

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Assessment on the problems of female staff at Jimma University

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Abstract

Women's participation in all spheres of life has become significant. In Ethiopia, although their contribution in economic, social and political spheres is considerable, the existing situation does not seem to explicitly endorse this idea. This study is therefore, meant to identify gender related problems of Jimma university (JU) female staff and contribute to the formulation of a plan to alleviate the problem. The study is a cross-sectional investigation through quantitative and qualitative study methods using questionnaires and focus group discussion respectively, conducted on the university community (staff, academic and administration in both sex). The data are organized and analyzed using basic statistical methods and chi-square test. The result indicated the most frequent problems such as: attitude of the society against females, work overload, lack of assertiveness, political and economical inequality, and fear against the success of gender equity. Significantly high rate (64.3%) of females believed that there existed gender discrimination currently ($p < 0.05$). Most females and males agreed on equal participation of women in all positions except at the time of pregnancy, on the need of special attention to women both at working place and at home. Educating female staff in continuing education as well as upgrading their qualification at work site was found the basic solution suggested.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender is an analytical term to help distinguish between the biological dimension (sex) and the cultural one (gender). Traditionally society assumes that there are observable differences between the sexes. However, we know that personality, behavior or abilities are the result of differential socialization because these socially induced differences result in discriminatory reward, statuses, opportunities and roles. Gender roles in every society of the world are reflected in socio-economic levels exerting various degrees of constraints in both sexes, sharper on women's side, the majority of them found at lower status. Gender imbalance is one of the critical issues specially in developing countries it requires immediate intervention in line with empowering women in social, political and economical activities, particularly in

decision making management sections.

Affirmative action is currently recommended till females reach the level of equal status.

Education is a key factor in the growth and well-being of any individual. At the same time, it is a powerful tool for the integration of women in to the social, economic and political spheres, in the sense that it fosters tolerance, democratic values, political awareness and respect for the human person. It also plays a vital role in bringing about equality, fraternity and ensuring human rights of a given society. Studies from around sub-Saharan Africa repeatedly tell the same story regarding female education. In Sudanese society, despite the strides made towards improving women's status in recent years, blatant inequalities still characterize their position (2,3).

Women contribute over 50% of African population and more than 25% of households in many African countries are headed by women. Women play a crucial role as mothers, producers, active community mobilizers and custodians of culture. They also play a vital and central role in family well-being and maintenance, and generally have a strong commitment to the survival protection and development of children as well as survival of society at large. Indeed there can be no meaningful and sustainable development and peace without the active participation of women (4).

Women's participation in all fields in the world has become significant. In Ethiopia, although their contribution in economic, social and political spheres is considerable, the number of women with higher level of education is very low.

Their involvement in political and economic activities is rather limited. Among the educated women, very few are assigned in equally important high level posts. In addition, female's enrollment ratio in all universities in Ethiopia, is very low compared to their male counterparts (5). Girls in rural areas do not have chances to go to school even at the basic levels because they are loaded with various house work. Early marriage, abduction also hinder rural girls from their education (6).

Jimma University is a typical example of tertiary education institutes in Ethiopia for hardly having any role models of female staff at the decision making managerial posts currently. In fact, the women ratios by January 1998, were 46.6 % (144) in administration and 28.8% (152) all in all, that means negligible rate (3.7%) of female

academic staff including expatriates (7).The status of female staff in administration section is at most in a secretarial position; the majority lower than that are cleaners, janitors, cooks and the like. Jimma university has done almost nothing on the affirmative action for its female staff except the affirmative action going on for female students and the future plan outlined in directory of organization working on gender in Ethiopia(8).

This study is a part from the study conducted to identify females (staff and students) problems of Jimma university to assist in formulating a tactical plan to alleviate them. The purpose of this particular section of the study is then to: identify gender related problems of female staff within the university in order to assist the formulation of appropriate gender strategic plan,

specifically measures the attitude and awareness of the staff towards gender issues, identify gender related problems of women workers of the university, asses related problems of women workers of the university, and to a possible suggestions in solving the problems identified and recommended specific course of action to be taken.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study was conducted in Jimma University which is one of the six universities in Ethiopia. Jimma University is located in Jimma which is 335 km south west of Addis Ababa. It comprises four faculties in the main campus (the former JIHS) and Agriculture College. The study was conducted between May and July 2000.

