



The Relations between Gender Difference and Advancement in Thai Academic Careers

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Abstract— The fact that women have increasingly expanded their academic roles; it seems on the surface that problems associated with gender inequality do not exist in academic careers. The researcher argues that the above data is still inadequate to come to that conclusion because headcount is not a sufficient measure for gender equity at work. The pilot study with Thai academic researchers presented in this work is aimed to understanding the complexity of gender and academic career advancement in Thailand. Multiple sources of data including questionnaires, interviews, and documentary data related to gender issues are collected. One important finding from this study illustrates that the respondents did not perceive gender discrimination in academic careers, despite the quantitative data indicated that women got less on rewards. The expected main contributions of this work for academic careers are as follow: to assist in identifying the problems faced by women and to offer useful information relevant to gender equality issues in academic careers. Furthermore, this study provides useful data for the development of Thai research on gender issues.

Keywords— Academic careers, career advancement, gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rapid industrial growth and increased access for women to education make women participation in the labour market steadily increases [1]. This is also true in Thailand, where women account for over a half of all employees in the labour market. Because gender bias in Thailand is deep-rooted and predominant in every societal sector and the level of awareness in gender discrimination is extremely low [2], Thai women, therefore, remain under represented in top managerial positions and the gender wage gap still exists [3]. The evidences supporting these observations could be found in Thai academic careers. Although women are predominant, they seem to hit the glass ceiling. Women account for over 60 percent of academic workers, but below 30 percent of them take responsibility at higher levels in the workplace [4]. In addition, female academics' income was approximately equivalent to 89 percent of that of men [5].

It was found that most literature has always focused on the importance of academic careers in industrialised or developed countries. Basically, characteristics of academic personnel in developing countries are different from those of developed countries in several ways. Moreover, the conceptualisations of gender vary in one country to another, depending on cultures, traditions and values [6]. For this reason, it is difficult to make the generalisations about issues associated with gender in academic career for both developed and developing

countries. Since social and institutional environments are dissimilar due to the society being considered, so their impacts on gender issue are very distinctive. Consequently, each society requires its empirical studies to demonstrate the effects of social and institutional environments on the mechanism of gender gaps in academic science [7].

Thailand, a developing country with less technological advancements, was selected to study about gender difference in academic career. Two reasons to carry out the study could be explained as follow. For the first one, it is noteworthy that more than half of Thai academics are women while in industrialised countries, females account for only 25 percent of total academic workers. It is interesting to find the explanation to clarify the difference between these two figures. For the second reason, gender research in Thai context is incomplete in its practical application because there are limited studies to discover the problems of gender discrimination in academic careers in Thailand. With these two reasons, Thailand is very attractive to serve as a case study in this paper.

The aim of this pilot study is to explore whether or not gender inequality exists in academic careers through a comparison of career advancement between male and female workers in academe. The expected contribution of this study is to offer some possibility to reveal the hidden reality on gender issues in Thai society, which helps to pinpoint the problems faced by women and men workers in academic disciplines. This would support executives and policy-makers in order to organise possible policy to encourage career advancement amongst personnel in this sector into the future.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this part, three topics of literature are reviewed: the political and legislative promotion of gender equality in Thai society; the gender treatment in Thai academic

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organisations, and the influence of individual background on the career advancement.

In Thailand, women movements started to come to the scene since the mid 20th century. However, according to [8], "gender issues were seriously considered in academic institutions after 14 October 1973, the day when a political demonstration started into the democratisation movement". A significant outcome of the movement was a gender equality clause in the 1974 Constitution of Thailand, which brought about some significant legislation including, "every person is equal in Law and is protected in equality and is protected in law equally between men and women, without discrimination to person because of gendered differences could not be done" and "women should be protected in employed person, job employment, career advancement, leadership and benefits of consideration from working as men by eliminating all forms of discrimination against women" [9]. This legal system is groundbreaking to a career path for women; for example, the first female minister was appointed in 1976.

However, academic institutions in Thailand remain controlled by men. The perceived male culture in scientific society and the difficulty of being taken seriously in a male-dominated profession put women off academic career advancement, particularly at senior levels [10]. Thai female academics account for 66 percent of the total academic population, but the percentage of female professor is under 30 per cent. Although law or mechanism has been developed to prevent discrimination against women, most Thai people is still of an opinion that it is acceptable that men, as opposed to women, are granted with more opportunities in their careers [11]. According to [12], "women as a group receive fewer chances and opportunities in their careers, and for this reason they collectively have worse career outcomes". As a result of these organisational practices, women are disadvantaged and have fewer opportunities of promotions to higher positions.

In addition, some researchers have suggested that individual background is also a key factor in determining women's access to higher positions [13]-[15]. Women of higher socio-economic status, such as holding higher degree earned, had greater access to more opportunities to move forward at their workplace [16], [17]. Furthermore, there are some studies argued that family role is an important factor to distract women from career advancement [18]. Although economic and social changes make it necessary for women to earn family income, parental role tend to be permanent role for women than men [19], [20]. As long as households roles limit the time those women spend in developing their careers, women remain disadvantage in career advancement [21].

