Seen but not heard:

Women's experiences of educational leadership in Solomon Islands secondary schools

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the representation of women in leadership positions in Solomon Islands. In particular, it explores the educational leadership experiences of women working in Solomon Islands' secondary schools. While much research to date has been carried out in the developed and developing countries, very little has been undertaken in Melanesian countries. As such, we know very little about women's experiences in educational leadership in Melanesia.

Research data was gathered using qualitative methods. Specifically, interviews were conducted with eight women, five were deputy principals and three were Heads of Departments. All the participants were teaching in schools in an urban centre. Data gathered were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach. The data gathering was conducted in the Solomon Islands in October 2007.

The key findings revealed a number of issues that impacted on the women's leadership in their respective schools. Findings include lack of self confidence, difficulties in balancing work and family, discriminatory attitudes and the influence of the cultural patriarchal norms on the attitudes towards women in leadership positions. Other key findings related to the nature of the organization, in this case, the school. This included a lack of initial preparatory and on - going professional development programmes and a lack of consultation in the decision making process. This study also found that while the women embraced the collaborative approach to leadership, the structural barriers through the hierarchical organization of the schools meant they could not lead the way they would like to.

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Finally to my children, Theleima, Kerry and Fisher, - thank you for helping Daddy at home and not giving him a hard time. Big thanks for understanding and letting Mummy go to school. You have been my inspiration. I dedicate this thesis to you.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

An Overview

In the Solomon Islands, the 'big man' (Narokobi, 1983) method of selecting leaders, where only men are selected, has disadvantaged women in the process. This is because of the traditional Solomon Islands culture and social practices which relegated women to domestic duties at home. Nevertheless, times are changing resulting in more women getting an education and having paid employment. These changes have moved women out of the domestic sphere into the public one to accommodate the changing nature of the economic system, from the traditional to cash based system. In spite of this, the majority of women are in the lower ranks of the work force with very few at the top level, which is dominated by men. The same can be said in the school context where the majority of principals are male and very few are women. With this in mind, I believe there is a need to explore with women in secondary schools, their experiences of their leadership in schools.

This introductory chapter will highlight the area to be studied, my reasons for undertaking this research and also the significance of this study.

Statement of the issue

In Solomon Island's secondary schools, nearly all the educational administration and leadership positions such as principal posts, deputy principals and the heads of departments are filled pre dominantly by men

(Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2006). A survey conducted in 2006 by the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) showed that out of the total number of secondary teachers, 27.8% are women. Of the 103 secondary school principals throughout the country, only three were female, in other words, 2.9% -. (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2006). Such statistics illustrate that women are grossly under represented as secondary teachers and school leaders. The issue raised here is one of social injustice within educational leadership with regards to gender inequality. In addition, while much research to date has been carried out in the developed and developing countries, very little has come from Melanesian countries. As such, we know very little about women and educational leadership in Melanesia with the exception of work by Kilavanwa (2004), Strachan (2002) and Strachan, Saunders, Jimmy and Lapi (2007). In view of this, the study is underpinned by the following question:

What are the leadership experiences of women educational leaders in Solomon Islands' secondary schools?

Who am I?

In my profile for a school magazine in 6th grade, I wrote 'To become the first woman Prime Minister of Solomon Islands' as my future ambition. While that was a childhood dream, reflecting on this now, my interest in this area on women and leadership had already begun back then.

Throughout my high school days and my one year at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) I had already started to stand up for women's issues. In classroom debates about having women as leaders, I was always on the team standing up and arguing for women to be included, especially in parliament. My interest in women's issues was further reinforced when I came to New Zealand to study. Early on in my studies, one of the courses that really opened my eyes was on 'Women in Society'. This course caught my attention more than ever and I started to question many of the things that I had taken for granted in relation to me being a woman. Upon completion of my studies, I went back to the Solomon Islands and taught as a secondary school teacher. This was when I started to notice that the majority of principals were men. I also observed that although women teachers held positions of responsibility, they played a minor role and at times were left out of the decision making process. This started to raise questions for me.

Coming back to study again, I was introduced to the complex world of educational leadership and realized that women play a significant role as leaders. Upon reflection on leadership in the Solomon Islands' secondary school, women's experiences had been missing and I wondered why? As a young Solomon Island woman undertaking an educational leadership program I felt the need to undertake this study to learn from other Solomon Island women, what they had to share about their leadership experiences in Solomon Islands secondary schools. In particular, voicing their opinions on what they believe are the challenges and constraints that have impacted on their leadership roles. In undertaking this study, I am

hoping that my research will in a small way provide an avenue to give women a voice.

Significance of the study

The information gathered from this study will be useful for government organizations in the Solomon Islands such as the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) and the National Council of Women. These organizations may be aware of this issue but a lot still needs to be done to continue to emphasise its importance, hopefully leading towards policies that may provide equal employment opportunities for women. In addition, the knowledge that eventuates from this will also contribute to the growing body of knowledge on women and educational leadership in developing countries which Oplatka (2006) has identified as an area that needs more research.

More importantly, the study aims to highlight the influence that the traditional Solomon Islands culture and social practices have on women to effectively lead in schools. In addition, the nature of the school as an organization will also be looked at to help explain the under representation of women. Ultimately, it is about bringing the women's voice to the forefront so that their experiences are heard.

The context of the study

Geographical features

Solomon Islands is a scattered archipelago with a total land area of 28, 369 square kilometres. It is about 1, 900 kilometres northeast of Australia. The nation comprises a double chain of six large islands and many smaller ones. The capital Honiara is situated on Guadalcanal. Other major islands include Choiseul, Isabel, New Georgia, Malaita and San Cristobal. All these islands are mountainous and sparsely populated (Pollard, 2000).

Socio - cultural context

The Solomon Islands comprise diverse cultures, languages and customs. Of the total population of about 496, 000, 93.3% are Melanesian, 4% Polynesian and 1.5% Micronesian (Malasa, 2007). There are eighty to ninety different languages spoken in Solomon Islands. Christianity is now the major religion in the Solomon Islands with five 'mainline' Christian denominations (Anglican, Roman Catholic, South Seas Evangelical Church, United Church and Seventh Day Adventist Church) predominating in terms of members. The conservative roles of men and women are separate; I elaborate more on this, later.

The Education System

The Solomon Islands Education system is administered under the Education Act of 1978 (Education Act, 1978, Solomon Islands). This Act

defines the roles and responsibilities of the Minister of Education, Education Authorities, school committees, school boards and school principals.

The Education Act is in dire need of review to accommodate the changing needs of the national education system. It provides the legal basis, with much administration of the country's education system being decentralized to the education boards of the nine provincial governments and the Honiara City Council (Malasa, 2007). This was necessary because of the geographic isolation and cultural diversity of the country with additional issues relating to communication and transportation (Sikua, 2002). The Teaching Service Office (TSO) monitors and facilitates the appointment of teachers, promotion, demotion and salary payments. This role operates in conjunction with that of the Education Authorities and School Boards who notify the TSO of any vacancy that may exist in their schools (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, because of the decentralization of the education system, the Education Authorities now play a major role in the appointment and promotion of teachers, except for salary payments which are administered by the Teaching Service Office.

The present education system is responsible for ensuring the operation and development of schools and training institutions across Solomon Islands (Malasa, 2007). It manages over 600 primary schools with a student enrolment of 85 – 000, 140 secondary schools with a student enrolment of 29, 000 (Ministry of Education, 2004) and a teaching establishment of over 4000.

The secondary schools in Solomon Islands can be categorised into three main types. The Community High Schools are extensions of existing primary schools and enrol students up to Year 9, although some now enrol up to Year 12. These schools are mostly rural and community based and are administered by the churches and Provincial Education Authorities (Malasa, 2007). The second type is the Provincial Secondary Schools which are located within the country's nine provinces and administered by their host provincial government, including the Honiara City Council. They enrol students from year seven to twelve with the majority of intake from the host province. The third are the National Secondary Schools administered by the national government through the Ministry of Education or the churches (Malasa, 2007). The National Secondary Schools enrol students from Form 1 to Form 7 and they come from all over the country.

There are six chapters in this report. In this chapter, I have introduced this thesis and stated why I am interested in studying women's educational leadership experiences. Chapter Two contains the literature review which examines current literature on women and educational leadership in both the western and developing countries. The third chapter presents the research design used in this research project. This includes the research methodology, method and ethical considerations when carrying out the research and a description of the research process. The fourth chapter presents the research findings that illustrate the themes and ideas that have emerged as a result of this study. The fifth chapter is a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature in this area. Lastly, the conclusion brings together and summarizes my research, illustrates limitations of this

study, provides suggestions for further research and presents my recommendations to initiate change.

To begin this thesis, in the following chapter, I firstly examine literature on women and educational leadership.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In countries like Australia, (Blackmore, 1993, 1999, 2002, 2006), Great Britain (Coleman, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2005; Evetts, 1994; Hall, 1993, 1996), New Zealand (Court, 1994, 2005; Strachan, 1991, 1993, 1999) and the USA (Shakeshaft, 1987), although the majority in the teaching profession are women, only relatively small proportions hold senior leadership and management positions in educational settings. According to Cubillo and Brown (2003) the problem is gaining access to these positions, "while it is true that more women now than ever before are slowly chiselling through the glass barrier to take on leadership positions, one can hardly claim to hear glass ceilings shattering around us" (p. 280). As early as the 1980s, it has been noted that women's route into leadership is fraught with difficulties (Marshall, 1984). This is due in part to a number of barriers and constraints women have faced and continue to face when they attempt to enter senior positions. The influence of a society's culture on the attitudes of people continues to deny easy access for women seeking leadership roles because they do not fit the leadership norm (Growe & Montgomery, 2000).

The literature that focuses on women and educational leadership in developed countries is now extensive (Adler, Laney, & Packer, 1993; Banks, 1995; Bell & Chase, 1993; Blackmore, 1989, 1993, 1999, 2002; Coleman, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2005; Coleman, Haiyan, & Yanping, 1998; Coleman & Pounder, 2002; Court, 1994, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2003a, 2003b, 2006; Ouston, 1993; Ozga, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1993; Strachan, 1999). This is due in large part to the rise of feminism and its critique of the way educational leadership has been based on male hegemony. In this literature review, I will examine literature on women and educational leadership looking especially at the under representation of women in senior leadership and management positions in secondary schools and how educational leadership discourse has explained this under representation. In particular, notions of gender and its impact on the leadership dialogue will be discussed. I will also investigate the influence of gender on historical and current educational leadership and management theories to demonstrate the notion of how such theories have assumed gender neutrality. In addition, other explanations for the under representation of women in leadership such as androcentrism, stereotypes, internal barriers, the selection process and discrimination will be considered.

I then focus on women and their approach to leadership before going on to examine and review literature on women in developing countries. This will contextualize my research and illustrate that experiences of women in leadership positions have been mainly from Eurocentric perspectives and there is a gap with regards to there being little research on the

experiences of women in developing countries, in particular, women in Melanesia, of which Solomon Islands is a part. In the last section of this chapter, I explore literature on women in Melanesian societies in relation to their ever changing roles and the part they play in their society, in education, decision - making and educational leadership.

Educational leadership, management and administration

Leadership, management and administration do not mean the same thing but sometimes they are used interchangeably. Over the years, there has been considerable discussion in the literature about the similarities and differences between the notions of leadership, management and administration. There is no agreed definition of the concept of leadership. Yukl (2002) argued that "the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective. Some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no "correct" definition (p. 6 – 7). Defined broadly, leadership according to Yukl (2002):

> is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish the shared objectives. (p. 7)

The concept of leadership overlaps with two similar terms, management and administration (Bush, 2003). According to Schon (1983), leadership and management are not synonymous terms. Schon (1983) and Yukl (2002) pointed out that one can be a leader without being a manager and one can manage without leading. Some writers who make the distinction between leadership and management recognize that the two concepts

overlap and are both necessary for organizational success (Cuban, 1988; Early & Weindling, 2004; Fullan, 2002; Robertson, 1995). One distinction between leadership and management is that leadership is linked with change and management is seen as a maintenance activity (Caldwell, 2006; Cuban, 1988; Early & Weindling, 2004; Fullan, 2002; Robertson, 1995). Early and Weindling (2004) stated that:

> Leadership tends to be more formative, proactive and problem solving, dealing with such things as values, vision and mission, whereas the concerns of management are more to do with the execution, planning, organizing and deploying of resources or making things happen. Management is focused more on providing order and consistency to organizations. (Early & Weindling, 2004, p. 5)

Some authors (Robertson, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992; Schein, 1985) perceived managing as not leading. According to these authors, the school leaders are forced to do rather than decide; to implement rather than to lead.

The notion of administration has been viewed by some researchers as the overall umbrella that integrates both management and leadership (Kedian, 2006; Robertson, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starrat, 2004). According to Sergiovanni (1992), administration can broadly be defined as "a process of working with and through others to accomplish school goals efficiently" (p, 15). Kedian (2006) viewed leadership, administration and management as a continuum. He explained that where management ends, administration starts and where these two end, leadership starts.

It would be inappropriate to say that school leadership is management because school leadership incorporates management techniques, values,

beliefs, morals, visions, leading and educating (Grace, 1995; Robertson, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992). The term that is preferred in this context and is used throughout this thesis is that of educational leadership.

Researching women

Much research on women in educational leadership relates to research and observations made in the UK, Western Europe, Australia and USA. Although comprehensive in its scope and direction, research in educational leadership has considerable imbalances in what Blackmore (1999) termed the monoculture of the powerful which focuses on leadership as a male domain. Not only that, current research may also lack context, specificity and relevance as most are based mainly on Eurocentric or Anglo - American perspectives, values and beliefs (Walker & Dimmock, 2002). Because of that, it makes the assumption that research on the experiences of women in the Western world, are the same for women in developing countries (Oplatka, 2004, 2006). However, in relation to the Solomon Islands context, this can be problematic because the socio – cultural context is very different. Women in the Solomon Islands come from different backgrounds and have different customs and cultures as well as different experiences. Therefore, to group them together and say that they behave in the same way is the same as silencing their voices.

This is one reason why feminists have been so critical of the way research has previously been conducted and reported. As such, they have strongly

argued for research that uses a lens that puts women at the centre of the inquiry (Blackmore, 1999; Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Maynard, 1994; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Strachan, 1993). This then would reinforce what Marshall (1984) stated, that "what women do, say and think is taken as the foundation on which to base concepts and models of the world" (p. 44). In this way, women's views and experiences are brought to the forefront, giving them the opportunity to be more visible and less marginalized.

There have been studies conducted that specifically report on black women in educational leadership (Alston, 2000; Ong, 1988). However, Moreton-Robinson (cited in Fitzgerald, 2006) argues that one criticism of this literature is that "all women of colour are labelled as one group thereby negating their distinctiveness based on ethnicity, family, geographical location, language, social and familial relationships, knowledge, spirituality, philosophy and aspiration" (p. 205). What is known is that women from minority groups are under represented both in the research and in leadership positions and that these women occupy two unique positions – one related to gender and one related to ethnicity (Banks, 1995; Fitzgerald, 2006).