A cross-sectional design, using both qualitative and quantitative study methods were employed in conducting the study. The qualitative study used focus group discussion (FGD) to enrich the information that was generated through the quantitative data collection methods. The target of this study was the total staff of the university; 237 academic staff (7 females), 313 administration staff (148 females).

Data were collected using structured questionnaires for quantitative information and focus grouped discussion (FGD) for the qualitative ones after the validation of the appropriate pre test. Accordingly, the questionnaire was prepared in Amharic, distributed to statistically derived random samples of 142 staff respondents, purposefully designed to represent academic and administration staffs, and sex proportionally stratified. In addition, the focus groups consisted of 8 people matching the group criteria, (relating to job/sex and for those who cannot do the questionnaire) who

indicated willingness to take part in the study. Eight different groups of staff were held. The groups were made up of: two male academic staff groups; four female administrative staff groups; two male administrative staff groups. Although groups were allowed a free discussion of issues, moderators ensured that the following issues were raised: opinions on gender equality; whether females need special attention, and solutions for the above- mentioned problems.

Discussions were recorded by tape-recorded on the bases of the agreement of the group members.

The information was sought on socio-demographic information such as age, sex, monthly income, urban/rural origin, educational background, and attitudes towards gender equality and was obtained using both open and closed ended questions.

The data were analyzed using basic statistical methods. The closed ended questions were analyzed by SPSS

statistical package applying chi square test, and the comments from open questions were coded into major categories and analyzed in a semi-quantitative manner, whereas the results of the focus group discussions summarized and categorized.

RESULTS

Background

Self administered questionnaire comprising closed and open ended questions were distributed to 76 male and 66 female staff members. Only 61 males and 46 females indicated their age and occupation. The majority, 78.5% (84) of them were in the age intervals of 20 - 29 (45) and 30 - 39 (39) year old. As shown in Figure-1, 82.6%(38) of females and 75.4%(46) of males were of age in the range 20-29, where the difference was not significant ($P>0.05$ and $\chi^2 = 0.8052$). Of those staff who indicated their occupation, the majority were administration staff 95.35(102) of which 43 % (46) females (Figure-2). Thirty nine of the males and 32 of the

females were willing to indicate their residential areas, 32% (26) coming from the rural areas around Jimma town of which 31. 3% (10) were females, walking a long distance every day [Figure-3]. At the time of this study, 89.7% (96) of the staff responded about their monthly income earned below Birr 300, where the majority of the females 89%(41) found in this range.

There were eight focus group discussions of staff in which most of the participants were female groups. The major sources of information during FGD were Janitors, Kitchen workers and secretaries from the female staff. Major focus areas like: opinions about gender equity, the need of special attention for females, problems of female staff, possible solutions for the problems mentioned, were the centre of the discussions.

