

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PUBLIC SECTOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT AT THE MANAGERIAL LEVEL IN JAFFNA DISTRICT

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In Jaffna district, the participation of women in the labour force has increased after the thirty years of internal armed conflict and economic stress. Correspondingly, women are now strongly represented in the cadre of public sector organizations. While women represent a sizable proportion of the employees in the public sector in Jaffna District, their representation at higher levels of the organization are lower. The main objective of the present study was to identify barriers identified by women, relative to men, for career advancement at the managerial level of the public sector in Jaffna District.

Barriers were categorized into socio-cultural, individual, and organizational. Separate sets of equal numbers of women and men at the middle managerial levels in public sector organizations in Jaffna district participated in two studies. The studies were structured in such a way that participants were not aware that gender was a focal construct until towards the end of the interview sessions. In Study 1, the responses of forty officers to semi structured interviews were content analyzed. In Study 2 structured questions were used to investigate the experiences of 120 officers.

Study 1 revealed that women officers in the public sector report socio-cultural barriers, individual barriers and organizational barriers in that order. The first two categories of barriers were reported more often by women than men. Organizational barriers were reported more often by men than women. In Study 2, for each of the three types of barriers, specific barriers were identified from the literature and Study 1. Descriptive analyses were conducted to examine the nature of these barriers for men and women at secondary and tertiary level positions. All socio-cultural barriers and some individual barriers were perceived to be more relevant by women than men.

Next, ordinal regression predicting career satisfaction was conducted separately for men and women at primary and secondary level positions. Based on principle components analysis (PCA), composites of variables were used to represent the three types of barriers. These were regressed to predict career satisfaction, where education level was taken as control variable. Only the model for men at the secondary level was significant, $R^2 = 0.345$. Organizational barriers negatively predicted career advancement of men at secondary level.

The results suggest that women seemed to choose to remain at lower levels because they perceived higher positions to have higher responsibilities. Women also received more socio-cultural barriers in terms of career advancement. Men were slightly more likely to report unfair promotion practices as barriers.