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THE FORGOTTEN WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF REPRODUCTIVE  
HEALTH ISSUES AMONG WOMEN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES AND  
EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE

**Rosewita Murutare, Stanzia Moyo, Peter Mujuru and Torerayi Moyo**

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF  
WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN MUTARE DISTRICT SCHOOLS

**Viola Oyedele, Attwell Mamvuto and L. Nhiwatiwa**

THEATRE EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUITY:  
POSSIBILITIES FOR THE MILLENNIUM

**Nehemiah Chivandikwa, Doricah Mhako-Mutonhodza and  
Kudakwashe Sambo**

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, CHILD ENGINEERING AND  
THE SEARCH FOR AN ENNOBLING GENDER PARADIGM

**Itai Muhwati, Tavengwa Gwekwerere and Zifikile Gambahaya**

ROLE OF GENDER IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF  
HOME ECONOMICS: A CASE IN MASVINGO PERI-URBAN

**Lillian Manwa, Emily Motsi**

INCESTUOUS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN SHONA SOCIETY:  
IMPLICATIONS ON THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS  
OF THE GIRL CHILD

**Molly Manyonganise, Godfrey Museka**

## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN MUTARE DISTRICT SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

*This study was designed to investigate teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of women leadership in Mutare District schools. The research design was both quantitative and qualitative where the descriptive method was used. All the teachers in the 202 schools in Mutare District formed the target group. A total of one hundred primary and secondary school teachers were randomly selected from ten schools and used as respondents in the study.*

*A structured questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. An open comment at the end of the questionnaire accorded respondents an opportunity to freely express their opinions. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used for data processing and analysis.*

*The results of the study showed that teachers in Mutare District perceived women leadership as effective. The results also showed that women leaders were confident in the discharge of their duties and that they were conversant with the demands of school headship. However, results on the question of motivational schools depicted some deficiencies. Teachers felt that women leaders did not sufficiently develop their subordinates for career advancement.*

*Overall, women leadership was perceived as effective by the teachers considering the fact that most of the components of effective leadership were found to be positive.*

### Introduction

The entry of women into the once male dominated profession may be one of the major achievements of the century, yet in many countries, including Zimbabwe, there is still a small percentage of women in leadership/management and related decision making positions (Muller and Rowell, 1997). Many governments including the government of Zimbabwe, have adopted affirmative action measures to improve the status of women in all spheres of development.

In Zimbabwe, a number of policies designed to address this anomaly were promulgated. These included the 1984 Policy on Growth with Equity whose

main objective was to ensure that there was a fair representation of both sexes in the economic, social and political development of the country. Then there was the 1992 policy on women advancement, the policy was to have at least 30% of women in decision-making positions within a period of five years. Lastly, there was the 2003 National Gender Policy. Its aim was the advancement of women and men in all sectors and to create equal opportunities for women and men in decision making in all areas and at all levels. Yet in spite of these existing measures in many countries including Zimbabwe, women still faced an uphill struggle when it came to promotions to leadership positions. Many studies have been carried out on women leadership. Most of the studies were carried out in the United States, Europe, Britain and Australia in terms of managerial efficiency and performance between male and female managers/leaders and these concluded that there were far more similarities than differences between them (Nicholson and West 1988).

However, results of a survey conducted by Rosener (1990) on whether women lead in different ways from men revealed that women were more transformational in their leadership than men. Transformational leadership is a new model of leadership where the leaders' main responsibility is to serve the followers by creating an environment in which they, the followers can apply their knowledge, skills and efforts, and whom the leader actively seeks to engage their commitment and to develop their potential (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Rosener's findings were supported by Bass and Avolio (1994) who found that women were rated by subordinates as being more transformational, effective and satisfying as leaders.

In the past, it was found that a major problem for women professionals hampering their career development was their fear of promotion (Goodman and Shikiar, 1985). Recent studies by Davidson and Cooper (2003) reported no difference between male and female managers on achievement, motivation, aspiration towards promotion and motivation to manage.

