
Career Progression of Female Academics in Public Universities: A Tale of Open University of Tanzania

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Abstract: Tanzania recognizes that gender equality and female empowerment are important for development of the country. Despite the government efforts to put in place employment laws, policies and gender strategies to remove inequality, still there are underrepresentation of female employees in senior positions in many public sectors. In Public Universities the situation is the same as the number of academic staff varies between female and male. There is huge gender gap in this career as it is dominated by male. Gender disparity tends to be wider in senior positions. The major objective of the study was to examine factors that affect career progression of female academics to senior positions in Public Universities. The study employed qualitative design to understand academics experiences on the female career progression. Open University of Tanzania (OUT) was used as a study case. Twenty one (21) participants were selected purposively from senior positions, junior positions and University management. Interview method for data collection was employed to collect primary data and secondary data were collected through documentary review. The study used thematic analysis in data analysis. The findings revealed that family work conflict, culture and gender, lack of mentor and mentoring program, lack of role model, low self-confidence, limited opportunities and networking were factors that discourage career progression of female academicians to senior positions. The findings implied that few female academicians managed to reach senior positions and majorities are struggling to move up. Their failures were associated with traditional gender role, society believes and gender stereotype. Generally, the study contributes to the addition of knowledge and literature on career progression of female academics which has been under-researched, especially in Tanzania.

Keywords: Career Progression, Female Academics, Public Universities, Open University of Tanzania, Tanzania

1. Introduction

Females represent about half of the world's population. They also comprise half of the workforce. The contribution of female is important for the development of any country. Different reports worldwide show that female's access to education and employment has improved. Since 2005, female enrollment has continued to grow, and in many countries (including Tanzania), female make up more than fifty percent of the total enrollment in higher education [1]. This promising statistics, unfortunately, does not reflect female's share of academic careers, especially in senior positions in Universities worldwide.

The underrepresentation of female in senior positions in universities is a worldwide problem [2, 3]. The increase number of female participation in Universities has not

changed female's academic representation at senior levels in universities in Tanzania, which is similar to that in other Western countries [4-6]. In Tanzania the number of female academic staff holding senior positions is decimally low [7]. The underrepresentation is wider in senior positions. For instance, at the University of Dar es salaam there are only 5 female professors out of 59 professors and 11 female associate professors out of the 111 associate professors and 36 female senior lecturers out of 198 senior lecturers [8].

At the Open University of Tanzania there are no female professors out of 3 professors and 4 female associate professors out of 12 associate professors and 5 female senior lecturers out of 24 senior lecturers, however the number of lecturers is impressive as is greater than that of male [9]. In recent years, OUT has managed to employ academically strong, experienced, young, energetic and dynamic staff to succeed the generation of highly qualified, experienced and

reputable senior professionals, who are at the age of retirement.

It is the policy of the University to recruit, incentivise and retain new staff in order to continuously provide quality services. Due to this commitment the percentage of female academic staff has increased from 18.4% in 2001 to 41.1% in 2017/18 [9]. The University also establishes gender unit to make sure that they have gender balance in the organization. Despite of all these efforts the numbers of female academics holding academic senior positions like senior lecturers, associate professor and professors remaining low. We expect the increased number of female academics over past 20 years could have impact on the increase number of senior positions something which is not yet happened.

The review of documents like journals, articles, papers, dissertations and theses show that there is limited number of studies about the factors affecting career progression of female academics to senior positions in African countries, and specifically in Tanzania. Different studies worldwide identify some of the factors that block female academics to reach senior positions; however the gap is huge in Tanzania context as so far there is no published research on this area.

Hindrances to female's career development include traditional gender role, gender stereotypes, lack of confidence, lack of mentor and role model, family work conflict and patriarchal system [6, 10]. According to [11] among the reasons as barriers that hinder career development include recruitment and selection policies, promotion policies and lack of mentors and career counseling. Female are usually perceived as they lack ability to do the same what man does in their career [12, 13]; or being incapable in ways that prevent them to perform like man in their career [14]. However, there is widespread agreement that female's commitment and abilities are not the problem [6, 10, 15]. Instead, female's career development is hindered by culture, networking and organisational politics [16, 17]. According to [18], there are other factors such as the structural and social cultural that hinder female academic to progress.

