CHALLENGES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

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Abstract: The underrepresentation of women in senior administrative positions in higher education institutions is found in many research studies across the world. Similarly, in the Maldives, the higher education sector is gender imbalanced with more males in higher positions than females. This study explored the challenges faced by women leaders in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Republic of Maldives. The instrument used in this mixed methods research was a survey questionnaire of three sections, followed by interviews. Section One comprised of items for demographic information of the participants. Section Two comprised of 13 items on a five-point Likert scale of which item four required participants to denote whether being a woman in HEIs was challenging. Section Three of the survey questionnaire comprised an open-ended question which required participants to list their challenges in HEIs. The questionnaire was administered to randomly selected women leaders (N=12), from five HEIs in the Maldives. The data from item four of section two of the survey questionnaire were analysed for frequencies and percentages, while the data from the open-ended question in from section three of the survey questionnaire and the interviews were analysed thematically. The challenges experienced by women leaders in HEIs in the Maldives were found to be the heavy workload, lack of career development opportunities, voice not being heard, and lack of support. To empower women in HEIs in the Maldives, it is recommended for employers to offer flexible work schedules, focus on productivity, offer diverse professional development and training opportunities, provide mentorship and support networks, tackle persistent sex-discrimination, and strengthen pay equity.

Keywords: Leadership, Higher Education, Challenges, Women Leaders

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Introduction

The Maldives is a small island nation consisting of 1190 islands scattered in the Indian Ocean with a land mass of just 300 km^2 (United Nations Environment Programme, 2005). The population of the Maldives surpassed 300,000 in 2006. Over half of the 199 inhabited islands have a population of fewer than 1000 people, which undermines the benefits of economies of scale. The uneven distribution of population poses many challenges for development, including the high unit cost of providing social and economic services and infrastructure (Permanent Mission of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations Office at Geneva, 2006). The HEI's in the Maldives are Maldives National University (MNU) established in 2011, and the Islamic University of the Maldives (IUM) established in 2015, and seven other private colleges.

The underrepresentation of women in senior administrative positions in higher education institutions is found in many research studies across the world. Similarly, in the Maldives, leadership positions in the higher education sector are male-dominated and gender imbalanced. The underrepresentation of women in academic administration suggests that practices and leadership by males function to exclude women (Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014). Today, few women are found to be in leadership roles in the HE sector in the Maldives. As a result, far less is known about the characteristics and experiences of female leaders in higher education in the Maldives. Investigating the status quo with regard to the challenges and constraints of women leaders in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Maldives can provide HE administration with insights to understanding the employees and to provide strategies which may help stakeholders to strengthen the role of women in HEIs in the Maldives.

Objective

As the Maldives attempts to transform itself into a knowledge society and diversify its economy, higher education becomes a key sector to achieving this objective. Hence, it is significant to develop HE sector of the Maldives. Since there is limited literature on HEI in the Maldives, this study becomes significant. This study will benefit the stakeholders of HEIs in understanding the status quo of women in senior positions in HEIs in the Maldives. Although this study investigated the job satisfaction, supports and challenges women in leadership roles in five HEIs in the Maldives, this paper presents one part of this study; the challenges of women in HEIs in the Maldives.

Literature Review

Worldwide studies on women in HE reveals women are still significantly under-represented at top management level. This paper reviews the literature on women in HE, the cultural prejudices, organisational culture, leadership and support for women in HE.

Women in HE

Women working in HE finds their career quite challenging. Many scholars have addressed the issues of such challenges of women in administrative positions in HE, both internal and external, in developed and less developed countries (Costello, 2012; Morley, 2014; Oplatka, 2006). The main issue of women in HE is being unacceptably underrepresented, especially in senior administrative positions (Altbach, 2010). Studies show that female academics are disproportionately represented in male-dominated institutions (Anderson & Williams, 2001; Morley, 2003; Trowler, 1998). In general holding back of women from leadership, initially described as the glass ceiling, is the symbolic wall women hit at mid-management levels (AAUW, 2016), blocking women to advance. Additionally, the perception and gender stereotype that women are inferior to men, due to their lack of masculinity (Lyness & Thomson,

1997) is a challenge. However, the society views women to perform multiple roles as a working woman, daughter, wife and mother (Lyness & Thomson, 1997), in addition to the expectation of being humble, respectful, attentive, understanding and discreet. While women have moved towards gender equality at home and in the workplace, it is still not an easy task to be appreciated, and their work acknowledged in HEIs. With more flexible gender roles, more awareness and global changes, women are able to navigate life more easily and freely (Chin, 2011). Despite the positive changes, women working in male-dominated environments have few people to collaborate with (Bagilhole 1994; Kerman, 1995), hindering collegiality and collaboration within the workplace.

