

# Women in Educational Leadership Roles in Private American Universities: A Mixed Methods Study in Beirut

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## Abstract

Woman leaders in educational leadership roles are currently facing several obstacles, such as being discriminated against in the hiring process and being pressured by work and family obligations (Verniers & Vala, 2017). Thus, this topic has not been thoroughly investigated in Lebanon. The lack of research about this topic in Lebanon underscores the importance of this study, which explores the relationship between the experiences of women in education and the following three pertinent themes: 1) gender equality, 2) work and family, and 3) recruitment and hiring practices. First, this study investigates the relationship between certain demographic factors (such as age, marital status, age at marriage, educational level, and employment) and the perceptions of gender equality within women's workplaces. Second, the relationship between work and family and the success of females in educational leadership roles has been examined. Third, this paper explored the relationship between perceptions of gender equality in the workplace and hiring practices. The literature review provided a better understanding of the key concepts that serve as a strong foundation for this study. The literature related to women in educational leadership has been critically analyzed.

## Keywords

Gender, Leadership, Leader, Female Educational Administrator, Higher Education

## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on women in leadership roles. This research was conducted in Lebanon, a country situated in the Middle East. In the country's capital, Beirut, there remains a gap between the number of women on one hand, and

men on the other, who occupy educational leadership roles in private universities in Beirut. The majority of research in educational leadership in the past has been based on male-dominated perspectives, theories, and interpretations (Shakeshaft, 1989). It would be pertinent to study the antecedents of this phenomenon to achieve a better future for women in the workplace. Research conducted about the link between gender and successful leadership is fairly recent; in the past few years, multiple studies have shown that men outnumber women in leadership roles in educational institutions (Alan et al., 2020; Eklund et al., 2017).

There are various obstacles that affect the career advancement of women seeking higher positions in private universities in Lebanon (Jamali et al., 2005; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010, 2011). The term “gender equity” has various definitions and these definitions depend on the perspective of the observer. According to the International Labour Office (ILO, 2000: p. 48), gender equity means “fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities”.

Moreover, the majority of prior research concerning educational leaders has been based on male-dominated perspectives, theories, and interpretations (Carrigan et al., 1985; Collinson & Hearn, 1996). Therefore, this study was conducted with the aim of increasing the number of women in leadership positions in Lebanon, as well as raising awareness about the gender gap in seniority positions in private universities in Beirut. This paper examines the current situation of female leaders in higher educational institutions in Beirut.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Women do not enjoy equal representation in educational leadership positions in Beirut, notably in higher educational institutions (Jamali et al., 2005; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010, 2011). What are the causes of this gap and what are the obstacles standing in the way of women’s career development that have led to more men in senior positions in private universities in Lebanon, specifically Beirut? There are few studies concerned with women leaders in educational leadership roles in Lebanon (Jamali et al., 2005; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010, 2011). Thus, this study was designed to examine this gap in the literature and to raise awareness about the importance of the role played by women leaders in educational institutions in Lebanon.

### **1.2. The Need and Purpose of the Study**

The literature concerning females in educational leadership roles is lacking. This paper is about female educational leaders in Beirut. Not only would it contribute to the understanding of the current situation, but it would also assist women who seek to be educational leaders. The main purpose of this exploratory, con

vergent study was to examine the current situation of Lebanese women in leadership positions at the university level. The researcher explored factors that affected the career advancement of women seeking higher positions in private universities in Beirut. Moreover, the researcher investigated the influence of three factors on perceptions of gender equality. These factors are demographics, work and family, and recruitment and hiring practices (Benard et al., 2008; Correll et al., 2007; Wirth, 2001). In essence, this paper sought to analyze the obstacles standing in the way of women's career advancement. The general purpose of this paper was to contribute to existing knowledge about women in educational leadership positions and to examine the issues faced by Lebanese women in senior positions in educational institutions.

## 2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study was framed by the following three research questions:

- 1) How much of the variance in the total equality scores can be explained by the following variables: gender equality, work and family, and recruitment/hiring practices?
- 2) What perceived obstacles do women leaders in educational institutions in Beirut face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- 3) To what extent do the qualitative findings confirm the quantitative results?

The first research question is quantitative, the second research question is qualitative, and the third and final research question is an integrative question that contains both quantitative and qualitative elements. The study's hypothesis is "No variance in the total equality scores can be explained by gender equality, work and family, and recruitment/hiring practices".

## 3. Literature Review

This section presents the background knowledge base used to support this paper's investigation. It contains an overview of the topic. The three themes are gender equality, work and family, and hiring practices (Budig & England, 2001; Carter et al., 2003; Correll et al., 2007; Ellemers, 2014; Korenman & Neumark, 1992; Verniers & Vala, 2017).

### Definition of Key Terms

This study has terms related to women in educational leadership in higher education institutions. Thus, it may be better understood based on the definitions of the key terms. The following are definitions of the key terms required for this study. The definition of "gender" is behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits generally associated with being either male or female. It refers to the social difference between masculinity and femininity (Kruger, 2008). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), gender refers to the identification of self as either male or female. The definition of "leadership" is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leaders and their followers (Gardner, 1993).

The definition of “leader” is a person who motivates or inspires others to take an action that they might not otherwise take on their own. It does not refer exclusively to the person at the top level of an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). The definition of “female educational administrator” is a female who is currently employed as a Dean, Chairperson, Coordinator, Head of Department, etc. at the university level.

The definition of “higher education” is an education spanning over four years in a private university in Lebanon.

### 3.1. Theme 1: Gender Equality

#### *Merits of Gender Equality in the Labor Market*

Mounting evidence in favor of gender equality in the workplace is contributing to growing awareness on the subject. In particular, gender equality has proven to be a boon for enterprise productivity and economic growth, such that many organizations make it their objective to hire a balance of men and women to benefit from the advantages of gender diversity (Wirth, 2001). Such benefits are most visible at the higher management level. Out of the Fortune 1000 companies, in 638 the presence of women in administrative ranks was found to be a reliable predictor of company value, regardless of industry, firm size or corporate governance measures (Carter et al., 2003). There are many proven reasons behind such benefits. For one, women’s firm representation in strategic leadership positions contributes to firms’ ability to penetrate new markets through reaching a wide range of suppliers and customers (Ellemers, 2014). Additionally, gender-diverse management teams exhibit a higher sense of innovation and creativity, as well as improved problem-solving abilities, as they entail the advantage of tapping into various perspectives (Ellemers, 2014). Furthermore, gender diversity ameliorates companies’ understanding of global market trends and demands, thereby better positioning them to react to changing environments (Ellemers, 2014). Yet, despite the proven benefits of gender equality in the workplace, a 2018 report by prominent consulting firm McKinsey and Company indicated that progress on gender diversity had stalled (Krivkovich et al., 2018). In the United States, since 2015 women’s representation in the labor market has shown almost no sign of improvement: “Women are underrepresented at every level, and women of color are the most underrepresented group of all, lagging behind white men, men of color, and white women” (Krivkovich et al., 2018: para. 5). This raises a pertinent question: If the data shows women’s participation in the labor market is a positive force, then what barriers still stand in their way?

#### *Gender Wage Gap*

The gender wage gap is a reality that affects most—if not all—countries, including the most developed ones (Christofides et al., 2013). Christofides et al. (2013) asserted that despite clear provisions set by EU Employment Guidelines pertaining to the encouragement of female labor market participation and the reduction in gender gaps in employment, evidence suggests there is still a clear

gender wage gap across European countries.

In developing countries, the assumption is that the gender wage gap issue is worse, seeing as gender inequality tends to be more pronounced than in the developed world. This assumption is backed by evidence pertaining to the significant disparity between women's labor market status in developed countries on one hand and developing countries on the other (Jamielaa & Kawabata, 2018). In fact, in the developing world, not only are women more likely to be perceived as being primarily responsible for household and family affairs, but most of those who work do so as part of low-skilled labor, thereby further widening an already existing gender wage gap (Jamielaa & Kawabata, 2018). Moreover, the case of Lebanon is revealing. Dah et al. (2010) drew on data derived from the Central Directorate of Statistics on Lebanese household living standards in 1997. The researchers revealed a large gap between the average annual earnings of men (\$11,151) on one hand, and women (\$7254) on the other, noting that this gap is present despite the fact Lebanese women tend to have a higher level of education than their male counterparts, which would normally be positively correlated with higher income. Jamali et al. (2008) studied the gender pay gap in Lebanon, focusing on three sectors: banking, healthcare, and higher education. Against expectations, the researchers found that employees did not believe the gender pay gap issue to be salient, least of all in banking and healthcare. However, one finding revealed discrimination was perceived to be most significant in higher education. The results were interpreted within the context of a recent grading compensation scheme which the study's authors argued could affect wage gap perceptions, alleviating feelings of inequity, in addition to dominant cultural beliefs pertaining to gender earnings differentials in a generally conservative society (Jamali et al., 2008).

