Influence of gender stereotypes on the effectiveness of women senior managers in NGOs in Nakuru County, Kenya

Esther Kalekye (a,b), Peter Koome (b), David Gichuki (c)

(a,b) Department of Development Studies, St. Paul’s University, P.O Box 1957—10101, Nyeri, Kenya.
(c) Department of Human Resource Development, Karatina University, P.O. BOX 1957—10101, Nyeri, Kenya.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of gender stereotypes on the effectiveness of women senior managers in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Nakuru County, Kenya. A descriptive survey design was used and the target population was the human resource managers and women senior managers in 65 duly registered and active NGOs in Nakuru County. From these organizations, simple random sampling was used to select a human resource manager and a woman senior manager which resulted in 130 respondents. Primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire which had close-ended and open-ended questions while secondary data was collected through the use of document analysis. Quantitative data was sorted, cleaned and analyzed through the SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were analyzed through the use of frequencies and percentages while inferential statistics were analyzed through the use of Pearson Correlation and Pearson Chi-Square tests. The findings of the analysis were presented in form of tables and charts. On the other hand, qualitative data were analyzed thematically and the results were presented in the form of narratives. The study adhered to and ensured that research ethics were upheld. The study found out that gender stereotypes had a statistically significant negative relationship with the effectiveness of women senior managers (r = -0.342; p<0.05). The Chi-square test results indicated that gender stereotypes had a statistically significant association with the effectiveness of women senior managers. The recommendation made was that a similar study can be conducted to provide both the perspectives of men and women senior managers.

© 2020 by the authors. Licensee SSBFNET, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Introduction

The past two decades have seen the rise of women development in organizations which has focused on different glass phenomena such as glass ceiling, glass escalators, and glass cliff. These phenomena have brought to light the impediments faced by women in organizations. This is attributed to the gender roles given to women where women are thought of as homemakers and child-bearers (Johnson & Hackman, 2018). This line of thought affects organizational development which is supposed to create congruence between organizational systems, methods, strategies, structures and cultures.

Glass and Cook (2016) opine that women leaders have been associated with positive leadership in terms of increased profitability, corporate social responsibility and innovation. Nevertheless, women hold different leadership positions and they are found to be lesser as they rise the managerial ranks as compared to their male counterparts. Studies around the globe indicate that women hold marginal leadership positions and they are not entirely isolated from leadership. For example, a report by Grant Thornton (2019) shows that in 2019, women in senior management position were about 29 per cent and of this, 15 per cent were CEOs. In Eastern Europe, 32 per cent of women held senior management positions and this was the highest proportion globally. Women representation in senior management positions accounted for 31 per cent in Africa, and 28 per cent in the Asia Pacific.

In Kenya, Murugami (2017) argues that in the corporate sector, the ratio of men to women in management entry level is 51:49. However, as women climb up the management ladder, they become fewer as compared to their male counterparts in similar positions.
Similarly, a report by Equileap & Nairobi Securities Exchange (2019) showed that in the 60 companies listed in the Nairobi Securities Exchange in 2019, there were only six per cent women CEOs.

Women have worked hard to break the glass ceiling and there are changing narratives on ‘think manager, think male’. The move to the strategic apexes is however seen to have ulterior motives. Reflecting on the study by Ryan and Haslam in 2005, Pereira and Paola (2019) highlight that women are put in a leadership position when there is a likelihood of organizational failure. The positions are deemed to be risky and precarious. This ideology has birthed the notion of ‘think crisis, think woman.’

In the NGOs, Black, Henty and Sutton (2017) evidence that women hold few leadership positions and their promotion is skewed in favour of men which creates gaps for the glass cliff phenomenon to take place. The glass cliff phenomenon encompasses gender stereotypes which affect the effectiveness of women senior managers. This aspect is under-researched, especially in developing countries. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the influence of gender stereotypes on the effectiveness of women senior managers in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Literature Review

As a function of organizational development, gender stereotypes can affect the stability of an organization (Glass & Cook, 2016). In organizations, women are faced by different stereotypes especially when it comes to their management styles. For example, in Sweden, Peterson (2016) found out that in higher education organizations, women were appointed in some management positions due to their feminine management styles. These management styles were associated with feminine language such as supportive and encouraging. Women were found to be promoted and given opportunities in which they were either undervalued or over skilled.

