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# Leadership Stories: Barriers To Women University Leaders Leading With Authenticity

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative narrative study was conducted to gain leadership stories of effective female university leaders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study. How did you get to this leadership position? How do female leaders tell their stories as authentic leaders? What challenges do they face while leading with authenticity? How do Women University leaders overcome these barriers? In-depth data were obtained by interviewing four female university leaders. These interview were conducted at Women's University of Swabi- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.. These interviews were hand-coded to generate additional research questions and linked themes. Research shows that women are experiencing a bumpy road to university leadership. Participants experienced barriers related to gender, professional development, and family life. Each leader has had to overcome these obstacles to achieve successful leadership.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Women Leaders, barriers, authenticity.

## INTRODUCTION

In the early days of the 20th century, women were restricted to their home boundaries and avoided public places (Ishaq, & Memon, 2016). Today women are rendering services in all areas of life such as business, education, health,

accounting, budget analysis, and social services. They are educating, uniting, and mobilizing females to play positive roles in the reconstruction of society. Despite their rapidly increased role, women still face more challenges and difficulties as compared to their male colleagues especially in leadership. Although women's strength in the workforce has considerably increased now a days, yet women still occupy top leadership positions much less frequently than men almost in all industries (Tariq et al., 2017). Moreover, recent studies state that males and females become decent political, professional, and educational leaders, but males occupy more topmost positions in these fields than females (Al-Moamary et al., 2020).

Women's leadership in the field of education is the crying need of the time. Women leaders at the university level began playing an increasingly important role in female students' mobilization to fight social conservatism with the slogan that no nation can make progress without the cooperation of its women. Women leaders with the attribute of authenticity not only transform organizations but also bring about a social revolution and enhance the effectiveness of institutional performance (Offermann et al., 2020).

Some current studies focus on female leadership styles and acknowledge that women face some challenges of gender discrimination in gaining important leadership positions. Research shows that global ignorance and prejudice can affect even the physical attitudes of women as leaders (Nam, 2015). Some current studies (Himmerick, 2020; Thomas, 2021) concentrated on women's leadership styles acknowledge that female meet some one-sided impediments due to gender bias in getting the highest leadership posts. Studies authenticate in what manner insensible, and universal prejudice likely influence a person's actual attitude to females as lead personalities (Nam, 2015).

This issue becomes even more risky for women who work in sensitive cultural societies. Many societies in Pakistan especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region are established on tribal, cultural, ethnic and gender basis. Due to the norms and strict culture of pakhtun society, professional women face various barriers in underetaking their daily academic and professional activities. Moreover, the Pashtun society is ruled by gender stereotypical perceptions that restrain women from moving forward in their careers especially when they strive to persue leadership positions( Maryam et al, 2021).

As a result, women's ratio is less than men's in higher institutes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan especially in leadership positions. Nowadays, new universities have been established in the country that is a positive shift. Females students are in majority in these universities, it is imperative that women may be granted more chances in the leadership ranks in these universities. It is indispensable for inexperienced females to understand that they can accomplish leadership roles and can improve themselves professionally while performing their duties during university (Thomas, 2021).

The ratio of females in upper positions in higher educational institutes is increasing as time passes because now females are focusing on education for their empowerment to gain the leadership positions. This ratio is increasing at a tremendous level throughout the world. Females are breaking the shackles which have limited their opportunities for advancement as leaders (Himmerick, 2020). Women leaders in education are, consequently, more likely to flourish in manipulating instructors to practice more appropriate instructional approaches. 75% of females are teachers, and 34.5% of them are chosen as principals and 18% as superintendents, showed figures from the National Education Statistics in America (Fisher, 2020). According to Eagly et al. (2020), women leaders displayed flexibility, resilience, enthusiasm, and responsiveness and appeared as authentic leadership and have the ability to face challenges. These women leaders' leadership style in education incorporates transparent relationship, ethical care, belief in empowering people through team work (Alhammadi, 2019).

Madsen et al., (2020) described the need for conducting investigational studies on female leadership for the improvement of their knowledge, proficiency, and skills in order to help them in obtaining and sustaining high posts in administration at school, college, and university level.

