

# Gender Biases Against Women in Labor Division in Kenya's Ministry of Education

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**Abstract** The study investigated gender biases against women in labor division in Kenya's Ministry of Education. The research study was guided by the African feminism as a theoretical frame work. The concurrent triangulation design, which is one of the Mixed Methods Approach models, was used in the current study. The target population in this study consisted of the thirty six Sub-County Education officers in the six sub-counties of Kisumu county. These are the six Sub County Directors of Education (SCDEOs), the six Quality Assurance and Standards officers (SCQASOs), the six Deputy Assistant Directors (Teacher Management), the six Sub-County Examinations Officers (SCXO). In view of the number of Education officers in the six Sub-Counties of Kisumu county, the current study employed saturated sampling technique. Thus, all respondents were given opportunity to participate in the study. The main Instruments of data collection in this research were the questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis guide. In order to ensure this, the researcher sought the expert judgement from lecturers in Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOUST). The split-half method was used to ascertain the reliability of the questionnaires. In this research study, the correlation coefficient was 0.845 and thus was considered appropriate. The results show that the multiplicity roles that women play in the domestic, productive and reproductive spheres which the labor policy seem not to recognize, limit women's capabilities to seek top management positions. The study recommended that The Ministry of Education should strive to put in place and affect the policy that will ensure gender equality and equity in the recruitment and promotion of education officers in top management positions.

**Keywords** Gender biases, Women, Labor division, Kenya, Ministry of Education

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## 1. Introduction

Societies worldwide at different times and different geographical locations have never been egalitarian. An egalitarian society where all men are equal and no one will experience the indignity of being relegated to a lowly position is yet to be found [1]. All human societies have some forms of social inequalities because power, prestige, social status, wealth and other resources are unequally distributed between individuals, groups and societies. The study revealed that one of the major social inequalities that has been sustained from time immemorial is gender inequality, which is the male domination of women in the society. The foundation of modern education in Kenya was laid by Christian Missionaries who introduced writing and reading to spread Christianity, and throughout the colonial period, women in Kenya experienced considerable social, economic and political inequalities relative to men. The state favoured males in the provision of paid labour needed by

settler economies, thus, resulting into women being grossly underrepresented in paid labour but served as unskilled labour in the agricultural sector [2].

Another related study [3] showed that 33.3 percent and 32.1 percent of top and middle management positions respectively were held by women. In terms of professional qualifications, 55 percent and 51.5 percent of M.Ed. and B.Ed. holders respectively, were women. Both male and female genders were rated 'high' in possession of skills and personality characteristics the respondents considered important for top educational management and leadership positions. This view received support [4] that the barriers which retard women's progress in management include the endocentric bias and patriarchal nature of the society, the traditional stereotypical perceptions of women's abilities and attitudes towards women's family roles which makes it difficult for women to be accepted as managers. The national gender policy in Zimbabwe [5], states that a gender just society in which men and women enjoy equity, contribute and benefit as equal partners in the development of the country.

Although there has been significant shifts in terms of policies and legislations on gender equity, government often lack the financial resources and political will to implement

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Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/sociology>

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them and the progress is slow [6]. In the Republic of Kenya, the new constitution that was promulgated on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2010 has far reaching provisions that will enable gender equality and freedom threshold. The guiding principle here is that the achievement of gender equality, equity and women's empowerment are accepted development goals and essential planks for Kenya to become a developed country by 2030. The Kenya National Commission for Human Rights [7] reported that although the discriminatory laws have been addressed in Kenya's New Constitution, women still face many challenges in regard to accessing top management and leadership positions. From the fore going, the studies point to the fact that women are under-represented in the top management positions in higher education due to the societal cultural view of women as a group and or individuals.