Cultural Prejudices

Women are often viewed through the cultural lens of the countries they belong to. The cultural expectations of women are generally childbearing and taking family responsibilities. Research has shown that in some traditional societies, women are expected to take on more family responsibilities than men (AAUW, 2016). With changing times, more flexibility for women from such traditional roles has taken place, providing women with the freedom to work, in addition to family responsibilities. However, balancing family responsibilities and work is found to be one of the most challenging obstacles for women aspiring to become leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sandberg, 2013).

Cultural expectations binding women to family responsibilities have found to be a huge challenge for academic women (Batool & Sajid, 2013; Chen & Hune, 2011; Hossieni, 2008; Luke et al., 2003; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010). While feeling deeply conflicted about leaving children behind to pursue their careers, women comply with the policies that accurately do not value their sacrifices. With assumptions that women with young children are not on a fast track prevents women form leadership positions (AAUW, 2016). In addition, cultural values also have an impact on women's career development. Worldwide research of cultural values on women's career development reveal cultural values block women administrators in HE (Batool & Sajid, 2013; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Harrison & Huntington, 2000; Hoeritz, 2013; Orser & Stanley 2012). Further, literature also reveals that women in eastern universities are less eligible for promotion due to the challenges of balancing family and professional life (Hossieni, 2008; Ismail & Rasdi, 2006; Lam, 2006).

Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is described as a dynamic process that can be comprehended as what an organisation has, is or does (Bagilhole et al., 2007). The concept of organisational culture as described by O' Connor (2011), in relation to management refers to the myths, values and practices accepting women's positions in the lower levels of the organisation and portray managerial positions in the hierarchy as masculine. Acker (1990) stated that masculinity pervades organizational processes and creating gender segregation by marginalizing women. As a result of gender misconception, it leads to the belief that women cannot be good leaders as they lack masculine leadership qualities, and perhaps lead to less chance of women being promoted to higher positions in the organisation.

Regardless of the misconceptions about gender and leadership, empirical studies show that men and women leaders behave alike when in same positions (Chin, 2011). It is also found that while men demonstrated being more task oriented and self- assertive in their environment, women were more interpersonal, selfless and concerned with others, distinguishing women being person oriented over task-oriented (Bass & Avolio, 1994; McGregor, 1985). Much

evidence supports women being more collaborative, cooperative, or democratic in leadership style when compared to men, who adopt a more directive, competitive, or autocratic style (Chin, 2011).

Further, collaboration is seen as central to views of effective leadership. It is also evident that the views on gender bias, diversity, cultural views and roles lead to philosophies of leadership styles. Women, while managing multiple roles of life and work balance, based on their experiences and perspectives tend to lead in a different leadership style. Chin (2011) stated that being an authentic leader is more challenging when negotiating multiple and intersecting identities.

Today, HE has a major role in creating quality leadership for a global society. According to Chin (2011) transformational leadership model is consistent with the goals of HE to change and transform staff and employees to enhance learning, generate new knowledge and empower students to become positive change agents. Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a process where leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation, by engaging in a mutual process within the concept of shared vision towards a common purpose. Also, the potential for transformational change and collaborative leadership is based on the vision and the communication of the vision to followers (Chin, 2011). Thus, a collaborative environment within the HEIs with a shared purpose leads to transformational change. However, power dynamics and bias may mitigate such transformational change (Chin, 2011).

Theoretical Framework
This study was based on the Ethics of Care and Feminist Leadership theory by Joan Tronto (1993). Although different feminist theories have emerged through the 20th Century, in reality, leadership has always been male-dominated, while women work hard through conflicting roles in the society. Feminism requires the leadership to develop the goals of women (O'Connor & Yanus, 2014). According to Tronto's ethics of care leadership, the stereotypical deceptions associated with the women leadership is excluded and women leaders are encouraged to practice their compassionate, empathetic and collaborative personalities in working towards social justice. As a result, Tronto's approach would lead to gender-neutral ethics of care which apprises both male and female leadership alike.