Arguments portraying the gender wage gap as being a temporary anomaly that would balance itself out once the labor market reached the point of equal gender division have been met with aggressive criticism (Silva & Carter, 2011). In a study that sampled thousands of MBA graduates from the U.S. and around the world, Silva and Carter (2011) found the so-called "pipeline problem" was based on nothing more than simplistic assumptions. The study determined that even when controlling for region, industry, and previous work experience, women's first job after their MBA graduation paid them less than men. In addition, as their careers progressed, women received fewer raises both in frequency and in terms of financial remuneration. As such, allowing for time to presumably fix the problem was found to exacerbate it. Another myth, Silva and Carter put to rest, was that the overall gender wage gap was the product of women making the choice to not aim for higher positions that pay more. Silva and Carter cited evidence that even among male and female participants whose aspiration was to become CEO, women were always clearly at a disadvantage.

### ***Sticky Floor and Glass Ceiling***

In the past few decades, labor market studies have returned dire findings for

women workers (Berheide, 1992). One of the most common terms used to describe the difficulties experienced by women in their career progression is the “glass ceiling”. This denotes the situation where women are faced with obstacles on the way up the career ladder that men would not necessarily face (Berheide, 1992). As for the term “sticky floors,” it was coined by Berheide (1992) in a report published by the Center for Women in Government at SUNY. Berheide drew the conclusion that the problem with women’s career progression was less about the forces stopping them from going up and more about the forces pulling them down to ground level. Following a quantitative study of women and ethnic minorities in state and local government, the researcher found that the majority of participants were stuck with jobs that did not pay well and that they had few opportunities to move up or even sideways (Morgan, 2015). Evidence of “sticky floors” was still present in studies conducted in the last two decades (Bartol et al., 2003; Christofides et al., 2013). Christofides et al. (2013) reported that even in the European Union where women have made substantial career progress, the “sticky floor” effect was apparent, particularly in countries like Spain, Slovenia, Luxembourg, and Cyprus. Furthermore, various studies detected challenges for women in terms of upward mobility, despite showcasing leadership skills as good as or exceeding those of their male counterparts. One study (Bartol et al., 2003), in particular, aimed to evaluate the leadership skills of men and women by surveying the subordinates of 658 middle managers and executives in a large professional services business organization. The researchers found that both levels of female managers scored higher than their male counterparts on interpersonal, goals, and task leader behaviors. Yet, they were still underrepresented at the managerial level (Bartol et al., 2003). The researchers suggested an explanation rooted in gender norms and socialization patterns, whereby not only are leadership positions perceived to be more attuned to men’s skills, but women do not mold their attitudes to proactively pursue masculine standards of management and are less likely to be promoted.

However, the implications of the glass ceiling are not homogeneous throughout all industries and organizations. Goodman et al. (2003) found certain variables in the labor market served to increase women’s chances at occupying high-level positions. Examining employment data collected in the late 1980s and early 1990s from a sample of 297 medium-to-large companies in the state of Georgia in the U.S., the researchers tested the effect of multiple independent variables on the presence of women in top management positions, including the percentage of lower-level positions held by women, voluntary management turnover, average management salary, as well as an emphasis on promotion and the development of employees. In addition, they examined data pertaining to companies’ age, size and the industry type in which they operated.

Moreover, other findings unveiled at the turn of the century about women’s efforts to break through the glass ceiling indicated these efforts were not in vain. International Labour Office (ILO, 2000) data showed that throughout the 1980s

and well into the 1990s, women made substantial progress on this front, successfully occupying 40% of managerial and administrative jobs in a few countries such as the U.S., Canada, and Australia, in addition to 20% - 30% in other countries like Finland, Norway, Austria, the U.K., Costa Rica, and Colombia. Unsurprisingly, this progress was disproportionate in so far as which industries were affected most by it. The data obtained by Wirth (2001) validated the conclusions of Goodman et al. (2003), because women were found to be more likely to obtain a managerial position in sectors traditionally dominated by them; these included the communications, finance and banking, health services, and education industries. Wirth argued that one major factor that has contributed to women's progress in high-level positions is education. In the mid-1990s, women's educational enrollment figures had almost caught up to those of men. Nevertheless, the very content of education and gender-segregating rhetoric has worked against women's rise in industries traditionally perceived to be the specialty of men. Such an impediment may be viewed through the lens of the sociocultural perspective model, whereby societies do not just develop gender bias based on sociocultural norms but also manage to persuade women of the norms in such a way to influence their career decision-making process (Goodman et al., 2003; Wirth, 2001).

#### ***Gender Bias***

Conducting a cross-sector study on gender-based leadership barriers, Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) posited that despite the existence of a plethora of obstacles to women's career advancement and ability to lead, only a few are tackled by current initiatives. First, the researchers found that while blatant forms of gender discrimination at the workplace are scarce, primarily thanks to the rule of law, the complete elimination of such discrimination is a far more challenging objective. They pointed to evidence indicating "hidden" forms of sexism and misogyny, whereby the predominantly patriarchal values of society are covertly institutionalized, leading to the persistence of stereotyped ideas of femininity and masculinity; such stereotypes place men in the driver's seat with women playing a more supportive role. Moreover, Diehl and Dzubinski emphasized the presence of "second-generation" forms of gender bias that give rise to barriers based on interactional patterns, practices, and structures motivated by certain cultural beliefs about gender with an inherent bias in favor of men. Due to the subtle and unintentional nature of these biases, which are associated with non-reflective acts of exclusion, they are entrenched within organizations, invisible to both men and women. Moreover, the accumulation of these "hidden" biases is perceived to be responsible for women's inability to see themselves in leadership positions, as well as the inability of others to see them as leaders. The purpose of the researchers' study was to assess any similarities or differences that existed among the careers of women leaders who worked in two traditionally divergent industries: higher education and religion. Diehl and Dzubinski found that women in leadership positions who worked in industries, whether they were progressive and liberal or conservative, faced similar barriers. They concluded



that despite the differing characteristics of working in a liberal or in a constructive industry, women faced challenging situations.

### ***Adversity***

While the presence of gender bias in the workplace is evident, it is important to dissect how the resulting adversity that women face affects them and what the implications are. One of the most evident consequences of gender inequality in the workplace is adversity (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) found that the workplace's gender composition contributed to the propensity for gender discrimination, especially when descriptive gender stereotypes are associated with specific elements or job activities. Studies investigating discrimination often concluded that women who acquired jobs in male-dominated workplaces suffered the most from gender discrimination and sexual harassment (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Some explained this pattern as being a hostile reaction by men to the perceived risk of women entering their domain and threatening to diminish their privilege (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Diehl (2014) explored the subject of workplace gender-based adversity further by interviewing women in higher education about what adversity meant to them. Diehl's findings corroborated previous research which pointed to both positive and negative connotations of adversity as perceived by the women who experienced it. For instance, while for some adversity was synonymous with inescapable losses and traumatic experiences, others saw opportunities and a feeling of liberation, giving rise to new directions. Diehl categorized by theme the experiences of the women whom she interviewed, including—but not limited to—self-esteem, pride, power, control, and opportunity. The majority of participants expressed having to deal with negative implications relating to the development of insecurities (feelings of inferiority, shame, self-doubt), as well as loss of control and relationship stress. However, many simultaneously stated that their negative experiences gave rise to positive ones, particularly at the level of personal empowerment and opportunity. Diehl's work was essential to the interpretation of how gender-based barriers affected the perceptions and mental states of women who experienced them from an introspective viewpoint. This helped to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of gender bias in the workplace. Women's perceptions regarding adversity have received little attention in previous research, but are considered to be secondary to more visible consequences on the emotional, physical, and behavioral levels (Diehl, 2014).