So for this purpose, the current study was conducted to gain a rich account of the women leaders leading in high research institutions in Pakistan. These women university leaders are considered successful women as they have crossed the cultural barriers. It is significant to know about the techniques these women employed in reaching to these high leadership positions. What barriers did these women face while leading with authenticity? A true story of the struggle for the movement can best be told by those who have personally experienced it. The lived experiences of these women university leaders offers valuable knowledge for future leaders who wish to assume top leadership position in their career plan.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Leadership for women is difficult. Historically, women have been underrepresented in leadership positions in corporations and academic institutions. As students, women entered university later than men. In the early 1900s, women gained access to many higher education institutions. However, entry did not mean equality; In addition, women are often assigned to subprograms or fields of study that men consider appropriate for women. Many higher education institutions remain restricted to women. In response, only women's academies were created. Over time, these academies were transformed into teacher training colleges due to the growing need for teaching professionals (Nidiffer, 2003).

Underrepresentation is attributed to barriers based on gender bias, discrimination, and late entrance into the workforce and academic environment (Eagly & Carley, 2007c; Rudd and Kellerman, 2007; Glazer-Remo, 2008). According to Eagle and Carley (2007a), in their pursuit of leadership, women no

longer face a glass ceiling, but rather a maze. The traditional glass ceiling, which permitted women to see the top of the corporation but didn't allow them to access it, has changed into a intricate labyrinth of barriers and obstructions. However, women find strategies to work around these hurdles and move ahead. Eagly and Carley claimed that women still have to adapt to the hopes of a traditionally male dominated world, and that administrative processes may slow women's assumption of leadership. Yet, as women progress into leadership roles, administrations are also changing in response to leadership styles based on gender. Essentially, women do not move towards leadership development by displaying male behavior as a survival tool in a man dominated world, but by maintaining the authenticity of a female leadership style (Eagly & Carley, 2007a).

Women are supposed as kid carriers and custodians of everyone at home and this is the main reason behind their under-representation (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Besides, this also makes them to change their occupational paths or prevent them to achieve their target experience and knowledge for further advancement in their profession and this creates a basic problem (Maryam et al., 2021)

Eagle and Carley (2007c), argued that this is a challenging task but women can increase their leadership efficiency and allowing for laboratory success by practicing some behavioral strategies. First, women must "integrate the institution into society" (p. 163). Organizations expect the leader to represent the organization in conversations and demonstrations. Stereotypically it is assumed for male leaders that authority brings reliability to the leader. Equally, female leaders who display an older style are supposed as violent. Thus, women must balance power and society and show warmth in behavior where the situation allows. Second, women must build social capital (Eagly and Carley, 2007c). Women must build relationships with all levels of the workforce and network through self-initiation.

Valkenburg et al. (2011), argued regarding the effect of gender expectations on the perception and growth of leadership. Men are considered to be visual, while women are known to be communicative. To get promotion, women must uphold a natural leadership style in combination with motivating and persuasive. This intricacy of the gender paradigm strengthens various challenges for women while performing as leaders.

Women feel biasness about gender role expectations of leadership (Eagle and Johnson, 1990; green and Davidson, 1993; Bosack, Sczesny & Eagly, 2011; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagle and Mladenyk, 2011; Koenig, Eagly; Eagle and Wood, 2013; People considers those leaders as good leaders who display male qualities. According to Schein & Davidson (1993), when one thinks of a manager, one thinks of a man. The relationship between the leader and the male is close and direct. Stereotypical expectations of a leader reveal male characteristics (Koenig et al., 2011). Thus, although shared decision-making is an established model of

leadership (Burns, 1978), people see a good leader as one who is powerful, confident, and determined (Eagle and Johnson, 1990).

Several authors have explored role congruence theory and its relationship to women in leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Bosak, Szczany, & Eagly, 2012; Eagly & Mladenek, 2011 year; Eagle & Wood, 2013). According to Role Congruity Theory people normally behave as the stereotypical gender expectations are associated with them. Men are expected to show strength and control, while women are expected to show warmth and care. The difficulty with role congruence theory in leadership is that women must lead just according to these expectations. When women does not exhibit this behavior, they are perceived as inauthentic or too masculine. This leads to criticism for women leaders.

