QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STICKY FLOORS AND GLASS CEILINGS IN ACADEMIA

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Abstract

There are many sticky floors that impact on opportunity equality and so drives the difference in promotion rates (Booth et al, 2003). Sticky floors can be described as the phenomenon that all things being equal (ceteris paribus) women are, compared to men, less likely to climb the job ladder. Gender differentials exist in Higher Education, in that females are not promoted at the same rate as males resulting in under-representation of females among the professoriate (sticky floors). While glass ceilings in academia have been well documented sticky floors have received less attention. This study will consider the drivers of the pay gap in academia. Particular focus will be given to understanding the mechanisms that led to sticky floors.

The literature has focused on aspects of personality such as self-confidence in putting oneself forward for promotion and mentoring programs have been established to address this issue. In this project, we investigate the extent to which Institutional schemes, policies and procedures are impeding female staff in their career progression and that this is a potential mechanism through which sticky floors are created.

Using a qualitative approach, 26 semi-structured in-depth interviews with all female academics have been conducted. The female informants were from three different universities which are part of the Australian Technology Network, and the Group of Eight Universities. The interviews were conducted with female academics from different academic levels. The collected data is simultaneously being coded using standard coding practices for this analysis. The first 20 interviews have been analysed so far. The authors began with open coding (breaking the transcript apart), axial coding (building connections between different constructs), and selective coding (recording transcripts for specific examples and instances to assist with theoretical saturation) (Spiggle 1994). The research is still at the data collection stage and we are still conducting interviews.

Our preliminary findings suggest four important factors that influence sticky floors. Our analysis indicated the factors related to personal situations, institutional policies and structures, colleagues and peer influence and the decisions from the leadership teams. Each of these factors has positive and negative impacts on the informant’s situation and have led to the development of sticky floors.

This research is expected to provide insights into the expectations of the institution and leadership teams in order to deal with the increasing issue of sticky floors. It is expected that the mapping of the factors that lead to sticky floors will help in understanding gender-based inequalities in the tertiary education sector. The understanding of the factors leading to sticky floors could assist universities and institutional organisations to design frameworks to counter the growing issues related to gender inequality in the tertiary sector.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Higher Education, Gender Gap.