Tanzania recognizes that Gender Equality and Female Empowerment are important for development of the country. This is expressed in various documents like the proposed new National Constitution, labour laws, strategies, plans and policies such as the Tanzania Development Vision 2025, National Five Year Development Plan 2011/12–2015/16, and National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGR), Employment policy 2008 and Women and Gender Development Policy of 2000. The Government has also ratified regional and international commitments on gender equality and women empowerment and established the Ministry responsible for Gender. Universities also support the government by putting in place equal opportunity policies but female still not managed to reach senior positions.

We expect Universities to be far ahead on gender balance issues as one teaches about it. Universities should be an example on supporting career development of female staff. This is not yet to happen as there is gender imbalance in this sector as it is dominated by men [7]. Gender gap tends to be

wider in senior positions. If the career progression of female academics is not well understood may hinder participation of female in development. This study was designed to bridge the gap by investigating factors affecting career progression of female academics to senior positions in Public Universities in Tanzania.

2. Methods

The study was conducted at the Open University of Tanzania main campus which is located at Kinondoni Dar es salaam. There were various criteria for choosing Open University of Tanzania to be studied. Representativeness and uniqueness was among of the criteria. The Open University of Tanzania operates in more than 30 regional centres in Tanzania. The number of female academics employed by the University was impressive, however, most of them concentrated in the lower and middle level academic positions. The percentage of female academic staff has increased from 18% in year 2001 to 40% in year 2017/18 and it was expected that this increase would bring impact to senior positions but it is not yet happened. Senior position in this study refers to senior lecturers, associate professor and professors and junior or lower position refers to Tutorial assistant, assistant lecturer and lecturer. Therefore the number of female academics in senior positions is very few despite the increase of the number on lower positions. This statistic makes Open University to be a good study area for this research.

The information concerning the factors that affect career progression of female academics to senior positions in Tanzania is derived from the data collected from 29th January to 16th March 2019 for Master thesis entitle *Factors affecting career progression of female academics to senior positions in Public Universities*. The study was done at OUT and the study employed a purely qualitative approach. The approach was appropriate for this study due to its nature that the study focused on how the individuals attach meanings to their experiences issues hindering the progression of female academic to senior positions. The aim was to gain insights from individual experience. The study participants were male and female from both higher and lower academics positions as well as representatives from the university management, gender unit office and human resource department. Therefore, a total of 21 participants were involved in the study. Purposeful sampling technique was used to select participants who have relevant information and experience to meet research objectives.

The in depth interview data collection method was used to collect data from the selected participants. The method enabled to gain insight and interpret career reality through meanings that the participants attach to their career experiences. The interview protocol and interview guide questions were used to ensure that research questions were covered. All interviews were recorded in audio tape which provide the advantage of played later for more understanding of conversations. In addition, the researcher reviewed Organizational fact and figure 2017/2018, staff development

policy, recruitment and selection policy, promotion and gender policy and Academic schemes of services. The purpose was to understand career progression of female academic to senior position particularly the practices towards career advancement of female academics.

The thematic analysis was used to enable the researcher to arrange and describe data and identify themes within the data. In carrying out thematic analysis the researcher transcribed the data, then noting down major theme and combined themes with similar meaning to avoid repetition. The researcher relied on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the readers and users of the reports by *triangulate* different data sources of information, *member checking* and spent *prolonged time* in the field. Reliability was ensured through comparing the findings from the research instrument with a similar study. Moreover, crosscheck and verification of the data collected were done. Ethical issues were also considered by observing University guidelines, ethical standards and privacy of the participants.

3. Results

3.1. Profile of Respondents

The attributes of the participants involved in this study such as age, experience, academic qualification, department, roles within the institutions and marital status are considered in this paper. Age of participants ranged from twenty seven to sixty four years. Some participants were in sixties and fifties and the majority was in forties and thirties. This implies that the study reached different age categories at the University. This was very important in balancing information from different age group and further seeing whether age can be a determinant for female career progression to senior positions. The study found that senior female academics were in fifties to sixties, while junior academics were between twenties to forties.