In light of the above literature, this review of the literature illustrates that academic career advancement can be determined not only by politics and government legislation, societal values, organisational practices, but also by individual factors [22]. Therefore, the multi-factors should be considered in order to explain the hidden reality of gender issues in Thai academic careers.

Table 1. Participants' profile

| Characteristic | Number of respondents (N=21) | |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| | Male (N=7) | Female (N=14) |
| Marital status | | |
| Single | 4 | 8 |
| Married | 3 | 6 |
| Spouse's occupation | | |
| Academic areas | 1 | 4 |
| Non-academic areas | 2 | 2 |
| Highest degree earned | | |
| Bachelor degree | 2 | 3 |
| Master degree | 4 | 8 |
| Doctoral degree | 1 | 3 |
| Holding administrative position | | |
| Yes | 3 | 6 |
| No | 4 | 8 |
| Age (years) | | |
| Minimum | 24 | 22 |
| Maximum | 54 | 54 |
| Mean | 42 | 37 |
| Working Experience (years) | | |
| Minimum | 4 | 2 |
| Maximum | 34 | 34 |
| Mean | 11 | 17 |

3. METHODOLOGY

The tool for gathering information in this pilot study is the semi-structured interviews. Sampling size of participants was determined in terms of information richness rather than the number of participants as in [23]. Although a sample of 12 participants is sufficient to obtain the richness of data when using the semi-structured interviews [24], the results obtained in this pilot study were analysed with data assembled from 21 participants. A summary of selected participants is provided in Table 1.

The pilot study was conducted, largely during April 2009, in Bangkok, Thailand with three academic organisations comprising the public and non-public organisations and the educational institutes. Participants were recruited from academic personnel whose primary job is in academic area. In order to access the participants, the researcher contacted a number of academic organisations and approached some academic personnel through social contacts and deployed snowball techniques.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants to gather information on career chances in relation to gender in academic careers. The participants also had to be involved with a questionnaire

survey to compare academic career advancement between men and women in term of gender pay gap.

Descriptive statistics was employed to compare career advancement, in term of earned income, between male and female academics whereas the qualitative approaches were used to derive themes from the interviews so as to explain the advancement opportunity in academic careers. An examination of macro level (e.g. social values that may impact the advancement of the Thai academic careers) was also conducted based on documentary data. The career advancement of Thai men and women in academic careers is the main focus for the data analysis in this work.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to understand the gender difference in academic career advancement, the researcher took individual background of participants including educational degree earned and work experience into consideration. Based on educational level, all participants were classified into three groups as; group of bachelor degree earned, group of master degree earned, and group of doctoral degree earned. In addition, more two groups were set, based on work experience of all participants, as groups of less than ten and more than ten years experience. The quantitative findings gained from the questionnaire are graphically shown in the bar chart of Figure 1. It should be noted that the information presented in Figure 1 was calculated by using the average values of male income in each group as the base value for comparison.

It is interesting that even in the case of male and female workers with equivalent education level and years of work experience; female workers were paid less than were men. As seen in Figure 1, income of women who earn bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees was approximately equivalent to 43, 81, and 85 percent of that of men holding the same degree respectively. In addition, income of women who have work experience less than 10 years and more than 10 years was approximately equivalent to 67 and 69 percent of that of men holding the same work experience, respectively. It can be noticed that the ratio of earned income shown in Figure 1 would continually increase due to high educational degree and much academic experience of women. This finding is consistent with the review of literature, indicating that women of higher status were found to have more opportunities to move forward at their workplace [16].

In addition to disadvantage in rewards, women have been reported that the roles of wife and mother require too much of time, resulting in less time for academics. A large number of female participants with dependent children and other family commitments faced problems relating to their families. It is because academic occupations are taking more time, so it is difficult for women to meet family responsibilities and continue working [6]. Female married academics admitted that marriage and children interferes their career, especially on how to balance the time between work and family. Many stated the desire to be in the same geographical

location as their partner and family, which often lead to problems in career development. The following comments came from a number of participants:

"I have a young son which make I don't want to attend conferences or training outside this area. It can be difficult if you need a position, but you are limited to geographical mobility" (a 39-year-old, female, married academic)

It was found that, because women generally are more involved than men in child care and domestic work, they may be willing to forego advancement so as to have more flexible hours to take care of their family. One was quoted as saying,

"After marriage, I stop working late to take care of my family. They don't ask for that but it's my obligation." (a 35-year-old, female, married academic).

One participant said she did not wish to start a family, as this would prevent her from progressing further in her careers, stating,

"I have decided not to have marriage, partly due to my concerns regarding the work/life balance. If I am single, I don't have burden so that I can work more". (a 49-year-old, female, single academic).