## **3.2. Theme 2: Work and Family**

### **3.2.1. Workplace Discrimination against Mothers**

#### ***Motherhood Penalty***

Obstacles resulting from gender inequality in the labor market, particularly at the highest levels of the corporate hierarchy, appear to be exacerbated by one particular status: motherhood. Correll et al. (2007) examined the relationship between parental status on one hand and performance expectations/evaluations



of workplace competence on the other. Building on status characteristics theory, the researchers asserted that categorical distinctions among people, such as personal attributes or roles, are often tied to held beliefs about such distinctions. As such, a person's status is tightly linked to perceived behavioral patterns. According to this theory, employers implicitly expect higher competencies from individuals belonging to value states of a characteristic (men managers) compared with less value states (women non managers). Similarly, motherhood status is deemed to be a low value state which further degrades women's competency levels. Beyond theory, empirical data points to unequal workplace discrimination based on parental status. Cross-sectional analyses found a link between substantial wage penalties and motherhood status. Among women employees in various sectors in the early 1980s, [Korenman and Neumark \(1992\)](#) found a direct correlation between having children and lower salaries, even after controlling for unobserved heterogeneity. More specifically, they found a 20% difference in wages between childless women and women with two or more children. Furthermore, after controlling for women's human capital attributes, researchers denoted a penalty ranging between 2% to 11% for women with children compared to their childless counterparts ([Budig & England, 2001](#)).

Some scholars have attempted to more explicitly scrutinize the difference between male and female workers pertaining to pro-work behaviour, more specifically fathers and mothers, to determine whether such differences—if they exist—affect motherhood penalty ([Benard et al., 2008](#); [Kmec, 2011](#)). Drawing on national representation data from full-time employees in the U.S., [Kmec \(2011\)](#) examined workers' levels of job engagement, work effort, work intensity, and multiple other indicators pertaining to work enhancement from work. [Kmec](#) found that in so far as pro-work dimensions are concerned, mothers and fathers score similarly on five out of seven outcomes. Moreover, where there were differences, mothers reported more significant work intensity and job engagement than fathers. In addition, mothers did not exhibit any differences compared to non-parents on all outcomes. [Benard et al. \(2008\)](#) argued that the penalty of motherhood is due, at least partially, to cognitive bias that engenders discrimination against mothers. By cognitive bias, the researchers meant the propensity for—often implicit—subjective psychological connections between categories (in this case “mother”) and attributes (in this case work commitment and competence) to influence people's judgement of these categories' members. For instance, a manager may perceive a mother job applicant as being less competent than other female job applicants who do not have children. The extent of financial disadvantage incurred by mothers due to this cognitive bias appears to be hefty. [Benard et al.](#) related the findings of studies that covered the long-term implications. One such study revealed that mothers under the age of 45 in the U.S. made only 80% of the lifetime wages of women who did not have any children ([Benard et al., 2008](#)). In other countries, the wage gap was even more pronounced. [Crittenden \(2001\)](#) estimated that the lifetime motherhood wage penalty for college-educated women was worth more than \$1 million and mother-

hood was a substantial predictor of poverty in old age. In part, this is because mothers miss out on social security credits for any time they take off work.

### ***Systemic Discrimination***

Various factors have been considered to explain the wage inequality between women with children and those without. Some of the suggestions included a possible link between motherhood on one hand and reduced employment experience or reduced job effort and productivity on the other (Budig & England, 2001). Another suggestion was that employers unjustly discriminate against mothers. After testing these hypotheses, Budig and England (2001) found no more than one-third of wage penalties resulting from motherhood may be attributed to interruptions in employment, including a decrease in experience due to part-time work or maternity leave. Employer discrimination thus plays a significant role. However, the same discriminatory behavior does not occur against fathers. Unlike the motherhood role, assuming a fatherly role is not perceived to be culturally at odds with being an ideal employee. Townsend (2002) related the good father figure image to that of a good worker, both of which being a part of the same definition of what it means to be a man. Thus, when men are fathers, their parental status is not deemed a threat to their productivity in any way. If anything, various studies indicated that married men (most often being parents as well) tend to earn higher salaries than their unmarried counterparts, which may be attributed to the perception that married men are more productive, motivated by their breadwinner status and labor market specialization—in contrast with women’s domestic specialization (Budig & England, 2001; Townsend, 2002). Employing data drawn from the *Household, Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia (HILDA) Survey*, Carney (2009) examined the factors affecting the capacity of mothers to pursue career paths across the occupational spectrum. The scholar found that female workers who suffered from the greatest risk of employment disadvantage were those who were perceived as unable to conform to ‘ideal worker’ behavior. This was especially noticeable in high-status occupations, resulting in mothers’ increased risk of being excluded from employment, or of being pressured to move down the occupational hierarchy to positions of lesser socio-economic status (Carney, 2009).

Exacerbating the systemic discrimination against mothers in the workplace is the reinforcing element of organizations’ existing family-friendly policies. More often than not, companies endow parents of newborn children with time off, but allocate more importance to mothers’ role in childcare responsibilities “... by granting parents the right to take leave before and after childbirth and earmarking (significant) parts to fathers, the system both promotes mothers’ stronger involvement in child care and fathers’ dedication to (and even importance in) the labor market” (Andersen, 2018: p. 1126). Andersen studied the effect of parental leave reform in Denmark, comparing the impact on the gender wage gap in 1980 and 2018. Throughout the years, four substantial reforms were enacted, in 1989, 1997, 1998, and 2002, whereby fathers were allocated increasing paternity leave time to assist mothers at home. The researcher found that fathers’

more pronounced involvement in their households was positively correlated with a decrease in the gender wage gap.

### ***Motherhood Myths***

Some scholars stipulated that gender discrimination based on motherhood status is often justified through sociocultural constructs that serve as motherhood myths (Hare-Mustin & Broderick, 1978; Johnston & Swanson, 2003; Verniers & Vala, 2017). Verniers and Vala (2017) argued that the belief in traditional gender roles within the household founded the association between gender and the ability to perform parental and domestic work. In turn, this has created and sustained disadvantageous attitudes in the labor market to women:

Motherhood myths include the assumptions that women, by their very nature, are endowed with parenting abilities, that at-home mothers are bonded to their children, providing them unrivalled nurturing surroundings. Conversely, motherhood myths pathologised alternative mothering models, depicting employed mothers as neglecting their duty of caring, threatening the family relationships and jeopardizing mother-children bondings (Verniers & Vala, 2017: p. 3).

Such myths continue to be pervasive in society. In a study conducted decades ago on attitudes toward motherhood, Hare-Mustin and Broderick (1978) found that the majority of participants were inclined to perceive women as being primarily mothers, with all the responsibilities and connotations that come with this status. In particular, men were determined to harbor substantially more traditional attitudes toward motherhood than women. This suggests that mothers have long dealt with gender-based discrimination in a labor market dominated by men at the higher echelons of corporations who have hiring power (Hare-Mustin & Broderick, 1978). Moreover, Johnston and Swanson (2003) asserted that even at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was evidence to suggest that, of all media content, even contemporary women's magazines consistently portrayed mothers from an ideological perspective, painting them as tired, overwhelmed, neglectful of their children, and guilty. The researchers argued that these portrayals have contributed to the perpetuation of patriarchy, putting mothers at a disadvantage in the workplace.

### **3.2.2. Work-Life Balance**

Many companies harbor expectations about which employees are best fit to handle which jobs, how workers should or will behave, and the role of emotion on the job, among other examples of embedded gender-work ideologies that play into substantial historical power structures of inequality (Blithe, 2015). The issue appears to have multiple dimensions. On one hand, research suggested that women are more prone than men to experience the "guilt of missing out" on family affairs, including mothering, while on the job (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014). In addition, many companies still hold beliefs regarding women's affinity for engaging in child rearing and taking care of the family, with such expecta-

tions harming their career prospects (Moreton & Newsom, 2004). On the other hand, there is an evident lack of support from organizations with respect to men's work-life balance. Expected to be the "breadwinners," men are not provided enough flexibility to engage in responsibilities outside of work (Liebig & Kron, 2017). Liebig and Kron (2017) argued that involved fatherhood is diametrically opposed to the interests of the organization that employed fathers, seeing as it is perceived to be a force that challenges the full labor market availability of men. Yet, when men share domestic work, they contribute positively to women's wellbeing and work-life balance by diminishing the "dual burden" phenomenon and enabling women to give more attention to their careers. Furthermore, more extensive work-life balance by both men and women may compel organizations to review their policies and reconsider the negative connotations attached to work flexibility and leave, simultaneously enhancing gender equality (Blithe, 2015).