Staff of Jimma University by age

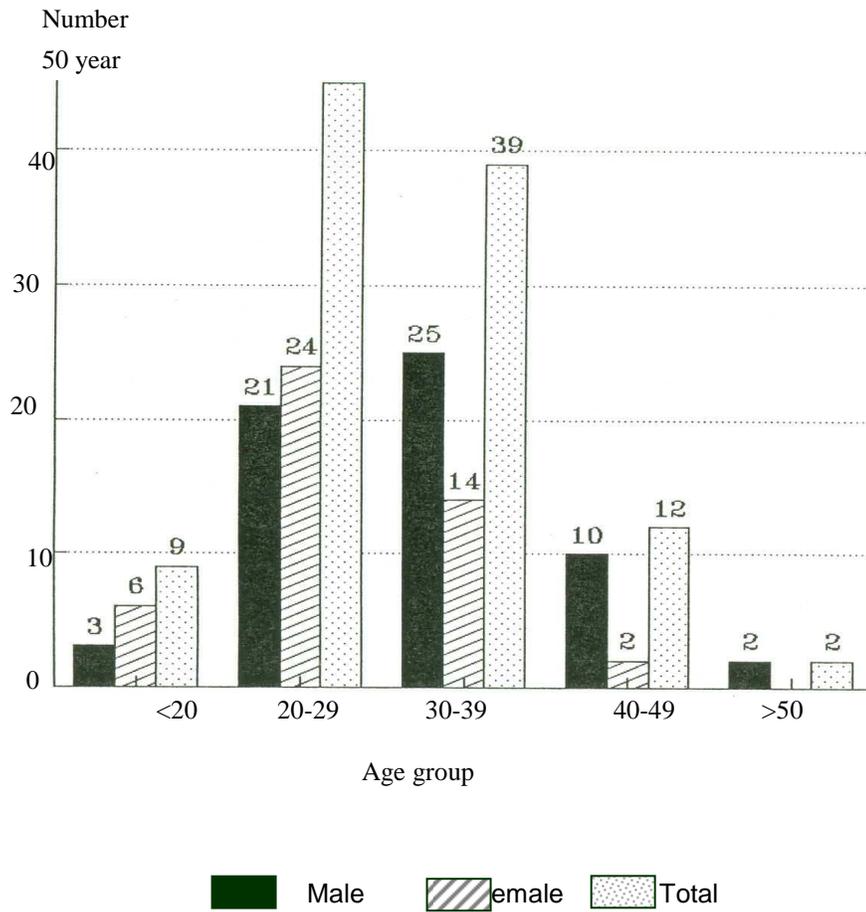
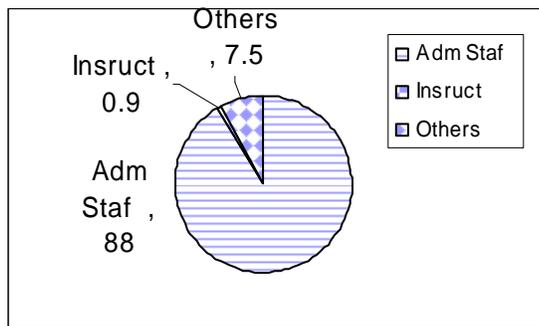


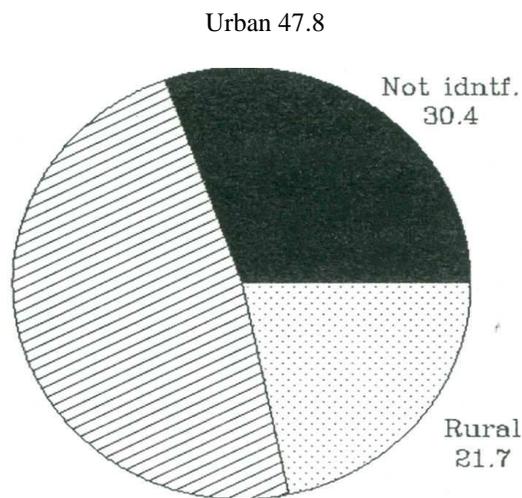
Figure-1

Occupation of Staff of Jimma University in percent



Adm-stf-93.5%, Inst- 0 (Total-107,m61, F-46)
Figure-2

The living area of JU female staff in percent



Female-46, Male-61 (Total-107, Max.-\Jr bane 45), Mi n.-Rural(26)
Figure -3

Equity

Only 56 males and 44 female staff responded as to whether they have information about gender equity, and 96.4 % (54) males and 86.4%(38) females were found informed about gender equity [Table-1]. Here, 86.4% (51) of males and 95.3%(41) females believed in gender equality. There still existed 4.7%(2/) females who did not believe in gender equality. As to the response to the gender discrimination, 60.3% (35) of males and 35.7% (15) females did not believe its existence at all. On the contrary, the majority of female staff 74.3%(27) believed there existed gender discrimination currently ($P < 0.05$ and $\chi^2 = 59.114$). Ninety six and half percent (55) males and 91.9%(34) females believed that females were encouraged to go to higher education.

Unlike the female students, female staff encountered several problems such as; attitude of the society, work over load, lack of assertiveness, political and economic inequality, fear that gender equity will not be successful, a belief that gender sensitivity in theoretical not

yet practical, etc. Several reasons were forwarded for the fears that gender equity will not be successful. Some of these were: cultural impositions, lack of awareness and non assertiveness. Unnecessary support such as, affirmative action during employment, religious impositions, natural differences, wrong direction of the systems of management for change from top to bottom instead of starting from the mass females themselves.

