

Exploring the Leadership Roles of Omani Women in Government Institution: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

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The primary objective of this research was to investigate the difficulties encountered by women occupying leadership roles within the Omani government. An interpretive phenomenological analysis methodology was used. The study revealed many significant findings, including gender stereotypes, limited access to mentorship programs, and the struggle to maintain a work-life equilibrium among female executives in Oman. The research revealed that Omani women leaders demonstrated robust coping methods, including networking, self-development efforts, and techniques for preserving work-life balance in the face of various obstacles. The implications of the study highlighted the importance of implementing a range of support measures for women leaders in Oman. These measures should include the provision of role models, the initiation of mentoring programs, the delivery of leadership training, and the establishment of flexible work arrangements within government institutions. The primary objective of this comprehensive approach is to augment the leadership proficiencies of women in Oman and cultivate a more inclusive and supportive professional milieu.

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Introduction: Women in leadership roles often face a variety of challenges, particularly within governmental institutions. In the context of Oman, women continue striving to strengthen their presence in leadership positions amidst professional and societal obstacles.

Objectives: The primary objective of this research was to investigate the difficulties encountered by women occupying leadership roles within the Omani government.

Methods An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology was employed to explore the lived experiences of Omani women leaders.

Results: The study revealed several significant findings, including the persistence of gender stereotypes, limited access to mentorship programs, and the ongoing challenge of maintaining a work-life balance. Despite these obstacles, Omani women leaders demonstrated strong coping mechanisms such as building professional networks, engaging in self-development, and implementing strategies to preserve work-life equilibrium.

Conclusions: The findings underscore the need for comprehensive support measures to empower women in leadership roles. These include the provision of role models, the establishment of mentoring initiatives, delivery of leadership training, and the implementation of flexible work arrangements within government institutions. Such an approach aims to enhance the leadership capabilities of women in Oman and foster a more inclusive and supportive professional environment.

Keywords: Omani women, Leadership challenges, Government institutions, Gender stereotypes, Work-life balance

INTRODUCTION

The study has focused on the women of Oman to provide them with opportunities to achieve a position in leadership. The inclusion of women in governmental institutions was essential for achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive governance. According to Liu (2022), the active participation of women in political processes plays a vital role in the pursuit of gender equality, including both objective and subjective dimensions. By participating in politics, women were able to assert their agency, develop self-actualisation and garnering recognition from their male counterparts (Liu, 2022). In Oman and the Arab Gulf region, women face limited opportunities and societal expectations, leading to under-representation in decision-making domains (Determann, 2012). The study was conducted to delimit these obstacles and enhance women's participation, which was key to achieving genuine

gender equality and inclusive governance. Legislative reforms in Saudi Arabia have increased women's workforce participation, from 19.4% in 2017 to 35.6% in 2022, in sectors like defense, mining, construction, manufacturing, and retail, promoting childcare, driving, and leadership roles (Alanazi et al., 2023). The study has also covered the challenges because, being a women leader, it was difficult to make achievements. However, in one of the studies by AlBalushi et al. (2019), women leaders at educational institutions in the Sultanate of Oman encounter moderate obstacles in organisational, legislative, and social domains, necessitating the use of media campaigns to enhance their visibility (AlBalushi et al., 2019). In one of the study, there was a lack of support for women where men, society, and colleagues created significant challenges that women were facing in advancing academic leadership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (Jaradat, 2019). The women empowerment and leadership initiative was considered one of the successful supported careers for the development of anesthesia specialists, where they have been given the potential for wider application and considering the subspecialties (Schwartz et al., 2021). With the help of this study, it was observed that empowerment and support were essential for women to achieve their goals in leadership.

The study aims to evaluate and analyze the challenges faced by women in Oman in their leadership roles within the governmental sphere. The study applied the principles of gender equality and inclusive government through the facilitation of enhanced possibilities for women to participate in political processes. Furthermore, the study aims to gain insight into the many challenges that women face while struggling for positions of leadership. The study also aims to identify potential approaches, including legislative changes and media campaigns, that might effectively increase visibility and provide support for women in their leadership roles. The study has used content analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of women leaders within the Omani Government.