The research study was guided by the African feminism as a theoretical frame work developed by African scholars [8-12], who argued that, African Feminism is opposed to how Western Feminism dichotomises human relations by placing males against females, as well as the individualism and competitiveness which is detrimental to the African female course. Gender bias against women therefore shows that while male adult literacy is the highest, female adult literacy is lower. This means that inadequacy in educational preparedness for the females results in their under employment or end up in informal sector with little or no opportunity for advancement; [1, 14]. A research study [15] established that women do experience a strong gender bias when being evaluated for promotions on both their level of performance as well as their potential impact. Furthermore, [16] it is argued that although it is widely acknowledged that educational attainment has the potential to equalize the distribution of employment and earnings, empirical evidence in Kenya has mainly focused on monetary return to educational attainment. International Labor Organization [17] confirms that in Kenya, employment is governed by the general law of contract, as much as by the principles of common law. According to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [18], the employment rate of prime-age women in 2005 was 10% to 20% smaller than that of their male counterpart in most Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Smaller gaps are found only in the Nordic countries, with Finland being the country with the smallest gap (6%). The gender employment gap is highest in Turkey, Mexico, Greece, Korea and Italy. The gap is still well above 30%, and therefore, these countries still lag dramatically behind the OECD average (20.6%). Thus the practice of glass ceiling worldwide prevent large number of women and ethnic minorities from obtaining and securing the most powerful positions in higher grossing jobs in the workforce regardless of their qualifications and achievements [19].

Studies done in Kenya [20-27] have largely concentrated on women under representation in the Higher Education leadership and or career advancement, leaving out women's promotion to top management in educational system. Thus, there is not much research about gender biases against

women in labor division in Kenya's Ministry of Education. The present study therefore investigated gender biases against women in labor division in Kenya's Ministry of Education.

## 2. Research Methodology

The concurrent triangulation design, which is one of the Mixed Methods Approach models, was used in the current study [28]. Accordingly, this model is selected when the researcher uses two different methods in an attempt to confirm, cross-validate or corroborate findings within a single study. The research design employed both qualitative (interview and open-ended questions) and quantitative (questionnaires) to collect data from the respondents. The target population in this study consisted of the thirty six Sub-County Education officers in the six sub-counties of Kisumu county. These are the six Sub County Directors of Education (SCDEOs), the six Quality Assurance and Standards officers (SCQASOs), the six Deputy Assitant Directors (Teacher Management), the six Sub-County Examinations Officers (SCXO), to whom the questionnaire was administered and the six senior Sub-County officers from the Kisumu County Director of Education's Office, who were interviewed by the researcher on the day and time that was agreed upon. Thus, they were to form a total 42 education officers/participants in the research study.

The current study employed saturated sampling technique. Thus, all respondents were given opportunity to participate in the study. The main Instruments of data collection in this research were the questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis guide [29]. In order to ensure this, the researcher sought the expert judgement from lecturers in Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOOUST). The split-half method was used to ascertain the reliability of the questionnaires and a correlation coefficient of 0.845 was reported. Descriptive statistics was used in data analysis which entails the use of frequency distribution tables and percentages to summarize data on the closed-ended items in the questionnaire [30]. The current research study employed the thematic analysis approach which was found relevant due to its importance in giving personal feelings from the respondents.

## 3. Findings & Discussion

The study established the existence of any gender biases in labor divisions in Kenya's Ministry of Education. The researcher developed two sets of statements to examine this construct. The items were designed in such a manner that they were linked to gender biases in labour divisions in the Ministry of Education which were associated to obstacles to women in accessing top management positions. The statements were put in two different sub-headings; the labour policies that are insensitive to women managers' multiple roles and the ministerial reasons that explain the absence of

women managers. The respondents were asked to tick the appropriate response in each case given their perception on the statement in regard to women opportunity at top management positions. From the responses, the researcher computed percentage frequencies of the responses. Table 1 presents the summary of the responses on the labour policies in the Ministry of Education that are insensitive to women managers' multiple roles.