Most of the participants, both male and female groups agreed that except the biological differences and cultural influences/impositions, females could equally participate in all spheres of activities (education, politics, economics, top management, social developments etc) as males. The males emphasized that females should participate in any activity outside home equally. Some participants believed that females could participate in all activities partially reasoning that they may not have strength to fully participate in activities involving heavy weight especially during pregnancy. This idea was forwarded from both female and

male groups. Both parties agreed that if it were not due to cultural barriers which caused weaker self confidence, females could do anything. Females in particular did believe that they need education primarily to challenge the cultural influence because of which they are lagging behind. In addition, they believed that if they grew equally, had been given equal opportunity like their brothers in their childhood, they would have felt the same and would have worked equally. Females criticized the traditional outlook towards their performance, saying that

even if they do the best work, the society looked at their weak sides only. Males strongly suggested that women can participate equally in all activities except where there are biological barriers, but the problems is that women themselves do not feel they are equal. Most of the males strongly support that now a days women empowering in urban areas though they are few in numbers. Something has to be done for this for those in the rural areas too. Equity is the very problem for women in the rural areas due to the impact of culture and lack of opportunity for education.

Attitude and consciousness of the staff of JU towards gender issues

Table -1

	Attitude	Value	Sex		Total %
			Male	Female	
1	Informed gend. Equal.	Yes	n = 56 96.4	n = 44 86.4	n = 100 92.0
		No	3.6	13.6	8.0
2	Belief in gend. Equal.	Yes	N = 59 86.4	n = 43 95.3	n = 102 90.2
		No	13.6	4.7	9.8
3	Gend. Discrim. Exist	Yes	n = 58 39.7	n = 42 64.3	n = 100 50.0
		No	60.3	35.7	50.0
4	Females Encouraged to H. Educ.	Yes	n = 57 96.5	n = 37 91.9	n = 94 94.7
		No	3.5	8.1	5.3

1. Were you informed about gender equality?
2. Do you believe in gender equality?
3. Do you believe, there exist gender discrimination?
4. Do you encourage females to go to higher education?

THE NEED for SPECIAL ATTENTION TO FEMALES

Both male and female respondents in FGD agreed that females need special attention temporarily to compensate their shortcomings due to cultural domination. The attention must start at family level and go to school and college levels, and then at the working areas as per their assertiveness levels. Parents do not encourage their daughters to go to school; they rather prepare them for early marriage. Thus, parents, friends, and the society at large must be educated and develop awareness so as result to change their attitudes.

Here females argued that, since females are naturally over burdened due to pregnancy special attention like avoiding hard labor and heavy duty, free health service, activity shifts from the hard work areas like kitchen chores must be given. Not only this, pension right for females, that was not there previously must be incorporated in the government policy with due consideration to overtime payment, education (upgrading workers), special by laws for female concerns etc.

The male respondents in this study had a lot of concerns and ideas. Saying that, government prioritizing its concerns towards female education is to be encouraged: rural females should be given special attention.

Currently, as women are working at home and outside to support their family, they are handling double work. It is this time that they must be supported by males/husbands. Male partners are the ones responsible for leading them to unwanted pregnancy against family planning which in turn leads to uncontrolled population growth. The males have to share the responsibilities. The males must learn how to understand women's problem and support them. This culture should be developed. Sex education must be given at school levels; but there existed fear also "support females but do not forgetting males too". Affirmative action not only for all females but for those who need it and some males also who need support is necessary. The affirmative action has to start /begin at childhood, right at the beginning of elementary school. Special forums must be

created for females especially for those in the rural areas. Here there must be forums for males also to enable them to understand the females' problems and support them. Females must be supported in family Planning (contraceptive), to be united and organized.

PROBLEMS OF FEMALE STAFF

Response to the open ended question has shown that female_staff at the working place, (13) of them stated that female staff inferiority complex was the major part. Some said that females like kitchen workers were not insured at their working place, and some said they were in short of materials like uniform, cleaning, and gloves for protection etc.

More problems were discussed in detail during FGD and both groups agreed on the following points.

- Workers at cooking areas suffer working at night and getting home late night - hard labour and scarcity of transport (not at all Jimma Agriculture Collage).

- Females are not organized to struggle for their right
- Hard work and long time service with are not rewarded with reasonable payment.

Females complained that:

- Male staff embarrassing, bosses asking for sex.
- Females seen reluctant of their job, lack of efficiency
- They are jealous of themselves, disorganized, lack unity - not able to ask females' right
- Lack of continuing education/upgrading enrolment in for extension program, minimum criteria not considered for female.
- Seniority is not respected
- Sick leave/annual leave - not given properly, no fee health service, no uniform at JCA
- Lack of facilities like cleaning materials for Janitors, kitchen workers.
- Heavy weight lifting that could affect reproductive systems.