Most of the studies were carried out in developed countries like the United States, Great Britain and Europe where the cultural, social and economic environments were completely different from developing countries like Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the studies focused on participants from the world of Business and Industry, not much was done in the public sector.

In Zimbabwe, the few studies conducted were based on low representation of women in leadership positions in politics, health and other sectors in society (Gaidzanwa, 1998). This excluded education which is the largest Ministry in terms of numbers of which about 60% were teachers. More than half of this percentage was women.

Mutare District had 202 schools, 156 primary and 46 secondary with a total of 3435 teachers. Women formed about 60% of the total number of teachers. Of the 202 school heads in the District, only 15 were women (Annual Report to the Secretary for Education, Sport and Culture, 2007), hence, the need for the study to find out teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of women leadership in Mutare District Schools.

### **Research Questions**

In order to determine the perceptions of teachers on the effectiveness of women leadership in schools, the following questions needed to be answered.

1. What are the teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of women leadership?
2. Are women leaders capable of motivating their subordinates to attain maximum output?
3. Do women leaders show confidence in the discharge of their duties?
4. What are the perceptions of female teachers on the demands of school leadership?

### **Research Design and Research Instrument**

The research design was both quantitative and qualitative where the descriptive method was used. One main advantage of choosing the qualitative method was to bring out on people's experience, their feeling and emotions using flexible language. Qualitative research focuses on data that exists in the minds of individual and how they are expressed and also concentrates on data that is valid and tries to give a true and full picture of that which is researched (Oyedele, 2003) and the method was appropriate in analyzing the respondent open response towards the end of the questionnaire. The quantitative method helped in analysing the information in the structured questionnaires. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire with a section at the end for open comments from the respondents.

### **Population and Sampling Procedure**

All the primary and secondary schools teachers teaching in Mutare District constituted the population of the study. The rationale for targeting the primary and secondary school teachers was that all served under the leadership of head teachers who were either male or female. The district had a total of 202 schools of which 156 were primary and 46 secondary. Ten schools, six primary and four secondary schools were randomly selected for this study and a total of One hundred primary and secondary school teachers were randomly selected from these ten schools.

## Data Analysis

The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) for analysing descriptive data was used for data processing and analysis. It was used to find the frequencies and percentages which were presented in the form of tables and charts. The open responses were put in tables.

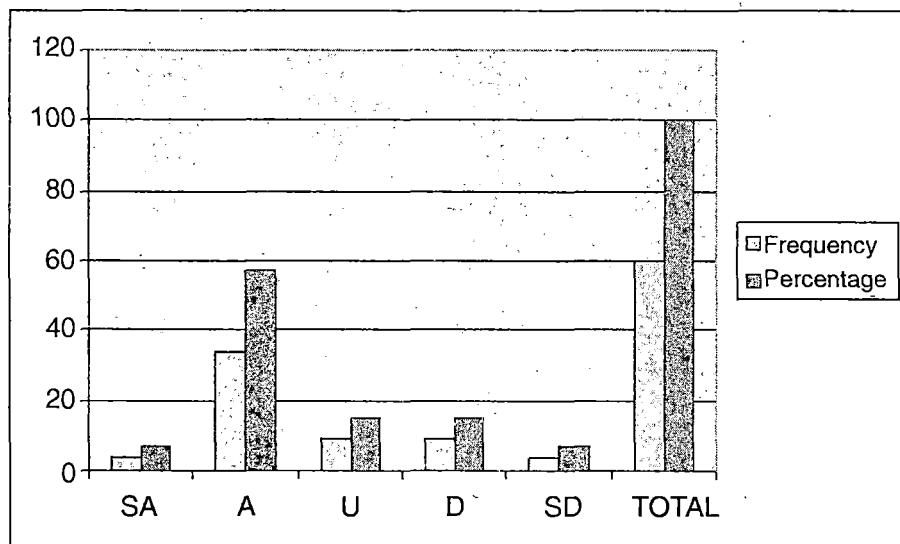
## Results

The results are presented in relation to the four research questions.