Women work very hard to reach and maintain leadership position which is not acknowledged by society as compared to their male colleagues. Besides they do not enjoy alike incentives and rights as males do. The reason behind this is our traditional and societal beliefs and repressive values which are deeply rooted in our societies. "Pakistani Women in an evolving society" a book by Alavi (1991) also portrayed that in Pakistan and other developing countries, female labourer's financial input is not acknowledged and it has substantially more to go. Females are not encouraged to get education and trainings. Male led culture is deeply rooted in our society and this approach has created several complications for females. (Salas-lopez et al., 2011)

In Pakistan, public activity is defined as a male-centric joined family structure where men are assigned the role of bread earner and women have more or less no power to make decisions and are in charge of homes and responsible for home responsibilities (Mumtaz and Salway, 2009). In such social background, women's movement is also seen as a social code of integrity. Female travel requires consent and is strictly observed (Zeba and Shahnaz, 2000), especially if females need to travel outstation.

Madden (2011) also explored responses to stereotypical expectations. Madden established that gender stereotypes exist, but further argued that these stereotypical expectations of elders have changed over time and culture. Madden suggested women should emphasize more on a female leadership style that intentionally exceeds gender expectations. Rhode and Kellerman (2007) had different concept that female leaders are more supportive than male leaders. Instead, team work and cooperation have become the administrative norm, and leaders both males and females are expected to exercise an authentic leadership style.

In summary, the literature shows that women have the potentials as well as the opportunities to be successful leaders. However, leadership for women is a progressive process and women must take responsibility hiking routes. An authentic leader is reflected in the minds of subordinates. Women must define themselves in leadership and use their inner explanation to shape leadership. Spiller (2021) expresses authenticity as self-awareness, transparent interactions,

processing of balanced information, and ethical care are the constructs of authenticity in leadership.

Although women have not reached equality with men, the number of women in leadership positions in higher education is increasing (Bornstein, 2007; Eagly & Carly, 2007a; Glazer Remo, 2008). According to Eagle and Carley (2007a), women are working their way into management positions at the top. The increase in the number of women in university leadership is indicative of this change (Eagly and Carley, 2007a; Glazer-Remo, 2008). The American Council on Education, 2012 explains that the majority of women working in higher education function in mid-level management positions where 57% of faculty and administrative staff are women. Only 27% of women are represented in the presidency (American Council on Education, 2012). The unequal number of women who deserve the top leadership positions but not promoted remains an important area of research.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study of leadership was a qualitative narrative study conducted to collect the leadership stories of successful women university leaders.

Six women leaders were selected from the Women's University of Swabi- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. The Women's University of Swabi was preferred for the reason that this is the most nearby University for my study.

To choose the sample, convenient sampling techniques were used. The characteristics of the participants were that all six female leaders were between the age of 30 and 50 years. They were PhDs in their respective fields. All of them had more than ten years of experience at the university level. Four of the participants were HODs (Heads of Departments) and two were performing duties in administration.

Each participant was sent an invitation letter requesting a one-hour in-person interview. Four Heads of Departments and two female administrative officers from the Women's University of Swabi showed their willingness to participate in the research. Data was collected during a one-hour in person semi-structured interviews. The data were collected until saturation was reached.

Interviews were transcribed and hand coded to identify actions, events, and story lines that identify the self-described leadership skills of each participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Identified themes were triangulated with field notes, participant public speeches, and media articles for thorough analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This research work tailed narrative inquiry techniques (Damiani, et al, 2017) to collect the women leaders' stories. Therefore, the primary quiz was designed in the narrative way, asking interviewees' administrative practices. Thus results start with such replies.

Two of the six participants described their path to leadership position as an unintentional way. They did not had an apparition of becoming a Head of

Department in university in their career planning. Though each women leader showed an inner spirit to succeed in life, yet two participants did not had a predetermined ambition and plan to become leaders in future.