Methodology
This study employed sequential explanatory mixed methods research design. A random sampling technique was employed for this study. The participants were administered the survey questionnaire first and later interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. From the randomly selected sample, a total of 12 women in leadership roles in HEIs in the Maldives consented to the survey questionnaire. The findings for Likert scale item four in section two was descriptively analysed and the responses for the open-ended item in section three of the survey questionnaire and the responses from the interviews were thematically analysed following the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Instruments
Data were collected by administering a survey questionnaire of three sections. Section one of the survey questionnaire in this study comprised of eight items for demographic information of the participants. Section two comprised of 13 items on a five-point Likert scale; Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree. Item four required participants to

indicate whether being a woman in their role in HEI was found to be challenging. Section three of the questionnaire comprised of 11 open-ended items. Item six of this section required the participants to list the challenges they faced in their roles in their HEIs. The responses for the item on challenges were collapsed and placed under common categories.

Reliability
The reliability test was performed to verify the measurement of items in the Likert scale of the survey questionnaire using the Cronbach alpha measurements. Cronbach's alpha value for the construct was 0.91.

Findings
Demographic Analysis
The respondents in this study were in leadership roles in HEIs. From the respondents, 58.3% (n=7) were in the age group 40-49, and 25.0% (n=3) were in the age group 30 -39. The respondents' status indicated that 83.3% (n=10) were married. From the respondents, 58.3% (n=7) worked in colleges, and 41.7% (n=5) worked in universities. The respondents indicated that 58.3% (n=7) were from the private sector, while 41.7% (n=5) were from the government sector. In terms of work experience in their HEIs at the time of this study, 58.3% (n=7) had worked for seven years, and 41.7% (n=5) were in the HEIs for less than three years. The qualifications of the respondents showed 25.0% (n=3) had PhDs, and 75.0% (n=9) had a Master's degree. The respondents also stated 16.7% (n=2) were in the position of Dean, 41.7% (n=5) were coordinators and another 41.7% (n=5) did not disclose their position. The respondents' demographic analysis is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents Demographic Analysis

Demographic	Frequency	%
Age		
20 – 29.9	1	8.3
30 – 39.9	3	25.0
40 – 49.9	7	58.3
50 – 59.9	1	8.3
Status		
Single	1	8.3
Married	10	83.3
Divorced	1	8.3
HEI		
College	7	58.3
University	5	41.7
Sector		
Government	5	41.7
Private	7	58.3
Years of experience in current HEI		
Less than three years	5	41.7
More than three years	7	58.3
Qualification		
PhD	3	25.0
Masters	9	75.0
Position		
Dean	2	16.7
Coordinator	5	41.7
Other	5	41.7

Challenges of Women in HEIs

The item in Section One of the survey questionnaire required respondents to indicate whether being a woman in their position in HEIs at the time of the study posed any challenges. The responses showed that 16.7% (n=2) strongly agreed, while 50% (n=6) agreed it was challenging. A total of 25% (n=3) were neutral in their responses, while 8.3% (n=1) strongly disagreed.

From the open-ended question in the survey questionnaire on challenges of women in HEIs, and from the responses of the interviews, five main categories of challenges were identified. The responses from the survey questionnaire revealed, 91.7% (n=11) stated heavy workload, 83.3% (n=10) stated lack of opportunities for career development, 58.3% (n=7) stated voice not being heard and 50% (n=6) stated lack of support.

Heavy workload

The respondents in this study expressed having too much work allocated to them. One of the main reasons stated was that women had to manage multiple roles in their HEIs. For example, the respondents listed coordinating the academic courses, teaching, developing programs, administrative work, and research in addition to their roles in their family. The excerpt of P7 below highlighted the nature of workload.

> *"Currently I am coordinating three programs, preparing for lessons, teaching, and also supervising academic staff to ensure the smooth operation of the college"* (P7).

While P7 had to cope with the multiple roles in the workplace, P4 sheds light on other expectations of women in the society.