Recently there have been calls to research the experiences of women of different race and ethnicity as well as women in developing countries (Banks, 1995; Fitzgerald, 2003a, 2003b, 2006; Grimes, 2005; Oplatka, 2006). This is because as Grimes (2005) pointed out "the mainstream epistemology about women in educational leadership roles has been constructed, canonized and theorized from a white hegemonic female perspective" (para.1). Therefore the experiences of other women are

silenced thus making them more marginalized in the literature. Banks (1995) identified the need for future research to have a broader scope and to reflect on the dynamics of race and gender within the changing nature of our society.

Fitzgerald (2003a, 2003b, 2006) supported this view and highlighted in particular, research on the ethnicity of women. She called for an "indigenous theory of educational leadership that places indigenous women at the centre of the narrative" (p. 14). This means that the knowledge production for and about educational leadership needs to be dismantled to provide a standpoint from which to theorise and research the realities of leadership through the experiences of women from a variety of ethnicities. This is also supported by Oplatka (2006) who calls for "further examination of the career experiences, leadership orientations, and subjective voices" (p. 605) of women in educational leadership within developing countries. This is especially important for women in the Pacific islands, especially women in Melanesia. In Melanesia including the Solomon Islands, there is minimal research on and about women's experiences in educational leadership. This has contributed to the continued silencing of their voices. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see that this vital area has since been explored by Kilavanwa (2004) in Papua New Guinea, Strachan (2002, 2007) and Strachan, Saunders, Jimmy and Lapi (2007) in Vanuatu. In saying that, more still needs to be researched in other Melanesian countries such as the Solomon Islands.

In the next section of this chapter, I examine some of the reasons for the under - representation of women in educational leadership positions. This

includes androcentrism, the influence of gender on the educational

leadership discourse and theory.

Androcentrism

The under - representation of women in leadership positions has been

explained as a result of androcentrism. As defined by Bem (1993):

> androcentrism or male centredness is the privileging of male
> experience and the 'othering' of female experience; that is, males
> and male experience are treated as a neutral standard or norm for
> the culture or the species as a whole, and females and female
> experience are treated as a sex – specific deviation from the norm.
> (p41)

Thus, what is termed as the norm is based only on the experiences of

males and also from the male viewpoint. This is highlighted by Blackmore

(1993), who states that educational theory and administrative practices

have been dominated by men, who have acted as gatekeepers. These

gate keepers have set the standards, produced the knowledge and

declared what is significant, relevant and important in the light of their own

experience. This perception creates a belief in male superiority and a

masculine system in which female values, experiences and behaviours

are viewed as inferior (Bem, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1987). This patriarchy has

resulted in an androcentric world which certain writers (Ouston, 1993;

Ozga, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1987) have strongly argued explains why men,

and not women, occupy a majority of formal leadership positions in

schools and society.

As noted by Adler, Laney and Packer (1993) the female experience of leadership in education, as elsewhere, is different from the male experience. In their research and readings, they found that literature on educational leadership rarely describes the female experience. This goes to show that the assumption of the leader as male is still dominant. Nevertheless, there have been many books and articles on women and leadership since.

Gender and educational leadership discourse

With the exception of some literature (Adler et al,1993; Acker, 1994; Alston, 2000; Blackmore, 1999, 2002; Coleman, 2002; Coleman et al, 1998; Court, 1994, 2005; Cubillo & Brown, 2003, DuBois & Ruiz, 1990; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Fitzgerald, 2006; Hall, 1996; Ouston, 1993; Ozga, 1993; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1993; Skrla, Reyes & Scheurich, 2000, 1993; Strachan, 1991, 1999), when one looks at the literature on educational administration and leadership, much of it has been written by and based on the views of one gender - male. According to Grace (1995), this patriarchal and male power has shaped the construct of leadership, its culture, discourse, imaging and practice for centuries. This view is also shared by Adler et al. (1993) who found that "most of the literature on educational management and on theories of management and organization ignored women, either by making the assumption that all managers are male or by assuming a gender – free position" (p. 3).

As defined by the International Labour Organization Bureau for Gender

Equality (GENDER), (2000), gender refers to the social differences and

relations between men and women which are learned, changeable over

time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures. These

differences and relationships are socially constructed and learned through

the socialization process and are context – specific and can be modified

(ILO, 2000; Williams & Sheehan, 2001). Using this definition, I explore the

role that gender plays in educational leadership discourse. As Blackmore

(1989) states:

> Leadership is a concept central to theories of how organizations
> such as schools and educational bureaucracies work since,
> historically, schools have been organized in hierarchical ways.
> Authority is seen to be legitimately accorded to the principal,
> generally a male. Increasingly the ways in which schooling and
> school knowledge are defined and organized have been contested.
> (p. 93)

To get a clearer picture as to why this has been the case for women in the

western world, Reiger (1993) gave a historical account of the gender

dynamics of organizations. She looked at how the formation of masculinity

and femininity in the eighteenth century, promoted the ideology of

separate spheres for women and men based on the bourgeois model of

the family. This became institutionalized in modern organizations. Thus,

the public sphere was for the male and the private or domestic was for the

female (Blackmore, 1993; Reiger, 1993). In addition, these separate

spheres were idealised in a way that made the public sphere a man's

world encouraging male dominance and the domestic sphere was

epitomised as being a woman's place where generally negative

connotations were attached to this private sphere but also making it inferior to that of the public sphere (Coleman, 2002).

Nevertheless, Blackmore (1993) noted that "women's entrance into the public sphere in the early 20th century, particularly at the top as leaders completely threatened this simple dichotomization of life into the public and private or male and female spheres" (p. 34). She argued that the values, ideologies and structures associated with dominant theories of administration and associated cultural practices, favours certain images of masculinity at any one time. Women moving into the public sphere threatened many of the basic preconceptions of the rational bureaucratic world. Thus, steps were taken by top male administrators and male dominated school boards to make certain that women administrators were concentrated in the lower administrative echelons and that the male old – boys' network was promoted (Blackmore, 1993). This dichotomization between the public and private has, according to feminist theorists such as Eisenstein and Pateman (cited in Blackmore, 1993), denied women equal access to public positions. Soobrayan (1998) sums it up in this way:- "in short men have enjoyed hegemony over the conceptualisation of leadership and hegemony over the position of leadership" (p. 38).

Educational leadership theory and gender

Gender has impacted on how theories about educational leadership have been constructed. Mostly, past theories of educational leadership that developed, have been dominated by one gender, the male and have taken

the stance of the male – as the norm. Following this stance of male as the norm, public expression and writings has been a chronicle of man's experiences where their viewpoints predominate and their needs are expressed (Marshall, 1984). Thus, it was taken for granted that theorising about leadership and the classification of leadership theories is gender – free (Coleman, 2002). However, feminists such as Blackmore (1989, 1999), Court (1994, 2005) and Strachan (1991, 1999) have challenged and continue to challenge this male dominance.

In constructing a feminist critique of leadership in education, Blackmore (1989) has undertaken a critical analysis "of, and a reflection on, the way women have been displaced from or submerged in both organizational and political theory, and how much of this invisibility has permeated the everyday commonsense notions of leadership" (p. 98). She posits that although the gender issue is never confronted in the models on leadership, such theories assume that:

> Leadership styles and administrative contexts are gender neutral and that such skills are context and content – free to be freely applied across a variety of 'categorizable' organizational situations. (Blackmore, 1989, p. 103)

In New Zealand, another feminist who has also critiqued the educational leadership discourse is Court (2005). In her discourse analysis of a proposal for initiating a shared leadership for co – principalship, Court found that the women who prepared the proposal were influenced by feminist discourses such as the radical and cultural feminist discourse. These discourses influenced the women's decision to initiate a co – principalship as an attempt to change the organizational hierarchy and

unequal power relations. One example is the use of power. Thus, whereas men's collective power was analysed as oppressive, "within a cultural feminist discourse, women's collective power was constructed as beneficial, enabling individuals to support one another's development of personal potential and to contribute to building a sisterhood for political change in patriarchal gender relations" (Court, 2005, p. 12). Initiating this co - principalship, Court (2005) stated that they were "disarticulating elements of the dominant discourses and re – articulating them within feminist discourse to build a counter – discourse of co – principalship as collective educational leadership" (p. 16).

What these women did was to address issues of structural gender inequality but more importantly they challenged the dominant leadership discourses, practices and policies that Blackmore (1999) suggests tend to be more repressive than emancipatory for women. Blackmore (1999) and Davies (1998) have suggested that feminists need to shift their focus from making women the problem when examining women and leadership. Instead, the focus should be on reconceptualising the notion of leadership and management itself, relative to wider dominant power and gender relations and on restructuring the organizations and institutions (Blackmore, 1999; Davies, 1998).

Similar sentiments were raised by Gosetti and Rusch (1995) who argued that the "texts, conversations, writings and professional activities that construct, our knowing and understanding of leadership" (p. 12), have come from an embedded privileged perspective which has ignored issues of status, gender, and race. To rectify this, they explored different lenses

that can be used to unearth the embedded notions to make them more

visible. An example of this is the feminist lens (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995)

which has the ability to focus on the gaps of male dominant culture,

knowledge, and behaviour. As they explained:

> Through this lens [feminist], we can locate in the spaces, women
> and other marginalized groups who have been excluded from the
> development of knowledge… we begin to see more clearly that
> those characteristics of gender, which we are taught to accept as
> natural, are really constructed from the values, beliefs, and
> assumptions of the dominant culture…(p. 15 – 16)

The feminist lens helps us recognize that gender not only includes the

embedded values and beliefs of a dominant patriarchal system but is

embedded itself in how we view issues related to leadership theory and

practice (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995). In essence, theory has failed to

acknowledge the different values of women and remains largely rooted in

a male perspective. Hall (1993) concludes that:

> There is relatively little to date in research about women managers
> that can be used to challenge theories of educational management
> or lead to their reconceptualization to include both women and
> men...Research is needed that challenges traditional stereotypes...
> The association of management and masculinity has not been
> established as a fact yet is treated as such, with negative
> consequences for women in education. (p. 43)

Women's leadership

Whatever the leadership approach one adopts, there is little doubt that

women have a great deal to contribute to the changing practice of

educational leadership in response to the radical global restructuring of

education (Cubillo & Brown, 2003). There are many different approaches

to leadership. The approach that is usually associated with women is that of collaborative leadership.

Collaborative leadership as effective leadership

Women are seen by some as a new source of leadership talent because of their "caring and sharing propensities, their communicative and organizational skills and their capacity to listen to and empathize with the needs of others" (Blackmore, 2002, p. 59). The collaborative and participatory style of management is the style most strongly identified with women leaders (Coleman, 2002; Court, 1994; Hall, 1993, 1996; Morris, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1987; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). For example using aspects of Bem's research with reference to the Sex – role Inventory, Coleman (2002) asked participants to choose adjectives for themselves which they identified as describing their leadership styles. She found that the single most popular term to indicate a style of management used by both male and female principals matched her term, collaborative.

From this and other categories, Coleman (2002) concluded that this suggested a favoured style of management for both men and women consistent with adjectives most often chosen from the feminine paradigm. In an earlier study, Evetts (1994) found that from the analysis of the responses from principals regarding which leadership characteristics each individual had, there was a great deal of variation amongst both the women and men. Nevertheless, Evetts (1994) noted that some of the male principals emphasized collegial relations and participatory forms of

leadership in schools, while some of the female principals were inclined towards hierarchy and authority in management. This is similar to research conducted by Grace (1995) in which analysis of the accounts of the twenty four women principals showed that, in their view, some men and women operated relatively democratic and participatory decision – making regimes and some men and women did not. Nevertheless, Grace (1995) has noted that while there are emerging patterns of gender – power relations in school leadership, there is great potential in contradictions for women in leadership. As Grace (1995) explains:

> On the one hand, a growing literature of leadership and management studies... celebrates the virtues of consultative, non – hierarchical and participative decision – making...styles of leadership...which women have particular sensitivities...on the other hand, however, an oppositional trend towards hierarchy, line – management and executive action can also be discerned. (p. 186)

This view is also shared by Blackmore (1999) who argued that to be caring and sharing can also set women up for failure because "the covert message of the system [education] is of greater efficiencies, strong and hard management, entrepreneurial and not educative leadership" (p. 168).

In spite of such findings, feminist research on women in leadership provides evidence that many women principals are caring, collaborative, communicative, consultative, communitarian, consensus oriented and student and curriculum focused (Blackmore, 2002; Court, 1994, 2005). However Blackmore (1999, 2002), Coleman (2002, 2005) Evetts (1994), and Grace (1995) have noted that not all women lead in a certain way. As is elaborated by Blackmore (1999):

> The discourse about women's styles of leadership does not attend enough to the range of political differences amongst women. Many women administrators eschew any notion of discrimination, while others point to it as central to their experience; some women are politically committed to gender equity, while others do not see gender reform as their responsibility. There are women who are controlling and women who are facilitating and women who are both. (p. 60)

As Strachan (2007) noted, this difference in the attitudes of women towards styles of leadership shows "that women are not passive observers but active in generating ways that they can work which best suits the way they choose to operate in, or out of, educational leadership" (para. 20).

Hence, the leadership style that one adopts may be influenced by the organizational needs of the institution and the socio – cultural context (Evetts, 1994) but also that the leadership style has to suit the needs of the school in the current economic and political climate. Soobrayan (1998) noted that, the challenge for women who are now beginning to achieve positions of leadership is whether to transform themselves to fit into a preconceived role or to redefine leadership in terms of their experiences and ways of thinking. Morris (1998) sums this up when she states that good educational leadership:

> Needs to be seen not as a polarisation between perceived masculine and feminine leadership styles, but as an integrated holistic concept of management, that allows for the incorporation of behaviours characterised as both masculine and feminine. (p. 101)

It is interesting to note that research on women leaders in developing countries, has highlighted that women prefer a collaborative style of leadership (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Hasibuan - Sedyono, 1998; Morris, 1998; Morriss, Guat Tin, & Coleman, 1999; Soobrayan, 1998).

Barriers and constraints

There are some barriers that have been discussed that have contributed to women's under - representation in educational leadership. Those barriers and constraints that are mentioned here are linked to personal and the organizational structures.

Self confidence

Writers have investigated several theories which have considered internal barriers faced by women who have attempted to gain formal leadership roles. These include a lack of self – confidence, lack of competitiveness and a fear of failure (Banks, 1995; Bell & Chase, 1993). One area highlighted in relation to career planning and development is that women lack self – confidence (Coleman, 2002; 2005; Shakeshaft, 1987). However, Shakeshaft (1987) argues that the self – confidence of women have been measured by male defined standards of self – confidence where:

> Women have self – confidence in areas in which they have experience (private sphere functions), whereas men have self – confidence in areas in which they have been allowed to participate (public sphere functions). Therefore low self – confidence might be viewed then, as a product of a system that keeps women separated from experiences that would help build confidence in the public sphere. (p.84)

In addition, there is an assumption that women are not in leadership because they do not want to be, which according to Shakeshaft (1993), is

a myth as studies about female aspiration level do not support this. This notion of self – confidence is reiterated in a study by Cubillo and Brown (2003), where it was found that women's so – called lack of confidence was more to do with unfamiliarity with the territory than a lack of faith in their abilities. However, studies by Coleman (2002, 2005) have revealed that this lack of confidence is linked to the fact that the women have felt they were in an environment where leaders are expected to be male or they would be compared unfavourably with men. In spite of that, possibly one of the most surprising findings is the number of women principals who have simply drifted into principalship. This lack of planning is linked in some cases to a lack of confidence in their own ability. This sentiment is echoed by Chisholm (2001) although her participants attributed their lack of confidence in their leadership to issues of race and gender.

