

Gender Division of Labour and Sri Lankan State Universities: A Case Study

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Abstract

Organisations are part of human life and women and men spend a considerable amount of time in their respective work organisations. There is a current debate on how women and men are placed in organisational structures/hierarchies. In the globalized world economy, women play a key role and there is a significant progress in the labour force participation of women over the last two decades. In contrast there is a universal and persistent gender difference prevailing in productivity and earnings in different sectors and jobs. Review of literature indicates an absence of studies globally, on gender composition and positioning of gender in the organisation structure of universities. Researchers being academic staff members of the Sri Lankan public sector universities with an experience of more than two and half decades can claim the fact that majority of the leadership positions such as vice chancellor, dean and head of the department are held by men. In contrast, the gender composition and the positioning of academic and non-academic staff members within the organisation structure have not been researched. The study relates to the conference theme of exploring and reviewing gender configurations and the situations/status of women and men in higher education in academia, in countries and in Higher Education Institutions. Against this backdrop to fill the gap in existing literature this study using the case study methodology aims at understanding the positioning of women in the organisation structure of University of Sri Jayewardenepura, a public university in Sri Lanka. Main objective of the study is to analyse the gender composition of the academic and non-academic staff members of the university and their positioning in the organisation structure. A quantitative analysis is carried out using secondary data that are collected from published documents available at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Percentage analysis is the main statistical measure used for the analysis. According to the analysis at University of Sri Jayewardenepura gender segregation is visible in the organisation structure and includes both horizontal segregation that concentrates women and men in different types of work, and vertical segregation that concentrates women

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in lower grades and men in higher grades. In conclusion gender is integral to organisational processes at University of Sri Jayewardenepura and it is neither gender neutral nor asexual but gendered.

Key Words: Gender Division of Labour, Women, Horizontal Segregation, Vertical Segregation

Introduction

Organisations are part of human life and women and men spend a considerable amount of time in their respective work organisations. In contrast there is universal and persistent gender differences prevailing in productivity and earnings in different sectors and jobs (World, Development Report, 2012). There is a current debate on how women and men are placed in organisational structures/hierarchies. In the globalized world economy, women play a key role and there is a significant progress in the labour force participation of women over the last two decades. According to Acker (1990) it is not new that at the global level, national level and organisational level the most powerful positions are held by men but organisation structures are considered gender neutral. In contrast Kanter (1977) argues that organisational structure places women at the bottom of the hierarchy and present as tokens at the top (cited in Acker, 1990). Review of literature indicates that there are a very few studies globally, on gender composition and positioning of gender in the organisation structure of universities (Carrigan, Quinn, and Riskin, 2011). Although a study on gender in relation to academic staff members in Sri Lankan state universities has been carried out attention has not been paid to non-academic staff members and it is highlighted that there is a lack of substantive scholarship and research on women and leadership in higher education in South Asia (Morley and Crossourd, 2015). Thus the gender composition and the positioning of academic and non-academic staff members within the organisation structure in Sri Lankan state universities has not been researched. Researchers being academic staff members of a Sri Lankan state university with an experience of more than two and half decades can claim the fact that majority of the leadership positions held by academics such as vice chancellor, dean and head of the department and the non-academic positions such as registrar and bursar are held by men. Against this back drop to fill the gap in existing literature this study using the case study strategy and a quantitative analysis aims at understanding the gender division of labour by analysing the positioning of women and men in the organisation structure of University of Sri Jayewardenepura, a state university in Sri Lanka.

