The need investigate career progression of female professional employees in the South African construction industry

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to investigate factors influencing career progression of female professional employees in the construction industry in order to identify challenges and suggest possible mitigations. An integrative review of purposively sampled literature on career progression is used to arrive at challenges to career progression faced by female professionals in the South African construction industry. The limitation of the study is its theoretical nature at this stage. Findings show that involvement of women in the construction industry has increased. However, women apparently still face challenges in progressing to senior positions in their careers. Some noted common factors include training, mentoring support, and networking. Implications of the study include the need to study factors influencing female career progression with the support of empirical data. There is also a need to examine the factors that act as barriers and analyse their nature in order to develop possible mitigations, which are also nuanced with the experiences of the subject population. The study forms a basis for understanding influencing factors and challenges to career progression of female professionals. This study is at its early stage of a more extensive research project and will be used as the foundation for empirical studies.

Keywords: Female Professionals, Construction Industry, Career Progression, Senior Positions, South Africa, Women

1. Introduction
The number of females entering the workforce that are male dominated is increasing throughout the world [1]. Compared to men, women seem not to advance in the in male-dominated industries such as construction, even when they have the same experience and educational qualification [2]. Given the welcome and growth of women within the workforce, the progression to higher and senior positions remains very low[3]. The highlighted poor career progression of women in construction can be traced to the lack of growth due to a perceived stiff competition from male professionals. Women are underrepresented in senior positions in the workforce, and still men outnumber women in in management positions [4]. Thus, the percentage of women in senior positions, 20%, is very small globally, while men hold about 80% of senior positions [5].
2. Background to the study

While participation of women in the workforce is increasing globally, there is still a considerable gap and high rate of unemployment for women in developing countries [6]. Currently men are still considerably more in the workforce than women [7]. Women in the labour force seem not to experience equal opportunities in the workplace [8], as they face difficulties in recognition and promotion to leadership roles in different sectors [9]. There are still appreciable gender divisions in various sectors, where construction for instance, has an overall 91% male worker proportion over 9% for females. Men also hold 92% of managerial positions, while the 8% of women managers are concentrated in the education and health sectors [4].

In developing countries such as South Africa, the lack of career progression of women in construction has been noted [10,11]. Entry of women into education and training has improved, giving them access to qualifications so they can aspire to senior positions [12]. However formal qualifications allow easy access of women into the construction industry but do not guarantee their career progression [13]. Post-apartheid South African government introduced gender related policies such as Employment Equity Act and National policy framework for empowering women and encourage gender fairness [14]. As such, there has been an increase in career advancement opportunities for women in construction and other industries [15]. However, women are apparently trapped in lower levels to middle levels [16]. There is therefore a need to address the gender imbalance in career progression, within the construction industry, in the South African context. The current paper therefore investigates the apparent gap, in order to firstly, understand its nature and thereby paint a theoretical picture or basis for the research direction.

Generally, there is a low succession of women to higher levels of work, within the construction industry [14]. Furthermore, the rate at which women progress across hierarchy of work levels in the construction industry differs appreciably from the experience of their male counterparts [16]. There is therefore a need to study the factors, which influence career growth and progression of female professionals in the construction industry.

3. Methodology

The preceding summary forms the aim of the current paper. In the absence of empirical evidence specific to the study focus, there is need to build a theoretical understanding from available literature in the first place, which will serve as a strong basis for empirical studies. The methodology for the study is based on integrative literature review, of extant literature, purposively selected through a systematic literature search, using wits library database and google scholar. Below is the diagram that illustrates the steps performed from Google Scholar and Wits library data base for systematic review refined results to assist in answering the research question. The process is divided into two parts, where the first part shows a table with a breakdown of articles related to the study on Google Scholar and Wits Library, and the second part will be discussing the steps which were followed to analyse the content of the selected papers.

| Table 1. Article search from Wits Library |
|-----------------------------------------|
| **Data base:** Wits Library            |
| **Search filters**                     |
| Step 1: Login                          |
| Log in using Student username and password |
| Advanced search: Keyword OR Subject    |
| First search: Women and Work OR Women Employment |

The set of papers searched was limited studies dating to last years (2015-2020). Articles of women in the workforce internationally like United Kingdom and United States were selected to broaden the scope, and the focus
3.1. Paper Selection. The Wits Library database based on filter search mentioned above, produced various documents. Articles which addressed the focus of the study were identified and selected for the use of this study. The articles were carefully identified through reading of the abstracts to confirm the relevance on the focus of the study. After the identification and selection of articles, the last step was to download the relevant articles.

3.2. Google Scholar Search. Wits Library provided articles, and some of the articles only provided abstracts and could not be downloaded. Therefore, the authors and articles i.e. Mpemba, (2018) Glass ceilings-a study into the barriers faced by aspiring professional black women in the South African Built Environment were copied from Wits library database to Google scholar for accessing and downloading the articles. The articles had certain limitations used to filter the research, which are specific dating range of the articles 2015-2020, document type and research field. Content analysis was used to review selected literature.