Marital status of female academicians was also documented. The majority of participants were married and only few of them, were not married. In addition, some participants had children and other do not have children. Marital status and having children were considered important factors particularly in African context where family responsibility is mostly done by women. The interest here is to know how female academicians balance work and family responsibilities. The study found that the female academics that were married and have children were more experienced difficulties in balancing career, work and family than the female academicians who are not married. In addition, the majority of male participants had the views that they were not affected by family responsibilities.

Participants' experience was considered to be an important factor that can explain the progression of female academics. Experience may help to build academic profile and create more opportunities for career progression. The experience of the participants ranged from 3 years to 33 years. The study found that the participants who have many years of working experience shared their views and clarified the issues that are

likely to affect the progression of female academic to senior position than the participants who have few years of working experience. OUT have five faculties which are Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Faculty of Business Management, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Law and Faculty of Science, Technology and Environment Studies. The participants were selected from all five faculties.

Role played also was important to help to gain specific information. Five participants played multiple roles as academic staff, and administrator (HOD, Dean, director and DVC). It was also important to know how participants played multiple roles and balance with their career. It was found participant who played many role experienced more challenges in reaching senior positions.

3.2. Factors Affecting Career Progression of Female Academician to Senior Positions

The paper seeks to know the factors affecting career progression of female academicians to senior positions in Public Universities in Tanzania. The study found that family work conflict/balancing family and work, traditional gender role, lack of mentoring and career cancelling, limited opportunities and networking are among the factors that hinder female progression in their career.

3.2.1. Family and Work Conflict

Family role under this study referred to the family responsibilities of childrearing and household related tasks such as cooking, washing clothes, fetching water and taking care of husband, sick and old people. Work role on the other hand referred to all academic duties like lecturing, conducting seminar sessions, marking course work and final examinations, supervision of research and field works, heading the academic units, research, consultancy, outreach services and publication. The study found that female academician got a challenge in balancing family and work responsibilities. From feminist view women got challenge because of gender stereotype and division of work especially domestics responsibilities. Majority of female academicians interviewed had the view that it is difficult for them to balance their career goals and family responsibilities. One of the participants said that:

As a woman you have a lot to perform at home, for instance, I am supposed to cook and take care of children and husband. All these affect my career progression because I need to sacrifice if I want to grow to the top (Participant 8).

This implies that women have more roles to perform at home and they are expected by society to be mothers, wives, care takers and workers. The view that family responsibilities affect career progression of female academic was also supported by male participants. One male participant elaborated that:

You know sometimes the implementation of policy is hard because when the time for further study comes the women may decide not to go for further studies instead may decide to raise a family, get pregnant and bear children. We can't blame them because the Nation also wants human capital (Participant 16).

This means that males recognized that getting pregnant, bearing children and family responsibilities is one of social obligations of female academics. Also, the researcher wanted to gain insight from male perspective about how the family responsibilities affect their career and career progression of female academic to senior positions. One male academician elaborated that:

You know for me I think male academic did not experience problem of balancing academic work and family work but experience of female is different. To publish is not an easy task you need much time and for women who have children is more t challenge (participant 10).

The perspective from this participant suggested that family responsibilities affect the career progression of female academicians only, male are not affected by the same. These brought difficulties for female academicians to balance the family and work roles as clarified by one of the participants:

It is a bit challenge to balance career requirements and family responsibilities. I sometime try to allocate time for family and time for career, but still it is difficult (Participant 5).

Apart from allocating time for family and work roles, other participants shared their experience on strategies they normally use in managing family and career roles. It was lamented by one of the participant that:

To balance career and family responsibilities, I have to work extra time at home while balancing cooking, marking student's projects, supervising research and take care of children and husband. Conflicts are inevitable, a family needs attention, other family guests visit, and I have to cook and nurture children while at the same time meet deadlines for submitting in student's grades (Participant 11).

This means that female academician need to balance time for family and time for work and failure to do so may lead to slow career progression. It also implied that women need to work long hours to balance these two conflicting role. However, the strategies shared by the majority of female academician focused on the work roles that requires deadline and in most cases they do not play major role in career progression. It was expected to hear how female academicians make sure they do research and allocate time for publication which is the main requirement for promotion and further career progression.

Furthermore, the findings from single and married women were different. Female participants who were not married were found to have more freedom and time for their work and career although some of them said that they postponed marriage for career. This was elaborated by one of the participant that:

I have decided to remain single until I completed my PhD studies. I knew the stress I could have to balance my career and family responsibilities (Participant 1).