In a global comparative study, Peus, Braun, and Knipfer (2015) found out that gender stereotypes had a negative influence on the perception of women in leadership. Cultural norms affect and shape women’s roles in organizations in the USA. In India, women were seen as homemakers and their home roles were reflected in the roles they were given in organizations. In Singapore, the women managers were seen as subordinate to male managers even though they held the same positions. Similarly, a study by Sabharwal (2015) indicated that there were role incongruities for women leaders in male-dominated fields due to lack of support for communal behaviours such as empathy and affection. These gender stereotypes prevented women leaders from participating in key decision-making and policy-making processes which made them less empowered compared to their male counterparts.

In South Africa, Osituyo (2018) found out that in the public sector, gender stereotypes hindered career progression for women. This led to the underrepresentation of women managers in the South African public sector and it is also a barrier in the achievement of organizational development. Additionally, the women were given top management roles that revolve around compassion and a few decision-making roles. This thinking is grounded in the role congruity theory.

On the other hand, in Kenya, Ratanya, Mukulu, and Sakwa, (2019) found out that in parastatals, a positive relationship existed between women’s leadership performance and gender stereotypes. From an early age, stereotypical ideologies were inculcated in the respondents which were built to their adult lives revealing that the ideologies were social constructions. Leading personalities of women were found to be firmly rooted in gender stereotypes.

Research and Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey research design. The target population was human resource managers and women senior managers working in 65 Non-Governmental Organizations registered and actively operating in Nakuru County, Kenya. A simple random sampling was used to select a human resource manager and women senior manager from each organization. Therefore, the sample size was 130 respondents.

The study used both primary and secondary data where secondary data was collected by reviewing documents on gender stereotypes and the effectiveness of women senior managers. Primary data was collected through a questionnaire. There was a questionnaire for the human resource managers which contained both open- and closed-ended questions and a questionnaire for women senior managers which contained open-ended questions. This ensured that the researcher collected qualitative and quantitative data allowing for triangulation of data. The questionnaire was undertaken through a content validity test to scrutinize the questions and ensure that the questionnaire was fit for the study. Also, a reliability test was conducted to ensure the questionnaire measured what it was intended to. A pilot study was conducted in ten randomly selected NGOs in Nakuru County that did not participate in the actual study. A Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.78 deemed the questionnaire reliable for the study.

To collect data, the researcher sought authorization from relevant authorities such as St. Paul’s University, the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), the County Commissioner’s office and the Ministry of Education in Nakuru County, and from the organizations chosen to participate in this study. When permission to conduct the study was provided, the researcher identified the respondents and also sought their permission to conduct the study. If a human resource manager was a woman, they answered only the questionnaire on human resource managers and they did not participate in answering the women senior managers questionnaire. A drop-and-pick method was used in providing and collecting the questionnaires from the respondents after one week.
The data collected was cleaned, coded and analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Science (version 24.0). Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistics were analyzed through inferential statistics such as Pearson Correlation and Pearson Chi-square tests. To achieve this, the close-ended questions were computed to create new dummy variables for the independent (gender stereotypes) and dependent variable (effectiveness of women senior managers). The dummy variables were then transformed into dichotomous variables coded as 1(yes) and 2(no). The quantitative data were presented in form of tables and charts. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically and presented in the form of narratives. The ethical principles adhered to in this study included principles of anonymity, do-no-harm, and voluntary participation.

Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

Out of the 130 questionnaires that were given out, only 107 were duly filled and returned giving a response rate of 82.3%. The response rate was deemed appropriate for the generalization of findings. From the 107 respondents, 54 were human resource managers and 53 were women senior manager. The demographics of the respondents were analyzed and the findings were recorded in Table 1. Among the human resource managers, 57.4% were male while 42.6% were female which indicated gender parity among the respondents. Gender parity was important in providing aspects of gender stereotypes from the perspective of men and women. On education, 5.6% of the respondents had a Master’s degree, 7.4% had college diplomas, and 87% had attained undergraduate degrees.