Research question 1 states that:

"What are the teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of women leadership"?

**Figure 1 (a): Women leaders perceived as effective**



From figure 1 (a), above 6% of the teachers that responded to the questionnaires strongly agree and about 53% agree that women leaders are perceived as effective in their leadership. 15% were undecided. Another 15% disagreed and about 6% strongly disagreed that women leaders were perceived as effective.

**Table 1: Some verbatim responses of teachers on their perceptions on the effectiveness of women leadership.**

- They are perceived as effective in their leadership because they are proactive in their planning and they involve subordinates in administrative issues.
- Women leaders are considered effective because they are generally very focused, orderly and quite understanding.
- Some women leaders are more competent in the discharge of their duties than their male counterparts.
- Female heads of school are said to be quite effective because they perform their duties wholeheartedly, are committed and monitor day to day activities in the school. Women leaders are considered effective in that they combine professionalism with some degree of caring and are concerned with the welfare of their subordinates.
- Some of them are seen to be very responsible and quite dedicated in their jobs and therefore quite effective leaders

From the analysis of the responses from the questionnaires (see figure 1a), the majority of teachers agree that women leadership is perceived as effective. Also see table 1 showing some of the verbatim responses from the teachers stating the fact that women leadership is generally perceived as effective.

According to a study by Bass and Ovolio (1994) on transformational leadership, it was found that woman leaders on average were more effective and satisfying to work for, as well as being more likely to generate extra effort from their subordinates (Owen, Hodson and Gazzard, 2004).

Research question 2 states that:

“Are women leaders capable of motivating subordinates to attain maximum output” ?

**Figure 2: Women leaders show appreciation to motivate subordinates.**

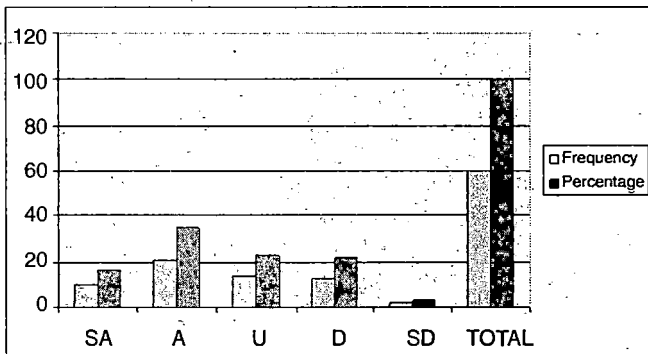


Figure 2 shows that 16% of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire strongly agreed and 35% agreed that leaders show appreciation as a way of motivating subordinates to attain maximum output. About 23% were undecided. About 21% disagreed and about 3% strongly disagreed that women leaders show appreciation as a way of motivating them.

**Table 2: Some verbatim responses of teachers on whether women leaders show appreciation to subordination as a way of motivation.**

- Yes, some women leaders show appreciation to subordinates by thanking them when they produce excellent work for example good grade 7, form 4 or form 6 results as away of motivating them.
- Yes ,by exhibiting professional conduct when dealing with subordinates.
- Yes, women leaders display a caring attitude towards subordinates especially those who work hard to obtain good results in the school such as grade 7 results.
- No, some of the women infect the majority do not develop their subordinates for career advancement and do not support the promotion of other women.
- No, women leaders do not reward their subordinates when the subordinates perform in an outstanding manner like 100% pass at grade 7 levels.

