



QUEEN BEE SYNDROME: WORKPLACE CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE SUBORDINATES

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Abstract

The current study intends to look into the queen bee phenomenon in academic sector of Pakistan. The study documented the lived experiences of female college teachers regarding Queen Bee phenomenon at the workplace. In this qualitative research, data was collected through semi structured interview guide to explore this phenomenon. Data was collected from those working women who have at least 2 years of experience by using purposive sampling technique. The data for this qualitative study were collected from 17 participants. Participants were female college teachers from public and private academic institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. These participants shared three major themes about their experience of Queen Bee syndrome. They shared that Queen Bee syndrome has affected their professional and personal lives. The findings also revealed that female leaders were not considerate about their subordinates' issues. Furthermore, unwelcomed workplace and unfair environment cause continuous stress.

Keywords: Queen Bee, Female College Teachers, Career Advancement, Women Aggression

Introduction

Queen bee syndrome refers to a behavior in which women in leadership positions consolidate power and authority in workplace to undermine the progress of other women. They display negative behaviors included creating unsupportive environment, intentional withhold of knowledge and cooperation to hinder the success of other women (Jayaratne et al., 1973). Instead of creating a supportive environment a Queen Bee leader may create suppressive and competitive environment, which is obstacle in the career advancement of their colleagues. Such obstacles negatively influence the social and professional lives of working women. Furthermore, this phenomenon is based on stereotype and discrimination by female leaders to other working women (Faniko et al., 2017).

The Queen Bee syndrome views differently across cultures; it is being studied why women manifest such behavior. Women in power may feel other women their competitors and may have fear being surpassed by them. As a result, they may adopt hostile or non-cooperative behavior towards capable subordinates. Furthermore, organizational culture and environment also foster Queen Bee syndrome. Past experiences and organizational environment direct them to become a queen bee at leadership position. So, Queen Bees are not reason of discrimination but they are result of inequality. This is also the game of power dynamics, where women leader perceive themselves superior and powerful to others and wants to grasp that position. Past experiences and organizational environment direct them to become a queen bee at leadership position. So, queen bees are not reason of discrimination but they are result of inequality. This is also the game of power dynamics, where women leader perceive herself superior and powerful to others and wants to grasp that position (McKinnon, 2020).



The effects of Queen Bee phenomenon are more than individuals' conflict. The way women are treated in their workplace have many consequences on their psychological and emotional well-being. Moreover, it directly affects organizational culture and performance. For this reason, institutions must create. Moreover, it not only affects the women individually but also has an impact on work performance of women and environment of organization at workplace. Hence, it is a very important concern of working organizations and institutes to create a supportive environment for women to establish a healthy and productive setting (Chesler, 2006).

Women often remain in the sense of competitiveness under the effects Queen Bee phenomenon at workplace. Working women creates troubling patterns for each other, that patterns she describes as 'cut throat'. Based on a study on 500 women, Barash (2007) explains that women face many challenges at work when they speak openly about Queen Bee effect and rivalry imposed by female leaders in top positions. Instead of receiving support, women who confront this issue are often exploited and singled out.

In this article, researcher will examine the existence of Queen Bee phenomenon and its effects on women at workplace. Researcher also wants to explore the strategies that women adapt to cope with the effects of Queen Bee.

Literature Review

Studies show women leaders affect other women employees at workplace adversely, by which female face different challenges. Females at superior leadership position create a gap with other subordinate female worker that cannot produce opportunities and success towards them. Also females at top ranks have more exposure to discourage, repress and push back the other female subordinates than the males and not allow the subordinate female workers to develop at workplace (Derks et al., 2016). According to Netshitangani (2019) women should support each other in accordance to collaborative leadership, on the other way non collaborative leadership creates discrimination.

The Queen Bee phenomenon is a natural desire of individual to attain the power and conquer the individuals who are their subordinates by influencing those (Arvate et al., 2018). Loya et al., (2006) in his findings suggested that women treat each other negatively; there may some circumstances which develops such kind of behavior among them. Women develop negative feelings towards other that results in rejection and competition. In this way women becomes rivals and this may result of Queen Bee phenomenon at workplace. Under the effects of Queen Bee syndrome women fails to help each other which can create rivalry, aggression and competition among them.

In context of Pakistan now many women are the parts of job sector. Evidences from different researches are present in regards of Queen Bee phenomenon, but there is lack of literature exists in context of Pakistan. So, there is need to explore the phenomenon in regards to the styles and patterns of Queen Bee effects.

Methods

Research Design

This study used qualitative research design based on phenomenology. This approach is appropriate for this study as it allows for an exploration of the individual experiences of female college teachers.

Data Collection

Participants of the study were female college teachers recruited by using purposive sampling. Participants were both married and single women who had at least 2 years of experience. The data for this qualitative study were collected from 17 participants.