Stereotypes

Stereotyping in educational leadership centres on the belief that there is a natural order portrayed by male leadership and female subordination (Coleman, 2002). The most common stereotype is that relating to gender roles (Banks, 1995; Bell & Chase, 1993; Coleman, 1996; 2002; Cubillo & Brown, 2003). Gender role stereotypes arise in response to the sexual division of labour and occupational segregation in the home and workplace. Evetts (1994) notes that gender stereotypes have come to constitute normative beliefs which people tend to conform to. Because of this, the taken – for – grantedness of the division of labour in which men

administer and women teach is evident in educational research
(Blackmore, 1993).

Women are also stereotyped into caring roles. The identification of women
with particular attributes such as caring links them with the emotional and
irrational and implicitly inferior status of such female work (Coleman, 2002)
which reflects notions of the domestic or private sphere. Blackmore (1989)
and Ozga (1993) have argued that this stereotype has cast women into a
deficit position. Blackmore (1989) explains:

> This [stereotype] implies the need and precondition for women to
> take on masculine attributes of leadership (rationality, aggression,
> the ability to control and dominate) in order to succeed; it accepts
> the hierarchical relationships in schools and state educational
> bureaucracies as necessary and given; it defines success/relevant
> experience in male terms (occupation, hierarchy, expertise). (p.
> 103)

However, Schmuck, (cited in Cubillo & Brown, 2003) warned of the
dangers of subscribing to a deficit model. Instead of training or educating
women to be like men, they should be valued for what they might bring to
the field of educational leadership. Coleman (2002) pointed out that there
is a positive stereotype of identifying women as nurturing, caring and
people oriented. This is because we are in a time when "emotional
intelligence is being recognized as an essential component of leadership
and management" (Coleman, 2002, p. 98) and therefore this stereotype
might even be thought to give women the advantage in terms of
leadership style. Schmuck (cited in Coleman, 2002) argued that the
socially constructed meaning of gender stereotypically classifies women in
subordinate roles and identifies them with the domestic arena which is

often seen as inferior to the public arena – the proper place of men. These stereotypes identify women as less worthy or qualified than men to lead and manage (Coleman, 2002; Shakeshaft, 1993).

Furthermore, research has also shown that women are expected to exhibit behaviours associated with sex – role stereotypes in order to be viewed as women (Blackmore, 1999; Skrla et al., 2000). As Blackmore (1999) argued, there is the overt message that women must continue to be "feminine, sensitive and caring, otherwise they are not seen to be good leaders or good women" (p. 168). Yet as Banks (1995), Blackmore (1999) and Coleman (2002) have asserted, these very behaviours are often seen as being adverse to effective leadership. Nevertheless, Blackmore (1989) observed that there was little empirical evidence to support the connection between certain traits and good leadership. There are also examples of stereotypes that relate to the identification of the female with domesticity and the stereotypical prejudice about an unmarried woman. Coleman (2002) noted with interest that there are no equivalent sets of stereotypes about men. Nevertheless, gender and role stereotypes continue because according to Marshall (1984), we continue to create and sustain them through some actions and practices. In saying that, stereotypes should not be used as an excuse to exclude women from leadership.

Discrimination

The literature shows that discrimination plays a role in women's under – representation in educational leadership (Bell & Chase, 1993; Coleman,

2002, 2005; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1993). The types of discrimination examined here are those associated with gender and race. The discrimination that women have experienced can appear during selection the process especially from the old boys network, even when they have acquired leadership positions.

Women have experienced discrimination during selection for leadership roles and during their leadership. This discrimination may be overt or covert (Shakeshaft, 1987). Overt or direct discrimination based on gender can be when someone is not employed simply on the grounds of their gender (Coleman, 2002). This has often been the case for women (Bell & Chase, 1993; Coleman, 1996, 2002, 2005; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1993; Skrla et al, 2000) who have faced blatantly sexist attitudes, especially during the selection and hiring process. For example, in a study by Coleman (2002) members of the selection panel made astonishingly personal comments on the appearance of the women candidates. As one woman recalled "Going for a deputy post, I was told I was only at this stage in my career because of my long legs and pretty face - I had just turned 40!" (Coleman, 2002, p.43).

Studies by Coleman (2005) and Schmuck and Schubert (1995) found that there were women who said they did not experience discrimination but these women later went on to contradict themselves by giving actual examples of being discriminated against. Along with Shakeshaft (1993) and Skrla et al., (2000), these writers noted that there is a tendency for some women to deny or ignore and may not even recognize examples of

discrimination. This is disturbing given that in these countries (the USA and Britain) equal opportunities for women are promoted through government legislation and private companies' policies (Coleman, 2002; Hall, 1996; Skrla et al., 2000; Shakeshaft, 1993). Nevertheless, studies have shown that even though legislations are in place, examples of direct discrimination still occur in developed as well as in developing countries (Bush & Moloi, 2007; Coleman, 2002, 2005; Hall, 1996; Hasibuan - Sedyono, 1998).

Although research does not support the notion that women's work suffers from family responsibilities, it is believed by some men in positions of power that these added responsibilities adversely affect women's ability to lead (Shakeshaft, 1987). This is supported by Coleman's (2002) study where the largest single group of comments were related to "the presumption that the head teacher would have the major responsibility for childcare and that her husband's job would take precedence and so consequently she would be less likely than a man to do the job well" (p. 43).

Women come from different races, have different cultures and so have experienced different cultural contexts. In light of the focus of this research, attention will now be shifted to women of colour to see how these different identities have contributed to discrimination. Women of colour experience discrimination based on two factors:-race and gender (Bell & Chase, 1993; Chisholm, 2001; DuBois & Ruiz, 1990; Growe & Montgomery, 2000). In her research, Chisholm (2001) found that black and white women, agreed that race and gender were at the root of a

perceived lack of confidence in their leadership. This double bind

(Blackmore, 1999) is also known as the dual barrier (Doughty, 1980; Ortiz,

1982). Doughty (1980) posits that African American women may be doubly

challenged by the dual barriers of gender and race:

> If hired, the black woman administrator and the educational system
> must realize that the duality status will bring dissonance. (A typical
> dictionary definition of dissonance is explained as discord or lack of
> harmony). The status quo will not be the same. Disequilibrium will
> occur. Some colleagues, subordinates or super subordinates will
> respond negatively to reporting and taking orders from a black
> boss. Others will respond to the gender of the person, and still
> others will respond negatively to both. (p. 170)

Doughty (1980) and Ortiz (1982) conclude that while women and

minorities encounter barriers to leadership positions, minority women

confront both gender and racial barriers.

In a comparative study of black and minority ethnic leaders (BMEL) in

England and a study of cross – boundary leadership in Gauteng province

in South Africa, Bush and Moloi, (2007) found that discrimination based on

race was still evident. This discrimination was shown in attitudes towards

the participants and also during the recruitment and selection process

where 36.2% of the English interviewees refer to racial or ethnic factors

inhibiting their career progress (Bush & Moloi, 2007). This was also

apparent in a study by Morris (1998) where one female participant who

was the most qualified for the job of principal was given the position of vice

– principal instead, because the selection committee felt that the

community would object on grounds of gender and ethnicity. In this case,

this may have been an assumption made by the selection committee that

the community would object as they had not been consulted.

Selection procedures

The selection procedures in place for those aspiring to leadership positions can be a hindrance for women. This area needs to be investigated as one continuous process which includes the recruitment selection and the appointment process (Bush & Middlewood, 2005) although each clearly involves a different stage. In Britain, local education authorities have wide discretion in developing their own selection process, which usually involves advertising, applying, selecting and interviewing (Evetts, 1994).

The literature suggests that in some countries, staff are nominated or appointed to their organizations by Education Authorities (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). This is also the case in the Solomon Islands where the Education Authorities are responsible for the appointment of staff. In other countries like New Zealand, the Board of Trustees are responsible for the selection (Brooking, 2005). Brooking (2005) noted that while there were selection processes in place, they often had little to do with the final decision. This study found that there was a high degree of discrimination against women by some boards and a preference for male principals. In schools where women were appointed principals, this was because no suitable male candidate had applied. Brookings' study (2005) revealed that:

> The effects of the invisible components in the politics of selection are more detrimental to women because there can be an understated preference for male principals and women are appointed to fill gaps where there is a lack of suitable male candidates. (p. 135)

This is similar to a study in Australia. In their report based on an investigation in two Australian states into principal selection, Blackmore et al. (2006) noted that there is a covert rule of appointing also known as the covert rule of incumbency. This is when candidates are appointed because they have already done a good job so they should be re - appointed. While this pattern of selection discourages new applicants, Blackmore et al. (2006) found that selection process can be used as a counter practice; that of appointing women as assistant principals or principals which can then lead to later success in gaining the job. However, the authors also noted that this same pathway is also open to the old boys network who take advantage and appoint candidates that they prefer (Blackmore et. al, 2006). When this happens, women may not be considered as candidates by the old boys network. This then disadvantages women who are not selected.

Male gate keepers and the old boys' network dominate interview panels. This can be seen when one looks at the interview panel for selection of principals in Australia (Blackmore, 1993; 1999; Blackmore et al., 2006), New Zealand (Brooking, 2005) and the United Kingdom (Coleman, 2002; 2005; Evetts, 1994; Hall, 1996). This has a huge impact on the selection process especially in disadvantaging women. This is evident in a research by Coleman (2005) informed by data from a survey of women and men secondary school principals in the United Kingdom in 2004, where it was still reported by both men and women principals that the selection panels which were predominantly male, appeared to have an innate preference for men in leadership positions.

The literature suggests that there are negative attitudes towards women by those who appoint and hire. These attitudes, according to Shakeshaft (1993), constitute a major barrier to female advancement in educational leadership. Negative attitudes also extend to when women are in leadership positions. Harris, Smith and Hale (2002) found in their interviews with sixteen female principals who described situations where parents who were unhappy with circumstances at school approached them as though they were easier to intimidate than male principals.

Despite the overwhelming evidence on discrimination in the area of selection, a study conducted by Hall (1996) in the United Kingdom, indicated a more open and egalitarian attitude on the part of selection panels. However, this indication of change in practice, Coleman (2002) argues, does not support surveys of men and women principals at the turn of the twentieth century which "clearly shows that a majority of women and a proportion of men judge that gender stereotypes, almost exclusively relating to women, still play an important part in the selection of the head teachers for our secondary schools" (p. 47). This sentiment was also echoed by research participants in Blackmore et al. (2006), who believed that women, in general still "faced an element of disadvantage as leadership positions continued to be perceived by conservative panels as belonging to men" (p. 312). Furthermore, even when women are well qualified "the self – perpetuating nature of the organization, its ethos and structures still limit women's chances of promotion" (Adler et al., 1993, p. 25). One question that needs to be asked is how this all relates to

developing countries and in particular the island nations of the Pacific like the Solomon Islands?

The next section examines literature on women leaders within developing countries. Oplatka (2006) noted that there is no clear definition of developing countries. For the purpose of this research, developing countries are those countries outside of Europe and North America that were colonized by Europeans before gaining Independence. Their economies are more agricultural – based, and are usually characterized by high birth rates, high mortality rates, high levels of poverty and large gaps between rich and poor. Oplatka (2006) highlighted that although these countries share some similarities, they have many differences in terms of culture, political system, economy and religion.

In the next section, I investigate existing literature on women in developing countries. In particular, I examine their representation in senior leadership positions, the influence of culture and traditions of societies on women's access and participation in educational leadership. I also highlight family responsibilities and how this impacts on women leaders in developing countries.

Women's educational leadership within developing countries
The literature on women leaders within developing countries is sparse. The knowledge base in educational leadership has developed mainly in Anglo American countries, so they lack context, specificity and relevance because educational systems in developing countries may not be similar

(Walker & Dimmock, 2002). This can also be said about research on women in developing countries and their leadership experiences. We know very little about the lives and careers of women in educational leadership within developing countries (Oplatka, 2006).

In developing countries, women are leaders and, sometimes, women are among the most oppressed (Drake & Owen, 1998). As identified by Drake and Owen (1998), in developing countries, women are "cast as both bringers of change and guardians of the old cultures" (p. 1). For some developing countries, it is considered important to educate women, to bring about advances which will supposedly improve the economic health and living of the developing countries. At the same time it is through women that family values and traditions are transmitted and maintained.

Advancements in the condition of women have been made in some developing countries (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Drake & Owen, 1998; Hasibuan – Sedyono, 1998). For example, some countries such as Zimbabwe have set and progressed towards targets which increase women's representation at all but the highest levels of government, administration and public sector services. This involved a strategy that abandoned an old principle of seniority. Promotion was automatically considered first "for those with most experience at the previous rung of the promotion ladder…this strategy enabled women to rise through the ranks" (Drake & Owen, 1998, p. 3).

In Uganda, similar strategies were used (Brown & Ralph, 1996). One such strategy was the sensitization programme which aimed to increase the

numbers of girls and women in education (Brown & Ralph, 1996). This programme is run at village level and is aimed at demonstrating to parents the benefits of educating their girl children as well as boys.

In principle, most countries in the developing world are committed to eliminating gender inequalities in education (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Morris, 1998; Strachan, 2002) but in reality progress is slow. Some of the reasons outlined for this slow progress are a lack of financial and human resources, ad hoc planning and policy development and difficulties in data collection (Strachan, 2002). The difficulties with the collection of data, is cited by many researchers as an issue when conducting research on women in developing countries (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Pheko, 2008; Brown & Ralph, 1996; Coleman et al, 1998; Jayaweera, 1997; Strachan, 2007).

According to Strachan (2007), "women in developing countries face barriers to accessing leadership not experienced to the same extent or in the same way by women in developed countries" (Para. 22). This is true especially when looking at the different contexts that women are in and the cultures that are embedded in those societies.

Women's representation in senior leadership positions
The under-representation of women in senior leadership positions has been well documented in the developed world. In the primary and secondary schools in developing countries, women are well represented as teachers (Coleman et al, 1998; Morris, 1998; Strachan, 2002), but not

as leaders. For example in Vanuatu, a gender analysis of the education sector revealed that women in Vanuatu are grossly under- represented in principals' positions (Strachan, 2002). While 50.1% of the primary teachers were women, only 30.4% were principals (Strachan, 2002). This under – representation really shows in the secondary division where 38.4% were women teachers and only a meagre eight percent were in principals' posts. This is similar in many developed countries (Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 2002; 2005; Hall, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987).