After the systematic search and selection of literature, a thematic content analysis was applied in order to derive the emergent themes.

4. Results

This section presents results of the integrative review of existing literature. The results are presented in two parts. An integrative discussion of literature references is presented according to emergent themes. Then key findings are presented in list form, using a table. This is followed by a brief discussion and conclusion.

4.1. Women in Employment Global View

While the participation in the workforce for women is increasing globally, there is still a considerable gap and high rate of unemployed for women in developing countries [1] [6]. Currently men are still considerably more in the workforce than women [7]. Women in the labour force seem not to experience equal opportunities in the workplace [6], as they face difficulties in recognition and promotion to leadership roles in different sectors [9]. There are still appreciable gender divisions in various sectors, where construction for instance, has an overall 91% male worker proportion over 9% for females. Men also hold 92% of managerial positions, while the 8% of women managers are concentrated in the education and health sectors [4].

4.2. Women in Construction Global View
The construction industry is regarded as a male-dominated field with a deprived diversity of gender, the women in the construction industry make up 11 percent of the entire workforce in the United Kingdom, which includes those who work in the admin, most often in design [17]. Women employed within the construction industry are filled in the junior positions but not growing in their respective designations in the industry and move towards the leadership roles [18]. [1], reported that the construction industry employs more men than women, which is why women are still underrepresented in the construction industry.

Women in the construction industry are defined as inferior to men, therefore, that perception has led to women in the industry to be assigned in lower positions and medium positions and not so much in senior positions [19]. The construction industry does not have a fair representation of women, the industry is a very rapid growing industry, yet women population within the construction workforce is very low [20].

4.3. Career Progression of Women at Work Global View

The above sections went through the history of women at work and women in construction workforce; and revealed that women participation in the workforce is increasing worldwide. With the increasing participating rate of women in the labour force, however, most of them are trapped within the lower positions and do not progress as far as middle management roles [1,21]. Women with higher levels of education enjoy better jobs than those without education [22]. There is a very slow progression for women to senior positions, women appear less suitable for holding senior leadership roles by some organizations [23]. The number of women in middle management is growing but remain very low in the CEO positions as the positions is highly occupied by men [21]. Women struggle to obtain fair representation in senior position within most industries, they substantially lag men in terms of being represented in leadership positions [24]. Today more women are getting educated and self-reliant, and this provides competition for their male counterparts in management positions [25]. With education and experience women still experience what is called Glass ceiling, which is an invisible barrier that prevent moving upwards to senior positions within their careers [26].

4.4. Career Progression of Women in Construction Global View

The construction industry is not diversified, women are relatively few in management and senior positions while men are overrepresented [27]. Most jobs in construction industry including leadership roles can be done by women, yet, men are dominating the industry [28]. There has been a change as women are acquiring qualifications and entering the workforce, however, men are still twice more likely to occupy senior position as compared to women with same experience and level education as them [29]. The gender gap in the workforce has narrowed compared to past decades and the main struggle is diversifying the leadership roles. Men are more likely to being exposed to promotion to senior position than women [30]. In early 20s in the UK the representation of women in managerial positions was less than 1% of the total construction industry [31]. Negative perceptions towards women, life-work balance and stress were the top mentioned encounters women come across in their careers, and one of the identified factors that influences career progression [32]. The performance and poor career progression for women in construction is highly influenced by gender stereotypes they come across their workplace, lack of self-confidence and insecure to compete with men [33].

4.5. Women Employment in South Africa

In mid-1990s in South Africa women have been taking initiative in educating themselves and considering professional careers [34]. Women represent a foremost part of the South African population and yet they institute only a third of the labour force [35]. However, the labour market favours men than women, there is no equal employment share between men and women in the labour force and women are highly dominated in domestic and clerk occupation, while men dominate the rest [36]. South is one
of the countries with high unemployment of women, and greatest inequality within the workforce for those women who are employed [37].

4.6. Women in Construction in South Africa

The South African construction industry still constitutes gender-based discrimination experienced by women; gender bias is still an issue in the industry [38]. The South African construction industry is economically active and consists of a dearth of competent and skilled professionals; however, it is not employing more women [39]. The industry could use women as resources to fill the gap of qualified and skilled professionals, however, it is difficult to do so, as women leave the industry due to not progressing [35]. The construction industry in South Africa is labelled as the most unchanged industrial sector because it has a male dominating at the management level [11], this is further supported by results from the An Overview of Women’s Work and Employment in SA Country Report No. 3[40]. The report reveal that women hold a little employment share in the construction both in the form and informal parts of the sectors, in the informal part of construction women for 9.8% of entire construction share and in the formal they hold only 13% of the construction share.