Sara said,

“I don’t believe in making such pre planned decision in advance for future. I don’t know why many women plan such things, and if they do, they’re really silly. You make certain choices in your career in advance that very often can lead in that direction. It’s often times unexpectedly happen. There are few people I know that have planned in advance for their future, this is what they wanted to achieve and they really achieved the same. I can’t say that becoming a leader was ever a part of my planning that I had.”

Sana was asked for her reply that if someone had told her 30 years back that she would be a university women leader someday. She answered,

“Oh, absolutely, my answer would be not at all. I never wished to be.” She said that she liked her previous position at college level as senior lecturer and did not had a plan to reach a university leadership position. She explained, I just wanted to keep doing that job and doing it well and making a difference. But it was the wish of my father to get higher education and get an administrative position at university level as my father always used to tell me ‘you have the skills of an effective leader’. So when the call came [for the HoD position], my response was like, no, not joining. But, in looking back, it seemed pretty fantastic to fulfill my father’s wish.”

In reflecting, the two participants Sofia and Sidra stated that the job of university leadership was their pre planned career goal. Further each of the two women leaders attributed career milestones to a mentor or person who encouraged them to seek administrative position at university. Sofia had a vision from the very beginning to become university leaders in future. She acknowledged the efforts of a mentor, who said to her early in undergraduate school that she should look toward becoming a university leader. He said that you are a talented girl. You have the potentials of becoming a good leader. She further added,

“You know, it makes a big difference having somebody say to you that you can do this. And so I applied for the position of Head of Department at university. I have to say that I loved university job. I loved the work of being a university leader. I had a strong desire to reach headship kind places. I was fully absorbed in my wish to be.. And so I did and I was very appealed to the position because it was the opportunity of looking across the whole university and seeing how all the different people work as a team.”

Sidra described her story in these words,

“I had a strong background of leading since my studentship. I would always be busy like a bee in my leadership activities for the students’ societies. I would remain busy in work for hours to complete, what I was required to complete. I had been leading groups of students, I had been performing different types of activities as group leader in students’ unions. I got

pleasure when I helped the students in their affairs. I had been recognized in the chair of management from the very beginning of my school life when I on no occasion knew as I would be a front-runner in the future.”

In addition to describing how they pursued a position in higher education administration, each woman leader faced barriers and challenges in their pathways to the leadership. These barriers required route-finding insight and negotiation. The barriers each woman leader faced helped in the growth of their personalities and developed their leadership practices. The barriers described by these women leaders were categorized in three types: **work-life balance**, gender bias and professional development.

### **WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

The literature on women leaders often blames an individual’s personal life, which is considered a reason why few women decide to pursue a second leadership position (Brown, et al., 2021). Many institutions may assume more than an average commitment from staffs. In some leadership roles, 24 hour availability is required that is a challenging task for working mothers. Marriage and children add new dimensions to the lives of professional women because responsibility for children and home life is mainly associated with women.

Professional development may need relocation. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), women often choose to sacrifice a leadership position for the sake of preventing a family or spouse relocation.

Although the women leaders I interviewed found balancing work-life as a challenging task, yet they seemed to enjoy the challenge and were successful at both ends. The more mature the leaders, the more easily she seemed to balance her personal life needs with the demands of the professional life.

These leaders revealed the complexities of balancing personal and professional lives that they considered as an important aspect of their leadership development. They through their strong character and conviction shaped their personal and professional lives according to the goals and demands of the time. They assumed and performed as authentic leaders at different ages and stages of their lives and compromised with partners and families. They revealed the importance of their families in their lives. They presented themselves as integrated—mothers, wives, daughters, partners, friends colleagues, scholars, teachers, and leaders. This was a great endeavor on their part to balance these roles and maintain their personal identity while performing a challenging official role.

Two of the women Heads of Departments I interviewed were past the stage of “children at home” and were in the position to better explain how they managed their professional life alongwith home responsibilities.

Sara told

“I didn’t consider even being an Head of Department before the graduation of my oldest child from high school to college. Those first few years of my



service being a faculty member with the institutional demands to get the work done along with my responsibilities as a mother to take care of my children, was a very difficult job.”