The exception is Nigeria where a good percentage (45.5%) of secondary school principals, are women. This, according to Aladejana and Aladejana (2005) is due to the fact that "at these levels, teachers' promotions are en – mass based on the year of graduation" (p. 72). However the story is different for university and other institutions where the promotion to most leadership positions is mostly by appointment after interview and/or by elections (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005). Tertiary institutions in South – West Nigeria are dominated by male leadership so decisions are also dominated by men. This male dominance has led to the under - representation of women leaders in universities because the decision makers do not choose women (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005).

Influence of a society's culture

The culture and traditions of a society have an effect on women in leadership. Many of these effects tend to be negative in nature. These effects can happen at the "'macro - socio - political level, the meso

organizational level and the micro level which concerns the individual herself"(Cubillo & Brown, 2003, p. 281). In a study by Hasibuan–Sedyono (1998) on Indonesian women leaders, it was found that discrimination against women is due mainly to the influence of traditional social attitudes and customs. These norms are similar in many developing countries (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998; Oplatka, 2006; Pollard, 2000; Strachan et al., 2007; Vaa, 2006). They stem from the cultural, social and religious beliefs and values that define femininity in terms of marriage, housekeeping and child – raising. The cultural and social structure that separates the society into male and female arenas is also a major obstacle to women's access to leadership positions (Oplatka, 2006). Leadership positions are perceived as belonging to male members of the society and women should refrain from attempting to attain this kind of position (Hasibuan–Sedyone, 1998; Oplatka, 2006).

The influence of tradition and culture also has been given as an explanation as to why women are under-represented in leadership positions. According to Strachan (2007) in the Melanesian context, "culture in Melanesia significantly impacts on females' ability to participate in education and decision – making at all levels, including educational leadership" (Para 25). Similar sentiments are also raised by Drayton and Cole–Georges (cited in Morris, 1998) about the situation in the Carribean. They suggest that this under- representation of women in decision making positions "exists alongside an education system and a culture which perpetuates stereotypical views of male and female roles" (p. 97). In China, research by Coleman et al. (1998) has noted that the influence of

culture and tradition stresses both achievement for the male in academic and career terms and the domestic role of the female. Coleman et al. (1998) found that:

> There was a conscious admission that women might sacrifice aspects of their career, not only to fulfil their domestic role, but also because of the need to support their husband, and for them to be seen as having a supportive and therefore subordinate role. (p. 148)

In some developing countries, women's progress into senior leadership positions has been slow and irregular (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Coleman et al., 1998; Morris, 1998; Oplatka, 2006; Strachan, 2002). The exception is Indonesia, where Hasibuan–Sedyono (1998) claimed that one could "hear the sounds of the shattering of glass ceiling" (p. 83). This is probably because since 1945, various initiatives have led to improvements in women's role in society (Hasibuan-Sedyono, 1998). Although this does not necessarily mean that these women have it easy as they do face difficulties as Hasibuan–Sedyono (1998) explained:

> …women working outside their home is still new in Indonesia, so society follows the movements of career women with considerable interest…with a magnifying glass, quick to judge whether the ways women conduct their working lives are appropriate within existing norms and whether they properly maintain their positions as caring and nurturing wives and mothers. (p. 87)

A recent study in Pakistan (Kirk, 2004) noted that cultural and religious beliefs continue to have an effect on women. This was shown by the lack of power that Pakistani women principals have. The study noted that while most of the non – government schools in the country had women principals, the power of the governing boards is predominantly in the hands of men (Kirk, 2004).

Male dominance in developing countries

One other factor influencing women's difficulties in accessing leadership roles in developing countries is the male dominance of every aspect of the society. In most developing countries, the society is essentially male dominated and thus, in most cases, males are the gate keepers to accessing education and leadership positions (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Brown & Ralph, 1996; Coleman et al, 1998; Kirk, 2004; Strachan et al., 2007). Because of male gate keeping, women are marginalized and generally excluded from aspects of the society such as education. For example in Uganda, one factor which had an adverse effect on girls' education in general was because of the patriarchal society and other social and cultural factors, which see many parents in Uganda preferring to educate boys rather than girls (Brown & Ralph, 1998). This is the same in Melanesian societies, which I will elaborate on later. However Jayaweera (1997) noted that:

> While patriarchal values are reflected in the almost universal acceptance of a male head of household in official documentation and in public perceptions, it is claimed that in practice joint decision – making... is more prevalent than is recognized in relatively egalitarian societies in the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka. (p. 422)

Although Jayaweera (1997) makes the above claim, she does not give specific examples to support such a point.

Family responsibilities

In many developing countries, women tend to take overall responsibility for domestic tasks and childcare. For married women leaders in developing

countries, family responsibilities have a significant effect on their careers as leaders. As highlighted in a study on Chinese women in management by Coleman et al. (1998), it is believed by some men that the dual role that women play, that of leader and a wife will affect their ability to progress in a career, irrespective of their potential to lead and quality of leadership. The women in this study stressed the difficulty of trying to balance all the different aspects of their roles with one another. They also highlighted that it was difficult to pursue a career as well as support family commitments especially when men do not do any housework. This view is similar to those expressed by South African women principals (Moorosi, 2007), particularly the married and younger women who were still able to bear children.

However, in some parts of the developing world, this is not the case. The women in Indonesia and Trinidad and Tobago in studies by Hasibuan–Sedyono (1998) and Morris (1998), -said that family responsibilities had not impeded their career developments because they had spouses who supported them as well as support from extended family networks. This may relate to the women's age as Moorosi (2007) found in her study. Moorosi (2007) found that women, who had older children, did not have the difficulties experienced by the young and married women.

Nevertheless, the road to leadership success is fraught with difficulties imposed by traditional cultural values. Hasibuan–Sedyono (1998) noted that women leaders in Indonesia still have to cope with conflicting demands which arise from their activities as leader, wife and mother. For example, women in this particular study had to wake at five o'clock in the

morning to prepare the food that their husbands and children like. This was done to substantially reduce the guilt they felt about working long hours outside the home.

The Melanesian context

In this section, I explore the literature on women's experiences in Melanesia. This is important because of the relevance it has for this particular research. In the context of this study, the Melanesian countries from which literature has been derived from are Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In particular, I examine the traditional and changing roles of Melanesian women, and their participation in education, decision – making and educational leadership. Violence against women is noted to show how this issue impedes women's access to, and participation in, education and educational leadership.

Women's ascribed roles

For women across the Pacific, their roles in societies are similar (Vaa, 2006). They combine the roles of housewife, mother, caregivers and nurturers of children, family breadwinner and backbone of the kinship group-, be it family or clan (Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Pollard, 2000; Tuivaga, 1988; Vaa, 2006). As part of their socialization, men and women learn and practice a "set of scripts and must remain within their feminine and masculine roles" (Kilavanwa, 2004, p. 10). From an early age, girls assist

their mothers both at home and in the gardens (Pollard, 2000; Tongamoa, 1988). Also from an early age, the girls are taught how they should interact with men. They are required to respect and take care of their brothers and they are also not permitted to answer back to their male relatives but must do as they are told (Pollard, 2000). As Pollard (2000) has identified, indirectly, the girls "are taught to accept the traditional female roles of subordination, and subservience to males" (p. 4).

The crucial role that women play in Melanesian society has been highlighted by certain writers (Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Tuivaga, 1988), especially in the "maintenance, continuation and survival of the community, family and individuals" (Cox & Aitsi, 1988, p. 24). Yet, women are only seen and not heard. In spite of this, women do not see their roles and status as degrading (Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Kilavanwa, 2004; Pollard, 2000; Tuivaga, 1988). Instead as Tongamoa (1988) noted, "the women perceived their ascribed and traditional roles and responsibilities as being divinely sanctioned and unchangeable, to be carried out for the benefit of everybody in the family and community" (p. 89). Nevertheless, it would be interesting to find out whether this view is still held today especially since the women in today's societies are now exposed to western influences through formal education, mass media and technologies.

The changing roles of women

In recent times and since the impact of western culture, women's role in the society has undergone changes (Tongamoa, 1988). The arrival of

missionaries in Melanesia had an immense impact on the roles of women. As Tuivaga (1988) noted, "the missionaries were working in a social context where the roles and status of men and women were ascribed and the division of labour between sexes was clearly defined" (p. 4). In addition, the missionaries introduced new skills such as sewing and other domestic skills which grew in importance at the expense of the traditional subsistence roles of women in agriculture and fishing (Pollard, 2000; Tuivaga, 1988). However, as Boseto (2000) noted, while the missionaries introduced Christianity, they also promoted a sense of western cultural superiority. As highlighted by Pollard (2000), "this was why under Western colonialism, islanders never questioned their rights nor demanded more from society than was traditionally ascribed to them" (p. 19).

Nevertheless, in Melanesian societies today, women's roles and status are being questioned by women. This is in large part due to the increasing number of women who have been exposed to western values through formal education, overseas travel, mass media, and the degree of exposure to modern technologies (Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Pollard, 2000; Tongamoa, 1988; Tuivaga, 1988). Some women who are well educated are beginning to question and see the sex division of labour as "unfair, degrading and biased against women" (Tongamoa, 1988, p. 89). This is in contrast to how Melanesians view this labour division as being complementary to the traditional system (Cox & Aitsi, 1988). Complementary or not, such labour division denies equal rights for women, thus continuously affirming their inferiority and subordination to men (Tongamoa, 1988).

While women's role and status in Melanesian societies are undergoing change, the pace is slower than in some other developing countries. As highlighted by Tongamoa (1988):

> This is because of the limited influence of western civilisation due to the greater isolation of the Western part of the region from the rest of the world…hence, its people are still strongly oriented to traditional culture in their attitudes and values. (p.90)

Interestingly, Pollard (2000) also commented that even though women's role and status are undergoing rapid change, there is still reluctance among the women themselves to abandon tradition entirely. This view is similar to those expressed by Papua New Guinea (PNG) women leaders (Kilavanwa, 2004). In Kilavanwa's study (2004), findings revealed that the ascribed roles of women are still very influential on women today in PNG; where all women regardless of whether they are educated or not, "still have a link to the traditional social norms even though their work place, environment and organizations are based on western systems" (p. 91). The roles of women cannot be isolated from family responsibilities because the intricate social network is interwoven with all aspects and issues of communal life. As mentioned in previous sections, women's roles include being a wife, mother, caregivers and nurturers of children, a teacher and the backbone of the kinship group (Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Pollard, 2000; Vaa, 2006). Boseto (2002) explains:

> Women are trusted to supervise and implement most household duties in relation to the preparation and distribution of food from the gardens, caring for the comfort of every member and visitor and teaching the young girls on a day to day basis. (p. 8)

Even in today's society where more and more women are getting paid jobs, they are still expected to carry on with their roles at home. This has led to women "playing double roles at home and at work which can be exhausting and adds pressure on them but they have to somehow manage it because they have to do it every day" (Kilavanwa, 2004, p. 65).

Violence against women

Violence can impact on women's access to educational leadership. Melanesian women experience very high levels of violence. This is because of the culture that sees men as being superior and women as subordinates which has resulted in limitations on women's freedom, movement, opportunities and choices (Boseto, 2000; Brouwer, Harris & Tanaka, 1998; Robertson cited in Strachan, 2007). When women try to venture outside their tightly prescribed cultural roles, they face very strong opposition, especially from men (Donald, Strachan & Taleo, 2002). This often results in violence against them (Kilavanwa, 2004). Because of this, women's opportunities for participating in leadership are significantly limited (Strachan, 2007).

The tribal tensions and warfare such as those seen in Solomon Islands and PNG have also resulted in violence against women and children (Strachan, 2007) where women are often targets of revenge for tribal fights and rape is quite common in these situations (Garap, 2004). Even when this has happened, people are reluctant to acknowledge and talk about such issues. This is because of "fears of reprisal from perpetrators

and their families, shame, trauma and cultural taboos" (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 22). Women do not feel free to discuss incidents of physical violence. Nevertheless, Robertson (cited in Strachan, 2007) has noted that: "even though PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), there is little assistance for women who experience violence…" (Para.40). This violence, has contributed to their limited access to education, decision – making and educational leadership opportunities. Pollard (2000) commented that this can also be viewed as a result of the socialization process "where men are taught to be outspoken, aggressive, strong and authoritative and women are conditioned to be submissive and silent and so they do not retaliate when they are hit by their brothers or husbands" (p. 38).

Education

In Melanesia, female participation in education is highest at the primary level but at more advanced levels, the numbers start to drop off. Generally more males than females are represented at every educational level (Brouwer et al, 1998) because opportunities for education are largely taken by men. Also because education in Melanesia is not compulsory (Strachan, 2007) females access to education is lower because of the privileging of males' education; where males are encouraged to pursue further education and girls are not seriously encouraged (Brouwer et al., 1998; Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Strachan, 2007; Tuivaga, 1988). As Pollard (2000) posits "the inequality of participation in higher education does not

necessarily reflect official policy or bias in favour of males; rather it is the consequence of the people's traditional world view, which includes the notion that a woman's place is at home" (p. 6). As such, in Melanesian countries, despite reform policies and planning, women are still disadvantaged and education is neither accessible nor equitable for women and girls (Kilavanwa, 2004; Strachan, 2007; Strachan et al., 2007).

In order to address this issue Pollard (2000) suggested that basic changes in some of the fundamental attitudes, values and beliefs are required before full gender equality can be realised. One such change may be in the perceptions that parents have about allowing girls to attend schools. Parents need to be aware of the benefits of educating girls. Strachan (2007) also raises similar sentiments and suggests that:

> While it is important to preserve those aspects of culture that help sustain and enrich people, it is also important to change those aspects that limit people's opportunities based on their gender. Both males and females need to be equally valued in all aspects of their lives, including education. (para. 35)

Women in educational leadership positions

Obtaining statistical data on the representation of women in educational leadership positions in Melanesia is very difficult because sex – disaggregated data is not systematically collected (Strachan, 2007). Vanuatu is the only country that has carried out a complete gender analysis of the education sector (Strachan, 2002) where it has found that particularly in the secondary sector, Ni Vanuatu women are grossly under-represented as principals (Strachan, 2007). The same is true for the

Solomon Islands where a survey conducted in 2006 by the Planning, Coordination and Research Unit of the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education showed that out of the total of 103 secondary school principals, only three are female, in other words, 2.9%. (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2006) In addition, according to the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development's (MEHRD) *Annual Report 2004*, it showed that there were more males than females employed in MEHRD and the more senior the position, the fewer females (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2004). This is also true for PNG (Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Kilavanwa, 2004) where women are employed in junior posts whilst men predominate in the most senior positions.

The under- representation of women in educational leadership positions begins with gaining access to education (Strachan, 2007). Because girls' access to education is limited, this may create a flow on effect that impedes the participation of women economically and in decision making at all levels in the society (Brouwer et al., 1998; United Nations, 2007; Strachan, 2007) including educational leadership. According to Kilavanwa (2004), in PNG, women's access to educational leadership is restricted by the "sites of gender inequality (male bias), division of labour, and the restricted access to education and resources" (p. 24). Thus, generally in Melanesia, most principals are male and very few are women (Strachan, 2007), as can be seen in Vanuatu where "gender plays a more significant role than ethnicity in the under representation of women in leadership as

98 percent of the population are indigenous Melanesian" (Strachan et al., 2007, p. 37).