University of Sri Jayewardenepura was initially established in 1883 by the most venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala thero as VidyodayaPirivena (a centre of learning for Buddhist monks). It was given university status in 1959 and renamed as University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 1978. At present the university consists of seven faculties namely faculty of management studies and commerce, faculty of humanities and social sciences, faculty of applied sciences, faculty of medicine, faculty of engineering, faculty of technology and faculty of graduate studies. Current internal and external student population is approximately 15,000 and 150,000 respectively. Academic and non-academic staff members account for a number around 1500. Apart from these the Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIM) located in Colombo 8, is also affiliated to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. In addition, the university has also been entrusted with a block of 40ha from the Yagirala Forest Reserve which is managed by the Sri Lanka Forest Department. This area is given to the Department of Forestry and Environmental Studies of the Faculty of Applied Sciences for promoting education and research. There is also a Research Centre built by the university which helps the researchers and those who have an educational interest in this area (Annual report, 2015).

Main objective of this study is to analyse the gender composition of the academic and non-academic staff members of the university and their positioning in the organisation structure. This study is the initial step of an ongoing research which looks at Sri Lankan state sector universities through a gender lens using the framework 'gendered organisation' of Acker(1990) and it relates to the conference theme of exploring and reviewing gender configurations and the situation/status of women and men in higher education in academia, in countries and in higher education institutions.

Theorising Gender Division of Labour

Gender as a Social Construction

Within this study the ontological stance taken is that gender is a social construction rather than the biological differences between women and men. According to West and Zimmerman (1987) gender is taken for grant in everyday activities and we assume it is bred to our genes. For people it is hard to believe that gender is constantly created and recreated out of human interaction, out of social life. Further, the building blocks of gender are socially constructed statuses (Lober, 1994).

Women and World of Work

The slow progress of women entering management and senior management in particular, in 1980s and 1990s was the concern of scholars who studied women at work (Makarem, 2016). Against this backdrop review of existing literature revealed that there is a lack of scholarly work globally in relation to ‘gender at work’ in universities, including Sri Lanka (Carrigan, Quinn, and Riskin, 2011). In contrast certain organisations such as schools (Weaver, 2017), banks (Acker, 2006) and production organisations (Gunatilaka, 2018) have been studied to understand ‘gender at work’.

Britton (2000) and Makarem (2016) argue that the organisations that are capable of understanding nuances in ‘gender at work’ are in a better position to develop an inclusive culture that has the capacity to appreciate unique attributes and strengths of women and men. In contrast gender is crucial yet neglected aspect of organisational analysis (Weaver, 2017). Thus it is timely and relevant to study ‘gender at work’ in Sri Lankan state universities especially because the growing concern on gender mainstreaming in the state universities.

Gender Regimes

When reviewing the work on gender Connell (1994) becomes significant because she is a scholar who paid attention to gender at a time that most of the writings on the classic themes of social science such as state and migration demonstrated gender blindness. She argued that gender relations are present in all types of institutions and form a major structure of institutions and subsequently introduced the concept of gender regimes. With the use of gender regimes she attempted to recognize forms of gender subordination in every social institution, such as family, state and street. By the “gender regime” of an institution we mean the patterning of gender relations in that institution, and especially the continuing pattern, which provides the structural context of particular relationships and individual practices (Connell, 1994). Wherever people are, gender relations are inevitably present. One institution may be differently gendered compared to another, due to its context and that of other related organisations. Thus, ‘context’ is significant in understanding the form taken by gendering in different institutions (Connell, 1987). Acker (1994) adopts concept of gender regime and used it as a lens to look at gender at work. For Acker the term gender regimes means the ways that gender is integral to organisational processes at a particular time, in a particular organisation.

Gendered Organisation

In order to understand gender at work or gender patterns at work it is essential to first understand an organisation’s gender structure and how gender is used as an organisational

resource. Historically Kanter's (1977) landmark study of a large corporation demonstrated that gender inequalities are laid in the structure of the organisation. She highlighted that women had less opportunity and power and were found in smaller numbers in important positions than men. Later Acker (1990) developed the concept of 'Gendered Organisations' and it is now widely recognised as a useful framework to understand gender at work. This is because Acker's work provides relatively a clearly defined lens through which one can study gender in organisations.

For Acker(1990) organisations are neither gender neutral nor asexual but gendered.

To say that an organisation, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine(Acker,1990: p. 146).

