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Review Article

**INVESTIGATING THE BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S  
PROMOTION TO MANAGERIAL POSITIONS IN IRANIAN  
UNIVERSITIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS:  
A REVIEW**Abdolreza Gilavand<sup>1</sup> and FatemehEspidkar<sup>2\*</sup><sup>1</sup>Employed Expert on Faculty Appointments, Department of Education Development Center, Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, Ahvaz, Iran<sup>2</sup>Staff of Dentistry School, Department of Education Development Center, Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, Ahvaz, Iran**Abstract:**

**Introduction:** despite the same level of knowledge and expertise of male and female employees, it seems that their opportunities for reaching management positions are not the same. Therefore, this research deals with the barriers to women's promotion to managerial positions at universities and higher education institutions of Iran.

**Materials and Methods:** This study has been done as a simple overview in 2017. Research data has been gathered through searching articles published on Iranian credible websites in and out of the country [SID, MAGIRAN, Elmnet.ir, Pub Med, Scopus, Researchgate and Web of Science] including language and history restrictions. 53 related studies were found in the initial search which 17 research papers that were completely related were used in this study.

**Results:** According to the results of the researches, the barriers to women's promotion to managerial positions can be classified in 7 components: dominant of patriarchal culture in the society and universities, problems caused by dual roles of women [conflict between family and work], the society's attitudes and misconceptions, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence among women, lack of equal educational opportunities, women's employment and legal issues and lack of suitable career in universities.

**Discussion and Conclusion:** Studying the problems of employed women and their pathology and providing appropriate solutions for solving or reducing their problems can be not only an important step in their human rights provision but also an increase in their job satisfaction that can lead to the effectiveness of Universities.

**Keywords:** Women, Management Barriers, Universities of Iran

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The world's history witnesses the huge and undeniable role of women in various events. Today that the topics of the development of world's countries are proposed, the role of women in this process has been heavily taken into account. Holding meetings, seminars, and several congresses on the status of women and their role in development tells the story of this critical issue [1]. With some care, it can be noticed that holding such programs also reveals another unpleasant issue which is the fact that so far or at least in recent centuries, the role of women has been neglected as half of the developing world's population [2]. Women as half of the population have a direct impact on the overall development of the society and the removing the barriers of women's active participation in economic, political and social affairs can help accelerate development progress [3]. In recent years, the quantitative increase in the presence of women in organizations was not associated with the qualitative improvement of their status and these huge and creative powers who are half of the owners of thought has not received much attention at managerial levels [4]. Despite the level of knowledge and the same expertise of male and female employees it seems that opportunities to reach management positions are not the same [5]. In order to achieve balance, equality and eliminating discrimination and as a result, a better and more complete development of the society, women need to be able to participate in the decision making process in different levels of society. Fortunately, these efforts have brought significant successes in many countries. Countries such as Norway, Denmark and Finland can be mentioned which more than 40% of the decision making authority is in the hands of women. Unfortunately, this issue is not worthy of attention in many third world countries and only a small number of women are in managerial and important decision-making positions in the country. In Iran, despite the fact that the country's constitution has prepared the ground to take over the majority of decision-making positions, only 8.2% of managerial jobs are allocated to women [6]. Improving the level of education, entering the business world and increasing social participation are among the changes that a significant proportion of Iranian women have undergone and experienced in recent years. The opportunity for this process has brought them new challenges. The mentioned changes have affected the position of women toward different affairs and have brought new social roles. These changes, as a source of improvement in their quality of life and the social progress, have also faced them with new challenges [7]. This situation is associated with more challenges particularly for women who are concerned about the coherence of the role of modern and traditional challenges.