METHODS

The present study has been done through content analysis methodology to explore the lived experiences and challenges of Omani women holding leadership roles in governmental organisations. With the help of content analysis, a deep understanding will develop of how women were coping with their position of leadership in different organisations. With the help of content analysis, the research has been analysed under the presence of meaning and also determined the relationships by creating concepts and themes (Reger & Kincaid, 2021). However, the data has been collected from different research articles to find out better opportunities for women to manage their leadership roles; however, this has been attached in the appendix.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS AND STEREOTYPES:

The exploration of diversity as a dimension within the realm of leadership has consistently intrigued scholars, prompting them to delve into this particular area of study (Fine, 2009). Women were shown to be less autocratic, more democratic, and participatory in their leadership styles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Moran, 1992). In a particular research, it was discovered that women's identity was seen as a distinctive strength, and under certain contexts and situations, women demonstrated superior leadership abilities across different roles compared to men (Dabholkar et al., 2003; Samo et al., 2019). The study also analysed women's life career experiences, revealing patterns in leadership careers influenced by social, organizational, and relational factors, as well as personal self-actualization. However, the study has shown the impact of work/life difficulties and unique life experiences on women's leadership, with studies examining the association between life events (Davidson & Burke, 2016; O'Neil et al., 2013). Other research (Eagly & Johnson, 1990) determined that when a woman's leadership style matched cultural expectations (congruent), they were observed as more successful if their leadership style was incongruent. The rise in women's political representation was largely impacted through gender stereotypes despite the significant challenges they face in comparison to their male counterparts (Hinojosa, 2021; Liu, 2019). Gender stereotypes impede women's political advancement due to male-dominated power, reinforcing conventional gender norms and primarily affecting women's representation in decision-making positions (Abidi, 2013; Moniruzzaman & Farzana, 2019).

EMPOWERMENT AND AGENCY:

The current situation has shown a persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, with their perception of leadership responsibilities potentially being influenced by their gender (Sales et al., 2020). Omani teenagers' views on gender roles and women's empowerment are influenced by factors like sex, age, socioeconomic status, sleep disturbances, self-esteem, smoking habits, aggressive behavior, and family relationships (El-Kharouf, 2010; Jaffer & Afifi, 2005). Omani women were actively encouraged to pursue professional professions, resulting in their presence in key positions within government, healthcare, education, and banking sectors while facing different challenges in leadership (Goveas & Aslam, 2011). In Oman, women have legal entitlement and the capacity to pursue leadership positions despite cultural challenges and familial support. Personal problems and traditional views on women's roles obstruct their ambition and motivation (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). However, women were addressing gender-related challenges through education and were determined for equality with men.

One of the studies has discussed that the cultural factors influence women's job choices, with leadership performance that was influenced through work-life balance and leadership abilities, a growing trend in Oman, beyond traditional metrics like social prestige and financial profit (Al-Lamky, 2007; Shaya & Abu Khait, 2017). Omani Women's associations were instrumental in safeguarding women's creative industries, fostering economic growth, and empowering them socially, economically, and culturally (Al Saadi & Almamari, 2022). Whereas it has been argued that Omani women in the private sector demand flexible hours, privacy, reduced work hours, and similar benefits to government employees, highlighting the need for family-friendly workplace policies (Belwal et al., 2020). The influence of women's empowerment on community development in Oman is significant; nonetheless, the persistence of cultural rigidity and traditional attitudes toward women is a considerable barrier (Amzat et al., 2019). The promotion of female business in the Gulf region has the potential to perpetuate gender norms and engender new forms of reliance while simultaneously strengthening pre-existing ones (Ennis, 2019). Cottage-based female entrepreneurs in Oman have difficulties in obtaining government assistance, getting specialized suppliers, and managing the high prices of raw materials. Conversely, concerns related to marketing are comparatively less significant (Ghouse et al., 2019).