> *"The biggest challenge has been multi-tasking between roles of a mother, a wife and commitment to the job"* (P4).

There could be other reasons why some HEIs have more work allocated for the respondents in this study. In this regard, P8 accounted for the cause of workload at her HEI.

> *"It is very difficult to do admin work and academic work alone due to a shortage of staff. Also, the pay is not equal to the workload"* (P8).

According to P8, shortage of staff was the main reason for an increase in the workload. However, it was also evident that P8 was not rewarded for the additional workload she had been managing. If staff were overloaded with work and not appreciated for their hard work, this could raise concerns about the motivation of the staff. Similarly, P12 disclosed lack of motivation as a result.

> *"It is very demotivating when people do not understand that you are burdened with too much work"* (P12).

Being burdened with work can also have adverse effects on the smooth running of the HEIs. Therefore, stakeholders of HEIs need to take these identified concerns into consideration to ensure a healthy academic culture in their HEIs.

Lack of Opportunities for Career Development

The opportunities for career development are important to employees and hence benefit the organization by improving retention and leadership development. Despite the overarching benefits of career development of employees, respondents in this study revealed being deprived of such opportunities in their HEIs. Some respondents reported the lack of policy for career development in the HEI. For example, P7 described the repercussion she faced as a result of not having a policy for career development.

> *"There is no opportunity for me to achieve associate professorship or move higher in the academic ladder because we do not have a formulated policy"* (P7).

According to P7, she faced an uncertain future in her workplace since there was no policy to provide further career development in her HEI. Such constraints could also affect staff turnover since most women in leadership roles aspire to seek more knowledge. Likewise, P1 expressed her situation with regard to career development.

> *"Career development opportunities are very limited. My quest for higher studies is weighed down by lack of opportunities for further professional development in this organization. Also, we don't have any policy for career development"* (P1).

Often working women like P1 desire to seek career development. However, due to lack of policies and opportunities, they tend to work with uncertainty. Indeed, if opportunities do arise, they would be eager to take it whether it is from another HEI. Hence, it is important for employees to create career development opportunities for staff development and retention of a more engaged workforce for the future of the organisation.

Voice Not Heard

Another challenge stated by the respondents was their voice not being heard. Since women are underrepresented in the senior positions of HEIs, being acknowledged in male-dominated leadership was quite challenging. According to the statements of the respondents, communication was difficult and getting opinions and voice across especially in decision making was mostly unsuccessful. This was further highlighted by P5's statement as seen below.

> *"Sometimes being a woman among the few women in senior management, our voices do not get heard"* (P5).

In addition, some of the ideas presented by women when expressing professional opinions were not acknowledged as P8 described.

> *"Very little opportunity is given to put forward my ideas. Most of the time I struggle to be heard. It is difficult to express an opinion which can even benefit the university"* (P8).

It is important to acknowledge and listen to the opinions of the women in leadership. As P8 stated, what women had to say may be very insightful and could contribute to the future of the HEI. Male leaders should also acknowledge that some women possess outstanding leadership skills and contribute to professional decision making, hence should be provided with the freedom to voice their opinions and suggestions.

Lack of Support

A supportive work environment enables employees to flourish, foster positive attitudes and stay motivated. However, many organisations fail to provide full support to employees resulting in employee dissatisfaction. Similarly, respondents in this study disclosed lack of support in their HEIs. Some respondents stated lack of staff, lack of resources, lack of teamwork and lack of equality. For example, P4 explained the lack of support from male seniors in her statement below.

> *"I would like to be accepted and acknowledged by my seniors. Even though I am younger than other employees in senior management I am also very capable. I also hope better incentives would be offered"* (P4).

Regardless of age, women in higher education should be accepted as they can bring unique contributions from their experiences. Employees in a similar situation as P4 should be acknowledged for their input to the strategic positioning of the HEIs. This issue was notably common across HEIs in this study, as P9 revealed similar circumstances were endured by her.

> *"As a minority gender in the senior management, at times the way the men plan our work hinders my efficiency. I would like more flexibility of work and more support from my seniors"* (P9).

It is evident that male seniors need to consult women for decision making in order to consider their preferences and suggestions. Hence, employees will feel valued and greatly contribute to job satisfaction. Also, seniors should provide women with necessary resources, mentoring and networking opportunities as well as maintain equality among staff to produce diversity and contribute to the social transformation of the HEIs.