Writing in 1990, Acker argues that the assumption that the worker is a man, with a male body, sexuality, minimal responsibility in reproduction, and in control of his emotions, pervades work and organisational processes. Thus there is no way which women can compete, since the terrain is gendered in the first place. Moreover, organisations stigmatise women's bodies, sexuality, reproductive ability, menstruation, etc., and use biological difference to justify the control and exclusion of women. Features of employment frequently noted, such as gender segregation or the glass ceiling, should not be seen in isolation, but rather as evidence of the gendering of organisations themselves, not only discrimination within them.

Gender Segregation

Focus of the study being to understand gender division of labour more attention has to be paid to how women and men are placed in the organisational hierarchy that reflects gender segregation. Segregation includes both horizontal segregation that concentrates women and men in different types of work, and vertical segregation that concentrates women in lower grades and men in higher grades (Bradley 1989).Acker (2006) in her later work: 'Inequality Regimes' became interested in knowing how the 'steepness of the hierarchy' changes depending on the type of organisation. Steepness of an organisation's hierarchy may reflect steeper or flatter management structures, or the possible differences team work makes.

Methodology

In order to understand gender division of labour or how women and men are placed in the organisation's hierarchy, secondary data are collected from published documents available at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. An analysis on the gender composition in each of the job categories and an analysis on positioning of women and men in the organisation structure are carried out to understand the horizontal and vertical gender segregation respectively at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Percentage analysis is the main statistical measure used for the analysis.

Analysis and Findings

Using secondary data the analysis is done using percentages to identify how the women and men are placed in the organisation structure vertically as well as horizontally. Analysis on the academics holding administrative positions revealed that men are at the two top most positions (Chancellor and Vice Chancellor). At the level of the deans of faculties, out of seven positions there are only two women and thus 71% of the deans are men. Next level is the Heads of Departments (HOD'S) and in five faculties the majority of HOD's are men. Accordingly in the faculties of Engineering, Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Applied Sciences (AS), Management Studies and Commerce (MSC) and Graduate Studies (GS) have 100%, 85%, 80%, 58% and 57% men as HOD's respectively. Thus vertical gender segregation is clearly visible within the organisation structure of University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

Composition of academic staff also follows a similar pattern and it is given in table 1.

Table 1 – Composition of Academic Staff (Faculty Wise)

Faculty	Women %	Men%
Engineering	20	89
Humanities and Social Sciences	38	62
Applied Sciences	47	53
Technology	50	50
Management Studies and Commerce	53	47
Medical Sciences	64	36

Within faculties the staff composition takes different forms and in certain fields of study women are the majority while in some it is men. For example in the faculty of medical

sciences, department of paediatrics and department of parasitology have only women while the department of surgery has only men as academics. In the faculty of HSS, the department of Pali and Buddhist Studies has only Buddhist monks and men as academics.

Library staff has more women including the librarian and deputy librarian and 75% of senior assistant librarians and assistant librarians.

When considering the administrative staff top most positions such as the chancellor, vice chancellor and registrar are held by men and the university council has 18 men and 3 women as members. At the level of deputy registrar and senior assistant registrar women and men account for 50% each but at the level of assistant registrar there are only women. This again is an evidence of vertical gender segregation. Bursar is a woman and more than 75% of the posts of deputy bursar, senior assistant bursar and assistant bursar are held by women.

Making visible the horizontal gender segregation, among the non-academic staff members 69% of the clerical staff such as management assistants and computer application assistants is women but in contrast 93% of the primary staff such as work aids and lab attendants is men.

Conclusion

Gender segregation is visible in the organisation structure of University of Sri Jayawardenepura and includes both horizontal segregation that concentrates women and men in different types of work, and vertical segregation that concentrates women in lower grades and men in higher grades (Bradley 1989).

Agreeing with Acker (1990) gender is integral to organisational processes at SJP and it is neither gender neutral nor asexual but gendered.

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