**Table 1.** Labor Policies in the Ministry of Education as Reported by Respondents (n = 24)

Item	Male (n=15) f (%)	Female (n=9) f (%)	Total (N=24) f (%)
Maternity leave duration	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)	10(41.7%)
Heavy work load	7(58.3%)	5(41.7%)	12(50.0%)
Working on weekends	8(72.7%)	3(12.5%)	11(45.8%)
Meetings timing	6(46.2%)	7(53.8%)	13(54.2%)
Gender imbalance	5(50.0%)	5(50.0%)	10(41.7%)
Gender discrimination in appointment to senior management position.	3(50.0%)	3(50.0%)	6(25.0%)

The findings of the present study in Table 1, show that more than half of the respondents 13(54.2%) feel that meetings timing as a labor policy is insensitive to women manager's multiple roles. For women, unequal share of domestic and particularly child rearing responsibilities are not included in the work policy neither do such policies address the women experiences during and after child birth and that, the multiplicity roles that women play in the domestic, productive and reproductive spheres which limit their capabilities as managers need to be addressed and put into policy [31]. A respondent observed:

*A woman is the care provider of the family and so weighs carefully her obligations in the family and her promotion. The husbands of such women would prefer their wives to be close to the family and care for them than to work very far from their homes or keep on moving to places for meetings and or seminars that are associated with top management positions. In fact, other women may end up resigning for the sake of the family (SEO4)*

This view from (SEO4) seems to suggest that the family is a factor that adds to women's burden curbing their ambition and forcing them to skip leadership opportunity, thus, giving men a competitive advantage. The late or odd hours meeting do not allow women to exercise their roles effectively as mothers or wives. Half of the respondents perceived that heavy work load 12(50.0%) is a practice that does not consider the multiplicity roles of women. Thus, 7(58.3%) male respondents supported this view that the load of work was detrimental to women progression. A related study on factors that prohibit women from advancing into leadership

position [32] revealed that women perceive that, even if they work at the top management positions and their family simultaneously, evaluators may not promote them due to their own perceptions of the work and family conflict that they undergo. Thus, it can be observed that the labor policy is yet to achieve its objective of gender equality, equity and women empowerments.

The items of working on weekends 11(45.8%); maternity leave duration 5(41.7%) and Gender imbalance 10(41.7%) were other important policy areas that women seemed to have a need for review because they don't take into the account the various tasks women managers go through. A respondent had the following to put forth:

*One policy that does not regard a woman's social needs is when duty requires one to go to work over the weekend. Some officers work far from their families and weekend is the only time to make a visit (SEO2).*

**Table 2.** Absence of Women in Managerial Positions as Reported by Respondents (n = 24)

	Male (n=15) f (%)	Female (n=9) f (%)	Total (N=24) f (%)
Few numbers of women	3(50.0%)	3(50.0%)	6(25.5%)
Male chauvinism	4(50.0%)	4(50.0%)	8(33.3%)
Management positions dominated by males	13(68.4%)	6(31.6%)	19(79.2%)
Patriarchal structure	7(63.6%)	4(36.4%)	11(45.8%)
Political structure	5(50.0%)	5(50.0%)	10(20.8%)
Men fear women domination	4(44.4%)	5(55.6%)	9(37.5%)
The notion that women are not good managers	3(42.9%)	4(57.1%)	7(29.2%)
Discrimination against women	5(55.6%)	4(44.4%)	9(37.5%)
All panelists are men	1(50.0%)	1(50.0%)	2(8.3%)
Unclear promotion procedures	1(25.0%)	3(75.0%)	4(16.7%)
Favoritism	0(0.0%)	4(100%)	4(16.7%)
Lack of networks for women	1(25.0%)	4(75.0%)	5(20.8%)
Irrelevant questions asked at interviews	1(25.0%)	4(75.0%)	5(20.8%)
The appointment requirement standards are too high for women.	2(66.7%)	1(33.3%)	3(12.5%)

This argument seem to suggest that working on weekends do not promote good policy for it does not allow social development of the women managers because it denies them the family bonding. A related [33] study is in agreement with the views of (SEO2) that women have unequal share of domestic and particularly child rearing responsibilities which are not in the work policy, neither do such policies address the experiences during and after child birth. Furthermore, the maternity leave duration is insufficient and do not allow the women managers to recover fully after delivery. Furthermore, although there has been a significant

shift in terms of policies and legislations on gender equity, government often lack the financial resources and political will to implement them and the progress is slow. [6] It emerged from the study findings that, gender imbalance and gender discrimination in appointment to senior management positions was real in Kisumu County.