Moreover, work-life balance issues have put pressure on women's wellbeing. Maji (2019) found women fared far worse than men when it came to balancing their workplace and household responsibilities. Studying female employees working in the engineering and technology sectors, the researcher noted that women working in gender-atypical professions suffered from solo status and social identity threat, having to work many more hours than their male counterparts to adjust to their workplace environment. For one, solo status involves the experience of individuals who make up a few members of a social group or other specific category. Maji found that women working in traditionally male-dominated areas were more likely to suffer from solo status, whereby their low representation in the workplace and the associated psychological consequences affected their ability to perform well and be productive. Moreover, it was determined that these women suffered from social identity threat because they felt they were not fully welcome in the organizations where they worked; many of them even experiencing patronizing behaviors, including sexism, from their male colleagues. The study's participants expressed that these cumulative effects resulted in working longer hours to make up for the loss of productivity, as well as spending less time at home, thereby worsening their work-life balance (Maji, 2019).

### 3.2.3. Age

Gender inequality in the workplace may extend to an individual's age. However, there are conflicting views in the literature as to which gender is at a higher disadvantage when it comes to ageism, the process of discrimination against people based on their age (Kiger, 2018; Martin et al., 2019; O'Sullivan, 2019). O'Sullivan (2019) argued that women suffer most when it comes to age discrimination, citing evidence from the National Bureau of Economic Research which found the résumés of older women received fewer call-backs than men in the same age category and younger men or women. The rationale behind this discrimination may involve the perspective that when women are younger, there is the presumption that they will take time off to have children and care for their families;

as a result, when they are older, employers make the assumption that these women did take time off and thus are less experienced and qualified than men in the same age category. Older women working in certain sectors may face the prospect of being fired because their employers believe they are no longer attractive enough (Martin et al., 2019; O’Sullivan, 2019).

However, some organizational behaviour studies indicated that older women may be shielded from employer discrimination (Kiger, 2018; Martin et al., 2019). In a recent study published in 2019 by Martin and colleagues, it was found that older, assertive men faced the most significant “agency prescription”, which refers to pressure exerted on them to not assert themselves, but rather to let younger workers rise. In contrast, assertive women were not confronted with the same pressure, given that they were not perceived to be a threat. The result of the study was surprising, given the intuitive presupposition that because older women workers belong to two minority groups, they should face a double penalty in terms of bias (Martin et al., 2019). Instead, the fact that they do not belong to a dominant category protects them from these penalties (Kiger, 2018).

### 3.3. Theme 3: Hiring Practices

#### *Notable but Limited Success*

Most of women’s representation has been skewed toward women’s status as students, as opposed to university staff. In fact, while in 1870 there were already 11,000 women enrolled in colleges throughout the U.S., constituting approximately 21% of total enrollment, the figure dramatically increased to 283,000 or 47.3% as early as 1920. By the 1980s, women had taken the lead in regard to representing almost 52% of university-level students in the country (Long, 2008). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest women have become more likely to hold advanced degrees in comparison to men. By the mid-1990s, more than 55% of Masters Degrees were awarded to women (Long, 2008). Such success has transposed into senior positions acquired by women in the educational sector, albeit not consistent with their student achievements (Long, 2008). In fact, (Long, 2008) asserted that as of 1995, women held 15% of presidencies in higher education, establishing this type of representation in 453 out of 3,000 American institutions. Considered on its own, this percentage may seem low, but it is a three-fold increase since 1975, when merely 148 presidencies were held by women (Long, 2008). Studies conducted at the turn of the century suggested a few reasons as to why women’s high-level representation was so low, citing their higher propensity to take breaks from work to raise their children, as well as relatively low support from their partners/spouses (Corrigan, 2002).

The lacking senior representation of women in higher education is not only an American issue. In the U.K., statistics collected during the 2013/14 academic year indicated while women constituted 45% of academic staff, they accounted for merely 22% of professors, 35% of pro and deputy vice chancellors, and 20% of vice chancellors. These figures do not detract from women’s remarkable

progress over the years, considering that in pre-1992 English Colleges, only 24% of women were pro and deputy vice chancellors, and an even lower 11% were chancellors (Shepherd, 2017). Evidence is abundant, and the merits of women working at the executive level in the educational sector have been studied for decades. Ryder (1994) recounted that women's effectiveness as school principals was predicated on their ability to connect at a deeper level with all aspects of the job. Not only did they spend more time in unscheduled meetings, but they were more visible on campus and observed instructors more than their male counterparts. In addition, women principals spent more time interacting with their staff, especially with instructors, engaging in discussions about the curricular and academic areas. They were more likely to help new teachers and to inspire them to utilize more desirable teaching methods. Moreover, Gross and Trask (1976) found that women principals were considerably more knowledgeable about curriculum than their male counterparts and their heightened involvement in student and teacher affairs was due to the perception of their job as being an educational leader or master teacher rather than the more managerial-industrial perspective of men. Yet, there has often existed a dichotomy between women's more favorable approach to managerial responsibilities in education and their propensity to emulate men in leadership positions, which Porat (1991) argued harmed their integrity, particularly when the assumption of such a role is not just unnecessary but counterproductive.

### *Leadership Styles*

An individual's propensity to hold a high-level position in any organization is correlated with their ability to assume leader-like responsibilities. For a long time, men and women's personality attributes were perceived to act as determinants to their potential for leadership, placing women at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts. While typically associated with male-dominated industries such as construction, engineering, and finance, the male leadership style's dominance extends to industries such as higher education (Phelps & Taber, 1997). For instance, a study on leadership profiles in American higher education revealed that the typical president of institutions in this industry was a Caucasian male in his 50s (Phelps & Taber, 1997). As such, many women striving to apply to and acquire a high-level position found themselves mimicking men's normalized methods of leadership, as they considered it the easiest way to show that they were capable of assuming the associated responsibilities, particularly because this method had persistently established itself as acceptable to the public and effective in attracting recognition and promotion Porat (1991). Nevertheless, in practice, Growe and Montgomery (1999) asserted that men and women in leadership positions adopted different leadership styles, placing emphasis on different aspects of their jobs. While women were inclined to focus more on relationships, procedures, and the sharing of information, men had a higher tendency for hoarding information, achieving goals, completing tasks, and winning. Women encouraged consensual, contributive decision-making, while men fa-

vored the majority rule and adopted a more traditional top-down administrative style [Grove and Montgomery \(1999\)](#).

- ***Traditional Leadership Style***

In *MegaTrends for Women*, [Aburdene and Naisbitt \(1992\)](#) envisioned how women's liberation would unfold, as they built a new social order by challenging traditional leadership norms heavily influenced by authoritarian values. In essence, they described women's leadership styles as revolving around six behavioral patterns: empowerment, restructuring, teaching, the provision of role models, the encouragement of openness, and the stimulation of questioning and curiosity. The results of such patterns were determined as early as the 1970s as having a predominantly positive effect on the functioning of organizations, particularly in the field of education. [Gross and Trask \(1976\)](#) found women principals to be more knowledgeable and even more concerned about instructional supervision. In addition, both teachers and superiors had a preference for women over men, as they were perceived as more effective administrators. Moreover, instructors' performance on the job as well as their students' academic performance rated higher under women's administration ([Gross & Trask, 1976](#)).

- ***Leadership in Sports***

Despite this apparent success of the female leadership style, leadership positions have been attributed to men in the majority of fields, especially those perceived to be more male-centric, such as sports ([Darvin et al., 2017](#)). However, evidence points to the lack of any tangible justification for this trend. [Darvin et al. \(2017\)](#) investigated whether men served as better leaders to female basketball players at the professional level. The researchers examined data related to more than 1500 players for 19 Women's NBA seasons between 1997 and 2015, as well as 4000 players for three seasons of NCAA Women's Basketball, between 2013 and 2016. They found that in both leagues, the gender of the head coach in charge of women's teams did not have any influence on individual player performance.