BALANCING PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIFE:

Research indicates that women exhibit assertiveness, dominance, and ambition in occupations with equal power levels, adapting to balance professional and personal responsibilities while maintaining job quality (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Oman's women view leadership success holistically, focusing on work-life balance and mentorship rather than solely on social standing and financial prosperity (Hallward & Bekdash Muellers, 2020). Omani women in leadership positions observed success through a subjective lens, placing significant importance on career-focused leadership and familial support as essential factors contributing to their achievements (Hallward & Bekdash-Muellers, 2019). Remote work, despite potential disruptions to the workplace, offers benefits such as reduced office space, reduced commuting time, avoiding office politics, increased gender diversity, reduced absenteeism, and a healthier workforce, benefiting both businesses and employees (Ozimek & Stanton, 2022). The presence of an imbalance between work and personal life among individuals of Omani nationality has been shown to be connected to cognitive deterioration in several domains, including attention, focus, learning, and memory, as well as an elevated level of anxiety (Al-Adawi et al., 2022). Work-life balance was vital for job satisfaction and retention among Emirati women, and governmental and organizational measures are needed to enhance this balance and promote economic diversification (Shahani et al., 2021). Oman's sustainability is linked to government assistance, but many owners remain unaware, leading to concerns about procedural intricacies, legal frameworks, and regulatory requirements (Alqassabi, 2020). Whereas the Omani state should continue supporting women in the industry by encouraging their active participation, advocating for their rights, and facilitating their economic empowerment (Hansrod, 2019). Omani women encounter challenges within the Information and Communication Technology industry as a result of gender prejudice, inadequate training, and limited knowledge. However, these challenges required the need for policymakers to tackle these concerns (Elnaggar, 2007) proactively. The problems pertaining to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Oman include both company-specific and collective concerns that have an impact on the operational effectiveness of socially responsible organisations (Tabook, 2021). Another highlighted challenge that needs to be solved was that the aspects include socio-cultural, character issues, training facilities, and career counseling that were not given to the women who were working in the ICT sector in Oman (Elnaggar, 2008).

NETWORKING AND MENTORSHIP:

Women managers in Saudi Arabia and the UK have different perceptions of mentoring and networking, influenced by cultural differences (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015). Skill formation in Oman has challenges stemming from socio-economic and cultural aspects, necessitating more investigation to provide lasting enhancements (Langthaler et al., 2022). There is a growing inclination among Omanis towards entrepreneurship and innovation, indicating the need for government assistance in expediting the development of small businesses and attaining the objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040 (Subrahmanian Muthuraman & Rengarajan Veerasamy).

The act of empowering women to achieve notable positions in entrepreneurship has a significant impact on society; this has stemmed from the opportunity giving women to assume roles that extend beyond their conventional responsibilities as wives and mothers (McElwee & Al-Riyami, 2003). Due to that, it was highly recommended that appropriate measures be implemented in this context, particularly within a traditional community like Oman. The National Training Program in Oman has shown achievements; nonetheless, it is essential to engage in continuous participatory action research to effectively tackle issues and mitigate the prevalence of a 'blame culture' (Al-Harthy et al., 2017). The primary factors for promoting women's engagement in entrepreneurship in MENA nations are government initiatives and entrepreneurial training, but age and job experience do not have a substantial influence (Khan, 2019).

INTERSECTIONALITY AND DIVERSITY:

The study explores how age, education, socioeconomic status, and gender influence women's leadership in Oman, revealing that younger leaders often offer creative insights, while elderly leaders rely on established ideals (Hallward & Bekdash-Muellers, 2019).