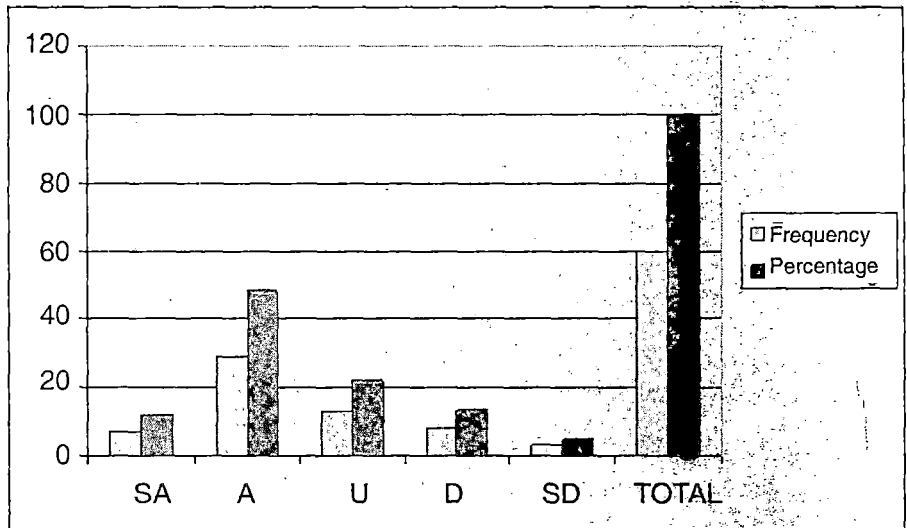
Basing on the analysis of the responses from the questionnaire (see figure 2), the majority of teachers agree that some women leaders show appreciation to subordinates as a way of motivating them to attain maximum output. However, the percentages of those who remain undecided and those who disagreed are rather high indicating some form of discrepancy as far as women leaders' motivational skills is concerned. Also see table 2 showing some of the verbatim responses from the teachers with some stating that some women leaders show appreciation to subordinates as a way of motivating them. Again some of the teachers have stated otherwise.

Brockunier and Heffner, (1994) wrote that 'many leaders in organizations apply the concept of expectancy to needs of individuals to grow, perform at high levels, gain recognition and rewards, gain promotions and contribute effectively to the organization.'

Research question 3 states that;

"Do women leaders show confidence in the discharge of their duties?"

**Figure 3: Women leaders display confidence when making decisions.**



In figure 3 above, about 11% of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire strongly agreed while about 48% agreed that women leaders show confidence in the discharge of their duties. About 21% were undecided. Those who disagreed and strongly disagreed that women leaders display confidence in the discharge of their duties are about 13% and 5% respectively.

**Table 3: Some verbatim responses of teachers regarding women leaders' confidence.**

- Yes, they are assertive and generally quite orderly.
- Yes, women leaders are firm, strong and quite confident when discharging their duties.
- Yes, women leaders are competent, confident and knowledgeable
- Yes, besides showing confidence in their jobs they also display a caring sympathetic attitude especially when a subordinate has a problem.
- Yes, in addition, they feel for others and are quite motherly in their approach to leadership.
- Yes, to some extent because some of them feel threatened when female subordinates actively participate in outstanding activities



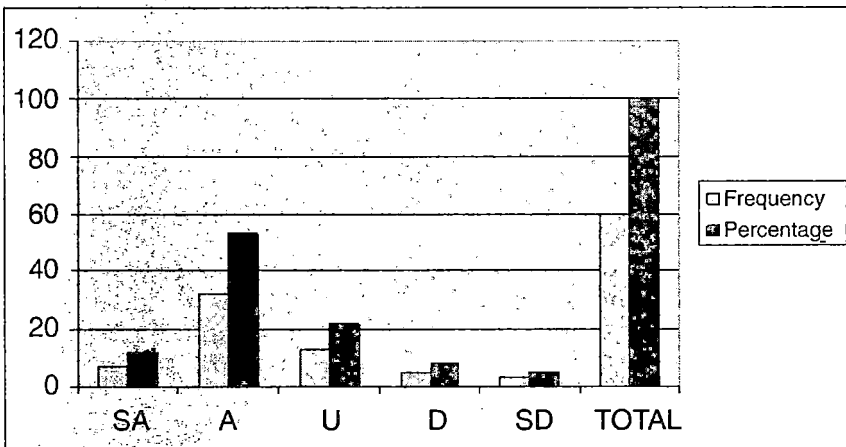
From the analysis of the responses from questionnaire (see figure 3, the majority of teachers agreed that women leaders show confidence in the discharge of their duties. However, a significant number remained undecided or disagreed. Also see table 3 showing some of the verbatim responses from teachers about how they perceive women leaders' confidence in the discharge of their duties.