She further explained that women have the potentials to learn to lead whenever they assume as leaders in their career and suggested younger leaders to be less worried with the next step.

“If you being a mother assume a leadership role and are worried about balancing work/life, then continue your job, with the passage of time, your work will get easier. As a result, you will get better leadership experiences.”

Sofia spoke about the effect her marital life on her profession and the role of her partner in handling her challenging job requirements.

“I had a strong wish to be a university leader. I contributed a lot as a leader in my university but after getting married and having kids, I faced so many difficulties. Even I was about to quit my job as Head of the Department because my responsibilities increased both as a leader and as a mother. But I continued my job with the help and support of my husband.”

Sana described taking administrative job at a university on the wish of her father. She told,

“I took the position to fulfill the wish of my father. I was married and had three kids. Soon after joining, I faced several difficulties. My kids were small needing full care and at the other side, my job demanded my full attention, commitments and energy. I decided several times to resign from leadership position but my parents didn't permit me. I worked very hard. Early two years were very challenging but my parents provided me their full support and cooperation. That's why I managed my responsibilities at both ends successfully. Now my children are grown up. I am now very happy that I didn't miss the opportunity to lead. I had a wonderful time and really learned how to lead.”

For this leader, although her father's wish may have influenced her decision to take the position. Yet, it resulted in a positive leadership experience for her.

Role expectations is another barrier in Pashtun society. A woman after getting higher education or becoming top level officer, still performs her final duty to care the people of her family, including children, husband, parents etc. This role expectation has been a main obstacle in the way of their professional development and becoming authentic leaders. As Sapna told,

“Although I am a high rank officer in the university, yet I am a house wife as well. After going back from the university, I cook food, clean the kitchen, wash and press clothes, care my children, husband and mother-in-law. My family's first expectations from me is to take care of them and my job is a secondary priority. I make schedule here but sometimes I am unable to implement it due to my home chores”.

Leadership is a challenging position for women, demanding full commitment of time, vitality and the ability to balance personal and professional life. Numerous women leaders commented on the inevitability of managing difficulties promptly. Shehla told,

“I am authentic leader. I show my strength and power as a leader. I'm a passionate but strong being. I ignore these sorts of issues and proceed further and look at the bright side of things. I try to handle all kinds of problems skillfully and thoughtfully.”

Although work life balance and family arose as a barrier for these women leaders, yet none of the women leaders revealed regrets at their decision for joining leadership position that demanded more travel, time and energy. These women leaders appeared very satisfied with the roles they had performed.

Each woman leader found a way to balance marital life and profession without excuse or regret. These women chose the administrative pathway and struggled a lot for its success. None of the participants described it as easy or without pressure. They picked challenging routes and moved forward. Relationships helped" them find their balance.

As Sidra told

“You will always feel the need of having someone that you can rely upon for good advice. Someone who can guide you in the right direction, and probably someone who actually has the knowledge of the whole scenario and who can make you move forward when you find no vigour to move.

## **GENDER BIAS**

All the participants considered gender as the most common barrier in the way of women leadership. Women gain leadership promotion in a different way as men do (Eagly & Chin,2010). Women lead towards the top of organizations at a slow pace and face more difficulty as compared to men. Most women expressed deep concerns on an unequal representation of male and female educational leaders, on all level of the education.

Education in Pakistan meets several challenges- the low representation of females in enlightening leadership and it was well-acknowledged in empirical studies of West and Asian settings too (Offermann et al., 2020).

Sara showed her concern while discussing gender bias,

“One of the shocking things that I have felt is that when a woman get a leading position suddenly find the lack of support, cooperation and inspiration from her colleagues both males and females, because now she is at the top of the mound and probably in a position where there's a lot of people who are either suspicious or jealous and use different tactics to make her goals as failure.”

Sana described sexual harassment as a great hurdle faced by women leaders,

“We know very well that some women get extra favours from boss while some are victimized. In reality, this is harassment, due to which some leave

their jobs in order to get escaped from their boss. It's front and center problem when you're in this job."