- ***Leadership Bias***

Furthermore, although much empirical evidence points to women leadership characteristics favorable to managerial success in higher education, the association between leadership and masculine traits persists and its roots have been scrutinized from an organizational psychology perspective ([Madden, 2011](#)). [Madden \(2011\)](#) found gender stereotypes predicted how women perceived themselves in circumstances where leadership is necessitated. The perceptions of leadership effectiveness were potently tied to attributes stereotypically associated with gender differences. At the crux of this subject was the dichotomy between "masculinity" and "femininity", which are associated with competence and incompetence through intermediary characteristics. For instance, men who had stern attitudes were perceived as serious and capable of leading, whereas women who displayed friendly behavior were judged as being too lenient and incapable of properly managing a team or any situation. In contrast, women who were



cold were perceived as unfeminine, and therefore competent. Moreover, a second dichotomy was in the difference between “communal” and “agentic” leadership styles. Whereas communal behavior centers on the process of decision-making and group dynamics, agentic behavior is outcome and task oriented. Generally, these two types of leadership are perceived to be mutually exclusive, with the expectations being that men tend to be more agentic while women are more communal (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Madden argued that gender bias in leadership forms at an early stage of information processing, thereby making it difficult for women to assert themselves as leaders in the workplace, as they engage in an uphill battle because “... stereotypes color how behavioral information is encoded. This suggests that female leaders will have difficulty getting subordinates to perceive them as possessing agentic characteristics and this perceptual bias may undermine the effectiveness of women leaders” (Madden, 2011: p. 57).

Recent data suggested that, over the past few decades, cultural stereotypes regarding men, women, and leaders have evolved in a feminine direction, although this trend is not detected in all studies. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that gender-based prejudice about leadership has decreased, albeit not to a point that marks a pivotal shift in individuals’ leader preferences (Madden, 2011). Rather, there is still a notable preference for men in leadership positions (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). The researchers’ findings help further understand the dynamic relationship between cultural gender norms and women’s ability to assume leadership roles, as they slowly but surely make headway in their pursuit of managerial and executive positions (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Skewed perceptions of male-versus female-like leadership exist across cultures. In a study on four cultural groups in Western Europe, the vast majority of respondents saw differences in leadership capabilities based on gender; men, in particular, stereotyped women’s leadership negatively, with the most prevalent stereotyping occurring in Anglo and Nordic groups, and the last in Latino participants (Prime et al., 2008). More specifically, it was found that men believed women to be ineffective at basic leadership duties, such as being a role model, solving problems, influencing and inspiring others, and delegating tasks. While the researchers noted the small effect size of these results, they nevertheless asserted that these effects accumulate over time throughout women’s careers, substantially impeding their long-term success (Prime et al., 2008).

#### ***Interventions Targeted at Gender Inequality in the Workplace***

In the last few years, barriers to gender equality in academia, especially in developed countries, have been breaking down (Fritsch, 2016). The case of Austria provides a worthy example to examine through the lens of women’s career development. (Fritsch, 2016) explored the relationship between women’s patterns of career development and the advancement of female faculty at Austrian universities. By conducting semi-structured interviews with women in leading positions working for a sample of these universities, Fritsch found patterns across these women’s behaviors and attitudes toward their career which allowed them

to ascend to leadership status. The first such pattern corresponded to individualistic and output-driven characteristics, whereby interviewed participants expressed it took them both hard work and assertiveness to advance in their careers, staying true to their own character instead of borrowing from the typical, male model of leadership:

Moreover, their individualistic, assertive qualities extended to their ability to refuse certain faculty obligations when they perceived them as obstructing their main duties. As for the second pattern, it involved politically-sustainable characteristics, where women who made it to top positions in academia may have contributed to the acceleration of sociopolitical change in their institutions through political commitment, through their participation in the breaking up of traditional structures with the aim of assisting early-stage academics. In particular, the involvement of female leading executives on university boards as well as working and representative bodies was found to help in the dissolution of traditional male-dominated networks and to proactively counteract discriminatory patterns. The third pattern detected was of adaptability and flexibility, whereby when presented with various opportunities, women who best managed to acquire leadership positions were those who were capable of being flexible and adaptable enough to choose the best alternatives (Fritsch, 2016). The decisive factor is to recognize which option is the best or most advantageous in any given situation. A given situation may actually require self-effacement in order to achieve success. In another context, self-advocacy may be indispensable and a further method for achieving success (Fritsch, 2016: p. 628).

Past evidence corroborated the success of a flexible leadership style for women. Yanez and Moreno (2007) conducted eight case studies of women in high-managerial posts in a sample of Spanish universities focusing on how these women handled managerial functions, the leadership styles they adopted, and the transformational initiatives they assumed at critical moments during their tenure. The researchers found that adaptability and flexibility were central to successful leaders, particularly in cases where they served as agents of change during times of organizational tension. Aside from women's own efforts and contributions as a form of intervention targeted at ameliorating their management-level standing in higher education, other suggestions have been made, focusing on comprehensive organizational change, to accomplish the same objective. The use of a transformational leadership model in the context of facilitating women administrators' career progress in higher education was proposed. As per this model, both women and the organizations where they work would have to adapt to create a more nurturing environment. At the personal level, women ought to focus on building and enhancing a specific set of personal characteristics, including a thorough sense of responsibility, a strong work ethic, an enthusiastic attitude, team building and networking skills, planning skills, listening and communication skills, as well as creativity and the willingness to experiment. At the professional level, women must focus on respecting others in the workplace, adopt a systematic and fair decision-making mechanism, and be

adept at anticipating challenges. Moreover, the researchers emphasized the role of women's surrounding environment: "the most important environmental aspects that need to be developed in order for women to feel comfortable as leaders in the academy are: effective communication, supportive leadership, a network of mentors, intellectual stimulation, personal recognition and participative decision-making".

## **4. Research Design and Methodology**

### **4.1. Participants**

The participants in this mixed study design were a total of 48 women who are currently working at two private universities in Beirut and whose ages ranged between 25 and 72 years old. For the semi-structured interviews, the sample consisted of four females in educational leadership roles in Beirut. The four participants in the interviews were not the four members of the expert panel who reviewed the questionnaire and the interview questions.

A total of 48 women participants (44 university instructors as survey participants and four women administrators at top positions at a university level as interview participants) were involved in this study. Furthermore, the instructors who filled out the questionnaires were not randomly chosen, as they had to fit the following criteria: they had to be women instructors who worked in a private university located within Beirut. The researcher prepared an email list using the emails from two universities websites of women working in the School of Arts and Sciences.

### **4.2. Research Design**

A mixed methods research design was implemented to explore the perspectives and experiences of women in educational leadership positions. Due to the nature of this study, the researcher conducted thorough and in-depth interviews with four Lebanese women leaders. The mixed methods design was the most suitable for gaining insight into what is occurring in private, English speaking universities in Beirut. Notably, it allowed the researcher to get a glimpse of the situation of women and educational leadership in Lebanon. This study was a convergent study and the design was a descriptive one. The researcher chose the convergent design because there was a separate collection and analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. After analyzing each set of data, the results of each data analysis was merged and then interpreted. The descriptive design provides answers to the questions of who, what, when, where, and how associated with a research problem. It is used to obtain information about the current status of the phenomena and to describe what exists with respect to variables. It examines the nature of experiences, perceptions and issues existing in an environment. This design does not intend to examine the effects of an intervention or identify a cause and effect relationship between variables. The descriptive design was the best design for this convergent study because it examines perceptions versus

causality. This design is great with mixed methods since it seeks to gain perspective from both quantitative and qualitative research.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. However, it is important to note that this was a pilot study. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all universities in Lebanon. Additionally, a randomized sampling approach was not adopted for recruiting participants to answer the questionnaires; the researcher instead used a convenience sampling method. The researcher sent a SurveyMonkey link to instructors who are currently employed in the School of Arts and Sciences at two private universities and a total of 44 instructors out of 60 responded. The inclusion criteria consisted of being a female instructor and working in the School of Arts and Sciences at a private university located within Beirut.

The existing body of knowledge relating to women and educational leadership in Lebanon is limited. This necessitated the use of primary data, which was generated by using two research tools: interviews and questionnaires. Prior to administering the interviews and questionnaires and during the development phase of the study, the interview questions and the questionnaire were both reviewed by academic experts to ensure their validity and were amended according to the experts' revisions.

### **4.3. Qualitative Instruments**

Primary data was collected qualitatively by interviewing four women in the university domain. These four interviews reached saturation and were conducted based on previously scheduled appointments. The interviews were done in Beirut during the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters. They added substantial information about how women were dealing with their leadership positions in the field of education. The interviews were semi-structured and included questions prepared by the researcher based on the literature review and the second research question. Semi-structured interviews are flexible because they allow the interviewee to express themselves, something which cannot be attained through questionnaire responses. The semi-structured interview included six probing questions prepared by the researcher, such as "Do you believe women seeking leadership positions within your university face different challenges than men? If yes, what are the perceived challenges in being a female educational administrator?".