Hence, studying about the different effects and consequences of women's employment and its related issues is of great importance [8]. The women faculty members of the Ministry of Health, due to having specialized education, while being active in the field of education and research, often engage in health and medical activities as well as executive and managerial activities [9]. But like other women they are faced with problems. Since in the present era, the university is the main pillar of the development of societies and given that about 70% of the students who are enrolled in college are girls and also, a high percentage of university faculty members are women [10], It seems that according to their population ratio, executive and managerial positions are not fairly divided between them. Therefore, studying the problems of employed women and their pathology and providing appropriate solutions for solving or reducing their problems can be not only an important step in their human rights provision but also an increase in their job satisfaction that can lead to the effectiveness of Universities [11]. Therefore, this paper investigates the barriers to women's promotion to managerial positions in universities and institutes of higher education in Iran.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

This study has been done as a simple overview in 2017 and in order to examine the barriers to women's promotion to managerial positions at universities and higher education institutions of Iran. Research data has been gathered through searching articles published on Iranian credible websites in and out of the country [SID, MAGIRAN, Elmnet.ir, Researchgate, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science] including language and history restrictions. 53 related studies were found in the initial search which 17 research papers that were completely related were used in this study.

**RESULTS:**

Feizi et al. [2015] have conducted a research on investigating the status of women's promotion indicators in managerial positions of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. In this research, Delphi method and questionnaire were used to collect data and T-test was used for data analysis. The Ministry of Health and Medical Education which is the second ministry that has the highest number of employed women is the statistical population of this research. The results of this study showed that the level of trust [0.80], success [0.67], support of others [61.1%], believing their ability [0.80], organizational support [1.26], equal opportunities for promotion [0.71], access to the communication and information network [1.03], attitude gender equality [0.73], knowledge

management [0.72], observance of religious rituals [0.88] and managerial skills [0.91] in women were less than average. At the end of this research it has been concluded that the most important problems of organizations is who should be the manager so that he can have administrative authority and the power to attract the cooperation of others and when a man and a woman are candidates for the management post, this weight is placed on the man's scales and leads him to victory. Finally, in this study it is concluded that the rights of women and men are equal in the ruling Islamic system of Iran and the Islamic world. The right of education, the right to own property, the right to vote and in general all aspects of rights for men also exists for women. However, the indicators for women's promotion to managerial positions in the Ministry of Health and Medical Education are very low and below average. [3].

Bordbar et al. [2012] in a study have investigated the status of female faculty members of Yazd ShahidSadoughi University of Medical Sciences in managerial positions and identifying the barriers to the promotion of these faculty members to managerial positions from their point of view. This is a descriptive survey research in which the opinions of female faculty members of Yazd ShahidSadoughi University of Medical Sciences have been analyzed based on the research questionnaire extracted from theoretical foundations and research literature. In this study, 28% of female faculty members had managerial positions at various levels. 44.4% of female managers were the group manager. There was a significant relationship between the individuals work experience and having managerial posts. The culture of the organization, the incorrect structures in the organization and social factors were identified as the main reasons for the lack of participation of female faculty members in managerial positions of the university.[11].

Ahmadi Kahnali et al [2013] have studied "the barriers of women's access to managerial positions from the viewpoint of female managers in Bandar Abbas city". In this research, female managers of Government organs of Bandar Abbas in south of Iran that were selected by purposeful sampling were studied through deep and semi-structured interviews. The results of the data revealed four categories of barriers to women's access to managerial positions from their point of view that these four general categories were divided into several components based on more and deeper analysis of the data. In order of importance, these barriers are: personal barriers with fourteen components including marital status and children, not being sponsored by the family and the husband, women's lack of confidence in their abilities, organizational barriers with nineteen components including attitudes and thoughts of decision makers

and management, the preference of men to women in equal conditions, ignoring the competencies and abilities, social barriers with four components including community culture and patriarchal attitudes in society, lack of belief in the high ability of women in society, negative judgments and prejudice against women, and political barriers with five components including long term maternity leave and obey their husbands. At the end of this article, in addition to discussing the research findings, suggestions for removing these barriers, such as increasing self-esteem and self-confidence of women through introducing successful female managers in the country as well as paying attention to the capabilities of women in organizations are presented [2].