Table 2 presents the summary of responses on the ministerial reasons that explain the absence of women in top managerial positions in education.

The findings of the present study show that the main reason for absence of women managers is domination of the management positions by males, which has existed for a long time and has been sustained due to the socio-cultural factors. This was observed by more than three quarters 19(79.2%) of the respondents. It seems that the barriers which retard women's progress in management include the endocentric bias and patriarchal nature of the society, the traditional stereotypical perceptions of women's abilities and negative attitudes towards their managerial roles which makes it difficult for women to be accepted as managers [4].

A participant made this remark:

*This society is so patriarchal. As a woman, there is nothing you can get unless you know or have a tall brother.* (SEO1)

This domination of top management positions by males undermine the females effort to ascend to the top management positions. The scores on these interrelated items of patriarchal structure 11(45.8%), men fear women domination 9(37.5%), discrimination against women 9(37.5%), and male chauvinism 8(33.3%) all point towards one major conclusion, that, the society is patriarchal and that men dominate almost all prime positions in educational organization without the regard of their female counterpart. Admittedly, the skills, competencies and dispositions deemed essential to leadership including assertiveness, competitiveness, autonomy and authority are embedded in socially constructed definitions of masculinity [34]. It also came out from the current study that more than a quarter of the respondents felt that women with appropriate skills, knowledge and experience are generally few in numbers for labor market 6(25.5%). A respondent reported that;

*Women can be promoted but their number at the senior administrative levels is low* (SEO 5).

This means basically that, there are fewer qualified women personnel at the senior levels of educational management and this condition disadvantages women. The study also found that, women are asked irrelevant questions during interviews 5(20.8%) for promotions just to ridicule and lock out some people including women. Worse still, there is a claim that women lack networks 5(20.8%); the appointment requirement standards are too high for women and most of them cannot qualify 3(12.5%) respondents. This is coupled with the notion that women are not good managers, as was observed by 7(29.2%) of the respondents.

The desire to uplift the women to managerial positions has

not been very successful given the fact that the society and government structures and policies have not been put in place to fully ensure gender equity. The study findings show that most things are still in favor of men, for example 2(8.3%) of the respondents, in which there was 50/50 representation between women and men, said all panelist for promotion and recruitment meetings are male dominated. A participant responded that:

*If two qualified officer, male and female, went for interview for promotion, you can be sure that a male one will get promoted but not female* (SEO6)

The views expressed here confirm that it is unfortunate that women do experience a strong gender bias when being evaluated for promotions or for both level of performance as well as their potential impact [15]. That, women have to significantly work even harder to be perceived as equally competent as men. Hence, 4(16.7%) of the respondents claim that there are always unclear promotion procedures. This undermines the female effort to ascend to the top management positions given the fact that women lack networks, a prerequisite condition to get such promotions. In addition, 4(16.7%) of the respondents said there is favoritism in both the recruitment and promotion process.

It also emerged from the findings of the present study that victimization of women by their bosses exists in labor divisions in Kenya. The significant structural challenges within the Ministry of Education in Kenya remain with male domination of office positions and of the Public Service Commission which controls recruitment and promotions [23]. Furthermore, women struggle with so-called second generation biases, which are powerful yet not often visible to women's advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, practices and patterns of interactions that inadvertently favor men [35].

## 4. Conclusions

The study concludes that, labor policy of gender equality, equity and women empowerment which are also enshrined within development goals and Kenyan's own development strategies are yet to be achieved fully in Kisumu county as well as the entire country. Thus, the organizational culture to include a democratic process of appointing the leaders based on one's qualification and achievements rather than those other factors like political correctness, patronage and personal relationships. It is incumbent upon the Ministry of Education to notice that the appointment process, stereotypical tasks and nomination of top leadership which is male friendly lowers the women's self-confidence and career aspirations. The study recommends that the Ministry of Gender to sensitize the society to recognise the significance of women's contribution and allow them meaningful participation in development and decision making process at the top managerial position and foster equitable sharing of profits.

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