### **4.4. Development of Qualitative Questions**

The professors made changes to the interview questions by amending or eliminating certain questions. Reviewers were asked to make comments on each question with the following questions in mind: 1) Is this the best way to phrase this question? 2) Would you suggest additional words to make it clearer? 3) Do you believe this will get the kind of information I am seeking? And 4) Do you have any additional comments? The professors ensured the language was suitable for the target audience by clarifying vague terms, such as 'key positions'

(A.D.), including questions about obstacles faced by women leaders in Beirut (A.D.), splitting questions into two separate questions or eliminating them entirely (A.D.), personalizing specific questions so they resonate well with the interviewee (F.A.), starting the interview with a general question which leads to more personalized questions (F.A.), replacing “think” with “perceive” (F.A.), probing when specific answers are provided (F.A.), adding a future-oriented question about aspirations (F.A.), stating a dislike of the word “subordinate” (D.P.), probing further for someone’s opinion (D.P.), reducing the wordiness of questions to fit an audience whose first language is not English (D.P.), and “unpacking” questions so they aren’t too dense for the interviewee (V.K.). The result of this review process was six thorough interview questions well-suited for the target audience.

All interviews were recorded. The open-ended interview questions were related to women in leadership positions in the educational field and the questions were simple in content and style.

#### **4.5. The Questionnaire: Its Development and Review**

The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 60 university instructors. It consisted of demographic questions about gender, age, years of experience, and academic credentials, perceptions toward gender equality in the workplace, work and family priorities, and recruitment/hiring practices. Participants responded to a series of questions with 5-point Likert scales ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. The questionnaire was originally obtained from Crosby-Hillier (2012) and was amended according to revisions made by the same panel of academic experts who reviewed the interview questions. Examples of feedback from these academics included: replacing the word “female” with “women” (A.D.), replacing “boss” with “supervising gender” (A.D.), adding a question inquiring about the age at which the women respondent married (F.A.), adding a question about the number of children and their ages (F.A.), adding a question about parent’s current occupation (F.A.), clarifying what is meant by educational leadership roles (F.A.), the year they obtained their degree (D.P.), using the word “men” rather than “male leaders” (D.P.), and defining “success” (V.K.). All of this feedback was integrated within the questionnaire prior to sending it to the potential respondents.

#### **4.6. Procedures**

The researcher chose the two universities for this exploratory study based on availability and ease of access, while ensuring they were private, American universities located in Beirut. The two universities were labeled as A and B to maintain confidentiality. The researcher administered the interviews in person to avoid any misinterpretations from the respondents’ side. For each questionnaire, the respondents completed a demographic file about their gender, age, years of experience, and academic credentials. The interview and survey questions were

related to women in leadership positions in the educational field and were simple in content and style. Moreover, the interviewees were encouraged to respond objectively. The interviews were administered confidentially and the four female leaders were assured of that. Overall, the interviews and questionnaires provided clearer insight into how the females currently working in universities viewed women's leadership and how they handled its accompanying issues. They allowed for an understanding of how these women are coping with their leadership positions in the field of education.

## 5. Data Collection of the Surveys and the Questionnaires

Participants of the questionnaire were contacted by email. The email included a link to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire. The researcher's target was to receive thirty replies from thirty instructors from each university. The researcher used the convenience sampling method and prepared a questionnaire that included questions pertaining to demographic factors, perceptions of gender equality in the work place, work and family priorities, and recruitment/hiring practices. The participant responses were entered and stored on a secure, password-protected server with only the researcher having access. After respondents completed the questionnaires, the researcher analyzed the data on SPSS using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Data Collection, Version 25) to analyze the data gathered from the questionnaires. The researcher examined the influence of specific factors (demographics, work and family, and recruitment/hiring practices) on the perceptions of gender equality within educational leadership positions. To examine whether a relationship existed between these factors, the researcher conducted a correlational analysis (using Pearson's  $r$ ). Where significant correlations were found, the researcher investigated causality between these factors by running regression analyses. The researcher used SPSS to run the standard multiple regression test in order to look at the correlation between the mean scores. The researcher ran a multiple regression for the three levels of the survey to see which factor is the best predictor for gender equality, work and family, and recruitment. After that, the researcher compared the mean score of (for example: "hiring and recruiting") against the total mean score of the test. When the researcher found predictive relationships between these factors, she deduced predictors of perceptions of gender equality in the workplace. Finally, the researcher ran the Cronbach's alpha for reliability. After the analysis of the data, conclusions were drawn using triangulation techniques, whereby comparisons were made between the qualitative and quantitative data.

Overall, the interviews took around 20 minutes each, whereby the interviewees were asked six probing questions. Moreover, the interview data was voice recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. After the instructors filled out the questionnaires online, the researcher analyzed the data on SPSS using Pearson's  $r$  and ran the Cronbach's alpha for reliability, and the interviews were analyzed using the "thematic content analysis" procedure.

## 6. Data Analysis

### *Interviews Analysis*

The use of qualitative interviews is no stranger to the subject of female leadership in higher education. To investigate potential sources of gender discrimination that occur in the workplace, Fritsch (2015) relied on qualitative data obtained from 12 biographical semi-structured interviews with women who were successful at dealing with obstacles where they worked. The researcher noted multiple strengths of this kind of approach. First, the data used was derived from interviews conducted in successive cycles, allowing interviewers the time to alter and ameliorate their questions based on their experience in the first cycle. Second, owing to the qualitative nature of the research, direct approaches could be used in the process, whereby the researchers could pursue narrative-generating communication strategies, including ad hoc questions, general probing and conversational gambit Fritsch (2015). A close look at Fritsch's method revealed that it makes generally efficient use of strategies and software tools to analyze the data. By utilizing coding procedures within grounded theory, the researcher was able to determine multiple obstacles successful women in leadership positions face, aided by tools such as MaxQda which allows for automated pattern detection through processes like mapping word frequencies. Practically, such tools help to diminish what is otherwise considered to be a limitation in qualitative research: the abundance of unstructured, subjective data that researchers must analyze. However, as in the case of Fritsch's study, this kind of research is often conducted using the constructivist approach, whereby the researcher herself participates in deriving meaning from the raw data. When it comes to measuring gender discrimination, the use of qualitative interviews may provide researchers with more nuanced, detailed information to work with what would otherwise be purely quantitative research designs.

In regard to the semi-structured interviews, four participants were interviewed. The two interviewees from University A were interviewed in quiet and private rooms for twenty minutes each. The two interviewees from University B were interviewed via two applications: Skype and Zoom due to the lockdown in Beirut because of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, they were contacted via email. After receiving a reply, the researcher sent another email to confirm the meeting details in terms of date, time, and place/application. These interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken by the researcher. The interviewees were chosen based on the following criteria: the women are employed in Beirut, they work at a private university, and they hold a senior position in their field (Dean, Chairperson, Coordinator, etc.). After conducting the interviews, time was allocated to listen to the recordings. Subsequently, the researcher transcribed them into a Word Processing text file. Each interview was analyzed by dividing it into three files: transcript file, personal file (related to the interviewee personally, including their gestures and the researcher's impressions about them), and analytical file



(analyzing the content and categorizing the interviews' responses). The researcher analyzed the content using the content analysis procedure to show how the concepts present in the literature review were related to the interview. According to Burns, "this is a form of classifying the content based on the coding system that is related to the literature review and the research questions" (Burns, 2000: p. 434). In this study, the content analysis was done by classifying the content of the interviews and coding them under titles, which were derived from the literature review. The four interviews had the same set of questions, but answers to some questions differed and varied from one respondent to another. Finally, the researcher used the "thematic content analysis" procedure to analyze the semi-structured interviews. After the analysis of the data, conclusions were drawn using triangulation techniques, whereby comparisons were made between the qualitative and quantitative data.

The interview was chosen as an instrument to collect data for three reasons. First, this tool can best capture the participants' beliefs, opinions, and behavior (Gall et al., 2010). Second, the researcher can gather in-depth information about the participants' opinions especially when the responses made are non-verbal (Bell, 2005; Cohen et al., 2007). Third, the researcher can probe to obtain better responses, and can verify the reliability of the responses (Bell, 2005; Keats, 2000).