Sofia stated her experience with gender when she was appointed as Head of Department,

"When I was appointed as HoD, a lot of people assumed it was because I was a woman. But they ignored the fact that I had the potential to be selected as leader. I had a vast experience. I had a strong educational and professional background.. I had served at various administrative positions at some best public universities. There is not any department of the university I have not had some experience to work. So people do not look at the fact and say "well, she's not really qualified." This is actually an effort to degrade the qualifications of women. And to discourage them to move forward in life."

Women face greater bias as leaders in both higher education and business (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Bornstein, 2008; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Carli & Eagly, 2012; Madden, 2011; Hoyt, 2005).

Sidra described the different perceptions of men and women in leadership;

"I consider woman is mostly criticized personality in society. You never really hear the words powerful or great being used for women. Their strength is admitted and described in a very pejorative way. Even it becomes difficult to perceive whether it's an acknowledgement of their strength or it's a disgrace for them. I think such criticism and degradation doesn't come to men.

Sapna also shared the same view,

"I am authentic leader. I show my strength and power as a leader. I can do what a man does but I am not expected to do that because I am a woman. I know how to motivate my team but I am not praised due to gendered role. I believe that authenticity is the excellence of a leader, and if there is authenticity in his/her engagements, then one's truthfulness must be appreciated,"

All the participants interviewed gave explanations consistent with conventional beliefs of gender and leadership. Women in our society are considered the caregivers of the family and public dealing she is also expected to adhere to their gender-defined qualities such as kindhearted, caring and softness. (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Women are supported as far they exhibit these characteristics in her practices. Whenever women act contradictory to these stereotypes and do not satisfy the expectation, they face severe criticism. Male stereotypical behaviors are mostly considered effective for leadership. Since men have been in leadership position for longer than women, that's why male conduct is often regarded as the expected and liked role of authentic leadership (Hoyt, 2005; Eagly, 2007; Madden, 2011).

As per Role Congruity Theory, individuals are expected to act in accordance with others' expectations, has deep grounds in the management setting (Eagly & Karau, 2002). All the leaders interviewed supported this theory.

In connection with gender and bias, marriage and culture introduce an additional barrier to a women's career. The societal expectation that men work outside the home and women do so only as an option may bring an obstacle for women and men. As shehla told,

“In this male-dominated society, it becomes very difficult for a woman to go outside the home boundaries and do job. It's a challenging task being a women, especially being a Pashtuns lady. I cannot do any job without the permission of my husband.”

Maryam et al, (2022) posited the same perception “A woman belonging to a Pashtun family find it really difficult to work on a leadership position. In our sensitive culture, we live and strive to prove that we can serve as good leaders”

Gender stereotyping, gender discrimination, society's different approach to male and female, lack of public support, lack of trust, and individual shortage of diligence and negativity of male coworkers are the main barriers in the way of getting leadership positions for women as well as in performing as authentic leaders. It was also reviewed that women harm other females due to enmity in educational leadership. Reporting their findings, prospective women leaders are altered to be alert of the delicacies of rivalry and unpredicted aggression (Afifi et al., 2020).

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Becoming a university leader is not an easy job. It requires the accumulation of strong academic and leadership experience. In a survey on women leaders from all types of colleges and universities, about 75% leaders informed that they have worked as faculty members before joining as leaders. Fifty-one percent of the leaders had served as a deans or senior administrative officers in academic matters before becoming a president (American College President, 2012). The women leaders interviewed in the study called their professional development as career progression.

As Sana narrated

“I did not reach to the HoD position through direct and fresh appointment, I followed the traditional route to this leadership position. I rose here through the hierarchical ranks. I served as junior faculty member and then a senior faculty member for 15 years.”

She further added once she considered a move into an administrative role, she learned some important information from a senior Professor, the Dean of her faculty, “ until you get the scholarly credentials and experience required for authentic leadership, you shouldn't move to leadership position.”

This advice prevented her to move into administration too early. She instead preferred to serve and gain experience as a teacher and good researcher.

She told.

