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Female Leadership Development: From a Non-Western Perspective

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“The single biggest way to impact an organization is to focus on leadership development” - John C. Maxwell.

Research by Azcona et al. (2022) reveals that the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) gender equality will not be accomplished by 2030. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic gravely affected the issue of Women’s Labor Force Participation in 169 countries, which ultimately ended up widening the gender gap. Similarly, data from the International Labour Organization (via World Bank) (2021) show that females in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are the most impacted since they have the lowest Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in the world, totaling 18.61%, when compared to the other areas and the world standard which is approximately 46.3%. Moreover, females in the MENA region are employed in “gendered professional roles” where they occupy jobs in social work and health-care whereas men occupy leadership roles (Bastian et al., 2018).

Due to globalization, it has become a necessity to study leaders globally, and not just base analysis on the Western region (Gerring et al., 2019). However, studies that have researched leaders in the past are usually based on elites (e.g., white males) in America and Europe and are limited to parliamentary positions and come from typically male-dominated education backgrounds such as engineering. Additionally, in research by Bastian et al. (2018), female leadership development in the MENA region was considered different from the anglo-saxon countries and so the barriers and challenges are unique to the region. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to compare female leadership development in the MENA Region and Asia in comparison to the Western World. It is guided by the research question “What is female leadership development like in the MENA region and Asia and how is it different from the

Western world?” Subsequently, the researchers will rely on secondary data to answer the research question.

Literature Review

The general trend of increasing global female leadership is well-established across recent statistics (Kuhlman et al., 2017). Yet, Kuhlman et al. still finds substantial disparity in the gender breakdown of leadership between Western countries and other developing regions such as MENA and Asian regions (see Appendix). The statistics indicated that four Western countries - Germany, Sweden, the UK and Austria - have reached the 40% threshold for female leadership in the health sector. In addition, the female representation in leadership positions in Canada is 32.9%, 45.3% in France and 37.8% in the UK (OECD, 2022). In the United States, women held "36.4% of first- to mid-level management positions and 25.1% of senior executive positions" at S&P 500 companies in 2017 (Lyness & Grotto, 2018, p. 228).

Although there is still a long way to progress towards the goal of gender equality in leadership, the proportion of female leaders is distinctly greater in Western countries compared to the MENA and Asia. In 2019, 5.6% of Arab nations' leadership representatives were women, while just 2.5% occupy executive roles (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2021). In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), only 4.4% of private companies and 5.7% of public companies are led by women (Kemp et al., 2013). In China, women accounted for only 17% of leadership roles in 2016 (Zhang, 2018). In Japan, 12.6% of leader roles are represented by females in 2021 (Kim, 2022). In India, there are only 3% female leaders in economic business (Jacob & Chandrasekhar, 2021). The following section will go over how social principles, such as gender norms and adversity, influence leadership development in the non-western part of the world. Cultural factors related to

gender norms and gender expectations heavily influence female representation in countries in the MENA and Asian regions (Kemp et al., 2013; Kim, 2022; Zhang, 2018). In addition, a range of hardship in discouraging female leadership.

Impact of Imposed Gender Norms on Female Leadership Development

Under the shadow of the traditional patriarchal system, females in the MENA region and Asia are under pressure to conform to the cultural demands of obeying strict gender norms (Kemp et al., 2013; Zhang, 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Moyo, 2020). They are often expected to dedicate themselves behind the family by performing supportive roles in the household, such as being responsible for caring for other family members, organizing and managing daily household chores, and raising the next generation (Chen et al., 2018). Collectivism plays a huge role in gender norms about female leadership. Given the fact about gender norms in the context, society values and encourages male leaders to devote their life to work and never put blame on them when they don't contribute to the family. On the other hand, society expects females to set family as their priority. In India, all successful female leaders get financial assistance from male family members such as their fathers, husbands, brothers, etc. (Jacob & Chandrasekhar, 2021). The rising number of female leadership in contemporary Chinese family firms also comply with similar findings (Chen et al., 2018; Zhang, 2018). Even if a woman has a leadership position, the role she plays in such a framework is intimately related to the family's expectation of a woman's family role, such as child-rearing (Foo et al., 2006)

Scholars call out for diversity in leadership development (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2021; Chen et al., 2018). Females perform invaluable leadership traits in complex workforces. Research by Baroudi and Hojeij (2021) confirms that female leaders are able to accomplish their goals and

objectives just as successfully as their male colleagues. Female leaders show exceptional interpersonal and communication skills which increases the effectiveness of transferable leadership strategies. It is also notable that females construct a large percent of the workforce in the educational field (Davids, 2018). Female educational leaders generally apply a caring and nurturing leadership style with “kindness and sensitivity” compared to male principal's authoritative leadership style that only rely on one-way communication (Moyo et al., 2020).