On the number of years that the organizations had been in existence, most of the organizations (63.0%) had been in existence for between 6 and 10 years. This showed that the organizations were in a good position to explain the changes in management in terms of the women senior managers. Additionally, on the length of service in organizations, over 60% of the respondents had worked in the organization for over six years.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

| Demographic Characteristic | Category       | Per cent (%) | Frequency |
|----------------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| Gender                     | Male           | 57.4         | 31        |
|                            | Female         | 42.6         | 23        |
| Level of Education         | Diploma        | 7.4          | 4         |
|                            | Undergraduate Degree | 87.0 | 47    |
|                            | Master's Degree | 5.6         | 3         |
| Years Organization has Existed | 0-5 years    | 1.9          | 1         |
|                            | 6-10 years     | 63.0         | 34        |
|                            | More than 10 years | 35.2 | 19    |
| Length of Organization     | 0-5 years      | 37.0         | 20        |
|                            | 6-10 years     | 53.7         | 29        |
|                            | More than 10 years | 9.3  | 5      |

Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers

This study’s dependent variable was the effectiveness of women senior managers. The variable was measured in terms of Autonomy to make decisions and involvement in decision making. Data on this was analyzed and recorded in Figure 1.
Figure 1: Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers

The results show that 59.3% of the respondents believed that the organization gave women senior managers the autonomy to make decisions. Also, 94.4% of the respondents indicated that the women senior managers were involved in the decision-making processes. These findings contradicted the findings of the women senior managers who felt that they did not have the autonomy to make decisions. The women, however, felt that they were involved in the decision-making process but the extent of involvement was not adequate. This affected their commitment and some leave the organization. One of the respondents indicated;

‘As a senior manager, I am involved in the decision-making process but not in all matters that I am supposed to be involved in. It can be frustrating when trying to work but I am informed about the decisions that are made about my department and I am not involved.’ (Research data, WSM respondent 29, 2020).

Also, another respondent indicated that;

‘I always feel that decision-making in this organization is for the top management and the rest of us are just given instructions on what to execute. This means that decisions are made for me about the work that I should be doing. It’s even worse because most employees in the organization are women but the decision-makers are men. This is demotivating especially when I cannot give the ideas that will help grow the department and the organization.’ (Research data, WSM respondent 51, 2020).

Corresponding to these findings, Ryan et al. (2016) found out that employees in the recent past are positively focused on the effectiveness of women leaders. Yet, even when women hold positions of authority, they are less likely to have meaningful influence over organizational policies. In the same way, Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr (2014) found out that in organizations with strong ideologies on gender, men are seen to be effective managers than women which affects the effectiveness of the women managers.

Gender Stereotypes

The independent variable for this study was gender stereotypes and the data analyzed was recorded in Table 2.

Table 2: Gender Stereotypes

| Question                                                                 | Yes | No  | N   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Does gender play a role in the appointment of women senior managers?    | 96.3% | 3.7% | 100% |
| Does culture play a critical role in the appointment of women into senior management positions? | 44.4% | 55.6% | 100% |
| Does culture affect perceived management roles carried out by women in senior management positions? | 5.6% | 94.4% | 100% |

The results show that 96.3% of the respondents agreed that gender played a role in the appointment of women senior managers. Similarly, one of the women senior managers indicated;

‘Gender affects women appointments and promotions because women are still seen as the weaker sex and when being appointed to higher positions, there is always that consideration if the woman is capable and ready to work and that brings about the notions of gender roles which we are socialized with.’ (Research data, WSM respondent 45, 2020).

In agreement to the findings of this study, Mukarram, Hammoudeh, & Raziq (2018) found out that gender roles affect the standards that are applied for men and women in an organization which also affect the way appointments are done. Correspondingly, Sabharwal
Kalekye, et al., International Journal of Research in Business & Social Science 9(5) (2020) 84-90

(2015) cites that gender is a consideration in the appointment of individuals to senior management positions. This consideration brings about the glass cliff phenomenon which negatively affects how women leaders perform their work.

On whether culture plays a role in the appointment, 55.6% of the respondents did not agree with this statement. Also, 94.4% of the respondents did not agree that culture plays a role in the perceived management roles played by women senior managers. On the contrary, the women senior managers felt that culture played a role in their appointments and management roles. One of the respondents, WSM respondent 11 stated that;

‘In this organization, achieving gender parity is important but to be honest, culture plays a central part in the appointment of the women. Yes, we can consider competences, skills, and experience but when it comes to a male-dominated field like mine, culture is considered.’

Equally, WSM respondent 49 opined that;

‘Women managers have to contend with cultural perspectives in their work. The management roles we are appointed in are dependent on the roles we are expected to play in the society. In my own experience, I am vast in technological matters but my current position is in administration which seems to be suitable for women.’

