (80%) of the respondents was non-existent. 1 (4%) felt it was in the making, 2 did not know if it existed or not, and 2 said Yes, institutional mentoring existed through the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) but that it was not very effective. In fact, WORDOC, as a research centre, cannot mentor, it can only make accessible documentation about the written experiences of others in the field, and this can inspire

young academics. Individual members of WORDOC can mentor, however, and efforts are being made on this (Isiugo-Abanihe & Udegbe, 1999).

On their preference for mentees, 21 preferred to mentor both male and female and had no gender preferences, and 4 felt a greater preference for female mentees. Their reasons were that females needed to be encouraged more, considering the male dominated environment of the University system. The 4 (16%) who had never had a mentor made many mistakes that slowed down their upward career mobility.

A probing question was posed to those who were at the top, namely what next for them? It is interesting to note that almost half, 12 (48%), said they were not yet at the top! They were yet to become professors, even though they had in the past or at the time of interview were holding positions of responsibility in their faculties or departments. 4 (16%) of them stated categorically that they would not want to be Vice-Chancellor. Another 4 (16%) would and do aspire to Vice-Chancellor position. Of the 13 (52%) who admitted having reached the top, 3 (12%) said that they were not interested in becoming Vice-Chancellor. 2 (8%) even after retirement would like to help young women in their career. This goes to show that some women simply do not have an interest in certain positions, even if they are qualified for them. This study should be followed up by a wider scope study of both genders and their disposition to the apex positions in their establishments.

Some of the challenges the majority of the women faced were lack of determination, ambiguity in defining career goals, politics, and getting successors in their academic fields. Some of the women had come to terms with being the only female or the first and only in their field.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings generated from this research support earlier research that academic women were faced with peculiar challenges different from those of men.

We recommend strong mentoring efforts especially by senior females, as some of them were accused of not leaving successors behind at the time of their retirement. Senior females should be more concerned about mentoring their female students, so that equity in the University system can be ensured.

Academic women should devise a means of coping with executive stress and managing their time especially when still in their reproductive years. The University should create an enabling environment for networking among academics, such as the use of intercom, seminars and conferences. The University can adopt mentoring programs that have succeeded and are working in other places, especially with a focus on women's capacity building to ensure equity and equality. The University can also try to ease work/home conflict for women by establishing crèches in all faculties, and discourage subtle discrimination against female academics that are in their reproductive years.

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