Three of the participants observed that most successful female academics were single or divorced while it was not so in the case of men, pointing that having a family may relate to the advancement of female academics.

This finding is consistent with the review of literature in [25], indicating that "highly qualified women may be delaying childbirth or not embarking on it at all, especially women working in technology and in natural sciences were less likely to be mothers than those in other occupations".

However, family does not impede all females for their career advancement. It was found that the roles of spouses can support females in some situations. There were a few participants saying that marriage did not come between her work and family because her spouse understood her workload, helped with house chores, and had financial support to raise her children.

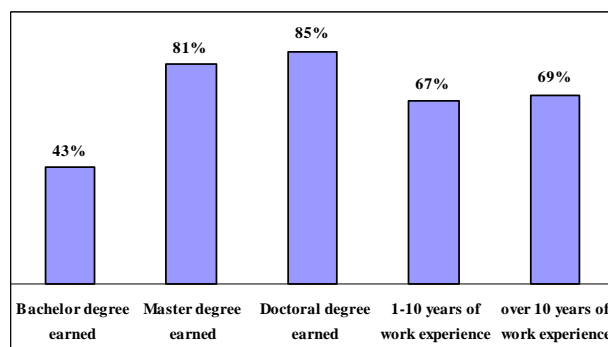


Fig. 1. Ratio of estimated female to male earned income in academic careers classified by education back ground and years of work experience.

"My spouse influences my decision of continuing my research career because he understood that the continuation of the lab work requires me to stay late" (a 31-year-old, female, married academic)

"My husband is financially healthy and also gets a high salary and thus shares our housing expenses and childcare expense" (a 43-year-old, female, married academic)

In addition to family role within the mind sets of women, the practice of the academic organisations can explain the barriers of women's advancement in academic careers [26], [27]. According to conservative Thai cultures stated in [9], "it would be unacceptable to permit women to perform leadership, so men, who are taking on their protective role, have more chances to get a job with leader tasks". This action is accepted by society and it is thought to be part of an organisational culture. This is consistent with finding from this study which revealed that men has biased attitude toward women in higher position. A number of male participants shared the following comments:

"Working in a female dominated environment, it may be that my ideas have been created less than working with male colleagues." (a 34-year-old, male, single academic).

"She (his boss) acts as devil, always blames my work, and checks my work in all details. I am not a young student. That makes me feel bored." (a 45-year-old, male, married academic)

Surprisingly, one important finding from this pilot study illustrates that the participants did not perceive gender discrimination in academic careers, despite the above finding indicated that women got less on rewards, had barriers in their personal lives, would be unacceptable to perform leader tasks, which those were likely to hinder professional development. The participants indicated that they felt they had little or no experience in gender discrimination. For example, one of the participants (a 54-year-old, female, married academic) replied:

"Such a gender problem rarely happens or does not happen at all because women have more opportunity and they are getting better in their jobs. Almost all of the staff at my division is women and they can work well".

The other (a 39-year-old, female, single academic) said that:

"I got enough, I don't need more"

And another one (a 50-year-old, female, single academic) was quoted as saying,

"I'm happy with what I have; I don't think I should be greedy".

As mentioned in [12]: "the causes of gender disparities in career achievement are held to lie within women themselves. The gender differences are said to be innate or else to be the result of gender-role socialisation or culture patterns". In traditional Thai society, women

have been socialised into the 'beautiful and charming', also have been given by social norms to do in domestic roles, whereas men are supposed to be strong and to dominate the wider world [9]. That makes women tend to rate themselves lower than men on their competence in the academic domain, and these kinds of self perceptions make many high-achieving women believe that they have gained career success through pretense rather than actual abilities [28]. This practice can explain why gender discrimination may not be a concern or become a hidden-issue among academe [19].

In light of the above studies, the researcher relies on two common explanations for the gender disparities that exist in academic fields: women's family-care responsibilities which preclude women having enough time for research and the practice within organisation which obstruct opportunities for women in advance their careers.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper presents the comparative study for career advancement of Thai male and female in academic careers. The study reveals that there are practices within academic careers that were at an unfair disadvantage for women, whereas personnel do not perceive any existence of gender discrimination. There are two points explaining the persistence of gender disparities in academic careers including; traditional role in family which distracts women from professional devotion and the existing of the male-dominant culture which discourage women in academic career advancement.

Based on the findings, possible policy is required to remove the barriers to women's advancement in academic careers. In particular, academic organisations should be aware of gender discrimination and negative gender stereotypes in their workforce. Especially, they need to accept the fact that there is gender discrimination in organisations and account them from top to bottom level. All of which should be embraced in organisation in order to demonstrate for fairness which can motivate workers to do their best work.

However, the scope and context of this pilot study remain limited in term of quantitative measurement. A full study using survey research will conducted with a large sample in the future. The purpose of the full study is to understand how women embark on their careers through the organisation system. In addition, more studies will further examine academic career advancement between men and women as to broaden the results and implications.

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