The aim of this research was to understand the various experiences that women encounter at a university level and to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender and educational leadership. This research study explored factors affecting the career advancement of women seeking higher positions in private universities in Beirut by investigating the influence of three factors on perceptions of gender equality. These factors were demographics, work and family, and recruitment and hiring practices. The sample consisted of four women leaders – two from University A and two from University B. During the course of the interviews, the researcher audio-recorded the interviews and wrote notes. The researcher audio-recorded the interviews after receiving the consent of the four interviewees. All four participants met the criteria for this study and the interviews were conducted in a confidential and professional manner. After conducting the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audios into word processing text files and analyzed the transcripts line-by-line. To maintain participant anonymity, the four interviewees were randomly assigned a number to exclude any links between the interview responses and the interviewees. These notes and digital files were kept on a password-protected laptop. A table on an Excel sheet was used to compile the interview data and patterns were determined among the four respondents. The data analysis produced three themes. Those themes assisted the researcher to understand the experiences of the interviewees and addressed the second research question. The three themes were very insightful in terms of answering the following research question: "What perceived obstacles do women leaders in educational institutions in Beirut face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?"

Furthermore, the thematic content analysis was used to show how the concepts present in the literature review were related to the themes in the interview; “this is a form of classifying the content based on the coding system that is related to the literature review and the research questions” (Burns, 2000: p. 434). In this research, the content analysis was done by classifying the themes of the interviews and writing them under titles, which were derived from the four interviews. All of the interviewees were asked the same set of questions, but answers to some questions differed and varied from one respondent to another.

### ***Obstacles to Women’s Advancement in Higher Education***

The interview findings revealed for women working in key positions at high-ranking universities in Lebanon, not many obstacles stood in the way of their careers. Notably, the interviewees expressed little concern over gender-based discrimination, as most agreed they did not have to deal with this form of discrimination. One of the main reasons cited to justify this was the universities’ culture. Department of Education chair at University A, Dr. N., asserted her establishment had traditionally espoused universal values such as gender equality. Similarly, Dr. H., Director of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment at University B denied having had any positive or negative experiences motivated by gender.

Nevertheless, some nuanced insight in the interviewees’ responses pointed to stubborn gender stereotypes affecting the perception of women and their seemingly inherent gender-specific characteristics in higher education. For example, University A Assistant Provost Dr. D.’s account of her promotion to department chair shed light on enduring women-specific stereotypes: “Someone told me this... she said: ‘Even though you are a woman, you are not into gossip, and that’s great’”. This statement is revealing on two accounts: First, there is an implicit assumption in it that the *norm* is for women to have a gossipy character, which entails talking about other people, often behind their backs, and by extension not being very trustworthy. Second, the fact it was another woman who made this statement implies women-specific gender stereotypes are not necessarily espoused by the opposite gender, but are internalized by both genders (Eckhaus & Ben-Hador, 2019). Moreover, some experiences such as those related by Dr. G. indicate some men in higher education continue to showcase sexist behavior that does not necessarily constitute an obstacle to career advancement per se, but rather may work as an intimidating factor that could adversely affect women’s mental wellbeing:

“Men in academia are super sexist. I don’t know how else to frame it. They call you ‘sweetie’ and I have been told by a senior professor that I should always try to lose weight because being an academic is not just about publishing; you have to look good and you go on TV, so you should lose weight. You know, a lot of that.”

These gender-stereotype pressures with which women in higher education have to consider may be explained by the sociocultural perspective model, whe-

reby the patriarchal nature of the Lebanese society is more susceptible to essentialist perspectives on gender, based on dominant male-based rhetoric that serves a hegemonic and legitimizing function (Brickell, 2006). Indeed, the relevant interview results, despite not revealing much hardship for women to acquire high-level university positions in the field of education, consolidate the findings of Timmers et al. (2010) who noted society's overarching cultural norms contribute to women's success (or lack thereof) in advancing to the higher echelons of their academic track. It is worth noting here the obstacles begin very early for women in Lebanon, as evident in some interviewees' testimonies such as "Perhaps, I was among very few girls who went on and found a job, and then continued their education and reached a leadership position". Therein is an implicit expectation that women typically are not expected to *continue* their education beyond a certain point, let alone acquire a leadership position. Fritsch (2015) would attribute such an expectation to the legacy of gender norms that have dominated societies across decades, bent and shaped as per the dynamics of a predominantly patriarchal culture. One finding by Fritsch is perhaps most relevant in countries like Lebanon where gender norms are more rigid than in the West: the expectation women will, at some point, assume household and caring responsibilities, inducing for them a greater degree of risk aversion whereby they will not take risks once they have a family and subsequent responsibilities.

Another notable takeaway from the interview findings was some women assuming high posts in educational institutions in Lebanon still contend with gender stereotypes in the form of biased leadership perceptions. For one, Dr. G. described the men with whom she worked at University B as being "condescending" and not supportive of their women counterparts. She highlighted a subtle subservient dimension of how women's own biased self-perception serves to reinforce men's judgement: "The other challenge is that women take a lot of the service roles... more of the support roles and less of the leading roles. They are less assertive and I still have colleagues who call our senior men professors 'sir' all the time... There's a lot of sexism, I believe." What Dr. G. refers to as sexism is an evident manifestation of gender bias and may be explained by contextualizing women's experiences at universities in Lebanon within the findings of Diehl and Dzubinski (2016), who discussed the prevalence of institutionalized "second-generation" forms of gender bias. In that regard, despite some women seeking to be promoted to a higher administrative position, and indeed succeeding, others continue to be impeded by their own adherence to accumulated subtle and often unintentional biases; such biases are based on interactional patterns, practices and structures motivated by cultural beliefs about gender with an inherent bias favoring men over women.

Moreover, some family-related limitations were mentioned. When discussing her juggling of work-related responsibilities, Dr. D. stated: "It was very tough to try to balance family life with the demands of chair," specifying the most challenging time was when her children were very young, such that they required

substantial attention and care. She tied this responsibility to enduring gender stereotypes: “No matter what, I think, women are still expected to provide the bigger percentage of anything related to the kids and the house and so forth”. This limitation is of high significance because it usually puts a lot of pressure on women not just to juggle their professional and household tasks, but to prove they can do so without being discriminated against. For women in this study, this effect was apparently less pronounced than that measured by studies of women working in gender-atypical professions (Maji, 2019).

In addition, some factors relating to family but also to gender-based expectations were mentioned, including the expectation that single women are freer than married women, and thus by extension more productive at work. Dr. G. related some comments she received on this subject: “It is always that your productivity is attributed to being single and like, of course, I have so much time on my hands. My male colleagues have made fun of me because I am motivated...”. Both Dr. D.’s and Dr. G.’s insight validate the findings of Benard et al. (2008) who argued motherhood is penalized at work mainly because of the underlying cognitive bias that serves to discriminate against them. In that regard, there exists a psychological relationship between the category of “mother” on one hand, and some attributes such as productivity (in this case) on the other. Another, perhaps less influential family-related factor was mentioned by Dr. N.: “I could feel that my husband became jealous. I could feel it but he was very good at hiding it because he is highly educated and comes from a good family... but he was jealous because leadership came to me; it was not like I used *nepotism* to get it”. However, Dr. N. did not insinuate this was a tremendous obstacle to her.

In addition, while it was not specified as being an obstacle, the difference in salaries between men and women was nevertheless mentioned by some interviewees, notably Dr. H., who emphasizes the universal nature of the wage gap. However, this factor was hardly a focal point in the insight provided by the interviewees, suggesting the wage gap issue in third-world countries like Lebanon may not be as serious as portrayed in the work of Jamielaa and Kawabata (2018). Yet, this may be affected by the fact universities like University A and University B are American establishments whose culture includes a fervent adherence to gender equality.