These divergent views are supported by the role congruity theory by Eagly (2018) which asserts that in gender stereotypes, women are given roles that fit their gender roles but when these roles go against this perspective, role incongruity occurs. Additionally, Glass and Cook (2016) highlight that there are difficulties in differentiating the roles that a senior manager plays by virtue of that position and the expected gender roles. As a result, gender stereotypes build up in the organization.

Moreover, the study sought to understand whether there were differences between the management styles of men and women. One of the respondents, HR respondent 43 detailed that;

‘I have noticed that men and women have different management styles. Men are more decisive and they are good at strategic thinking. Also, men are assertive in the way they lead. On the other hand, women are more approachable and they are good at solving conflicts and problems.’

In the same breath, WSM respondent 17 indicated that;

‘As women, it is believed that our management styles try to include every employee in different processes in the organization but men are authoritative.’

These views are convergent with the findings of Murugami (2017) who found out that there are different attitudes held by individuals in terms of management styles. For instance, masculine management traits are associated with art and war which views male managers as dominant, influential and strong-minded. The feminine management traits foster development and growth and female managers are thought to be empathetic and sociable. These views affect the effectiveness of women senior managers especially when the perceived gender roles are incongruent with the roles that the managers should play in the organization.

**Influence of Gender Stereotypes on the Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers**

The study sought to examine the influence that gender stereotypes have on the effectiveness of women senior managers. As such, the variables had to be transformed into dummy variables. Since the effectiveness of women senior managers had already been transformed and re-coded into the dummy variable called effectiveness, a dummy variable called gender stereotypes was created by adding all the close-ended questions on gender stereotypes. This dummy variable was then transformed into a dichotomous variable which was coded as 1 (yes) and 2 (no). This was done to allow for inferential tests to take place. The first inferential test to be conducted was the correlation test. This was achieved by conducting a Pearson correlation test which aided in the establishment of the relationship between the independent variable (gender stereotypes) and the dependent variable (effectiveness of women senior managers). These findings are recorded in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Correlation between Gender Stereotypes and Effectiveness of Women Senior Managers

|                      | Effectiveness | Gender Stereotypes1 |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Pearson Correlation  | 1             | -.342*              |
| Sig. (2-tailed)      | .011          |                     |
| N                    | 54            | 54                  |
| Pearson Correlation  | -.342**       | 1                   |
| Sig. (2-tailed)      | .011          |                     |
| N                    | 54            | 54                  |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**
The results show that the correlation value is -0.342 with a p-value of 0.000. A Pearson correlation value can result in a relationship that is positive or negative (Akoglu, 2018). In this study, there is a significant negative relationship between gender stereotypes and the effectiveness of women senior managers (p<0.05). The results are comparable to those by Peus et al. (2015) who found out that different cultural orientation holds different perspectives. However, gender stereotypes were found to have negative influences on the effectiveness and performance of women. In the same vein, Osituyo (2018) found out that there was a negative relationship that existed between gender stereotypes and women in senior management positions. This affected their effectiveness in terms of decision-making.

To test the association between the variables, a Chi-square test was conducted and the results are shown in Table 4.

| Value          | Df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|----------------|----|----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 61.262 | 12 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio      | 46.758 | 12 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 6.195 | 1 | .013 |

The findings show that the Pearson Chi-Square value $\chi^2$ is 61.262 while the p-value is 0.000. There is, therefore, a significant association between gender stereotypes and the effectiveness of women senior managers. According to Osituyo (2018), gender stereotypes influence the effectiveness of women leaders in organizations. These stereotypical ideologies are found to be socially constructed in patriarchal societies where women leaders are affected by the stereotypes in terms of what they do, how they do it and the decisions taken in the organization.

Further, the study sought to test the strength of this association whereby symmetric measures were tested using the Phi and Cramer’s V test. These results are recorded in Table 5.

| Value          | Approx. Sig. |
|----------------|--------------|
| Nominal by Nominal |               |
| Phi            | 1.065        | .000       |
| Cramer's V     | 0.753        | .000       |

The findings indicate that the Phi value was 1.065 at a p-value of 0.000 while the Cramer’s V value was 0.753 at a p-value of 0.000. These values indicate that there is a significantly strong association between gender stereotypes and the effectiveness of women senior managers at selected NGOs in Nakuru County, Kenya. According to Akoglu (2018), when the Phi and Cramer’s V values are >0.25, then, the strength of association between the variables is very strong. According to Osituyo (2018), gender stereotypes influence the effectiveness of women leaders in organizations. These stereotypical ideologies are found to be socially constructed in patriarchal societies where women leaders are affected by the stereotypes in terms of what they do, how they do it and the decisions taken in the organization.