Nursingsan et al. [2012] have studied the socio-economic factors affecting the failure of university women to reach the highest levels of management among female managers at the University of Tehran. They believe that examining the barriers to the achievement of excellent managerial positions for women in an important sector of society, which are Universities, are important and valuable from different gateways because clarifying the various dimensions of the problem will change the context for the creation of new theories and new methods of reviewing about the structure of employment and the management of women. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that despite the slight increase in academic and specialized fields, prevent women from being able to succeed in gaining top management positions in government organizations and educational centers, in order to present suggestions for increasing the efficiency of female managers and reduce the executive barriers of their management and thought about the solution. They applied "deep interview", as one of the means of qualitative method in anthropology research among fifteen female managers of the University of Tehran and in the end, they concluded that this issue, from the beginning, is integrated with "gender socialization" and is rooted in social beliefs and On the other hand, it is also related to the men's sociality in the organization. Also, "family responsibilities", "structural barriers", "legal system", "men's thoughts and attitudes towards women's abilities" and "their lack of readiness to transfer power to women" are other factors that can diminish their presence in the field of management especially at high levels.[14].

Mirghfourfi [2006] in a research entitled "Identifying and ranking effective factors in not assigning women to managerial positions in government agencies of Yazd province showed that cultural and social factors had the most effect on not assigning women to managerial posts [15].

Fatemi Sadr [2001] focused on the barriers to women's promotion at managerial levels at

Tehran's universities and individual and environmental barriers to women's promotion have been identified. Individual barriers generally include personality factors, interpersonal relationships and women's knowledge and awareness, and environmental barriers include cultural, social, religious factors and historical backgrounds. According to the findings of this research, cultural factors had the most impact on lack of women's promotion and the role of individual factors has been identified less than environmental factors [16].

Moshbaki et al, In another research that has been done in this field, conducting cultural work and the creation of critical knowledge and insight in society through the norms and right values and patterns for families and groups and social institutions and the institutionalization of these trainings through sociability and the dissemination of positive gender stereotypes around women and raising the level of women's education and the necessity of practical commitment to the law by the directors are among the suggested solutions for solving this problem and prioritization of cultural solutions in comparison with economic, political and even legal solutions about most of the women's problems and especially about this problem is necessary. [17].

Haddadi [2003] has investigated the impact of gender role in authentication of academic management positions. In this research, there was no significant relationship between the experience and education of women and their level of access to academic management positions but gender attitude toward management has been very effective in authentication of this post [18].

Hosseini Lograni [2006] in his research about the obstacles and challenges faced by female faculty in acquiring managerial positions at university concluded that there is a significant relationship between barriers such as family and cultural responsibilities and affiliation and the willingness of female faculty members and acquiring managerial positions. However, there was no significant relationship between economic barriers, higher academic levels, age and management ability of faculty women and achievement of academic management positions [7].

Alborzi and Khayer [2008] in a research entitled "Executive Strategies for Women's presence in country's great planning from the Viewpoint of powerful Academic Women" have presented two strategies. The first Strategy was the measures which their implementation turned back to women individually, including achieving Self-belief, supporting other women instead of competing with them, women's efforts to confront stereotypical viewpoints." the second strategy is collectively related to women's community or society as a whole including women's collective executive strategies, long-term planning for training skills

and increasing capabilities and the formation of nongovernmental institutions; Collective Executive Strategies by the community are also in the second category whose strategies included "appropriate culture-building practices for changing the positive attitude toward women", "valuing women's capabilities", "revision of laws," and "gradual assignment of responsibilities." [19].

In Asghari Research, by examining the methodological aspects of the research carried out on the effect of the variable of gender on job satisfaction of faculty members and using qualitative approach and systematic review technique, tries to draw researchers' attention to the necessity, importance and role of methodological considerations in making a deeper understanding and explanation of research possible, and providing a clear and precise answer in conformity with reality for problem-solving and fulfilling research objective. The findings of this study show that there are two main problems in the works of research studied here. One is ambiguity and lack of transparency in problem statement and research objective, and the other is tendency toward using a single [quantitative] research method without paying attention to differences in the nature and dimensions of fields of research. Asghari believes that in fields such as gender studies, in order to gain a deeper understanding and a more valid and clear answer, adopting a combined approach will be a more reliable choice [1].

