

OBSTACLES TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN'S ACADEMIC CAREERS AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

Gender disparity in higher education institutions and the under-representation of women in prominent academic leadership positions has been a serious concern worldwide. The study endeavoured to ascertain the obstacles which impede the development and progression of women's academic careers in higher education institutions in South Africa. A qualitative research method was used with strict adherence to participatory action design, targeting Walter Sisulu University's permanent academic staff as respondents. The participants completed a qualitative interview in which they shared their individual perspectives on obstacles to the advancement women's academic careers in South African higher education institutions. As a result, an extensive literature review was conducted, which aided in providing contextual insight into the topic under investigation. The key themes that underpin the data analysis of this study were four constructs, namely factors that hinders women's academic careers, challenges faced by women academics, advancing women's academic careers, and advancing employability of aspiring academic career women. The findings of the study revealed that unfair recruitment processes, gender inequalities, patriarchy, workplace harassment, intrinsic societal attitudes, low self-esteem, and a lack of mentorship programs were critical factors impeding women's academic careers. On the other hand, fair recruitment processes, revision of recruitment policies, eradication of verbal and emotional harassment, and maintenance of employment equity were identified as significant factors in empowering women to advance in academic careers in higher education institutions. The study recommended that a concerted effort should be made by women as individuals, universities as institutions, and the government as policy maker, to eliminate the challenges and to advance women's academic careers in higher education institutions in South Africa.

Keywords: *Academic Career, Career Progression, Empowerment of Women, Women in Leadership, Higher Education.*