Melanesian women and educational leadership

Literature on Melanesian women in educational leadership is currently very scarce. There is some literature on leadership in Solomon Islands (Malasa, 2007; Sanga & Walker, 2005) but the attendance to women is very marginal, the exception being Pollard's (2006) work. This is also the case in PNG where Kilavanwa (2004) has identified that writing about women's leadership is minimal in current PNG leadership literature.

Malasa (2007) identified that there has been no research on educational leadership in the Solomon Islands and so there has been no research on women in educational leadership in the Solomon Islands. For example, Malasa (2007) looked at issues inhibiting effective leadership in Solomon Islands secondary schools. While it was informative and highlighted important issues inhibiting effective leadership, it did so in a very general way and assumed that the views shared were homogenous. It did not address how women in leadership positions in secondary schools effective leadership.

Similarly, Sanga and Walker (2005) give a very detailed account of what leadership should be in a Solomon Islands context. While they explain and give suggestions on how people can be good leaders within their own organizations, again this work does not necessarily address leadership from women's perspective. Only very few mentions are given to women,

frequently as a group, such as women leaders and women's groups. This implies that all women leaders lead the same way and all women's groups lead and think the same; although as already mentioned in previous sections, this is not necessarily true.

Therein lies the strength of Kilavanwa's (2004) research in PNG and Strachan et. al.'s (2007) work with Ni Vanuatu women. Because their focus is solely on women in educational leadership settings, this allows us to see into the experiences of the women; one that is unique to women in Melanesia- especially the influence of the cultural context on women leaders in schools. For example, Kilavanwa (2004) highlighted that in a big man society such as PNG, men will not accept instructions from a woman because of the dominant role men play at home which conditions them not to take orders from a woman. In the same way, the Ni Vanuatu women spoke about male gate - keeping and how they had felt silenced (Strachan et. al., 2007). Kilavanwa (2004) suggested that the reason why we are still struggling to address gender equity issues is the absence of women's experience and the silence of women's voice in the big man society.

Nevertheless, when looking at women in leadership, there is a tendency to view it based on western ideas. Strachan (2007) raised an important point when she stated, "we must resist imposing western colonial practices and solutions. Those of us that are not 'of' the culture must listen to how women in Melanesia might want that support to manifest" (Para. 66).

Conclusion

In this literature review I have examined literature on factors that have led to the under- representation of women in educational leadership. I began with a look at researching women in order to demonstrate that women come from different backgrounds and have different experiences. I have also shown how the leadership discourse has been based on the views of the male gender, thus assuming that educational leadership and administration and theorising about leadership is gender free when in fact it is not. The male dominance in the society and in the educational leadership literature has impacted on restricting opportunities for women. This dominance has affected women in terms of the barriers that women have faced and continue to face such as issues of self confidence, stereotypes, discrimination based on gender and race and the selection process which has tended to favour men more then women. I have also examined literature on women's leadership, in particular the collaborative style which is most associated with women.

Most importantly, to provide insight into the influence of the socio cultural context, I have examined the limited literature on women educational leaders within developing countries and the impact of society's culture on their access to leadership positions. I have illustrated the story on women in Melanesia and leadership to date, looking at their ascribed roles in society and what have been some of the factors that have contributed to the changing roles of women today. In addition, I have discussed their roles in education, decision - making and in particular educational leadership. In the next chapter, I describe the research design used in this

study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The design of a research project guides the research, in particular the theoretical, analytical and practical underpinnings on which the research will be based. Research is defined for this project as a practice that aims for "active participation by the participant" (Creswell, 2003, p. 181), leading to collaboration between researcher and the researched in the creating and sharing of knowledge (Olesen, 2003) which can be used by others to make a difference (Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994). Therefore, research that is carried out on and about women needs to employ methodologies that put women at the centre of the research (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Lather, 1992; Maynard, 1994; Reinharz, 1992; Roberts, 1988).

This chapter describes the methodologies, research method and ethical considerations. This research is located within qualitative methodology and the feminist research paradigm. The specific focus of this research design has emerged out of the following question:

What are the leadership experiences of women in Solomon Islands secondary schools?

I first explain the theoretical perspectives that cover research methodologies and characteristics of qualitative and feminist research. Then, I focus on the ethical considerations identified as being relevant to

this research project and the research method utilized in the research to gather information.

Research methodology

The way we see the world depends on where and what we are using to see the world. Anderson & Arsenault (1998) elaborates:

> How we see the world is largely a function of where you view it from, what you look at, what lens you use to help you see, what tools you use to clarify your image, what you reflect on and how you report your world to others. (p. 3)

In the context of this research, the qualitative and feminist approach to research is employed. In this section, I look at what qualitative research is. I also examine feminist research and the appropriateness in the context of this study. I will then illustrate the ethical considerations relevant for this research project.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research aims to uncover the lived reality or constructed meanings of the research participants. In general, qualitative research uses methods that gather descriptive accounts of the unique lived experiences of the participants to enhance understandings of particular phenomena (Maynard, 1994; Mutch, 2005). Qualitative research examines people's words and actions in narratives or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It does not belong to a single discipline. This is explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2003):

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Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdiciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions. (p. 11)

As identified by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) qualitative research is made up of multiple methodologies. Creswell (2003) expands on this and identifies that the methods of data collection are growing and they "increasingly involve active participation by participants and sensitivity to the participants in the study" (p. 181).

Therefore, the researcher looks for involvement of their participants in data collection and seeks to build rapport and credibility with the individuals in the study. The researcher "systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). This introspection and acknowledgement of biases, values and interests or reflexivity, typifies qualitative research today (Creswell, 2003; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). So, in relation to this research project, the qualitative nature of the study in terms of the method of collecting data, allowed the women to be involved as much as possible. While I acted as facilitator, I also had to be aware of my biases and try as much to reduce it.

Feminist research

One reason for using feminist research methodology was to provide a framework that sought to tackle the invisibility of women (Blackmore, 1989; Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; hooks, 2000; Maynard, 1994; Roberts, 1988) in the literature so as to give them voice. Eichler (1988) stated:

> We have been brought up in an intellectually limited universe. Our dilemma is that all our major concepts, our way of seeing reality, our willingness to accept proof, have been shaped by one dimension – one sex – rather than by two... In order to truly understand our universe, we must create a vantage point that allows us to observe it both for what it is and for what it is not. (p. 2)

Feminist research challenges the legitimacy of research that does not empower the oppressed and otherwise invisible groups – women in particular (Cohen, et al., 2000, hooks, 2000; Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Instead, it seeks to demolish the power relations (typically empowering the white, male – dominated research community), and replace it with a different substantive agenda of "empowerment, voice, emancipation, equality and representation for oppressed groups" (Cohen et al., 2000, p.35).

Similarly, Schmuck, cited in Blackmore (1999), noted that, females and their experiences have been excluded from the development of knowledge. Thus, feminist research seeks to "challenge the passivity, subordination and silencing of women, by encouraging them to speak about their own condition and in so doing to confront the experts and dominant males with the limitations of their own knowledge and comprehension" (Maynard, 1994, p. 23). Reinharz (1992) sets three criteria for fieldwork to be judged feminist. It must:

> Document the lives and activities of women, understand the experiences of women from their own point of view and conceptualize women's behaviours as an expression of social contexts. (p. 51)

This is reinforced by Stanley and Wise (1993) who stated that feminist research "must be concerned with all aspects of social reality and all participants in it…the emphasis on research by women is absolutely fundamental" (p. 31). Feminist research needs to be faithful to the worldview and lived experiences of women. However in saying that, while all feminists are concerned with understanding why inequality between men and women exists, and the reasons for the overall subordination of women, all feminists do not agree on where to find the causes of male domination nor how to combat this and achieve liberation for women (Letherby, 2003).

As an evolving field of study feminist research is constantly being shaped and impacted upon both within its own field and by exterior discourse (Acker, 1994; Blackmore, 1999; Letherby, 2003). While such shifts in the discipline continue to develop, certain feminist research characteristics have been identified by some researchers and practitioners (Blackmore, 1989, 1993, 1999; Eichler, 1988; Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Hall, 1996; Maynard, 1994; Olesen, 2003; Reinharz, 1992; Roberts, 1988, Strachan, 1993). For example, Maynard (1994) states:

> …feminist research is characterised by a concern to record the subjective experiences of doing research…this concern with reflexivity…can mean reflecting upon, critically examining and exploring analytically the nature of the research process…to bring about change in women's lives. (p. 16)

Only by shifting the lens to put the social construction of gender at the centre (Lather, 1995) are we able to move beyond the consideration of women as an add on issue (Blackmore, 1989; Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Letherby, 2003) and instead look at society, culture and world from the standpoint of being female. Olesen (2003) argued that women in "specific contexts are best suited to help develop presentations of their lives and that contexts are located in specific structures and historical and material moments" (p. 365). Feminist research begins with an open – ended exploration of women's experiences, since only from that vantage point is it possible to see how their world is organized (Maynard, 1994) and thus can "reveal the existence of forms of human relationships which may not be visible from the position of the ruling gender" (Eichler, 1988, p.5).

Another key aspect of feminist research is the role of the researcher in the research (Maynard, 1994).especially the use of power. Issues of power are complex in research (Letherby, 2003). Feminist research rejects the hierarchical power relationships which can exist in research (Blackmore, 1989; Cohen et al, 2000; Hall, 1996; Kelly et al., 1994; Maynard, 1994; Olesen, 2003; Roberts, 1988). Instead, it seeks to replace this with a different agenda of "empowerment, voice, emancipation, equality and representation" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 35).The relationships between the subjects and researchers must be reciprocal (Cohen et al, 2000; Maynard, 1994), where attention to representation, voice and text be done in ways that displays representation of the participants (Olesen, 2003). More importantly, the person being studied is "not treated simply as a source of data" (Maynard, 1994, p. 16).

Feminist research not only provides conceptual and analytical direction, but also methodological orientation in emphasizing participatory, collaborative, change – oriented and empowering forms of inquiry (Patton, 2002).These underpinning characteristics provide a very general understanding of feminist research discourse. However, feminist research is highly diverse (Olesen, 2003) and feminist theory is not one, but rather a body of theories which take different political stances (Acker, 1994; Blackmore, 1989; Letherby, 2003; Williams & Sheehan, 2001). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that feminist research has "brought women's voice into and troubled the field of educational administration by challenging the dominance of positivist epistemologies and narrow views of science" (Blackmore, 1999, p. 69).

Validity and trustworthiness

There are different kinds of validity (Cohen et al., 2000). Bell's (1999) general definition is that "validity tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe" (p. 104). This means that research studies must have conclusions that can be trusted. What constitutes valid knowledge in feminist research? This question is of increasing concern to feminists (Maynard, 1994). Validity in feminist research is concerned with the role of experience and the process of interpretation (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). Whose experience should be included in the research and how do you interpret the experiences shared? Stanley and Wise (1993) suggest that:

> …the researcher's own experiences are an integral part of the research and should therefore be described as such…the kind of person that we are, and how we experience the research, all have a crucial impact on what we see, what we do, and how we interpret and construct what is going on. (p. 60)

While researchers bring own experiences into the research process, it is also their responsibility to ensure that the experiences of the participants are conveyed. How a researcher presents oneself to the participants, impacts on data collection.

Researchers need to ensure that they are trusted by the participants as this affects the data collection as well as the interpretation of gathered data. This may also impact on the validity of the research. Wolcott, cited in Hall (1996), suggests nine ways of satisfying validity. They include "talking little and listening a lot; recording accurately; writing early; offering informed interpretations; reporting fully; being candid; seeking feedback; rigorous subjectivity; and writing accurately" (Hall, 1996, p. 20).

As a Solomon Island woman, this makes me an insider to this study. Because I am of the culture, the women would feel free to share their experiences because they know that I too have similar experiences. Therefore my personal "insider status should not be seen as a dangerous bias but a necessary prerequisite condition for the sharing of intimate information" (Strachan, 1993, p. 76**).** This builds trust amongst the participants.

At this point of my research journey, I do not have the courage to identify myself as a feminist because I come from a society that snubs anyone who tries to go against the cultural norms. Regardless, as a woman

interested in women's issues and in working for social justice, I join with other women leaders as partners to address some common but very sensitive issue such as representation, equality, voice, emancipation and empowerment (Cohen et al., 2000)

Using a feminist lens for this research was important. This was because firstly all the participants were women. Secondly, each woman although from the same country, had all originated from different islands which had its own unique customs and cultures that had shaped the lives and experiences of these women. Therefore, it was important that a lens which put women in the centre of the inquiry be used because it allowed them to voice their views and opinions freely, so we can see how they view their own experiences. This enables us to better understand their experiences of leadership as seen from their perspective.

Ethical considerations

Researchers are unconditionally responsible for the integrity of the research process (O'Leary, 2004) and therefore must ensure that "in all steps of the research process, researchers need to engage in ethical practices" (Creswell, 2002, p. 13). According to Bogden and Biklen (1992), ethics in research are the principles of right and wrong that a particular group accepts. However, Kfir and Shamai (2002) noted that, "one should not conclude that ethics is the same as morality or that a code of ethics is a moral code" (p. 135). They also add that researchers should distinguish ethics and law since not everything that is legal is ethical.

There are no hard and fast ethical rules, as by definition ethical matters are contestable (Cohen et al., 2000). When considering ethics in research, there are many codes of ethics that set forth rules that the researcher must adhere to before undertaking research. For example, for this research project, I adhered to the University of Waikato's code of ethics (University of Waikato, 2007) This, code of ethics has guidelines that a researcher must ensure he or she follows so that those he or she is researching are not harmed in any way. These guidelines place emphasis on two issues which have dominated recent guidelines in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Bogden & Biklen, 1992; Cohen et al., 2000). The guidelines attempt to ensure that risks to participants are outweighed by the anticipated benefits of the research; the rights and welfare of participants are adequately protected and that informed consent has been obtained and appropriately documented (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Research involves individuals so the idea of respecting individuals provides an introduction to the importance of conducting research ethically (Creswell, 2002). In the context of my research, issues of informed consent, confidentiality and social and cultural considerations were taken into account.

Informed consent

The most fundamental ethical principle is that of informed consent. This principle forms the basis of the relationship between the researcher and the researched and serves as the foundation on which other ethical considerations can be structured (Cohen et al, 2000). Diener and Crandall (cited in Cohen et al, 2000) define informed consent as "the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would likely influence their decisions" (p.51). The involved participants must be informed and understand the nature and purpose of the research, its risks and benefits and must consent to participate without physical or psychological coercion (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Burns, 2000; Christians, 2005, Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell, 2002; Mutch, 2005).

Christians (2005) and Cohen et al (2000) state that agreement must be based on full and open information. O'Leary (2004) defines this as participants having a full understanding of their requested involvement in a research project, including time commitment, type of activity, topics to be covered, and all physical and emotional risks potentially involved. An informed consent form which describes the purpose of the research, its procedures, risks and discomforts, its benefits and the right to withdraw is signed by participants (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Bogden & Biklen, 1992; Burns, 2000; Mutch, 2005). This makes the situation clear and provides a degree of proof that the person was informed and consented to take part.

