

Women academics' careers in Kenya

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Abstract

This thesis examined the experiences of women academics in relation to their family contribution, educational experiences and, factors that motivated them towards academia, while highlighting strategies that they have employed to reach their present professional and academic ranks. In addition, any challenges experienced by the women academics were explored. The study is a contribution to knowledge and the extant literature on women academics' career experiences which has been under-researched, especially in Kenya. It claims to have made a contribution to a wider understanding of women academics' experiences, exposing a significant impact of culture, family, work tensions, gender role expectations, male-dominated university cultures, and a lack of role models and mentors, which contribute to the slow progress of women academics' careers in Kenyan universities. Using a qualitative research approach, the researcher used a face-to-face in-depth interviewing technique with sixteen women academics from three universities in Kenya while drawing from a feminist perspective. My aim was to create a dialogue on the lived experiences while at the same time using theory to inform and reflect on those experiences. With the use of thematic analysis, the data generated five themes; family socialization, educational attributes, motivational factors, challenges and strategies. The findings of this research demonstrated that very few women have progressed into senior academic and professional ranks and that, the pace is slow. They continue to be hampered by socio-cultural attitudes towards women and their roles in Kenyan society. This is not the full story as some of the women interviewed reported that they had to put off marriage for career and likewise, others put on hold or postponed career for family responsibilities. To maintain their positions or climb the professional ladder, they therefore, had to employ a range of strategies such as; working hard, focusing on research and publication for promotion purposes. The wider implications of these findings are discussed.