Several factors, including socioeconomic status, social conventions, and cultural constraints, shape the mobility of women in Muscat, Oman. The city's reliance further impacts these factors on automobiles and its well-established road infrastructure (Khan, 2019). The educational background of Omani women significantly influences their decision-making abilities and strategic thinking processes, making them well-equipped for leadership positions (Karadsheh et al., 2018). In contrast, Socioeconomic position significantly impacts leadership opportunities, networks, and resources. Omani women's educational background significantly influences decision-making abilities and strategic thinking, influencing their leadership experiences (Karadsheh & Al Zar, 2017; Karadsheh et al., 2018). The diversity of Omani women leaders was vital in order to comprehend the intricate and multidimensional character of their tales (Goveas & Aslam, 2011). In Omani culture, women's involvement in the labor market was recognised through three perspectives that have included dissenting opinions, conditional approval, and wholehearted endorsement, influenced by higher education levels (Karadsheh et al., 2018). One of the studies analyse the success characteristics of Omani female entrepreneurs, offering valuable insights for policymakers to develop effective policies to promote and harness female entrepreneurship in Oman (Hammami et al., 2022). Omani women have equal rights and responsibilities as their male counterparts, devoid of any form or degree of discrimination (Alghofaily, 2019; AlWahaibi, 2020). In addition, women were entitled to exercise their freedom to engage in public affairs, assemble and establish organisations, engage in employment, and hold positions in public offices.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES:

The presence of economic opportunity discrepancies between genders gives rise to disparate experiences and social inequities as women encounter restricted access to resources (Niko, 2019, 2020). Omani women have the potential to attain leadership positions; nevertheless, their progress was impeded from personal challenges and conventional perspectives, whereas cultural barriers do not provide a significant hindrance (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). The challenges faced by women in Oman as they want to advance in leadership positions are complex and influenced by cultural, sociological, and organisational factors (Kamøy, 2020). Gender norms and customary expectations have the potential to restrict women's opportunities to attain leadership positions (Noroozi et al., 2022). The presence of stereotypes about women's responsibilities as carers and homemakers might impede their progress in professional settings, impacting how they are seen in terms of their abilities and dedication to assuming leadership positions (Tinkler et al., 2019). Oman's female leadership lack may result in a lack of role models and mentors, hindering their ability to envision and pursue higher-level roles (Moreland & Thompson, 2019). Systemic hurdles, gender inequality in the workplace, biased recruitment, inequitable educational and professional growth opportunities, and gender-based discrimination in organizational environments hinder the advancement of Omani women in government leadership positions (Liu et al., 2022).

RESULTS

- Organisations and governments were essential in promoting gender equality and empowering women leaders. They must recognise and address cultural stereotypes, value women's unique perspectives, and provide opportunities for leadership development. Governments should also take proactive steps to challenge stereotypes and promote women's leadership across all sectors, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse leadership landscape.
- Educators and governments should substitute positive gender attitudes among Omani teenagers, create supportive environments for women in leadership roles, address cultural factors influencing job choices, and provide education and training for female entrepreneurs.
- It is essential to promote gender equality and women's success in Oman and also prioritise work-life balance, offer mentorship, remote work, and tailored policies for women employees. The government should increase awareness, improve access to assistance programs for women entrepreneurs, and enhance corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices.
- Oman's government should tailor programs to culturally appropriate genders, address skill formation challenges, and provide comprehensive assistance for women entrepreneurs. This includes financial support, training initiatives, and mentorship opportunities. A holistic approach, considering cultural contexts and targeted support, was essential for advancing women's roles in Oman's professional government organisations.

- In Oman, promoting women's success requires recognising and leveraging diverse strengths, addressing mobility issues, investing in education, challenging gender stereotypes, offering flexible work arrangements, and providing childcare support. Policymakers can support female entrepreneurship through training, mentorship, and financial assistance. Ensuring equal opportunities and protecting women's rights through anti-discrimination laws and gender equality training contributes to a more inclusive professional landscape.
- Government organisations must address gender disparities in economic opportunities by ensuring equal access to education, promoting women's entrepreneurship, and supporting women in the workplace.

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