For this research project it was of utmost importance that I obtain the informed consent of the women. For all these women, it was their first involvement in a research project. Therefore, it was important that I inform them thoroughly of the nature of the project and their rights pertaining to the research as well. Doing this was appropriate so that the women did not feel nervous about the whole process and in turn were well informed to give their consent to participate without being coerced (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell, 2002).

Ensuring privacy through confidentiality and anonymity

The right to privacy implies that the individual concerned should decide what aspect of their personal information is to be communicated or withheld from others (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998) but also that participants should not be made to feel that their privacy has been invaded or their time improperly used (Mutch, 2005). Diener and Crandall (cited in Cohen et al., 2000) view privacy from three different perspectives, the sensitivity of the information which refers to how personal or potentially threatening the information is that is being collected by the researcher; the setting being observed which may vary from the very private to the completely public and the dissemination of information which concerns the ability to match personal information with the identity of the research participants.

Confidentiality helps protect participants' privacy. It means that even though researchers are able to identify participants from the information given, they agree that in no way will they make such identification public (Christians, 2005; Cohen et al., 2000; O'Leary, 2004). Protecting the identity through confidentiality may involve obtaining permission for subsequent use of data (O'Leary, 2004); deletion of identifiers such as names, addresses or other means of identification from individuals' data (Cohen et al., 2000) and when quoting and reporting information, protecting the identity of the individual (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; O'Leary, 2004). However as Christians (2005) and O'Leary (2004) noted, ensuring confidentiality has proved to be problematic. This is because sometimes it is possible for others to work out who the respondents are, even though pseudonyms and disguised locations are used. This is particularly problematic in countries like Solomon Islands with small populations. I elaborate on this in a later section.

This is where anonymity is useful as it goes a step beyond confidentiality. It involves the protection of participants' identification from even the researcher (Mutch, 2005; O'Leary, 2004). Thus a participant or subject is considered anonymous when "the researcher or another person cannot identify the participant or subject from the information" (Cohen et al., 2000, p.61). Nevertheless, a participant who has agreed to a face-to-face interview cannot expect anonymity but at the most, confidentiality can be promised for the participant by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2000).

The Solomon Islands is a very small country. In the capital where this research was conducted, the notion of confidentiality and anonymity was

quite challenging. This was because of the close knit aspect of the communities where everyone knows everyone else. Because there were only a handful of women who were in these leadership roles, it was easy to identify which woman was the principal or deputy of which school. So when the nature of my research project was known by other colleagues, they all would point me to who was principal or deputy of which school.

Because of the smallness of the community, word spread and eventually everyone knew about my purpose and in so doing the identification of these women was known. Therefore, to limit the risk of anyone identifying these women in the research report, confidentiality must be ensured. The identity of the women must be protected by the deletion of identifiers such as their names, addresses and schools (Cohen et al, 2000). More importantly, protecting the identity of the individual, (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998; O'Leary, 2004) must be at the forefront when quoting and reporting information.

Social and cultural sensitivity

Issues of social and cultural sensitivity (University of Waikato Human Research Ethics, 2007) are ethical considerations that I took into account. This is because although all my participants are women from the Solomon Islands, they are all from different islands which have different norms and cultures. So in conducting this research, I was aware of these different cultures, in particular how the participants would view notions of privacy,

identification and confidentiality (Punch, 1998) from their cultural

perspectives which may impact on the data they give.

Reflexivity in the research

While conducting this research using a feminist research framework, which

advocates for cooperation and collaboration between researcher and

participants (Punch, 1998), I needed to be conscious of my biases

creeping into the research as this may have an effect on the power

balance between the participants and myself. Tolich and Davidson (1999)

emphasised the notion of reflexivity and its importance in research

because it makes researchers aware of the values that they bring to the

research. Researchers must "self – consciously reflect upon what they did,

why they did it, and how they did it" (Tolich & Davidson, 1999, p. 39). The

importance of reflexivity is emphasised in researching feminist issues and

as Letherby (2003) points out, critical reflexivity should be a constant

aspect of feminist research. She states:

> Research from a feminist methodological standpoint involves the
> researcher taking women's experience seriously and being openly
> subjective and reflexive of herself and the research process, which
> includes planning, doing fieldwork and interpreting and presenting
> findings. (2003, p. 69)

As the researcher in this project, I constantly reflected and questioned my

own assumptions pertaining to what I knew as well as my values which

are influenced by my cultural upbringing; one that may be different from

the participants. Therefore, during the interviewing, transcribing and

analysing of the data, I constantly reflected to make sure that I reduce my own biases so as not to distort the data in anyway.

In the following section of this chapter, I examine the use of interviews in qualitative research and explain the benefits of using such an approach in relation to this research.

Interview as a qualitative method of data collection

The semi - structured interview is one of the research methods used to generate data in educational research. There are many definitions of interviews. Creswell (2002) and O'Leary (2004) define interviewing as involving the researcher asking participants/respondents basically open – ended questions and then recording the answers. However, Fontana and Frey (2005) argue that interviewing is not merely the "neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers" (p. 696). Two or more people are involved in the process of interviews and their exchanges lead to the creation of a collaborative effort. This definition relates to Kvale's (1996) comment that interviews are the interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. The purpose of the interview according to Patton (2002) is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. He adds that qualitative interviewing "begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit… we interview to find out what is in or on someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

According to Cohen et al. (2000), the interview allows participants, both interviewer and interviewee to discuss how they interpret the world they live in and to express how they see situations from their own point. In addition, interviews are used to gather descriptive data that is in the subject's own words. This offers researchers' access to people's thoughts, ideas and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Reinharz 1992).

The interactive – relational approach to interviewing

One approach to interviewing is known as the interactive – relational approach (Chirban, 1996). This approach developed by Chirban (1996) was designed to balance the professional responsibility of the researcher with the goal of understanding the interviewee. According to Chirban (1996) six characteristics and qualities of the interviewer – self awareness, authenticity, attunement, posturing in the interaction, engagement of relational dynamics and integration of the researcher's person in the process – can be shaped to achieve the goals of the interview through two components, the interaction and the relationship. Chirban (1996) describes the interaction and relationship as follows:

> The interaction creates a context or setting for the wellspring of engaging an interviewee… the interaction shapes the dynamics, the conscious and unconscious processes, of communication that evolves between the interviewer and interviewee... The relationship provides the vehicle for the interviewer to know the interviewee... Within this relationship, the two people exchange their ideas, beliefs, and feelings that enhance growth and understanding. (xiii)

The interactive – relational approach views research interviewing as a collaborative process emphasizes the critical importance of both the interaction and the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The use of interactive – relational approach as an interview method promotes and upholds the process of establishing relationships within the research process. In particular, it is grounded within the feminist research discourse which seeks to demolish the hierarchical power relationships that exists in the research process (Cohen et al, 2000; Kelly et al., 1994). This method of interview was appropriate for my research because it allowed the participants to tell their stories in the way they wanted to tell them.

Limitations of the interview

While interviews are well known for their adaptability (Bell, 1999), there are also limitations. They are time consuming (Bell, 1999; Cohen et al., 2000). This includes time to conduct the interview, to consider what has been said during the interview, to go through notes and to extend and clarify points that may have been hastily noted.

Problems can also arise during the actual interview. Field and Morse (cited in Cohen et al., 2000) highlight the following, "interruptions from outside such as telephone calls, people knocking on the door; giving advice or opinions (rather than active listening), asking embarrassing or awkward questions and summarising too early or closing off an interview too soon" (p. 280).

The use of tape recorders to record data can be problematic. They can be intrusive and "affect the degree and type of privacy experienced by the interviewee, and may breach the public – private dimension of the exchange as it is understood by the person being interviewed" (Scott & Usher, 1999, p.110). This may make participants uncomfortable to speak into the recorder. Also, a tape recorder can sometimes inhibit good questioning and listening skills because as Tolich and Davidson (1999) note, its presence creates complacency so because the tape recorder is listening to the interview, it is easy for a researcher to think that he or she can hear the interview again later when transcribing. Although it is true, tape recorders sometimes do not work and when the tape recording is heard again, the researcher rarely gets a chance to ask follow up question.

Research Process

In this section, I describe the research process including access to institutions, the people and the devices used to collect and analyse information gathered.

Access to institutions

To conduct research in any Solomon Islands' schools, permission must be sought from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD). Two months before embarking on my fieldwork, a letter was sent to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education

and Human Resources Development with copies to the Chief Education Officer of the Education Authorities in the Solomon Islands (see Appendix 1). This was only done after I had identified the participants (see the next section) and schools that they were working in. This letter served two purposes; to inform them about my proposed research project and to seek permission to conduct research in their schools. I was granted permission to conduct my research in their schools.

Selecting the participants

Initially, I set out to include women who were current principals and deputy principals of secondary schools in the Solomon Islands. Time constraints and unreliable travel services prevented me going to other provinces. To get a list of the women currently holding senior leadership roles in secondary schools, contact was made with the Chief Education Officer of the secondary division of MEHRD who was very helpful. Purposive sampling (Mutch, 2005), was used here to select my participants. This is when participants are selected intentionally (Creswell, 2002) because they suit the purpose (Mutch, 2005). My research being about women's leadership experiences, I handpicked the women which, in this case was a group of leaders in secondary schools. Invitation letters (see Appendix 2) were sent to eight women, three of which were principals and five were deputy principals in secondary schools.

Upon arrival in the country, I followed up on the invitation letters. The first two weeks were difficult to do anything as during October, the third and

fifth formers sit the national examinations. I was able to make contact with the five deputy principals who were all willing to participate. Unfortunately, the involvement of three other participants who were principals did not eventuate. Two were busy and the other I was unable to make contact with. In order to identify and select the replacements, I used the snowball sampling (Mutch, 2005) technique. Mutch (2005) noted that "this technique is often used when access to a particular group is more difficult… the first subject, recommends another subject, who recommends the next, and so on" (p. 50). Three replacements were found. They were all heads of departments. The selection criteria, was based on their currently held qualification and the number of years they had been teaching which in this case was a minimum of four years. In this study, women I had taught with identified those who were heads of departments, who then recommended other heads of department. Before the interviews, the women signed a consent form (see Appendix 3) to show they had read and understood their role in the process and that they were willing to participate.

Conducting the interview

When interviewing the women, it was important that I adopted an approach that emphasised full participation from them. That was why the interactive – relational approach was used as it breaks down the hierarchy between researcher and respondent (Kelly et al., 1994, Letherby, 2003). Letherby (2003) noted that this approach to interviewing ensures that the respondent "is not objectified, nor placed in a passive role, but plays an active part in the research process" (p. 83). All the interviews were

conducted where it was convenient and accessible for the women, in this case, in their schools. There was one face – to – face interview with all women which lasted approximately one hour. The interview questions (see Appendix 4) were derived from my core research question which was:

What are the leadership experiences of Solomon Islands women in secondary schools?

All eight interviews were conducted in pigin (the **lingua franca** of the Solomon Islands) and tape recorded except for one woman who did not wish to be tape recorded. Her wishes were respected by me and I had the daunting task of trying to capture all the important things she was saying by hand. Interview notes were also kept for the other women who had agreed to be tape recorded so that aspects of the interview that the tape recorder could not capture such as expressions on the women's faces (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell, 2003; Tolich & Davidson, 1999) were noted down.

Data transcription

Individual interviews were transcribed. This was a very in depth process for me because I had the dual task of transcribing as well as translating the transcriptions into English. However, interviewing in Pidgin English was appropriate as it allowed the women to express their views more clearly. This would not be the case if the interviews were conducted in English because it is not the women's first language and so would hinder them when they try to explain their ideas and views. The interviews were transcribed into Pidgin English. The transcribed interviews were sent back

to the women for further comments and clarification and validation. These
were returned to me to bring back to New Zealand for analysis. However,
because of time constraints and the location of some of these schools,
attempts to get the transcripts to some of these women were difficult. In
those cases, I called them up and talked through the whole transcript and
then let them comment while I noted these down. The transcripts were
translated to English before the analysis of the data.

Data analysis strategies

Qualitative data analysis deals with meaningful talk and action (Coffey &
Atkinson, 1996). Its validity could be determined by comparing with the
themes from the literatures (Bell, 1999; Burns 2000). There are many
computer programmes that are available to use for analysing data (Bell,
1999; Burns, 2000, Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell, 2003) however for this
research, the thematic analysis approach was adopted. Thematic analysis
is a qualitative strategy that takes its categories from the data (Mutch,
2005). It focuses on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or
behavior (Aronson, 1994). Thematic analysis is commonly used by
researchers and in particular is suitable for analyzing and reporting
personal qualitative interview data (Mutch, 2005). This is the approach that
I have undertaken for this study.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the methodologies that are relevant to this research. The qualitative approach was important because it was essential to get a descriptive account of the unique lived experiences of the participants. Using a feminist lens was central because it allowed the research to put women in the centre to let them tell their stories so that we can understand it from their perspectives. The notion of reflexivity has also been highlighted as it is an integral part of feminist research. In addition ethical issues relevant for this project have also been covered which include informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and social and cultural sensitivity. .

The research method used to generate data in this research was the semi - structured interview. In particular the interactive – relational approach was used as it was grounded within the feminist research discourse. This chapter also highlighted the limitations of the interview as a research method. In the last section of this chapter I have given specific details of the research process. This included the selection of the participants, how and where the interviews were conducted. For this research, the thematic approach to data analysis was used. The findings from the data analysis will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

This study was set up to explore the educational leadership experiences of women working in Solomon Islands secondary schools. This research was based on the following question:

What are the leadership experiences of Solomon Islands female secondary school teachers?

Information was gathered from in - depth interviews based on questions from an interview schedule. The data were analyzed through the process of thematic analysis in order to elicit the recurring themes that appeared relating to the leadership experiences of the women. The recurring theme was the impact of the cultural patriarchal norms on their lives. The themes that are of significance to this study include selection procedures, the challenges faced by the women, and the perceptions about women leaders and women and school leadership.

Before presenting the findings I introduce the women and their backgrounds. For this study, pseudonyms are used instead of the women's real names.

The women

The eight women are Solomon Islanders but they all come from different provinces. Haylie comes from the Western Province, Mylene from the Central Province and Fiona from Choiseul. Although Anna, Faye, Giselle, Jackie and Janice come from Malaita Province, they all originate from different parts of the province and speak entirely different dialects. All these provinces have their own norms and customs but they are all patriarchal in nature and leadership at all levels of the society is generally held by the male members. Although in certain provinces like Isabel and Guadalcanal matters concerning land generally follows the women's line in terms of inheritance, the male members still have a say in decision making with reference to ownership.

Five of the women are deputy principals. They all have diplomas in teaching and one of them has a Bachelor of Social Science. On top of their responsibilities as deputy principals, they also teach in the classrooms. Subjects taught include Social sciences, Maths, Business studies and Home Economics. Three of the women head departments in their school. One has a diploma in secondary teaching and teaches Social sciences and English. Two of the women have Bachelor degrees. These two teach English and social sciences in their respective schools.