Conclusions

Based on the finding of this study, it is concluded that gender plays a role in the appointment of women due to gender roles which affect the standard applied for men and women in the organization. Correspondingly, gender stereotypes are applied when defining the management styles of men and women. Women are seen as approachable and good at solving conflict and problems. This exposes them to the glass cliff during a crisis in the organization.

Gender stereotypes also affect the management roles that are undertaken by the women senior managers. This is in line with the role congruity theory. It is also evidenced by the women heading administration and public relations departments despite some having professional and educational backgrounds that would place them in male-dominated positions. It is inferred that gender stereotypes have a negative correlation with the effectiveness of women senior managers. Conversely, there is a statistically significant strong association between perceived empowerment and the effectiveness of women senior managers in NGOs in Nakuru County, Kenya.
The study recommends that a similar study can be conducted to provide both the perspectives of men and women senior managers on gender stereotypes and the effectiveness of women senior managers.

References

Akoglu, H. (2018). User’s guide to correlation coefficients. Turkish Journal of Emergency Medicine, 18(3), 91–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tjem.2018.08.001

Black, A., Henty, P., & Sutton, K. (2017). Women in Humanitarian Leadership. Humanitarian Advisory Group.

Eagly, A. H. (2018). Some Leaders Come from Nowhere: Their Success Is Uneven. Journal of Social Issues, 74(1), 184–196. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12263

Equileap, & Nairobi Securities Exchange. (2019). Gender Equality in the Workplace Report.NSE.

Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2016). Leading at the top: Understanding women’s challenges above the glass ceiling. The Leadership Quarterly, 27(1), 51–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.09.003

Thornton, G. (2019). Women in business: building a blueprint for action. Grant Thornton Grant Thornton International Ltd.: London, UK.

Johnson, C. E., & Hackman, M. Z. (2018). Leadership: A communication perspective. Waveland Press.

Mukarram, S. S., Saeed, A., Hammonoudeh, S., & Raziq, M. M. (2018). Women on Indian boards and market performance: A role-congruity theory perspective. Asian Business & Management, 17(1), 4–36. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-018-0030-1

Murugami, P. (2017). Impediments faced by Female Leaders in Kenya in 2006-2016: A Transformational Leadership Theory Perspective [PhD Thesis]. International School of Management.

Osituyo, O. O. (2018). Deliberate Ceiling for Career Progress of Female Public Service Employees: A Contemporary Transformation Trend in South Africa. Journal of International Women's Studies, 19(3), 172–186. http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol19/iss3/13

Paustian-Underdahl, S. C., Walker, L. S., & Woehr, D. J. (2014). Gender and perceptions of leadership effectiveness: A meta-analysis of contextual moderators. Journal of Applied Psychology, 99(6), 1129. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0036751

Pereira, E. T., & Salaris, S. (2019). The Evolution of the Role of Women in Labor Markets in Developed Economies. In Handbook of Research on Women in Management and the Global Labor Market (pp. 1-20). IGI Global.

Peterson, H. (2016). Is managing academics “women’s work”? Exploring the glass cliff in higher education management. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 44(1), 112–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143214563897

Peus, C., Braun, S., & Knipfer, K. (2015). On becoming a leader in Asia and America: Empirical evidence from women managers. The Leadership Quarterly, 26(1), 55–67. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.08.004

Ratanya, S. N., Mukulu, E., & Sakwa, M. (2019). Perceptions as an antecedent of women leadership performance in parastatals in Kenya. International Academic Journal of Innovation, Leadership and Entrepreneurship, 2(3), 14-33.

Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S. A., Morgenroth, T., Rink, F., Stoker, J., & Peters, K. (2016). Getting on top of the glass cliff: Reviewing a decade of evidence, explanations, and impact. The Leadership Quarterly, 27(3), 446-455. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.10.008

Sabharwal, M. (2015). From glass ceiling to glass cliff: Women in senior executive service. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 25(2), 399–426. https://doi.org/10.1093/jpart/mut030

Vongas, J. G., & Al Hajj, R. (2015). The evolution of empathy and women’s precarious leadership appointments. Frontiers in psychology, 6, 1751. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01751