Nasiri et al [2015], In his research, examined the role of glass ceiling in reducing perceived organizational justice. In this study, descriptive research method [correlation type] is used and female employees of Urmia University are chosen randomly. Data were gathered through "the glass ceiling" questionnaires. Assessment tools include the glass ceiling and organizational justice questionnaire. Results of research indicate that: between glass ceiling and reduction of perceived organizational justice and its dimensions [distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice] is a significant and positive relationship. Also 0/29 of the variance of reduction of perceived organizational justice can be explained by glass ceiling effect. Also results showed that between dimensions of organizational justice, procedural justice, a high percentage of variance [0/58], can be explained and predicted by the glass ceiling. [20].

The findings of Abaszadeh's research [2013] showed that although women education has "quantitatively" improved yet in meeting "qualitative" criteria it has not been so efficient. So, to compensate for this shortcoming, the development plans must be effectively directed towards qualitative models [21].

The research results of ZareFarashbandi et al [2006] entitled "Group Participation and the main topics of papers of Medical science Journal of

Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences in Ahvaz" showed that women's participation in the compilation of articles in the Ahvaz medical science journal is much lower than that of men, but their participation had an ascending growth during the years under review and it is anticipated that this participation will increase further in the future. [22].

Beheshti [2007] in a research entitled "Women and Research: attempts for increasing the Scientific Activities of Iranian women" shows that 14.82% of all research activities in universities and research centers have been done by women. The results of these researches are in the form of master thesis and Doctoral research projects, articles presented in the seminars, as well as scientific-technical articles published in specialized journals. Also, the investigation of female participation rate in 123 public research centers shows that these partnerships grew by 43 percent from 1976 to 1994. The results of the information gathering and the statistics of women's research activities carried out by the "Iranian Information and Documentation Center" are now available in the form of a database of 16,000 records [23].

Karimi, Alijani and Salehi [2007] in their research entitled "Journal of Information Science and Technology: Bibliometrics Study" have Analyzed all articles of the journal of information science and technology using bibliometric method in a 5-year period [from 2001 to 2005]. The findings of this study showed that 67 articles, 29 translated articles and 7 reports have been published during this 5-year period that 11 translations [31.43%] and 31 compilation [36.25%] were published by women and 24 translations [68.57%] and 51 articles [63.75%] were published by men in this publication [24].

Karami and Alijani [2008] in a paper titled "knowledge production of Iranian Library and Information Specialists in the Emerald Database" have studied the current status, the growth and development of scientific productions of Iranian experts in the field of librarianship and information science from the first issue of related journals in the Emerald database until June 2007 using a bibliometric method. The results showed that men had 80% participation in science production while women accounted for only 20%. [25].

### DISCUSSION:

Although positive steps have been taken recently by the government to reduce barriers to women's promotion to managerial positions at universities and higher education institutes of Iran, there are still many barriers to achieving managerial positions. Some experts point out these limitations and barriers as "glass roof." In fact, the glass roof is the barriers created by attitudes or organizational bias that prevent women from achieving higher

positions in the relevant organization and reduce their contribution to reaching high occupations.[20,26,27]. According to the results of the conducted researches the obstacles to women's promotion to managerial positions in universities and higher education institutions of Iran can be summarized in the following seven factors:

1-The dominance of Patriarchy in Society and Universities:

Culture is related to a set of values and symbols learned in the past that reinforces the expectations, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals. "Turington" considers culture as a set of informal norms, values and rules that guides the behavior of individuals and forms in a society and a specific group that lives or works together and expresses the scope of how to do it. Hofstede believes that the difference between power and manhood in society is the characteristics of each culture. In our society, there is also evidence that culture has been formed by men and for them, and women do not have much opportunity to express themselves. With a closer look at some of the poems and literary works, it is also evident that women have been mainly humiliated and introduced as dominated and defeated people. This matter is completely evident in the process of socialization and education from birth. Parents and adults' reaction is different towards baby girls and baby boys. From the very beginning, they convinced their son to know himself as a strong and dominant person and this difference is also observed in the division of responsibilities and tasks. Therefore, in the early stages of life, children learn that women and men are not equal. This education begins from family and is completed in the society. Television programs, mass media, school programs, teachers' and students' relationships, educational books, children's and teenage storytelling books, and the world of politics are all based on gender and they convince the girls that it is better for them to deal with artwork, housekeeping and maternity and they prepare boys to take out responsibilities outside the home, earning money, and family supervision and management and in this way, they provide the basis of many gender inequalities. This procedure will make a heterogeneous pyramid of jobs distribution in adulthood and leads women to specific occupations.

Obviously, men will be dominant and women will be defeated in such a culture and they will not be allowed to take part in managerial positions. On the other hand, planning and management in organizations and universities is the responsibility of men, and based on their prevailing attitudes, they are less willing to allow women to enter management positions.

2. The problems caused by the dual roles of women [conflict between work and family]:

The duality of employed woman's duties at home and at work and her long hours of work puts more pressure on female managers than the female employee and male manager. In fact, the acceptance of the role of management at work does not diminish his role at home, and the male dominant culture has mostly the same previous expectations. This dual role will lead to greater accountability and more related physical and psychological stress. These issues make women find ways to avoid taking responsibility and if they accept it, they should tolerate their problems alone.

### 3. Wrong attitudes and beliefs of the society

There is often a general thought in society and organizations that women are more likely to work for entertainment and no one take them seriously and therefore, only providing them with ordinary jobs and earning a low income will give them satisfaction. Also, for many reasons, such as marriage and childbearing women have less willingness to continue their services in the organization and devote less time to work so their work cannot be counted that these attitudes are also largely based on the culture and the process of socialization.

### 4 . Lack of self-belief and self-confidence among women:

The dominance of patriarchal culture and the effect of wrong cultural beliefs caused by the process of gender socialization and also, lack of the presence of women in managerial areas and industrial jobs have led to weak self-esteem and self-reliance among women. This occurs more when women's managerial posts are rejected not only by men, but also by female colleagues and they are in doubt about women's ability and usually prefer male managers to female managers. On the other hand, the society views women as weak, emotional and mentally deficient creature and believes that a woman is unable to perform important tasks and the power of managing is specifically for men Therefore, these issues lead to a reduction in the presence of women in managerial positions.

### 5- Lack of equal educational opportunities

Access to higher education can provide better living and working conditions for women. In fact, education has become one of the important factors for the economic development of countries and has led to investment in education for women and girls; However, for various cultural reasons and constraints in choosing some disciplines, women tend to specialize in certain disciplines; in other words, before entering the market, there is a gender division based on the accumulated human capital. This factor and conductive factors for labor market demand which results from cultural and social factors, makes women to choose specific skills.

The division of the labor market based on its feminine and masculine forms has assigned part of the jobs into the women's field and other parts to

men's fields. Therefore, the liberalization of entering into some jobs has been replaced by exclusivism. The very limited contribution of women in the pyramid of decision making has led women to be less eligible for legal support for entering the labor market and therefore be pushed to secondary jobs.

### 6 .Women's employment and legal issues

The rights that the husband, as the head of the family, holds is a menace for the independency of women's character and does not allow her to be taken seriously. Although legal regulations encourages women to interfere with family spending, the society knows man the only one who can solve the financial problems of the family and is willing to help them in their duties. Therefore, in organizations, men are paid more than women for equal amount of work and often, due to men rules, they are more protected for gaining higher positions and management levels and the prevailing culture is that women do not need to receive more income. Also, Iranian civil rights, by inducing the idea of inequality between men and women, have created obstacles such as women's dependence on the permission of their husbands from leaving the country, being under supervision, ignoring her right about her children and the attachment of accepting the guardianship [even on her own child]. These types of laws convince the society that women are incapable creatures and the reflection of this image restricts the expectation of an organization toward a female employee and makes it difficult to plan for her education and use her information and experiences.

