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## Barriers to Women's Leadership Positions in Palestinian Government Universities

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify women's barriers to assuming academic leadership positions in government universities. The descriptive cross-sectional method was used, and a questionnaire consisting of 50 items distributed over four axes was designed. The study population comprised 177 female academic employees from Palestinian government universities (Khodori, Al-Aqsa). A simple random sample of 62 academics was selected from the study population, and the SPSS program was used to analyze the statistics and verify the hypotheses. The study revealed that female academic leaders in Palestinian government universities face significant cultural and social barriers, followed by moderate organizational barriers, and then family and personal barriers. The results also showed that society still does not accept women's leadership, and there is a conflict between their biological and leadership roles. The study found no statistically significant differences between female academics based on the university, academic rank, educational attainment, or years of experience.

**Keywords:** Barriers, Leadership Position, Palestinian, Universities, Women

### Introduction

In recent years, the topic of academic leadership, particularly female academic leadership, has become an area of interest for researchers worldwide, including the Arab region (Alyami & Floyd, 2019; Gümüş et al., 2020). Research has shown disparities in the number of female academics in leadership positions compared to their male counterparts in Western and Arab institutions, particularly universities (Jaber, 2022; Uppal & Hango, 2022). This is due to various barriers such as organizational, personal, familial, cultural, social, and professional constraints, as discussed in previous studies (Shepherd, 2019; Varshney, 2019). However, the researcher found that there is a lack of such studies in Palestinian universities. Out of the 18 Palestinian universities, only a few women have held high administrative positions, and no woman has yet led a Palestinian university. Hence, the researcher chose to examine the barriers facing women in leadership positions in Palestinian government universities, specifically Khodori University and Al-Aqsa University. The study aims to understand the perspectives of female faculty members in these universities regarding the challenges they

face, including organizational, cultural, social, and other impediments. The researcher, being an academic woman aspiring to a leadership role, has firsthand experience with this problem and hopes to shed light on it and find solutions. This study is the first of its kind in Palestinian government universities, and the researcher hopes that it will contribute to the development of more effective and equitable academic leadership policies.

### **Aims**

The main aim of the study is to identify the level of barriers (organizational, socio-cultural, and personal) facing women in assuming academic positions in government universities. The following objectives stem from it:

- a. To identify the level of organizational barriers facing women in assuming academic positions in government universities.
- b. To analyze the level of socio-cultural barriers facing women in assuming academic positions in government universities.
- c. To measure the level of personal barriers facing women in assuming academic positions in government universities.
- d. To identify the level of family barriers facing women in assuming academic positions in government universities.

The second main objective is to determine the extent of differences in the barriers facing women in assuming academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities according to variables such as educational attainment, academic rank, practical experience, and university location.

### **Method**

#### **Design, Setting, and Sample**

The study aims were addressed using a descriptive, cross-sectional design. The study was carried out at two government universities (Khodori, Al-Aqsa) in Palestinian from July to October 2022. The study population consisted of all female academic staff members in the aforementioned universities, which numbered 177 according to the human resources departments of the universities in 2022. The sample size was determined using the formula by Arceneaux (2014) and was calculated to be 62. A simple random sampling technique was used to select participants, and 52 valid responses were analyzed from the electronically distributed questionnaires to the female academic staff members in the study population.

#### **Survey Instrument**

The researcher has developed a study tool in the form of a questionnaire to identify the barriers facing Palestinian academia in government universities (Palestine Polytechnic University in the West Bank and Al-Aqsa University in the Gaza Strip) in assuming academic leadership positions from their perspective. The questionnaire consisted of 56 items representing the barriers facing academic women within four main areas: organizational, socio-cultural, personal, and familial. All questionnaire statements were formulated in a positive manner, and each statement was assigned a weight listed on a five-point Likert scale to assess the degree of importance of the statement, as follows: 5 is given to a response of "very strongly degree," 4 is given to a response of "strongly degree," 3 is given to a response of "medium degree," 2 is given to a response of "disagree," and 1 is given to a response of "very disagree." The final form of the questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section contains demographic information related to the independent study variables,

including the university, academic qualification, academic rank, and years of university teaching experience. The second section of the questionnaire includes 50 items representing 50 difficulties, distributed across four areas: 1- the organizational field, which includes 13 items, 2- the socio-cultural field, which includes 13 items, 3- the personal field, which includes 15 items, and 4- the familial field, which includes 9 items.

The researcher followed these steps to ensure the tool validity: Reviewed educational literature, previous studies, surveys, and official educational documents related to the topic. Consulted with some experts in the field. Presented the questionnaire sections to a committee of experts for review, feedback, modification, and linguistic correction. The final study format included a message addressed to respondents explaining the study's topic and objective, as well as some instructions related to how to answer the questionnaire. To verify the reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher calculated the Cronbach's alpha coefficient as a measure of internal consistency. The value of the coefficient was 0.957, which is a very high value, indicating that the questionnaire is highly reliable.