No payment for extra work.

- No counseling, service, lack of special rules & regulations in support of female staff like changing type of activities periodically from kitchen to clearing to etc when want to compete for the job.
- Unfair salary payment, even not at all for overtime work.
- No regular meeting to discuss problems.

Possible solutions:

Possible solutions for problems were discussed most in the focus group discussion (FGD). Both parties agreed on the need to:

- Provide awareness training for both males and females staff and bosses to increase awareness of the society about gender equity; there must be forums at different level to change attitude of the society.
- Educate families and

- communities to change their attitude towards educating female
- students at the start about women's right and organize them.
- Create empowerment to overcome cultural impositions

Provide assertiveness training.

- supports from the Government side
- Job security, employment opportunity,
- Design special gender policies at government level
- Appropriate salary and overtime payment policy designs with respect to annual leaves, sick leaves specially during pregnancy and delivery time, working hours, free medical service, type of work assignment that fits the women's condition.
- Support to employ adequate number of female academic staff.

- Males strictly suggested that something has to be done on
 - religious movements to effect changes; while females specially the secretaries commented that; the University management system must focus on gender equality.
 - Appropriate time must be arranged for education/upgrading female staffs.
 - Professional training must be provided to secretarial workers.
 - Entrance point for extension program should be reduced to be below 2.00 for female's diploma.
 - Sick leaves and annual leaves must be granted properly as per the government rules and regulations
 - Orientation must be given for new bosses on how to evaluate the efficiency and other activities of the staff members.
 - Performance must be evaluated by concerned officials at administrative levels
- Injured female staff on job must be transferred to other appropriate areas/departments. Females working long in the kitchen must be transferred to other areas periodically.
- Quality materials like uniforms must be carefully selected; staff must be involved when selection is made.
 - There must be regular meetings at each dept/ section and higher officials must be informed about females problems regularly and measures must be taken based on the problem.
 - There must be an office (organ) to hear females' problems and seek possible solutions.
 - There must be rewarding events for hard working women (staff - even males). A certificate or testified outstanding performance paper should be prepared.
 - Females should be united and organized at campus level.

DISCUSSION

The sample population to survey were representatives of diverse groups of workers at the university, both in the questionnaire and FGD; males (administrative and academic staffs), females (secretaries, janitors, cleaners, kitchen workers). These staffs were found at different levels of education. Very few at degree and diploma levels, and many of them were below or 12 grade complete. High rate of females earned monthly income of Birr 300. This implies that they have a very low educational background and consequently need educational upgrading and specific professional training. Educated women are more likely to seek health care for themselves and their children, to practice family planning, and to have increased opportunity for employment, that benefits the entire family [9]. However, education is not within the reach of many girls and women in the developing world. Since the majority of them were below 40 years old, they could effectively do their jobs if supported by

training properly. The very huge rate 95%(102) of administrative respondents to the contrary of the negligible rate of academic staff exposed that the question as to why the teachers, who were supposed to know more about gender issues were not interested in females issue leave alone for women but at least for the sake of

their female students. Could it be due to the very small number of female academic staff (not more than 7 including expatriates) by the time of this study? This could of course be an opening for further study.

Even though most of the female staff were observed living right in the town of Jimma, very few of them coming from a distance far from the town needed some help.

Significantly high rates of males and females shared their awareness about gender equity. The surprise was that the existence of the female respondents who did not believe in gender equity at all. This showed us how deep-rooted the

cultural impositions were. On the other hand, significantly high rate of females confirmed the existence of gender discrimination currently compared to the high rate of males who denied the fact reflecting the male chauvinism still strong felt by the females.

It was revealed in the study that both males and females in university community were conscious and ready to send their female children and relatives to higher education but the problem was how to make them pass 12 grades in which very few female students passed as clearly stated in the study by Worku [10]. The very impact of passing 12 grades was claimed to be the negative attitude of the society on the females through culture, religion, workload at home as well as outside, early marriage, etc. This was true in Malawi, where a very small rate (3%) of girls found attending primary school, to high school and college level [11].