“I had to focus on my higher education and my teaching. I had to polish my research skills and my papers written.. Once I had attained the perfect academic resume and considered myself competitive, I moved into the leadership position.”

Once a leader assumes an administrative role, there is often frequent transfers from one administrative position to another. All of the women leaders interviewed described their services on several short-term job assignments. Three participants called their experience as interim leader as a positive experience because it provided them an opportunity for more and more learning. As Sidra told,

“I enjoyed a lot to work on interim positions. I by nature like change and enjoy challenges in life. After assuming new responsibility, even increased responsibility, when I look back, my previous job does not appeal or motivate me. I realize how much I enjoy different things and new challenges”.

Sidra described her story of professional development as a process of continuous struggle at multiple levels of administration and on different commitments in different institutions. This struggle allowed her to develop dynamic leadership style. Her long term bond with leadership and observing different leaders in their positions appealed her to move toward an administrative position.

Sofia described how she gained administrative experience that made her resume more strong.

‘I worked on various administrative positions as additional duties. I rose through the ranks in the conventional way. I didn’t perform these administrative duties for salary as they were unpaid. They were in addition to everything else I was doing. I served as warden Women’s Hostel, worked as director academics and also performed as deputy controller of examination which was also an unpaid position. I served against these positions in addition to my duties as lecturer. I received no relief in my own duties. No course relief or anything. I just worked hard to gain experience and move ahead.”

Although the work was unpaid, Sofia gained experience by performing additional tasks. As a result she gained a positive reputation and experience in all facets of university matters that increased her administrative knowledge. As she told,

“I performed all these responsibilities in an excellent way and at the same time I was really good in keeping up my research and doing all my teaching in an effective way. One day Dean of my Faculty said to me ‘you know in the Dean office when an HoD comes with a problem, I refer him/her to you. I say, go and sit with Sofia and learn from her’. That’s the good reputation that I got and I am really happy and thankful to have such a good name.

The professional development needed to become a university leader was something discussed by each participant in detail. However, their experiences were different in the way of their professional development.

The women in this study became university women leaders through perseverance. They simply moved forward through their own efforts. They described their professional development as “all about determination” or “challenges.” Only one of the women interviewed participated in formal leadership training through Higher Education Commission Pakistan. She had a good experience of attending that training on leadership which she attended after she became a leader in the university.

According to Bornstein (2008), women with leadership aspirations must take responsibility for their own portfolio. They must seek appropriate mentors, fill gaps in their curriculum vitae, and seek a wide breadth of experiences in public speaking, management and implementing change (Bornstein, 2008).

All participants reported their independent actions that conform to Bornstein’s recommendations. They said “yes” to new challenges and learned from others in leadership positions. In the end, they understood the roadmap. Each woman leader revealed that it was essential to have the skills required for authentic leadership.

## **CONCLUSION**

The path to the leadership position for each woman leader interviewed was full of barriers that required commitment, energy and continuous struggle. These barriers mainly involved balancing personal and professional life, gender bias and skill development.

Each woman leader was bound to find a way to sharpen her leadership skills. Each participant had worked hard to improve her academic qualifications, professional skills, and undertook job on voluntary positions. Each participant carried out hard work both at office and home. They received support from mentors, partners, friends and family members. However, mostly each participant created her pathway around each barrier through her own intuition and own effort.

The findings of this study provide backing to Eagly and Carli’s research and their narrative of the labyrinth. It is evident from the interviews that these women did not move to the top position of the organization in a linear manner. They faced several ups and down and several turns.

Gender discrimination was described as the main obstacle in the way of promotion and even in reaching to the leadership position for these women. These women assumed the position of Head of Department after a long struggle of improving their academic and professional qualifications. They have served on several positions to gain the required experience for the high standard leadership position because they were aware of the fact that they would not be considered if their credentials do not fulfill the criteria. This was not an any task for these

women. Serving on unpaid positions and improving academic and professional qualifications during service made it very really difficult for them to manage their time and finances. At the same time, the responsibilities of children and family made their service more challenging and tough. However, these women overcome these barriers successfully through their continuous struggle and determination. None of them shared their path to success as easy but none of them expressed regrets .

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