The women's ages vary, from mid 20s to mid 40s. Most of them started out as primary teachers, before they went to the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) to gain a diploma in secondary teaching. The number of years they have been teaching ranged from four to 25 years in service. All the participants are mothers. Haylie, Mylene and Giselle have

two children, Faye, Janice and Anna have four children, Fiona has five and Jackie has six children.

In the following section, I reveal the findings pertaining to the leadership experiences of the women. In particular, I address the selection process.

Lack of transparency in selection procedures

For all the women in this study, they did not encounter any problems in gaining access to leadership positions in their schools. For them, the positions that they took up had never been advertised even though it is the responsibility of the Education Authorities as stated in the Solomon Islands Teaching Service Teaching Handbook (Ministry of Education, 2007) to do so. Nevertheless, all the women were appointed to their current positions via various avenues. However, this appointment process is not transparent so it might make it hard for other women to gain access to educational leadership positions.

For some of the women, their appointments were done internally by the principal. Mylene was appointed as Head of Department because her colleague became so ill that he could not perform his duties and had to rest. Some of the women said they were appointed because of their qualification. Giselle elaborates:

> I did not apply for this post. The principal saw that I have a qualification and he called me into his office and told me that there was a current vacancy in the department because that colleague had gone on study leave. So he looked at the qualification of the remaining teachers in the department and he saw that I had qualification to take up this position and it was given to me.

Even though the women base their selection on their qualification, it is worth noting that these are not necessarily a leadership qualification.

While some of the women's selections were made internally, some were made by the local Education Authority. The criteria that the Education Authority based the selection on varied as can be seen in the following comments. Sometimes it was based on merit where the women commented that doing a good job helped as can be seen in Faye's case:

> I was recommended by the Chief Education Officer of the Education Authority on merit because of the wonderful job I had done as deputy principal at a previous school.

Other times it was because of their seniority in terms of the number of years they had been teaching and also their status as confirmed teachers. Anna had been teaching for twelve years before she was appointed:

> This position was not advertised. I did not write any application letter. The Chief Education Officer just put me as deputy. I think he based it on merit in that I was the longest serving teacher, so that's what it was based on, my experience as a teacher.

Similarly, Janice who had been assistant teacher at one school was transferred to another school under the same Education Authority to Head of Department. She said:

> I was given the role of Head of Department because the other [Subject] teacher had been teaching for a while but was still on probation; whereas I am a confirmed teacher.

In another instance it was because it was convenient in terms of the location. Jackie had been teaching for the last 16 years. Three years ago, the Education Authority decided to start Form One in one of the existing primary school's thus making it into a community high school. As such they needed someone to fill in the new position that had been created as a

result of this. Jackie explains her appointment like this, "when this school became a community high, I was pulled out from the other school and because I lived near the school during that time, I was given this role".

This suggests that the women's path to leadership was in a way unplanned. They had not sought these positions but certain factors had enabled them to be successful in gaining a leadership position. There are appointment process but they were not followed. What is worth noting is that, those who were in the position to appoint such as the principals' and the Chief Education Officer, were all male. The schools that the women were working in were administered by the same Education Authority.

Challenges

In this section, I present the women's views on the challenges that impacted on their leadership roles. This section is in two parts, the first looks at personal challenges and the second looks at those that have arisen as a result of external forces.

Personal

Self confidence and self esteem

The women in this study spoke a great deal about the lack of confidence that they sometimes felt. For most of them, this was their first time in a formal leadership position so it was hard for them to cope with their responsibilities at school and also their roles as mothers. Jackie comments:

> There are times that I have low self esteem in myself. I feel that I am not fit to carry out this responsibility…I have to constantly battle and try to get over this. Also as a mother of [many] children, it is very tiring taking care of them. Sometimes I feel that I should not have taken up this position but give it to some one else. I do feel down at times, but then I do something positive or I share my frustrations with other colleagues who give me advice and tell me to not worry and that really helps.

For these women, this lack of self confidence is also linked to gender, in particular the attitudes shown towards women in leadership positions. This is explained by Fiona:

> Being a woman, it is hard because there are times when I talk, I hear negative comments from staff members and that makes me feel let down and I just want to give up. But then, I pick myself up and tell myself that no matter what, I must continue.

The women leaders also spoke about how their cultural upbringing had impacted on their confidence especially when dealing with male staff. Anna is from Malaita, a province known for its patriarchal society where men dominate. Malaita is one province that traditionally, women are marginalized and while other provinces in the Solomon Islands are starting to involve women in aspects such as decision making, for Malaitan women, this is still not so. For Anna, even though she is working in a different province, her socialization at an early age has impacted on her confidence:

> On top of the challenges of dealing with criticisms from other colleagues and students, I compare myself to others who are bigger than me, especially the bigger students, I find myself wondering how I can handle all this. This is a challenge for me and I feel ashamed. For example, we have male teachers and in my culture, for a woman to tell men what to do, it is wrong so this creates a big challenge for me.

The influence of culture on the different socialization process for boys and girls has contributed to women feeling a sense of guilt. Mylene had

recently completed her Bachelors degree and was teaching in one of the

community high schools in town. In her fourth year of teaching, she was

appointed as the HOD. While some people might be proud to have been

appointed to a leadership position only a few years into teaching, Mylene

was not one of them. She explains:

> When I was told that I would be the Head of Department I felt bad. This was because the other teacher, a man, had been teaching for more than 10 years and I felt that because he had been teaching longer than me, he should have been given that post. I think I feel like this because of that mentality that men should be leaders.

The women in this study attributed their lack of confidence to their

inexperience in the job and balancing family responsibilities. In addition,

the influence that society's culture has on gender especially in relation to

their socialization as girls and women has also contributed to this.

Nevertheless, while they all talk about lacking confidence, it was

interesting that all the women highlighted the importance of self motivation

and of not giving up when it was tough. They adopted an attitude where

once they realized that they were starting to feel down, they were quick to

find ways to bring them out of that sad place. While they acknowledged

this, the women did not give examples of what they did.

Balancing work and family life

The ascribed roles of the women in the domestic sphere, impacted on the

women's leadership roles in their schools. All the women had children and

this created challenges for the women. As Jackie explains:

> For me, the obstacle in my leadership role is my obligations at home. Especially having [many] kids, I have to make sure that

everything at home is sorted. The kids are fed and taken to school, the dishes washed and the house is clean. Sometimes my responsibilities at home hinder me from spending time to do my administration work in school.

Family responsibilities at home also created a situation where family and work responsibilities collided. Balancing work and family life created challenges for the women. This sometimes put them in awkward positions, where they were forced to make a decision; whether to stay at home or go to school. The husbands played a huge role leading up to the decision. Anna explains it this way:

> For those of us who are married and have children, it can be a challenge. For example, if one of the children is sick, then most times, the husband will tell us not to go to school. This creates a situation where you have to make a decision, to stay and look after the sick child or to go to school. So those responsibilities that we as women have at home and then other responsibilities at school, sometimes this comes into conflict. Sometimes, if husbands are helpful it is okay… there are times that I cannot cope with my responsibilities in school and do not complete certain tasks that I should be completing because things in my house is not organized.

The women talked about how their family responsibilities have impeded upon their responsibilities in school. It is also worth noting that these responsibilities at home not only affect the women in their leadership roles in schools but in some instances, it may also be a reason for the under-representation of women in leadership roles in schools. Haylie elaborates:

> Sometimes, women are given the post of principal or deputy but they themselves do not want to take on that responsibility. This is probably because of other responsibilities from home and other commitments. Other times it is because sometimes their husbands might not support them and seeing that when one takes on that role, you will be working and staying late in school so this contributes to women not wanting to take up the post because of having to balance work and family responsibility.

In spite of all this, all the women stated that their husbands really supported them in their leadership roles.

Organizational Constraints

Discrimination

All the women in this study worked in schools that are dominated by male teachers. They faced adversities that were discriminatory in nature. This is in the form of attitudes shown towards them, especially by male teachers. Because they are women, they were not treated with the same respect as a male leader as can be seen in the following comment. Fiona says:

> Being a woman leader is very challenging. For instance when teachers do not cooperate, like at this present time, we are so far behind in our school programs especially after the issue of re - levelling of teachers salaries. Those whose salaries are not sorted especially the male teachers are reluctant and do not go to their classes even when I tell them to…at times I see that they influence other teachers who in turn do not attend classes... In addition, the principal (male) that is here right now is of no help. He rarely stays around in school.

For those women who were in their first year of taking up these leadership roles, this was even more challenging for them. They felt that society's culture had a huge influence on these attitudes as can be seen in Haylie's case:

> This is my first year as deputy principal and one of the challenges that I have is that when I ask teachers to do something, they do not do it. This is because of our culture where it does not associate leadership roles with women. So when I try to talk and ask them to carry out a given task, they do not want to follow me.

While these attitudes are shown indirectly, there were incidences that were solely because they are women. Faye found this out the hard way:

> When I was transferred to this school to be the deputy principal, I got a shock during our first staff meeting. Instead of a warm welcome, the principal who was a man bluntly stated to everyone there that he did not want a woman to be his deputy! And I was sitting right there! Because of this, the principal would delegate work to other male teachers that he trusted and not to me. As a result some male teachers would not do the duties that I had assigned them to do because they did not want to take orders from a woman.

This show of discriminatory attitudes did not only happen in the schools. The women had also been treated unfairly by their Education Authorities when their needs were put aside so that they (Education Authorities) can address those of the male teachers. Janice explains:

> When I was teaching at the other school under this same education authority, they paid rent for the male teachers but not for us female teachers. Their reasoning was because our husbands would pay the rent. We were always fighting for that but we did not succeed and that's probably because those in the offices are all male. In the end, we received housing allowances which was something like $300 for the full year but that does not even cover a month's rent!

It is worth noting that while the women come from different provinces, there was no mention of any discrimination based on their ethnicity.

Lack of preparatory, leadership training and on - going professional development

All the women participants had not undertaken any leadership or administration training prior to their taking up the roles in their schools.

Because of that, they had a hard time in carrying out their responsibilities.

Fiona says:

> I see that more leadership training should be provided so that if leaders are given those positions, at least they have some basic information of what their responsibilities are as leaders. Also in terms of finance, in my case, I do not have any knowledge about accounting so courses should be given so that we are able to do book keeping and know how to deal with finance in our schools… This is very important because all our schools receive the EU (European Union) grant and when new principals and deputy principals come into the schools, they do no know how to go about this especially with spending and retiring of money.

The importance of leadership preparatory programs was also talked about in relation to further leadership aspirations. Most of the women had aspirations to pursue with their leadership but they felt that they needed to undergo training before they could apply for other leadership roles. Anna shares it this way:

> I would like to apply for further leadership positions but I need training in management. I need to gain training in management because to manage a big group like a school, I see that as a big responsibility which needs training. At the moment, the knowledge I have about leadership I gained along the way as I started on the job and I learnt as I went along. I also attended small workshops which gave me ideas on how I can manage a school.

The women leaders also highlighted that training should cater for everyone in the school but there were times that lack of action by the school administration disadvantaged them as well as other teachers.

Mylene explains:

> I think they should have small workshops so that teachers can gain a bit more knowledge about how to go about their leadership roles within the school or own department…maybe during holidays or breaks… The other thing too is that the school administration

should make us aware of outside invitations to attend workshops. For example, last year, there was an invitation for the teachers to attend a management workshop, I don't know how the school administration saw it, but they did not allow any of the teachers to attend! So that did not help us teachers!

The women also felt that men had more access to training then women.

Fiona commented that:

> There are courses but not everyone is given the opportunity to attend because sometimes when courses like these are offered, only certain people go, most times the men.

The inequality in access to leadership training was also commented upon in relation to scholarships. The women felt that women in general are not given the opportunity for further studies. Janice explains:

> They should have more training not just for men to attend but give women the opportunity to attend and participate as well… When giving out scholarships, they should give some to women to go and do leadership studies' because women are very good leaders and they do a good job as leaders but women are not given that opportunity.

Nevertheless, where the women lacked the relevant knowledge about their job, the support that these women received from their husbands played a huge part in their leadership. However, the women gave accounts where some other women were not so lucky. Haylie explains:

> A friend of mine was offered a scholarship for postgraduate studies overseas but because her husband had a job promotion he did not want to accompany her. She was very disappointed and cried the whole night. It is good to educate the husbands so that when women want to go back to school, the husbands will allow them, as that is one barrier; when the woman wants to go for further studies but the husband does not want her to go.

For all these women, even though they lacked formal training in leadership, they felt they could carry out their responsibilities but they

needed mentors who would help them. This mentoring was very important especially for women who had been appointed to a new leadership position in a newly established secondary school. Jackie explaines:

> … I have not really done a lot of administration... I see that it's not hard and I can carry out the responsibilities but I need to undergo training… during the first one and half years of taking up this role, there was no principal here, but only the headmaster of primary who has experience in his division and I was the only one in the secondary division. So because I did not have the training for me it was a challenge and I needed somebody who was experienced to take on the leadership role to look after the school, and in turn that person can share their knowledge and experiences with me.

The women leaders in this study expressed some important issues that need attention. They highlighted the importance of preparatory leadership training and on – going professional development. This issue impacted on the women's ability to effectively lead in schools. Without initial preparation and especially on – going professional development, the women leaders have noted that this influences their decisions about further leadership aspirations. It was also revealed that women do not have the same opportunity to access leadership training as men.

Lack of consultation in the decision making process

All the women leaders in this study were either deputy principals or heads of department. So for them, they had to constantly be in contact and had to consult with the principal, the Education Authority, the school board, the parents, teachers and students. For the deputy principals, the recurring issue that they had problems with was the lack of consultation with the principal on financial matters. They stressed that in other areas, the

principal would ask them for their input but when it came to financial

matters, it was a different story as can be seen from Jackie's account:

> …other areas like finance, there are times that I do not have any say at all. For example our school accounts, there are more than three signatories with two of those signatories being that of the principal and myself and the others, those in the school board. If they bring a cheque for me to sign but I question them about what the cheque is for, they will take it to another signatory. So sometimes, I would check the account and the balance has decreased, and most times, I have no idea when or where the money is used because I had not been consulted.

The principals these women were working with were male. For the heads

of department, this is a very huge challenge. Giselle contributes this lack

of consultation to her gender, being female, and contemplates whether

schools should continue to have positions such as HODs in the future:

> There are times when I need assistance with the running of the department but when I go to our school administration, they offer no feedback. I feel the reason is because I am a woman so they do not worry about it. Decisions that we should be making together especially with regards to the department, they decide without consulting me. In a way, I feel as if they are overruling and taking over my role as the HOD. Because of this, there are times that I think that if those in the school administration do not see my input into the decision making, as a concern, then why have that position in school?

This lack of consultation also brings forth feelings of unworthiness in the

women. Mylene elaborates:

> Although the HOD is a leadership role, in the school that I'm currently teaching at, I feel that I'm doing nothing and because of that I see being HOD as of no importance… because the school administration does not address the needs of the department… At the beginning of the year, we compiled a list of the resources that we needed for each of our departments and gave it to the school administration…they never followed up on our requests and never got back to us.