Eagly and Karau (2000) stated that: 'Communal characteristics which are most often assigned to women, centre on a concern for the welfare of others which include such traits as being affectionate, helpful, kind and gentle. In contrast, men are seen more often as possessing genetic characteristics such as being controlling assertive, confident and independent.'

Research question 4 states that:

"What are the perceptions of female teachers in the demands of school leadership" ?

**Figure 4: Female teachers are conversant with the demands of school leadership.**



From figure 4 above, about 11% of the teachers that responded to the questionnaire strongly agreed and about 53% agreed that female teachers are conversant with the demands of school headship. About 21% were undecided and about 8% disagreed while 5% strongly disagreed that female teachers were conversant with the demands of school headship.

**Table 4: Some verbatim responses of teachers on whether female teachers are conserving with the demands of school headship.**

- Female teachers generally know what is expected of a head of school such as supervision of staff and pupils.
- Female teachers are aware that when you head a school you have to plan your work and the entire activities in the school with the help of other teachers.
- They know that resources, that is, human and material. Have to be well managed in the school.
- Female teachers are aware that good communication skills are crucial in school leadership.
- Some of the female teachers do not seem to know about the demands of school headship

Basing on the analysis of the responses from the questionnaire (see figure 4, the majority of teachers agreed that female teachers are conversant with the demands of school headship. Consequently, the female teachers are perceived as knowledgeable in the demands of school headship. However, some were uncertain and a few disagreed. Also see table 4, showing some of the verbatim responses from the teachers on whether female teachers are conversant with the demands of school headship which are in support of Kasambira (1998) who states that 'the functions of school administrators might include, for example, planning, organizing, controlling, coordinating, teaching, communication and evaluation.'

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The research revealed that the majority of teachers in Mutare District perceived women leadership as effective. The respondents stated that women leaders involved their subordinates when planning activities and designing individual and group responsibilities. It was also found that they (women leaders) monitored and evaluated the performance of their subordinates to ensure quality output.

Most of the respondents agreed that women leaders conducted themselves professionally and were confident when making decisions. In addition, their communication skills were found to be good and that they were conversant with the demands of school headship. These findings were in line with what was highlighted in the literature review. It was stated in some of the studies conducted that women were transformational in their leadership and that if given a chance to lead, they were quite effective in their leadership.

However, most respondents identified gaps related to motivation. Comments made in support of these gaps were that subordinates were not developed for career advancement or rewarded for very good performance. Subordinates were also not given due recognition when they produced outstanding work. Despite these identified gaps, overall, women leadership was perceived to be quite effectively by the respondents.

Since this was carried out on a very small scale due to time and financial constraints, it is suggested that further studies on women leadership in the education system be conducted on a large scale so that research findings could be generalized.

### **Recommendations**

After analyzing the responses and comments made by the respondents in the study, the following recommendations were made:

- ❖ The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture needs to introduce measures in the form of seminars, workshops or short courses to improve the effectiveness of women leadership in Mutare District and elsewhere.
- ❖ Policy on gender needs to be revised to ensure that gender sensitization commences at grade zero to enable the girl child to develop leadership qualities at an early stage.
- ❖ Women leaders need to improve in the identified areas of weakness.

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