The experience shared by participant 1 in the quote above suggests that career progression particularly for female requires sacrifice as clarified by the participant. Apart from the sacrifice, women particularly in African context are bound to follow some society's norms and expectations as elaborated by one of the participant that:

I faced a number of challenges to reach senior positions. The big challenge was to sacrifice having family for career. At this moment I am in 40s I am not married and I am not thinking to have a family very soon, I fear family responsibilities I saw from my colleagues. I have decided not to be married to pursue my career because I realized that I cannot manage both. How many more sleepless nights would I spend if I had child? Though this helps me to reach senior positions but my family, and society in general did not understand me and they think am not a normal women."(Participant 3).

This means that postponing family responsibilities for career responsibilities is an individual decision that has to be made by women themselves; however it seems to be against society norms and the expectation of many people.

3.2.2. Lack of Mentoring and Career Counseling Programs

Lack of mentoring and career counseling programs was another factor that affects female academician's career progression. The majority of the interviewed female academicians said that career counseling and mentoring for female academic is not official in the organization. This means that an individual effort is required for someone to be mentored to grow academically. This was elaborated by one of female academicians that:

You can get advice about career and the requirement for progression from different people, but it is not something official. You may choose to have your personal mentor who will advise you on the issues related to progression (Participant 6).

This implies that the traditional mentoring is lacking in the organization and therefore the individuals need to identify and follow their own role model who can advise them in their career. The senior academicians' willingness to support junior academics is lacking. This was clarified by one of female academic that:

We lack a culture that senior pull up the junior; this in one way or another that affects career progression. You know the major effort is on individual so if you want to excel you have to find someone to ask for assistance. a culture of mentoring is not prevailing in this organization (Participant 1).

Despite the complaints from junior academic staff that senior academic staffs do not support them, the views from the senior academics were different. Most of them said that they support other staff to reach senior positions through mentoring and linking them to consultancies and research. One male professor elaborated that:

One of my responsibilities and I think this is for all Professors is mentoring. I do mentoring to support academic staff including female (Participant 10).

This implies that that the professors know that they are responsible for mentoring junior staff to support their career progression and he claimed to do the same. However, some senior staff explained that they have a lot of activities to perform and that is the reason for junior staff to feel that they are not supported in their career. It was elaborated by one of the senior participants that:

We do mentoring, however sometimes we have a lot of activities to accomplish. The better way for junior staff is to be engaged in some challenging activities to help them to gain some experience. And always I encouraged them to publish under umbrella of those who are already built strong profile in academic arena (Participant 19).

Despite the fact that mentoring is not something that is officially practiced and offered in the University, from top management perspective career counseling and mentoring programs should be practiced and offered within faculties and department as expressed below.

For academic staff to be promoted they have to publish. Now the career counseling is within the Faculties and departments. I think each academic staff has a mentor may be a professor or any other senior staff. So, this work should be handled by Department and Faculties and not human resource department (Participant 16).

This means that mentoring should exist in the University and Dean of Faculties and head of department are responsible for that.

3.2.3. Lack of Solidarity and Networking

The study found lack of support and cooperation from both male and female as a factor that hinders female academics progression. Some female participants lamented that they did not receive any support from their fellow women. One participant elaborated that:

When I was employed the issue of gender equity and balance was not considered in this University. The selfishness was very high and the struggle was real. To receive support from fellow women concern the career was hard things. I struggled alone. (Participant 7).

The study further found that women in senior positions behaved like 'social man' and they do not support their fellow female who want to grow in academics instead they work and collaborate with male bosses. It was elaborated by one of the respondent that:

Even my fellow women tell me to go back home to take care of my grandchildren. Can you imagine that? what I can say is that women do not support each other, and we do not like each other; we normally suppress each other.. How can a senior staff like me support junior female who tells me go home and 'lea wajukuu' (rise grandchildren)?(Participant 9).

Some participants complained that female who have made it up to senior positions they do not care about other women. They further claimed that women who are in leadership positions in higher learning institutions are not powerful, independent and capable to support their fellow women to grow in their career. Some participants went further claiming that some women in leadership position in higher learning are not independent and they do not care about other women and this could be a reason that they cannot support their fellow women.