#### ***Factors Enabling Women’s Career Progression/Ascension to High-Ranking Positions***

Among all enabling factors mentioned by interviewees, family support was the most prevalent. Dr. N. stated her grandmother played a crucial part in her being able to fund her way through higher education before she could establish herself in her career, despite her mother suggesting she should pursue the more traditional avenue of marriage. Similarly, Dr. D. held in high regard the support she received from family, especially when juggling her career at University A with her newborn son. She stressed that while her friends offered moral support and

encouraged her, the real practical push came from her parents and husband, especially after she gave birth to another child. Moreover, although gender-based stereotypical characteristics were cited as a small nuisance that somewhat affects women's careers in higher education, some saw in their gender a strength rather than a weakness susceptible to exploitation, for two reasons. The first relates to typical gender-related characteristics of women. For example, Dr. G. stated "in terms of finding solace, friendship, and community, I think being a woman is easier in that sense because we are used to being vulnerable, to speak out and to share... to fall apart and to be humble". This suggested there is a perception among women that their "feminine" attributes, even if socially constructed, endow them with the ability to communicate and understand their emotions better, thereby allowing them to get over obstacles and move on. This positive outlook on gender-based characteristics may partially be attributed to dynamics of adversity as explored by Diehl (2014). In that sense, while adversity was found to be usually associated with negative outcomes, for some women like Dr. G. it appears to be positively compelling, if anything a catalyzing agent for professional growth and more challenging work. The second reason is department-specific, whereby it was specifically expressed by some interviewees that working in the education department was inherently advantageous to them. This corroborates the findings of Goodman et al. (2003) who found women in high-level positions were substantially more likely to be employed in nonmanufacturing fields, as well as organizations that likely employ women at low levels of the hierarchy. Thus, if a similar study were conducted in a different industry in Lebanon, the results may have varied substantially. There is merit, here, to the findings of Wirth (2001) who connected women's traditional roles of childrearing and household management to their propensity for being involved in fields that extend such responsibilities. Education, evidently, perfectly fits this correlation. Working in the educational field meant they received professional and personal support from women colleagues and mentors.

Among all findings extracted from the interviews, the "support" aspect could best explain the success of women in high-level positions at universities in Lebanon. In fact, there was consensus on the importance of being supported by women superiors, in particular, which gives credence to the findings of Cullen and Luna (1993) on the positive effect of mentorship: not only does it serve to coach mentees on various professional skills, but also on how to handle hostile attitudes and adversity. In addition, Ballenger (2010) found women who were supported by others in leadership positions were best-positioned to be promoted or sponsored, seeing as they would otherwise likely be excluded by men.

#### ***Women's Career Goals and Ambitions***

There was a palpable sense of ambition in the words of all interviewees, albeit one geared less toward positions of administrative power and more toward fulfilling intellectual and academic accomplishments. For one, Dr. N. asserted she had already achieved many milestones in her career such as becoming the

Chairperson of Arts and Sciences at University A. However, her unfulfilled ambition was to establish an educational unit that would serve as training grounds for new university instructors, endowing them with methodological knowhows and facilitating their transition to teaching. When probed about whether this ambition was still on the cards, she dismissed the prospect, citing some factors with which it appeared she was reluctant to relate: “I don’t know... Sometimes I think of this and I say not, it’s too much. You know? Budgets, public relations, politics... But this was my dream for a very long time.” Dr. N.’s record of accomplishments is impressive, but the fact she did not realize one of her *dreams* could be explained by [Burnett et al. \(2012\)](#) findings on attrition, in particular the structural factors.

In addition, Dr. D. expressed interest in pursuing both educational and administrative goals, but clearly leaned toward the latter more than the former: “I do not see myself giving up on either teaching or administration. Actually, I can live without administrative work but teaching has to stay for me.” The work of [Burnett et al. \(2012\)](#) is relevant; in fact, the desire to sustain a prominent teaching role cannot be seen simplistically as being one-sided. While some women in higher education may indeed prefer to have a more direct role to play in the classroom, there is evidence to suggest this kind of role is more substantially demanded by students, based on their higher expectations of women’s nurturing behavior.

In some instances, the expression of ambitions and goals was accompanied by certain conditions, such as having the support of women colleagues: “I want to work with women like Dr. X and Dr. Y on research... I think it [objective] is doable – not alone but with a group of fantastic women scholars”. This unequivocally ties back to the perceived benefits of having close mentor affiliates, notably psychosocial mentors who are adept at enhancing their protégés’ self-esteem through the establishment of interpersonal and emotional bonds, and career mentors who more effectively assist in developing their protégés’ professional skills and are better equipped to sponsor them and introduce them to the right people ([Hansman, 1998](#)). Moreover, it was found some interviewees’ career accomplishments even succeeded their ambitions.

Dr. D.’s apparent surprise at her promotion may be explained by low expectations of promotion based on preconceptions. [Madden’s \(2011\)](#) work offers relevant context here. While, Dr. D. may have had all the proper qualifications for her to demand a promotion, not only did she refrain from doing so, but she found it surprising she was receiving attention. In particular, she said “I did not expect it, to be honest. When I was asked to be chair, they did consultations and everyone said why not Dr. D.? She started the writing center, she’s a good leader”. Madden found such behavior was best predicted by how women perceived themselves in situations where leadership was necessitated. In essence, the dichotomy between “masculinity” and “femininity”, especially in a country with a patriarchal culture like Lebanon, is associated respectively with the traits of competence and incompetence via intermediary characteristics. In that regard,

Dr. D. may have perceived herself to be too friendly and lenient, which, viewed through the lens of masculinity, is judged as being incompetent or at least unable to manage a team or situation properly. In contrast, she may have assumed someone with a sterner attitude would have better chances at being promoted or assigned a higher-ranking position. Dr. D.'s reaction could be explained by high standards for which women typically aim to compensate for their inherent disadvantage at the level of leadership positions. The findings of [Eagly and Carli \(2007\)](#) suggested women are perennially engaged in an uphill battle when it comes to leadership in the workplace, as expectations usually favor men's promotion, particularly given their agentic leadership types. Thus, Dr. D. may have made an implicit assumption that men leaders, in particular, would perceive her as not having sufficient leadership skills, including problem-solving, the ability to delegate tasks, and to inspire others. Evidently, as [Prime et al. \(2008\)](#) posited, the associated effects of the "masculine"- "feminine" dichotomy may not be substantial in the short-term, which explains why they are not noticed even by women, but in the long-term they serve to impede women's career progression and success.

## 6.1. Discussion

Since the purpose of this study was informative and exploratory, the researcher examined the current situation of Lebanese women in leadership positions at the university level by exploring the influence of three factors on perceptions of gender equality. These factors were gender equality/demographics, work and family, and recruitment and hiring practices. These three themes were investigated because they are important determining factors of women's experiences in education. The first research question was answered through the 44 completed surveys and the second one was answered through the four conducted semi-structured interviews. The study's hypothesis was "No variance in the total equality scores can be explained by gender equality, work and family, and recruitment/hiring practices".

## 6.2. Answering the Guiding Questions

This study was guided by three research questions.

**RQ1:** How much of the variance in the total equality scores can be explained by the following variables: gender equality, work and family, and recruitment/hiring practices?

This research question is quantitative and the answers were obtained from the collected online surveys. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Data Collection, Version 25) was used to analyze the data gathered from the questionnaires. The researcher ran factor analysis and reported the findings from the quantitative data analysis by stating four factors. These were: Gender Equality, Readiness to Educational Leadership, Family/Work Choices, and Mother's Education. A very strong relationship and an excellent association between dependent and independent variables was present. Moreover, the re-



gression equation and its analysis showed that the more educational institutions adopt diversification strategies, fair policies, and trust in the female leadership roles, the more people will seek to work for those institutions and vice versa. Also, the more educational institutions have planned recruitment policies including candidates' specifications, positive attitude and fairness in selection, the more it encourages its female employees to participate in collective decision-making activities (e.g., course planning, course coordination, supervision and advising, or offering other practical help). The results of the study showed that females with the adequate education and experience, planned engagement with family and work, strong awareness about females' roles and position pertaining to educational leadership fit strongly the overall opportunities in educational institutions to have strategic and effective role in the educational endeavors.

**RQ2:** What perceived obstacles do women leaders in educational institutions in Beirut face in the 21st century?

This research question is qualitative and the answers were obtained from the conducted interviews. The thematic content analysis approach was used in order to show how the concepts present in the literature review were related to the three themes that emerged from the interviews. The three themes were: Obstacles to Women's Advancement in Higher Education, Factors Enabling Women's Career Progression/Ascension to High-Ranking Positions, and Women's Career Goals and Ambitions.

**RQ3:** To what extent do the qualitative findings confirm the quantitative results?

The third and final research question is an integrative question that contains both quantitative and qualitative elements. Results of the semi-structured interviews and the online surveys indicate that factors such as demographics, work and family, as well as recruitment and hiring practices played a role in the career advancement of women seeking higher positions in private universities in Beirut.

## 7. Overall Conclusion

This research project was a study about women in educational leadership roles in two private, American universities in Beirut using the mixed methods approach. It utilized both a survey and four interviews of women in leadership positions at American universities in Beirut. This study provides additional data concerning the factors women face in moving to higher positions in university level leadership positions.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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