4.7. Career Progression of women at work in South Africa

The previous section on women at work globally has outlined how women are entering in greater numbers but they progressing to senior positions in greater. The global case on lack of progression for women is also a common case in South Africa. Despite the number of women who obtain higher education and enter the workforce in South Africa, this has still not translated into their career progression in the workplace [41]. More women found within the informal sector and those in the formal sector and professional careers hardly succeed, they are exposed to unfair work environment and compared to men and they are paid less and there is lack of promotion [42], [24] further mentioned that women hardly stay for a long period in their jobs, a large number of women leave from their jobs due to not finding themselves progressing, and those who make it to senior positions never stay for a long period in their jobs but retire early. More women have accessed employment successfully including male dominated such as mining and construction, yet the majority is struggling to attain fair movement to senior positions, advancement is very crucial in male dominated industries [41]. Women are not being exposed more to training that will help them advance in their careers [43]. Employees in organisations leave their jobs due to being frustrated from not getting enough training which will contribute to the career advancement [16].

4.8. Career progression of women in construction South Africa

In developing areas, mostly in African countries, women have been involved in construction historically, women used to build huts, clay floor in their homes and thatched roof while men would go to work. Therefore, women being part of the construction industry are not taking men’s job, but they are taking back a fair share of what is rightfully theirs [44]. The construction industry in South Africa is still male dominated and suffers from patriarchy, men in the industry decide on the position of power women occupy in the industry [45], [46] further revealed that sexist attitudes play a major role in employing and promoting, and women tend to suffer more which affects their performance in the construction industry. Sectors such as the construction industry have not experienced adequate feminine footprint when it comes to employment and advancement of women [14]. The construction industry has a tremendous shortage of women with experience over the 20 years because they leave the industry, which results in insufficient senior female role models who can provide training to young upcoming construction professionals [38]. Employers are not able to preserve females in construction due to the working hours of the industry; the hours are not flexible enough for African women as they must ensure balance between life at home and work [47]. The South African construction industry is not much different from the international case of the industry, female employees are rarely found within senior level but concentrated in the lower to middle management levels [48]. It is with the organization whether to or
not conform to the policies and promote the advancement of women, because support from organizations is one of the vital factors which have a great influence on career success [31]. Self-confidence, abilities and networking form part of the factors which encourage the career progression of women in the construction industry, as they provide good motive for individuals to gain strength to face and conquer challenges within the industry [49]. Women nowadays make good leaders and they perform well in management, due to skills they have, such as giving attention in detail, negotiation skills, organised and emotional intelligence [50]. However, that talent is untapped women are being judged based on the unique physical, identity and the work-life balance needs [51].

5. Key Findings

While following the thematic discussion of results from the integrative literature review, Table is used to present the key findings, according to the key themes of; women employment, women in construction, and career progression of women at work and women in construction.

Table 2. Key findings from review of extant literature

| Data base: Wits Library | Search filters |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Women Employment        | • The partaking of women in the workforce is increasing; however, women are overrepresented in the informal sector [6,7]. |
|                         | • Women are dominating in secretarial jobs, education and domestic services and remain underrepresented in mining, construction and other male dominated sectors [45,52] |
| Women in Construction   | • Women in construction are faced with challenges in entering the industry and those who make it in the industry are experiencing difficulties in being treated and equally as men in the industry, getting equal opportunities as men and advancing in the careers. In the industry, women are inferior to men, and they are mostly assigned at lower to middle positions and not so much in the senior positions[32,44] |
| Career progression of women in construction | • The lack of career progression and factors affecting career progression are common globally and within South Africa |
|                         | • The rate of women progressing to senior positions is very slow to the rate at which they are entering the workplaces [53] |
|                         | • Career development programmes by organizations encourages career progression of individuals |
|                         | • Discrimination is the main barrier on career progression for women in construction |
|                         | • Women are mostly inferior to men |
• Women are trapped at lower to middle positions
• There are common factors which affect career progression of women
• Training
• Mentoring support
• Networking

[43,51,54]

6. Discussion and Conclusion
The findings reveal that there has been an increase in participation of women in the workforce globally and in South Africa. Particularly in South Africa, amendments to relevant laws and emergence of new legal and policy frameworks have brought opportunities to accommodate and empower women to be more economically active. However, women in the workforce still face challenges such as discrimination, balancing other aspects of life and work, and progression to higher positions, especially management positions. The situation is the same in the construction industry. From literature, it seems that women are poorly represented in management positions and record very poor progression to higher levels of work as professionals. Literature also suggests that key causative factors include inadequate senior female role models within the construction industry, inadequate training, and poor mentoring support. Though the stated factors have been highlighted, there is little or no empirical evidence that shows the entire spectrum of substantiated barriers to career progression for women in construction, especially in the local context. Necessary differentiations have not been made between challenges active in this particular area, and the general list of barriers to women in construction. The nuanced experiences of the subject population in this regard need to be captured, examined, and compared with the experience of male counterparts. There is also a need to compare the narratives of men with that of women, and that of employers and employees. Ultimately it is necessary to derive well adapted mitigations to identified challenges. Following the current conjectures, the current study will be used as basis for subsequent empirical studies which will be applied at a national level.

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