3.2.4. Culture Attitudes and Gender Perceptions

Both culture and gender perceptions and attitudes affect career advancement of female employees. It was found that gender and culture affect career choices and progress of

female academic. Participants expressed some of gender perception that hinders career progression of female academic.

Patriarchal system which divides the human being into maleness and femaleness seemed to affect career progression of female academic since they are young. Girls and boys are assigned different duties and responsibilities while they are at home. This was clarified by the participants that the patriarchal system affects female's careers in different ways. Participant 3 expressed that *"a lot of people and families still think that it's right for boys to get education and girls to wait for marriage."* Participant 1 elaborated this statement by saying that *"when we were raised, we had different roles from the boys while we are at home. There are stereotyped that need to be changed and "that's where the challenge is"*. She further elaborated that *"if change can start from that level, then it is going to support career progression of female"*.

The view that patriarchal system affect male was also expressed by male participants themselves. One of the male participants said that *"society still sees males as the better creatures and that they will, too, be better in whatever way"*. This was further elaborated by a male participant that female work harder than male academicians to advance their career.

There is no slow career progression of female academic rather the system from beginning does not support women participation in higher learning institution, that makes the number of female academic employed to be fewer and thus fewer female senior academic (Participant 16).

Gender inequality is associated with the factors which discourage career progression of female academics as elaborated by a female participant that:

As a woman you're supposed to cook, to take care of children, and to keep quiet when others are making decisions. Men did not come with all the powers. All this are constructed ideas which make a girl seem like slave and all this bring back the career of female academics (Participant 9).

This means that unequal distribution of duties based on gender affect career progression of female academic. Gender issues are further found to affect career progression of female academician in different way as elaborated by one of the participant that:

To me gender discrimination it has never affected me but I know somehow it affects some people. And it is not actually gender discrimination but it's like kind of traditional things in our societies that women are expected to give more time in domestic activities than men. If you look at that perspective it pulls down women and gives chances to men (Participant 1).

This means to some extent gender discrimination either direct or indirect affect career progression of female. This was supported by some female who expressed their experience concerning assigning special tasks in the University. One participant said that:

In this University there are some projects that can be done only by men, and if a woman is chosen to join male team she must possess a PhD while for a man a Master's may be enough (Participant 18).

This means that norms and believes are rooted in the

societies and family that males can perform better than females. Participants further provide advice that the patriarchal system once removed will help women to excel to the top. It was expressed by one of the participants that:

Girls and boys are the same, they should be treated equal and nurtured in the same way so that we cannot make female feel inferior, once male and female are nurtured in the same way this will help woman to study and progress their career (participant 18).

The ideas that gender inequality which drag back women were also supported by male participants. One male participant suggested that:

Both male and female should be given equal opportunities. Don't tell girls to cook and boys to do their assignment. Domestic responsibilities are supposed to be for both (participant 2).

Most participants expressed that the culture that woman should take care of children and do all domestic activities is one of the factor that discourage the majority of female and hinders their career progression as clarified by one participant that:

The difference between husband and wife should be only in biological sex and not in responsibilities and duties. Husband should help their wife in some responsibilities. How can a woman cook and the same time take care of a baby and a man is there just reading a newspaper or chatting in social media (Participant 8).

Another sub theme emerged under this was lack of self-confidence of female and poor exploitation of opportunities. The majority of women do not trust themselves; they sometime think that they will be promoted because they are women. The criteria for promotion and the requirement are the same for both male and female and if you have the entire requirement regardless of sex you will be promoted. This idea was also supported by male participants who connected the issue of confidence with a low representation of women in higher positions. They further claimed that most of female academicians take a long time to complete their PhD and some stuck after getting their PhD thinking that they have achieved enough and therefore remained in Lecturer position for long time.

This was shared by a male academician who said that he has a friend who is very bright but it takes about 10 years to finalize her PhD. He further clarified that he has used different strategies to make her work hard on her PhD, but there is no improvement. This concurred with the experience that female academicians are easily satisfied with their academic achievement and progress. He clarified that when female completed their PhD they think it is enough and there are some who are satisfied with the master level education. This stereotype hinders the majority of female academicians to progress in their career journey.