Discussion

Heavy Workload

The main challenge of women in HEIs in the Maldives was having a heavy workload. Women with multiple roles trying to manage more work than necessary can lead to many problems and to burn out. Many studies show women have additional academic demands and heavy workload as lecturers and administrators in addition to their prescribed duties (Brown-Welty, Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011; Harris, Wright, & Msengi, 2011; Luke et al., 2003; Madsen, 2008, 2012; Morley, 2014; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Nguyen, 2013). It was also found that academics have an excessive workload and numerous responsibilities (Yıldırım, Ünal and Çelik, 2011). The heavy workload from increasing responsibilities can become a problem for academics.

Any individual with the excessive workload and time pressures can suffer work stress which in turn may affect their performance. Yaprak (2009) stated that excess workload increases stress and in turn decreases the level of commitment of the employee to the organization. Workplace stress has also become a widespread problem and a public health issue, as it affects both psychological and mental health of the individual. In addition, workplace stress is also a costly phenomenon for the organisation as it contributes to voluntary turnover (O'Neill & Davis, 2011).

Women work extra harder to become leaders by utilizing their strengths while working in a challenging environment as in HEIs. However, while, balancing life and work, women are asserted they still have the capabilities to build a career and manage their duties at the same

time. Madsen (2012) supports this view stating that life is never equal for women. They are faced with greater challenges than their male counterparts but are hardworking and more successful (Madsen, 2012).

The women in this study were balancing family life and work responsibilities and feeling the unpleasantness of the roles demanded of them. The increase in responsibilities in the workplace has not been coupled with decreased obligations for women (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Wells, 2011). Today, women still have to bear the burden of household responsibilities along with demanding and increasing responsibilities in the workplace. Notably, women tend to be assigned heavier course, service and advising roles than their male counterparts (Aguirre, 2000). As a result, women's availability for high profile work and leadership is reduced.

It is also suggested that when women have more roles, the likelihood of experiencing role conflicts, stress, depression and physical illnesses are greater (Stefanisko, 2009), while others suggest when the number of roles increases for women, they may develop internal resources to 'buffer' against potential negatives (Stefanisko, 2009), leading to higher self-esteem. Similarly, it is found in research that when engaging in multiple life roles in addition to leading was related to higher self- esteem, higher managerial skill, and performance (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002).

Therefore, leaders of HEIs need to ensure that women employees are not overloaded with too many responsibilities. There are many ways this could be made possible. Firstly, by taking initial steps to create awareness of the realities associated with women managing career and family, their experiences should be taken into account. Next, through campus dialogues, HEI leaders could gain insights of women's needs were met within the HEIs and how the institute can better address those needs in the future (Marshall, 2009). Further, work supervisors need to understand the commitments of working women by empathizing with them allowing flexibility in work hours to attend to family events and matters related to their children. Another way women could be provided flexibility is through their work hours. Alternative work hours may be allowed for women through a period of difficult crisis. It is found that if the workplace environment is not supportive, and creates conflicts with personal commitments, colleges and universities will be unable to retain them, hence, will lose these valuable and highly trained employees (Marshall, 2009). However, while flexible work provides more options for individuals, it does not always address the issue of workload (Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012).

Lack of Career Development Opportunities
Women aspire to move further up the hierarchy by equipping themselves with knowledge and skills. However, this is not an easy path as women are faced with multiple challenges. In a study by White and Ozkanli (2011), it was found that organisational norms, structures and values were perceived to be challenges to women's career development. This means women with children may not find their career development opportunities compatible with their work-life balance, while others who have time may not be provided with such opportunities. Some of the general training programs provided did not fit the women's schedules, while workshops on weekends and stretching for long hours made it difficult for women with family commitments (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Such risky career development opportunities for women perpetuates and intensifies the gendered organizational culture (Acker 1990). In the end, women are forced to make choices either to 'take-it-or-leave-it'.