In Ethiopia, the role of women has been minimized based on a long tradition of their exclusion from education and development [12]. The FGD

indicated that most of the respondents from both sexes accepted female participation in all spheres of activities (political, economical, social, etc.) except at the situations of biological barriers like pregnancy, which needed avoiding heavy work and medical attention. The emphasis of the majority of the males, who supported special considerations for females found at rural areas manifested the progress of their positive attitude towards gender issues, particularly in the areas where the majority of the downtrodden females were found. Here some of the respondents in both sex had fears of failure of gender equity based on the reasons stated in the result section. This showed the deep concern of these supporters from their observation of the progress of the improvement i.e, most of the problems were assumed to be very difficult to change in a short period of time, where the government support was highly needed.

To encourage the effort of females for equal participation in all possible spheres, both parties (males and females) agreed on special attention like

affirmative action and free health service during pregnancy to be given to females temporarily till their shortcomings are minimized. Here the females themselves were seen divided into two major points of view; one for special support, the others arguing against special support for females. They claimed that, if we want them to be as tough as males, they have to make it on their own. The special supports indicated by respondents could be categorized into two major groups depending on the responsible body for implementation. Some of the supports like avoiding hard work during pregnancy sick leaves, free health services, pension etc were appropriate to be implemented by the government at higher or policy level. Some others like periodic shift of activities of hard labor like the request of the kitchen workers, special rules and regulations to support females concern, etc were appropriate activities which could be executed by the university.

A Lot of ideas on how to execute support to females were forwarded by most of the males as listed in the result

section except very few of them who revealed their fear that males might be overwhelmed by the progress of the support to take place in the future. We hope the fear would gradually diminish when the success result equity at the level of gender issues through continuous awareness programs that must be conducted to avoid these fears.

The study revealed different problems of women at different categories of female workers of the Jimma University. The kitchen workers took the lead, by requesting periodic change of working areas for fair chances of avoiding hard and dangerous work, working throughout the late evening. The challenge to the university would be, whether there could be any equivalent areas of work to answer the question without disturbing the government policy for employment. Of course, requests or materials like appropriate clothes and gloves, transportation during the evening for safety and female staff organization at the university level

could be manageable. The second group coming with several problems like, sexual harassment from bosses, standardized upgrading education with special admission criteria to join evening division, annual leave, no par time payment for over time work, agent for females advisory were serious ones coming from secretaries. Here at short training level the university was trying its best providing appropriate computer training locally, secretarial and management training out to Debre Zeit management institute. But these did very little in upgrading their level of profession i.e. promotion like training at diploma and degree levels. Though reducing the minimum admission criteria for the female staff would be questionable. The university started recently a scholarship opportunity to its staff (both females & males) to learn in evening division at diploma level freely. Here, the university might need to consider special opportunity for females based on the capacity of interval revenue it could collect, if budget was to be raised the government might assist the university in its endeavor to realize its goal of upgrading female staff members.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the possible suggestion and recommendations forwarded from the study, the following summery could be made.

It was obvious that the attitudes of the community around Jimma University and the society at large must be changed. Continual awareness raising training on gender issues for both parties (females and males) starting at the campus level would be essential.

Education would be very important to change one's attitude as well as to increase women's empowerment to participate at every level of activities equally. For this end the university must design a means of advanced training for female staff, to complete 12th grade and go on diploma, degree and further levels as it has started at the evening division. Discussions must be made for special admission criteria for female staff, reducing the minimum admission criteria by CGPA 0.20 like it has been going on at national level for regular female students. And this could be

supported by special preparatory classes before the actual training in basic courses, say one semester/one summer session preparatory classes in basic science areas.

Women themselves are the vanguards to overcome their problems to reach at the level of equity. So, they must be organized and create empowerment and assertiveness. Here the university must play a great role in organizing them and providing assertiveness & by creating different forums like workshops, seminars, open discussion, inviting experts get together/gatherings etc.

Annual leaves and part time payments must be exercised by the university management sections. The request of shift of working areas due to hard labour is a sign of grievance, a message to the university. Possibilities should be worked out either to execute what was requested or provide incentives to compensate the hardship.

Lack of role models of female academic staff is a very serious issue that no body can deny. Thus the university has to

devise special means or opportunities to attract female employees.

Finally there must be further study on the attitude of teachers emphasizing on why they were not interested to respond the gender issue questions.

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