Slow career progression of female academicians was also associated with lack of network and connection. Some female academicians do not have a culture to cooperate with male academician who seems to be good in publishing. Female academician who network with male academicians in publishing increases the odds of their career progression to the

top position. This means that cooperation between male and female academicians in publishing is vital for female career progression.

4. Discussion

The study examined factors associated with female academic career progression in Public Universities and OUT was used as a case study. The study found that the factors that discourage female career advancement include family-work conflict, traditional gender role, and lack of mentoring and career counseling and limited networking.

In relation to family work conflict, the study found that female academicians have conflict in balancing roles related to family as well as those related to their work roles. Female participants who were married and have children reported to have many family responsibilities that slow down their progress. This finding is in line with William and Luke, who argued that family responsibilities and domestics' activities decelerate career progress of female academician [11, 19]. Women fail to balance between career progression requirement and family responsibilities. The study further shown that there are female academicians who postponed marriage and bearing children fearing that family responsibility may affect their career and failed to reach higher position in academia. This reflects the findings by Raburu who found the same in Kenya [16].

Lack of mentorship programme was also found to discourage career progression of female academicians. Mentorship programme in any working environment is important for junior to grow in the organization. This result concurred with that of Many, Onsongo and Kamau who argued that lack of mentorship hinders contribute to make women out of senior circle [20, 21, 22]. If the mentorship programme is available and well utilized in the universities the junior staff and female are likely to progress in their career following their role model. This correspond Raburu, Gardiner and Morley who argued that lack of professional role model limited access to information and experience sharing for career advancement of female academic [16, 5, 6]. Lack of network and solidarity in publishing was another factor found to affect career progression of female academic to senior positions. This concur Williams that women are not good in networking and they do not support each other [19].

Women who do not support their fellow women were referred as 'social men' in this study. This is similar to Luke that women who do not support themselves were referred as "queen babito and queen bees" [11]. Moreover, poor networking was found to affect young and less experienced (years) participants compared to older and experienced. Young and less experienced female encountered the problems of securing scholarship for their training and development, while experienced academician (most aged from forties to sixties) reported to enjoy opportunity for consultancies and research which build their career profile and hence further progression.

The issues of cultural beliefs and gender stereotype were raised by the participants in this study. Gender equality that

led to unequal distribution of roles and responsibilities between girls and boys exist in patriarchal societies and in turn affect female career progression. This concurs Raburu who found that in Africa, societies continue to believe that women are created to support men and work is additional things despite the capacity women may have [16].

Moreover, the results from the documents reviewed and the interview with University Management implied that there is a relationship between occupation, faculties and career progression. Remarks from the University Management showed that the progression of female who are in science Faculties is a bit difficult compared to non-science faculties. The results concurred with reports of National Bureau of Statistics of 2017 on women employment that indicated employment of female in Science Faculties is difficult compared to non-science faculties.

5. Conclusion, Policy Implication and Limitation of the Study

5.1. Conclusion

The Government of Tanzania recognizes the need for women representation in every sector to address the interest of all groups in sustainable development. Effort such as quota system has been taken to endure women representation. Despite the fact that the universities are expected to be far ahead in promoting gender issues, women are still under represented in higher position. This is contributed by a number of factors including culture and gender stereotype, difficulties in balancing family and work tasks, lack of mentorship programme and poor network.

5.2. Policy Implication

The problems of underrepresentation of female academics in senior level requires immediate policy measures as an intervention to increase female representation to top positions in academic. Increasing women's representation in higher positions is necessary to achieve gender parity in academic and empower women with an assumption that they will represent the interest of women and engender the decisions made by the universities. There is a need to have career development policy which will support career advancement of female academic by addressing the factors that drag back the career progression of female academics. Although the country has employment policy of 2008 and Women and Gender policy of 2000, still there is a need to review policies and develop mechanisms to implement the same.

5.3. Limitation of the Study

The study encountered some limitations which paved way for further research. The study is a qualitative in nature that provides explanations from the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity and the study conducted in a single case study. This means that the experience shared by the individual academicism cannot be generalized to other

academic staff and transferred to other universities. Since the study was done in one organization, other research designs such as survey study design can be conducted to cover large areas and reach many participants for the generalization of the findings. In addition, a similar study also can be done in private universities to see if the same factors appear to hamper the progress of female academic public universities will be the same in private universities.

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