The participants of this study showed that they did not receive opportunities for career development in the HEIs. Career development has a critical role in the success of the HEIs. Research studies on career development of women in western societies reviewed the impact of having professional skills and education on career development (Gray, 2011; Rosser, 2003; Umbach, 2006). Further, it is also found in literature, qualifications are a major factor that contributed to women's career advancement. Higher qualification was a great opportunity in the pursuit of career trajectories for women, which have helped them excel in the male-dominated world (Gray, 2011; Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2011; Steinke, 2006). In order to progress to higher positions in their institutions, administrators, especially women require good social ties, as their access to information and resources are limited in their institutions (Tharenou, 2001). As a result, women are reported being affected by heavy workloads (Barrett & Barrett, 2011). Hence, with the lack of career development opportunities, women remain in their positions trying to perform to their best.

Voice Not Heard
Employees in any organisation should be able to express their opinions and be valued, regardless of their gender. Women's voices not being heard in male-dominated organisations is not uncommon. However, there is limited literature and studies on this aspect of women in HEIs.

The findings of the study revealed that women in HEIs in the Maldives desired to be heard in decision making by their counterparts in their HEIs. The elements of women's empowerment are understood to be voice, decision making and leadership (Domingo et al., 2015). Sometimes, women have had to struggle to make their own viewpoint heard (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). However, while women may struggle to be heard in HEIs, they can express emotions freely and have full authority in decision making roles in their family life. There are many important reasons underlying for women to be heard. Their preferences and demands are bounded by concrete individual and collective experiences and consciousness (Domingo et al., 2015), and shaped by dynamics of power, to better influence. Also, when women form alliances around shared interests, the group coalitions have been found to be strong in initiating change. Such broader coalitions have been critical to processes of political change, such as challenging autocratic regimes or gender inequality (Domingo et al., 2015).

Further, women working together with women to a shared vision can become strong change agents. With their group cohesion, women are able to build their capabilities for voice and influence (Domingo et al., 2015). Thus, the experience of group cohesion and solidarity could lead to self-affirmation at both the individual and collective level to provide support and legitimacy to gender equality agendas and enabling women to exert the collective power needed to shift gender norms (Domingo et al., 2015).

Lack of Support
Findings of this study also revealed lack of support for women to manage their roles in HEIs challenging. Women in administrative positions in academic workplaces require support from other professional administrators in their departments (Beck, 2008) in order to adjust their profession. The issue of women lacking adequate support was further confirmed by Beck (2008), Berkovitch et al., (2012) and Collins (2009).

Leaders of HEIs should ensure women are provided with good support networks and mentors. Many researchers disclose that mentorship may be one of the great motivators for career

advancements of women (Airin, 2010; Blum, Field, & Goodman, 1994; Brown, 2005; Beck, 2008; Collings, Conner, McPherson, Midson, & Wilson, 2011; Harris, Wright, & Msengi, 2011; Kiamba, 2008; Madson, 2008; Walts, 2012), and one of the most investigated subject on women's professional development is the influence of mentorship on women in managerial positions (Harris, Wright, & Msengi, 2011). Correspondingly, the impact of networking on women's career development have earned importance. Studies have shown networking with influential leaders were more important for career advancement than job performance (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hewlett, Peranio, Sherbin, & Sumberg, 2010). Although women are considered to have strong communication skills, networking in the business world is difficult as it usually occurs in activities that are typically considered "masculine," (AAUW, 2016). Additionally, research shows that when women and men have mentors, women may benefit less from mentorship, particularly in areas of salary and promotions (AAUW, 2016). Similarly, women bound with family responsibilities may lack time for building professional networks or socializing with colleagues outside of work (AAUW, 2016).

Conclusion

This study found the challenges of women in HEIs in the Maldives to be a heavy workload, lack of opportunities for career development, voice not being heard and lack of support. It is necessary that these challenges be tackled at the organisational level, by allocating the reasonable amount of responsibilities and workload to match the salary in order to eliminate discrimination and maintain pay equity. It is recommended that career development opportunities should be provided for women, in order to ensure maximum participation suitability. As a result, women equipped with knowledge and skills will strengthen the HEIs. Also, leaders of HEIs should provide opportunities for women to express their feelings and grievances, which should be addressed and measures are taken to accommodate the needs of the women by providing flexibility. In addition, leaders should create mentorship within HEIs to provide support to women in order to help them maintain a healthy balance of life and work responsibilities.

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