### 7 .Lack of proper career in universities

From the organizational point of view, the career is considered as a logical sequence of work situations that enables organizations to lead capable individuals to blank positions or management levels and meeting the future needs of the organization.

Obviously, this career should be defined in a system based on meritocracy, and provides equal opportunities for women and men, while Iran doesn't have such an efficient system, and therefore, the opportunities for advancement are not generally the same in organizations and particularly in universities and are mainly in the hands of men. The results of this study are consistent with some of the world studies such as Hayfaa [8],Eiser et al [26], Weil et al [27],Tlaisset al [28]. Loscocco et al [28],Metcalf et al [29].

### Suggestions

Studies have shown that the oldest medical university in the world has been established in Iran [31].Eliminating barriers and reducing the impact of barriers to women's participation generally in the country's managerial levels and universities in particular, and achieving the goals of the Sixth

Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the use of potential women's capabilities requires comprehensive and long-term planning. In this regard, paying attention to the following factors can be helpful in this research:

Breaking the glass ceiling: most of the existing barriers will disappear by breaking the glass ceiling. This requires changing the culture of the society and, consequently, changing the culture of organizations, because organizational culture is influenced by national culture and it is not possible to increase the access of women to key posts in organizations without changing organizational culture. Basically, creating changes in culture is difficult, slow and costly. Experiences have shown that human beings do not respond quickly to sudden changes, but rather choose a defensive mode and hardly resist and on the other hand, they cannot resist gradual changes [3]. Therefore, changing the culture is essential and requires a comprehensive and strategic plan. The adoption of the following methods and techniques can facilitate this change:

- 1] Effective and appropriate use of social and mass media, displaying appropriate films from Iran's official radio and television; cooperation of The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Art Organizations and other relevant organizations with the Center for Women's Participation in order to raise awareness about women's rights; help in changing the attitude of men towards cooperating in family affairs and reducing the contradiction between double-housed activities of women at home and in the community.
- 2- Taking legal measures about using powerful women in management departments and defining a career path and using it in organizations in order to select suitable managers far from gender issues.
3. providing women with necessary knowledge about their rights and consolidate their beliefs by identifying and introducing the successful female managers and providing the necessary training.
- 4 .Establishing women's associations in departments and organizations and universities.
- 5- Training female administrators through the provision of practical training and management training programs in organizations and the determination of special quotas for women, especially in universities.
- 6 -Providing necessary training in organizations as well as providing the necessary training to teachers, professors and other education providers in order to prepare the ground for changing attitudes.
7. Elimination of gender discrimination from textbooks and fiction books.
- 8-Providing equal opportunities for choosing different disciplines in scientific-practical educations, professional and technical education as well as providing equal career opportunities.

9. Developing the participatory management system in organizations and encouraging managers to use women in management councils and planning groups.

10-Encouraging women to interfere in organizational decision-making and actively participate in councils and planning committees.

11. Changes in laws and regulations and removal of barriers and legal problems.

12 . Providing necessary knowledge about various occupations in the society and introducing empowered women in this regard.

13. Holding conferences, conventions and different meetings to illustrate the abilities of women at the community and international level and provide the necessary information.

14. Effective use of leading factors as existing community opportunities.

### CONCLUSION:

Women, as men, play a decisive role in the development and advancement of their societies. In fact, when women and men stand next each other, they will be able to put the country on the path of growth and development. Since women make up half of the active population of any society and can play a huge role in the construction of each country in general and in organization in particular, it is necessary to provide a suitable ground for the emergence and growth of their potential talents and the development of their abilities at all stages of their careers. Today, there are many limitations and barriers to their development at high organizational levels and management positions which are mainly rooted in the culture of the society. Their pathology and providing appropriate solutions to solve or reduce them can be not only an important step in the provisions of their human rights but also an important factor for increasing their job satisfaction and could boost the efficiency of universities. Therefore, the effective presence of women in the country's managerial areas requires comprehensive and strategic planning for changing the culture and the use of progressive movement factors as the existing opportunities in the society.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical issues have been completely observed by the authors.

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