Impact of Female Adversity on Leadership Development

Despite the impact of gender norms on burden for women holding leadership roles in society, females encounter hardship in achieving leadership positions, such as gender discrimination (Zhang, 2018), and lack of both educational and empowerment resources in leadership development (Kemp et al., 2013). Gender discrimination is prevalent in the MENA and Asian regions (Zhang, 2018; Baroudi & Hojeij, 2021). Additionally, due to societal norms and lesser legal protection for women, female-on-female discrimination in China is pervasive and apparent (OECD, 2012; Zhang, 2018). Moreover, in Lebanon, Egypt, and Palestine there is an absence of legislation warranting gender mainstreaming and gender equality; and in Jordan and Morocco, these laws are very complex and entrenched (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014). Headquarters are much less likely to hire females for executive positions. Similar situation also appeared in India, although the global trend is promoting gender equality in the workforce, male entrepreneurship receives significant investment, but female entrepreneurs struggle in surviving in the field due to funding issues (Jacob & Chandrasekhar, 2021). An experiential learning approach suggests leadership development should take place through authentic scenarios with hands-on experiences (Khattab & Wong, 2019), but females lack the opportunity of even being considered at the starting point.

In terms of leadership development, females are far more empowerment-oriented than their male colleagues (Jacob & Chandrasekhar, 2021). Additionally, empowerment from experienced role models significantly influence the aspired leadership style in females. However, the overall dynamic of female representatives in the MENA and Asian regions are left blank. Research in Arab countries identified there are rarely female role models in leadership to provide empowerment and mentorship for women (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2021).

Leadership Style Developed by Women Leaders in Non-Western Countries

Naidoo and Perumal (2014) conducted a study regarding women leaders at disadvantaged schools in Johannesburg, South Africa, and found that those women leaders rely on their own values to help them lead the school; most women leaders used a "relational, inclusive, and compassionate leadership style," but at the same time they are willing to change their leadership styles to autocratic to ensure the efficiency of their organization (p. 822). The aforementioned views contrast with the conventional picture of women, in which they are perceived as displaying "tenderness, love, caring, and encouragement" (Li et al., 2013, p. 428). Additionally, Li et al. found that the majority of Chinese entrepreneurial women adopt an achievement-oriented leadership style, which is characterized by a high initiating structure and a high level of consideration. Peus et al. (2015) contrasted the leadership styles of eastern and western women leaders and found that certain women leaders in eastern countries such as Singapore share a value-oriented leadership style similar to that of women leaders in the United States. However, this is not the case for the rest of the Eastern countries; task-oriented leadership is most often mentioned by Chinese women leaders, and relational-oriented leadership is the most common leadership style mentioned by nearly two-thirds of the women leaders in Eastern countries. The aforementioned differences in leadership styles may be a result of cultural influences. For

example, Menon et al. (2020) finds that Singapore employees are more likely to favor leaders who support the actions of their employees juxtaposed to American employees who favor front leaders that work directly with employees.

Literature Gap/Problem

The literature reveals a central problem and gap in the literature that although a substantial amount of research has been conducted on female leadership development in Western societies, less attention has been devoted to it in other regions of the world, such as the MENA region and Asia. For example, Davids (2018) highlights the challenges female principals in South Africa face, and ways to overcome the barriers. However, the study is limited in its number of participants and region. Additionally, Kemp et al. (2013) found that women in the UAE are underrepresented in senior leadership roles, and are more present in hospitality positions and departmental leadership.

Additional research by Chen et al. (2017) focuses on female leadership in China, yet the study is limited to family owned firms. Research by Khattab and Wong (2019) finds that the majority of executives do not mind that leadership development practices in the Middle East are based 80% on Western principles and 20% on Arab principles, and are open towards Westernization and globalization. However, the executives demonstrate appreciation to their tribal roots and local norms. While Khattab and Wong focus on leadership development, the study does not identify the challenges that women face in their leadership development. Moreover, the study by Baroudi and Hojeij (2021) complements the research by Khattab and Wong (2019) where it includes the female perspective of leadership development practices in the Arab world and concludes that female leadership participation varies from very minimal to fully involved based on the Arab country. Baroudi and Hojeij add that female educational leaders have to battle social norms, and deal with financial roadblocks to attain success.