### **Data Collection Process**

The research team selected a representative sample of female university employees to participate in the study. The selected participants were provided with a letter that explains the purpose of the study and provided guidance on how to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants electronically. Participants were given a reasonable amount of time to complete the questionnaire, and they had the option to contact the research team if they have any questions or concerns.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researchers received an official letter from the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education and from the Al-Aqsa and Al-Khodori Universities. The researchers obtained the informed consent of all participants, ensuring that they understand the purpose of the study, their role in it, and the potential risks and benefits of participation. Participants were also be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time. The researchers ensured that all data collected is kept confidential and that participants' identities are kept anonymous. This includes ensuring that any identifying information is removed from transcripts or recordings of interviews or focus group

### **Data Analysis**

SPSS version 28 was used for all analyses, with a significance level of 0.05. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the study participants and to determine their level of barriers. Independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA were used to compare the level of barriers between different demographic.

### **Result**

#### *Degree of barriers domain*

It is clear from table (1) that the degree of the organizational barriers domain was high, with an arithmetic mean of (3.60) and a percentage of (72.0%). The organizational barriers items ranged between (65.8%) and (77.6%). The degree of cultural and social barriers domain was high, with an average of (3.93), and a percentage of (78.67), and organizational barriers items ranged between (74.2%) and (83%). The degree of self-barriers was moderate, with a mean of (3.06), and a percentage of (61.28), and self-barriers items ranged between (55.8%) and

(70.4%). The degree of familial barriers came in at a moderate level, with a mean of (3.37), and a percentage of (67.39), and familial barriers items ranged between (58%) and (75.4%).

The degree of barriers facing women in assuming academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities was moderate, with an average of (3.48) and a percentage of (69.69%), and the degree of task performance according to the areas of the study tool ranged between percentages of (78.67) and (61.28%). Cultural and social barriers were at the forefront with a high degree and a percentage of (78.67%), while self-barriers were at the back with a moderate degree and a percentage of (61.28%).

Table 1

*Means, standard deviations, and percentages for the domain of organizational barriers*

No	Barriers domain	Mean	SD	Percentage	Degree of difficulty
1	Cultural and social barriers	3.93	.77	78.67	High
2	Organizational barriers	3.60	.65	72	High
3	Familial barriers	3.37	0.76	67.39	Moderate
4	Self-barriers	3.06	.81	61.28	Moderate
	Total	3.48	.61378	69.69	Moderate

*Differences in the barriers facing women in assuming academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities according to demographic variables*

#### 1. University location

The results from Table (2) indicate no statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in any of the study domains attributed to the variable of the academic woman's working university. The significance levels ranged from (0.5097) to (0.2185), which are values greater than the significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

Table 2

*Differences in the barriers facing women in assuming academic leadership positions based on University location*

P-value	df	t-value	SD	Mean	University	Domain
0.5097	50	-0.664027	0.7593	3.5096	Al-Aqsa University	Organizational
			0.6104	3.6410	Palestine Technical University - Kadoorie	
0.4804	50	0.704802	0.8416	3.8173	Al-Aqsa University	Cultural and social
			0.7698	3.9850	Palestine Technical University - Kadoorie	
0.2185	50	-1.246015	0.7764	2.8541	Al-Aqsa University	Self-barriers
			0.8239	3.1574	Palestine Technical University - Kadoorie	
0.3381	50	-0.967167	0.74532	3.2152	Al-Aqsa University	Familial
			0.77661	3.4382	Palestine Technical University - Kadoorie	
0.2614	50	1.135904	0.61018	3.3400	Al-Aqsa University	All
			0.61284	3.5488	Palestine Technical University - Kadoorie	

## 2. Academic qualifications

There are no statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level of significance in the average degree of barriers faced by women in assuming academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities from the perspective of female faculty members. These differences are attributed to the variable of academic qualifications Table 3.



Table 3

Results of One Way ANOVA to test the significance of differences in study areas according to categories of the academic qualification variable

P-value	f-value	df	Variance	Domain
.397	.940	2	Between groups	Organizational
		49	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.492	.720	2	Between groups	Cultural and social
		49	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.626	.473	2	Between groups	Self-barriers
		49	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.395	.948	2	Between groups	Familial
		49	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.507	.688	2	Between groups	All
		49	Within groups	
		51	Total	

### 3. Academic rank

There are no statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level of significance in the average degree of barriers faced by women in assuming academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities from the perspective of female faculty members. These differences are attributed to the variable of academic rank Table 4.