Inclusion Criteria

- Female college teachers who have been effected by Queen Bee syndrome
- Married and unmarried Female college teachers
- Working in an educational institution at the time of interview
- Having 2 years of work experience,

i. Exclusion Criteria

- Participants who live in other regions of Pakistan
- Female teachers who are not effected by Queen bee syndrome
- Participants who cannot communicate effectively
- Participants who have other issues than Queen Bee syndrome in working environment

Interview Guide

Semi-structured interview guide was used for in-depth interviews. Interviews were consisted of 40 to 45 minutes. Open-ended discussion will be held through semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected from public and private academic sectors to conduct in-depth interviews in Lahore. The interviews were conducted with the permission of the participants. Researcher used audio-recorder as well as took written notes while interviewing participants. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis.

Results

Three major themes emerged from this study: 1) Authoritative Leadership 2) Destructive Criticism and Favoritism 3) Organizational Culture

Authoritative Leadership

Majority of the participants shared that in their college Queen Bee leadership exists. Their principals are not cooperative. They are facing many administrative issues but they cannot visit their offices to discuss the gravity of issues because they would not allow them to speak. This kind of authority is causing them stress and demotivating them. A participant shared:

“I faced numerous challenges because of the female leader. Given her authoritative position, it is difficult to tell her that her decisions are making my life difficult at workplace as well as my family life. Consequently, I was unable to maintain a healthy relationship with my female leader.”

Data also revealed that human biases, insecurities and personal choices also exist in Queen Bees. Their dominance and behavior is also dependent on how they see their colleagues. For instance, a participant shared:

“She used to deliberately review my performance badly instead of giving me credit. She had some personal issues.”

This shows that how female leaders’ personal choices and behaviors lead to discouragement and demotivation. This highlights that Queen Bee syndrome is a product of leadership style.

Destructive Criticism and Favoritism



The findings revealed that sometimes Queen Bee syndrome is situational. Many participants shared that their leaders often give favors to some colleagues while some face strict opposition. This leads to formation of unnecessary groups and rivalries among colleagues, where individuals engage in leg pulling in order to remain in the leader's good books. A participant shared:

“The female leader is more focused on maintaining and showing her power if I resist their decisions. Her supporters create obstacles and show a lack of cooperation. As a result, I have to face challenges not from her but also from colleagues.”

Similarly another participant shared:

“When the female leader holds power, she forms competition in two ways: first, by directly competing against her perceived rivals and second, by favoring certain groups to pit them against others. However, it seems to be unhealthy competition.”

The findings also revealed that negative reviews by leader and favoritism cause low job satisfaction among female coworkers. This can be frustrating and they do not want to go their workplace. A participant shared:

“I have had a very negative experience with my female leader, which resulted in lack of interest at workplace. I felt anxiety and kept thinking about verbal abuse even sitting in my home. The continuous backbiting, teasing and leg-pulling by colleagues and leader caused me to experience stress. Additionally, I was subjected to close monitoring, which made me feel more toxicity.”

The findings reflected that Queen Bee syndrome holds many negative effects in it. The negative practices at workplace not only cause harm in job performance but also destroy overall well-being of female colleagues.

Organizational Culture

The findings revealed that sometimes female leaders come with positive energy; however, the negative inertia of workplace destroyed that positivity. As a result, Queen Bees are product of particular organization or work culture where senior workers build a Queen Bee to target their junior colleagues. A participant shared:

“The culture of organization is uncooperative, with numerous barriers that make it difficult to be stress free. Even among the academics, there is a lack of cooperation and support. The female leader's leadership also worsens the environment.”

The findings also revealed that female leaders were not considerate about their subordinates' issues. Their leadership shows little concern for the personal challenges of their subordinates, such as childcare or time management issues. When such concerns are raised, the response is often dismissive or they give examples of their struggles. The lack of empathy is hindrance for creating a supportive environment. A participant shared:

“I often feel that most of my energy is consumed by dealing with professional challenges, leaving little room to focus my personal challenges. Whenever, I went to my boss to ask for a flexible time table due to take care of



my child, the refuse made me tired. I have noticed that these difficulties reflect in my personality negatively. The working environment has a direct impact on my personality and well-being.”

The findings explained that toxic work culture not only affects work performance but also directly linked with social and personal growth. Unwelcomed workplace and unfair environment cause continuous stress. Furthermore, prolonged stress can lead to anxiety and depression.

Discussion

The study identified that Queen Bee syndrome has negative consequences on the progress of female workers. The authoritative leadership of female leaders is hinder the way of communication. Queen Bee phenomenon impacts women not only in their professional lives but also in their personal lives. In the workplace, the aggressive behavior of Queen Bees often humiliates and undermines their co-workers (Dellasega, 2010). When women feel powerlessness, they often attempt to regain a sense of control by using indirect forms of aggression (Duncan & Owen-Smith, 2006). Female leaders sometimes create distance from other female colleagues which creates uncooperative environment that can lead to disruptive behaviors in the workplace (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010).

Conclusion

This research highlights that Queen Bee syndrome poses many challenges for women in the workplace. The practice of authoritarian leadership style hinders a way to communicate with female leaders which creates uncooperative and least empathic work culture. These behaviors are not only having negative consequences at workplace but also cause disturbance in personal lives and overall well-being of female workers.

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