Findings

In general, females in Western countries achieve a higher percentage of both labor force participation rate and leadership representation compared to the MENA region and Asian countries where women face more difficulties and hardships in the labor market due to the traditional requirements and discrimination they face (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2021; International Labour Organization (via World Bank), 2021; Kemp et al., 2013). Therefore, after conducting a thorough literature analysis and identifying the gap, the following findings were evident. First, numerous studies highlight the fact that females in MENA region and Asian countries are expected to take on more family responsibilities and cannot fully devote themselves to work as their male counterparts (Chen et al., 2017; Khattab & Wong, 2019). Second, females do not often receive opportunities for professional development like training or promotions required by leadership positions and require mentorship opportunities to advance (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2021; Jacob & Chandrasekhar, 2021).

Conclusion

In short, female leadership development differs vastly between western and non-western countries. Female leadership development and a higher LFPR are vital in developing countries, to reduce the gender equality gap and achieve SDG 5. However, the imposed social norms and adversity women face, such as gender discrimination and disempowerment serve as obstacles to women's path to senior leadership positions and female empowerment. Still, this literature analysis points out that women from the MENA region and Asian countries are rarely vetted for, and there is a need to invest in them so they can feel empowered and contribute significantly with their unique perspectives to their work and communities. Furthermore, it indicates the need

to develop legal policies that enable gender mainstreaming as to promote and respect diversity in the workplace and senior positions.

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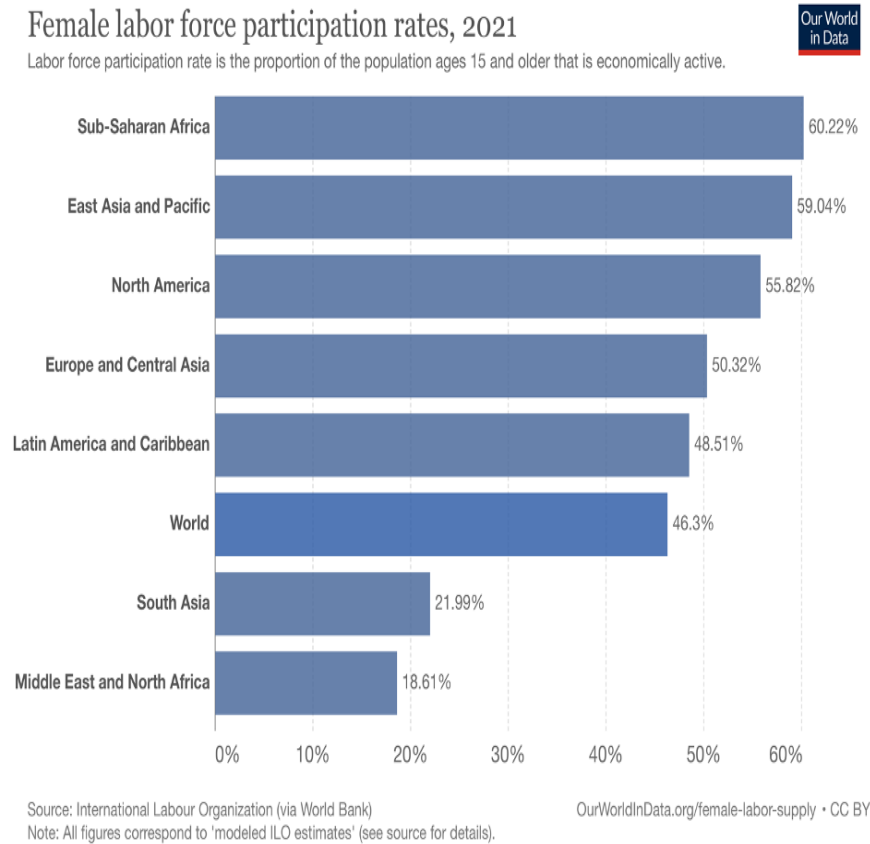
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Appendix

Figure 1

Female Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in the World



Note. Image shows Female Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in the World rates: 2021

Labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active.

From International Labour Organization (via World Bank), 2021, by ILO, 2021. Copyright 2022 by OurWorldinData.