Table 4

Results of One Way ANOVA to test the significance of differences in study areas according to categories of the academic rank variable

P-value	f-value	df	Variance	Domain
.555	.703	3	Between groups	Organizational
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.635	.574	3	Between groups	Cultural and social
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.907	.183	3	Between groups	Self-barriers
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.688	.495	3	Between groups	Familial
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.929	.150	3	Between groups	All
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	

#### 4. Practical experience

There are no statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level of significance in the average degree of barriers faced by women in assuming academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities from the perspective of female faculty members. These differences are attributed to the variable of practical experience Table 5.

Table 5

*Results of One Way ANOVA to test the significance of differences in study areas according to categories of the practical experience variable*

P-value	f-value	df	Variance	Domain
.428	.942	3	Between groups	Organizational
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.909	.180	3	Between groups	Cultural and social
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.130	1.976	3	Between groups	Self-barriers
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.064	2.588	3	Between groups	Familial
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	
.448	.901	3	Between groups	All
		48	Within groups	
		51	Total	

#### Discussion

The results of the study, through the theoretical aspect and discussion of previous studies that have proven statistically significant differences at a significance level of 0.05 in the study areas attributed to the variable of the university where the academic woman works, where the levels of significance were positive. This indicates a positive correlation in women taking leadership positions in Palestinian universities, as confirmed by (Alayoubi et al., 2020; Mahamid and Bdier, 2021). The current study also confirms the results that there are statistically significant differences at a significance level of 0.05 in the average degree of barriers facing women in assuming academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities from the perspective of female teaching in Palestinian government universities, attributed to the variable of the university.

The study's results, based on the discussion of previous studies and statistical analysis, indicate statistically significant differences at a significance level of  $0.05) \leq (\alpha$  in the areas of organizational, socio-cultural, personal, and family-related barriers, as well as overall academic qualifications. These findings are consistent with previous research, such as the study by (Alayoubi et al., 2020), which confirmed a positive correlation between these barriers and academic qualifications in women's leadership positions in Palestinian government universities. The analysis confirms the results that there are statistically significant differences at a significance level of  $0.05) \leq (\alpha$  in the average degree of barriers facing women in academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities from the perspective of female teaching staff, attributed to the variable of academic qualifications.



The results of the study, based on the discussion of previous studies, indicate that there is a relationship between barriers in the areas of organizational, social-cultural, self, and family barriers attributed to the variable of academic rank. The results of the analysis show that self-barriers had the highest percentage, reaching 0.90, followed by family barriers with a percentage of 0.68, then social-cultural barriers at 0.63, and finally organizational barriers with the lowest percentage among barriers at 0.55. This is confirmed by Skinner (2020); Gunzo (2020) that self-barriers are among the most influential barriers on women's leadership positions according to the variable of academic rank due to some self-factors that hinder women's competitiveness in choosing academic leadership positions. The current study has proven a strong positive correlation and the validity of the hypothesis, where there are statistically significant differences at the level of significance  $(0.05) \leq (\alpha)$  in the areas of organizational, social-cultural, self, and family barriers attributed to the variable of academic rank.

The study's results, through theoretical analysis and statistical discussion, indicate that family barriers exist between female academics with 5-10 years of experience, leading to differences and a weak correlation with women who have 20 years or more of experience. The analysis shows that the fewer years of experience, the more barriers hinder women from holding academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities. As experience increases, women become more competitive for leadership positions. The study agrees with the hypothesis that there are significant statistical differences in the barriers faced by women in holding academic leadership positions in Palestinian government universities due to the variable of years of experience. These barriers are related to organizational, social, personal, and family culture.

### **Implications of the Study**

The study highlights the significant gender inequality that exists in leadership positions in Palestinian government universities. Women are underrepresented in leadership positions, and they face numerous barriers to reaching these positions. The study suggests that affirmative action policies are necessary to address the gender imbalance in leadership positions. This could include measures such as quotas or targeted recruitment efforts to ensure that women are given equal opportunities to advance their careers.

### **Recommendations of the Study**

Based on the final results of the study and positive responses to the study questions, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Developing specialized courses to enhance women's self-confidence and skills.
2. Qualifications and experience should be the basis for leadership positions in university management. Women who meet the requirements should compete with men for leadership positions due to the high number of males in leadership positions.
3. Developing educational and awareness programs to emphasize the importance of women's participation in leadership positions in society's institutions, especially Palestinian universities.
4. The study recommends that researchers conduct studies on the same topic with different variables to identify barriers facing women in leadership positions.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study sheds light on the various organizational, cultural, social, familial, and personal barriers that hinder women's leadership positions in Palestinian government universities. The results indicate that women face numerous challenges and barriers, including gender discrimination, social norms, lack of support, and cultural stereotypes. Moreover, the study suggests that enhancing women's confidence and skills, adopting merit-based qualification criteria for leadership positions, developing awareness-raising programs, and conducting further research are essential steps to overcome these barriers and promote gender equality in university leadership positions. Ultimately, addressing these barriers will not only empower women but also lead to greater diversity, inclusivity, and innovation in Palestinian universities.

## Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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