The women leaders in this study, conveyed their feelings about being left out of the decision making process. There seems to be a break down in communication, especially with other leaders that they were working alongside. In particular, the women expressed their dissatisfaction with the overall leadership in their schools, which as mentioned already, were led by male principals.

Women and school leadership

Influence of culture and gender on attitudes towards women leaders

When asked how women are viewed as leaders, the recurring theme that came up was the influence of culture and gender on the attitudes shown towards women leaders, in particular the male dominance. Gender and culture do not exist in isolation but are interwoven. These factors had a negative effect on the way the women leaders were perceived regardless of age, status and ethnic background. Janice commented that:

> Being a woman in our society, our culture sees the status of women as being inferior and so in schools, it is the same. I see that the way women leaders are viewed is discriminatory. This is just because of them being women, they are not taken seriously. Even here in our school, some of the decisions that our deputy makes, the principal just overrides. Some of the things that she says or she assigns tasks to be done, no one takes it seriously. I feel it's because she's a woman.

Culture also affected the women leaders in terms of decision making. The women were brought up in cultures that emphasized male superiority. From an early age, they were taught how they should behave towards

men. In most islands, this meant that the decisions that men made, was

the final say, with women playing a silent role. Fiona explains:

> Because of our culture, in some areas, women should not talk and question what the men do so women's voices are not heard… because of this thinking, I myself have this feeling so when someone in authority is male and he makes the decision, I just follow whatever decision is made, even though I may disagree with that decision.

Haylie commented that the influence of culture had also impacted on the

way the community viewed women leaders:

> Some people might support women's leadership. Generally in my view, I think that the way that the community views women leaders is still negative… they see that women should not be in those leadership roles because they are women.

The attitude of some that male are superior, has made the women

question their own ability. Mylene comments:

> In this school, we have a woman deputy principal. Most of the teachers are men and some have been teaching a long time. When they see that things are not properly done, they sometimes go against the decisions that she makes. They even argue with her and complain about her to other teachers. I think it is because of this mentality that men should be in those leadership roles. There are times that I too think that maybe the men are right and maybe the decisions that men make are always right or maybe better than women.

The findings reveal that women are still viewed negatively as leaders.

However, some of the women felt that there are those who are now

starting to accept women leaders. Giselle points out that:

> Before, people saw women as if they were nothing. When they heard women talk, they would say 'what you're saying doesn't make sense' compared to what men have to say. But now it depends on the qualification that women have. When people see that women have the qualification for taking up the leadership role, I see that they will respect and accept whatever decision the woman

leader makes because she is qualified and she does a good job, so people will generally accept her.

The culture that is embedded in the society that these women leaders grew up in, has contributed to the attitudes shown towards them. Being women and living in a mainly patriarchal society has meant that for these women, while they are leaders, they are not given the same respect which is shown towards male leaders. The cultural stereotypes which include the idea that women's place is at home has made it hard for them to be accepted as leaders in the public sphere.

Women as leaders

The women in this study thought that women were very good leaders. They highlighted the importance of having role models, in particular, women as school leaders. They felt that having women in leadership positions in schools may help to change the way women leaders are viewed by the community. Janice explains:

> In the community high schools nowadays, you will start to see women teachers holding positions like heads of department, deputy principals and in some schools, principals. This is very good. Because of this, people are now starting to see that women can lead too. I think it is only now that people are starting to realize that women can lead…

The women also noted that schools that were led by women leaders were more effective in their leadership. Faye says:

> I see that schools that are led by women, there are a lot of developments because they are honest in their leadership and are transparent and they try to lead ethically. Also the community is now starting to see that when there are women leaders in schools, the school produces good results and the schools are lead in a way

that the whole community now appreciates the work done by women leaders.

This is reinforced by Fiona but she raises the point that women do need support:

> For me personally, I see that those schools that have female deputies and principals, those women are committed in their work and especially with finance, they are honest about it…it is really good to have women as leaders but they need support.

In spite of the fact that the women commented on the challenges of combining their roles at home with work life, they noted that these same roles had a significant impact on their educational leadership. They commented that their role as mothers helped them to transfer the knowledge of managing a family to the school setting. Anna elaborates:

> … I see that when women lead, they put things in order and they show concern for whoever they are leading... This is because a woman is a manager in the family so if she becomes a leader of a community or a group like a school, it would be good because she can bring the knowledge of managing her family and use it in the school.

The importance of having more women in leadership roles has been emphasized by the women leaders in this study. The more women are seen holding leadership positions in schools, may help to change the attitudes shown towards women. Women's roles as mothers should be seen as valuable, not only in the home, but also in transferring that knowledge of multi tasking to the leadership roles in schools.

Leadership styles

Collaborative and servant leadership

When asked what good leadership meant to the women, there were varying responses. The women spoke about good leadership in relation to how a leader should lead. Fiona explains:

> Firstly I think that to be good leaders, that person must know what are the responsibilities and roles that he/she must carry out in school…A good leader must also be able to work well with the staff in the school…let's take the role of principal. If the principal has the attitude like 'well, I'm the principal and boss' and makes decisions by themselves, then this won't work because in a school, principals and deputies have a team to work with like staff members. The principal or deputy principal must make sure that they hear the views from teachers and staff… in order for programs and other school activities to run smoothly, this group of people must work as a team.

To these women, leadership is about working together. Mylene reaffirms this point but with emphasis on team work with teachers: She expressed that leaders in schools tend to ignore teachers views. Teachers have a lot to contribute but school leaders sometimes do not take into consideration, teachers' views:

> Teachers should work together with the school administration and those in the administration should come down and ask us teachers about any problems we are having and help us find ways of solving them. Team work is very important and I believe if we do this, things can work out in the school between students and teachers.

When talking about good leadership, the women also highlighted the importance of relationships and collective decision – making. Being a good leader involves building and maintaining relationships with various groups. In the schools, those concerned are the teachers and students. This relationship needs to extend to other stakeholders such as the officers in the Education Authorities, Education Ministry and the parents:

> To be a good leader does not mean that you have to isolate yourself all the time from those working under you. You need to share ideas and hear the opinions of others about issues so that when decisions have to be made, it's more like a collective decision. I also see that being a good leader, you must be somebody who is open to others. Restrictions are there but you

must ensure that your relationship with the teachers is good. (Haylie)

The importance of collaborative decision making and good relationships is also noted by Faye. She commented that collaborative decision making that includes everyone, especially teachers, can have positive outcomes for teachers, students', parents and the wider community:

> I believe good leadership is shown when students show good behaviour and relationships between teachers and the community are good…decision making is collaborative so this means that everyone's opinions must be heard before decisions are made…so that the teachers' feel part of that decision making process.

Some of the comments on good leadership were also leaning towards servant leadership. This view of leadership can be attributed to the Christian principles and values, where the emphasis is on serving others and putting their needs before oneself. Commenting on good leadership with reference to stewardship, Janice says:

> In my opinion, good leadership is shown where a leader knows how to lead people as well as being able to listen… to be a leader, you have to be a good listener as well. This is because when you lead people, they will come across problems and you need to hear them. Also you need to carry out your responsibilities faithfully, so that means to be a leader, you have to be a servant of all. You have to make sure that your staff's needs are met, for example, their promotions and housing allowances.

This is also reinforced by Giselle especially the importance of listening. She states:

> For good leadership to happen, it does not mean that now that you are a leader, you have to dictate those you are leading. You as the leader have to listen to your other colleagues. So to me, it means that you will become a servant because you will have to do what they ask of you as their leader

The women leaders' views, on what they believe good leadership is covers certain aspects of collaborative and servant leadership. The importance of team work, building and maintaining relationships and the involvement of everyone in the decision making process is noted. The women leaders also shared attributes they identify as good leadership, which reflects their Christian principles. While they reveal what they believe good leadership should be, they do not state whether they themselves use characteristics of collaborative leadership.

To manage or lead

While the women's perception of good leadership highlighted aspects of collaborative and servant leadership, their descriptions about their responsibilities and how they carry out those responsibilities in schools differ from their views. Generally the roles and responsibilities of the deputy principals differ from the HODs. Fiona says:

> My responsibilities as deputy include assisting the principal especially with the running of the school programs. Mostly I'm involved with preparation of the school programs, student's discipline and welfare and also with the school finance like the collection of school feels, although the principal is the head accounting officer of the school.

As such, their responsibilities are centred round certain tasks that they have to address so that their schools are functioning smoothly. For Anna this involves "keeping students' records and also attendance of teachers to make sure that the forms are regularly filled in as well as keeping track of students' attendance.

For the HODs, the women's responsibilities is towards their respective

department, but especially ensuring that subject matters are addressed

early on as explained by Giselle:

> As the head of department, one of my responsibilities is that before
> the academic year begins, I have to draw up and allocate classes to
> each teacher in my department and also make sure that teaching
> materials and resources for teachers are ready and available before
> classes begin.

The women's responsibilities and how they talk about them and carry out

the different tasks, leans more towards management rather than

leadership. They focus on the maintenance of a system where great effort

is put into planning and organizing of daily operations of the school.

However, this notion of management is also linked to good leadership by

the women. Jackie commented that:

> To be a good leader, you must be administratively capable. That
> means you must have skills to administer the school which means
> that one must do some training.

In essence, the way that Anna perceives good leadership can be a

summary of what the other women have already mentioned while adding

her own unique blend to it. With the use of an acronym Anna explains:

> When I look at what good leadership is, the word 'RESPECT'
> comes to mind.
> **R** - Respect…God, others and oneself…
> **E** - Environment…respect for the environment…
> **S** - Service…one does not expect too much from others… a good
> leader does not sit down and order others, but they should be the
> ones serving
> **P** - Public…building and having a good relationship with the
> public…
> **E** - Expectation… people look to you with expectation…so be a
> good role model
> **C** - Commitment…ones commitment to their work
> **T**- Time…being conscious about time… being transparent

The women's perception of what good leadership is varies. Their perceptions encompass ideas that are both traditional and current about leadership. Their vision of good leadership may differ with the way that they lead in their respective schools. The hierarchical nature of the education system does not give them the opportunity to lead in the way they envisioned because they are busy maintaining the system, so there is more managing and administering, and less leading. The women leaders may want to show their leadership using collaborative means but they are obligated to carry out their duties as stipulated in the Teaching Service Handbook (MEHRD, 2007), which places more emphasis on managing rather than leading.

Summary

In this section I have presented the findings of the leadership experiences of women in Solomon Islands secondary schools. These experiences were revealed through the emphasis of significant themes that arose out of in - depth interviews; in particular, influences of the culture of the mainly patriarchal society which tends to place men over women in every aspect of this society, in this case, the leadership positions. Because of this male dominance, it has resulted in the women sharing views that in most cases are negative towards women leaders. This patriarchal dominance is shown especially through the discriminatory attitudes and the lack of consultation with these women leaders. In addition, the women spoke about their lack of confidence and the challenge of balancing family

responsibilities and work in relation to their gender and culture. This impacted on their confidence in performing their leadership roles. They revealed that collaborative leadership is what they believe good leadership is, a contrast with how they carry out their responsibilities in the schools. Nevertheless, the women do believe that women make good leaders. The next section will be the discussion of these findings in relation to the existing literature in this area.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study explored the leadership experiences of women working in the Solomon Islands secondary schools. While much research has been done on women and educational leadership and administration, it appears to focus primarily on women in developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, United States and some European countries (Adler et al, 1993; Banks, 1995; Bell & Chase, 1993; Blackmore, 1989, 1993, 1999, 2002; Coleman, 1996; 2002; 2005; Court, 1994; 2005; Evetts, 1994; Hall; 1993, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1993, Strachan, 1991; 1999). While the research is comprehensive in its scope and direction, it can be problematic in the sense that it creates room for assumptions to be made. One assumption is that the educational leadership experiences of women in the Western world are the same for women in developing countries (Oplatka, 2006). However, this may not be so as they may lack context, specificity and relevance, as most are based mainly on Eurocentric or Anglo - American perspectives, values and beliefs (Dim mock & Walker, 2002). This study was designed to address this gap in the literature. While a lot of research has come from the developed world, there has been very little from the developing countries.

Lack of transparency in selection procedures

The findings of this study indicate that, all the women interviewed had no problems gaining leadership positions in their schools. This is surprising, as the members of the Education Authorities who are responsible for selection are all male. This is also true in cases where the women were selected by their principals who were also male. So the findings of this study do not support previous research on the selection of leaders for schools which noted the huge influence that male gatekeepers have in the selection process, which tends to disadvantage women (Blackmore, 1993; 1999; Blackmore et al, 2006; Coleman, 2002, 2005; Evetts, 1994; Hall, 1996).

As also noted by Evetts (1994) and Bush and Middlewood (2005), the selection process can be a hindrance for women. This was not the case in this study. All the women commented that the positions they filled were never advertised so they did not have to go through the whole process of applying and then having to wait to hear whether they were selected or not. This finding is similar to what Blackmore, Thomson and Barty (2006) termed the covert rule of incumbency (Blackmore et al., 2006). The women in the study were appointed because they had performed their assigned duties well.

The findings of this study also indicated that while there are formal selection procedures to select leaders into schools, these procedures are not followed. A possible explanation for this is that, if a position was vacant for a long time, it needed to be filled quickly. Maybe the principals and Education Authorities did not want the work involved in looking for another

replacement. So maybe they chose the next available candidate, one that was already in the school or in close proximity to the school. This finding is similar to Brooking (2005) where it was noted that women were selected into leadership positions because a suitable male candidate had not applied so women were picked to fill the post. A point to consider too is that maybe, male teachers may not want to be deputy principals. They may not want to follow someone else's orders, even if it is from a male colleague, but instead would prefer to be the person giving the orders. This may be accredited to how they were raised, to be men and give orders, rather than take them. This lack of transparency may have enabled women to be appointed to these leadership positions. At the same time, lack of transparency in the appointment process and not following procedure could make it difficult for other women to gain leadership positions.

The findings of this study indicated that these women leaders had not planned their careers but had been placed in these leadership roles. As already mentioned, the women may have acquired the positions because there were no suitable male candidates. This lack of planning is in agreement with Coleman's (2000) findings which showed that the women leaders had simply drifted into positions of principalship. An issue that emerged from this finding is that, the Education Authorities are not following current procedures. This is because as stipulated in Section 4.4.1. and 4.4.2. of the Solomon Islands Teaching Service Handbook, "All vacant posts within the Teacher Establishment shall be advertised by the Education Authority…All advertisements shall be published and publicly

posted for at least one month prior to the closure of application" (p. 15).

However, as seen from the women's comments, their posts had never

been advertised. This implies that officers in the Education Authorities may

not be carrying out their duties according to the regulations, or maybe they

choose to ignore the process. One question that needs to be asked is

whether this is also happening in the rural areas? Especially if there are

limited resources, the Provincial Education Authorities may not have a

copy of the Teaching Service Handbook which details the roles and

responsibilities of everybody working in schools. Further research is

needed to ascertain this and to what extent as this may help to clarify the

representation and experiences of women in educational leadership in

both urban and rural areas.

Nevertheless, this lack of transparency and not following of selection

procedures may be seen as a blessing in disguise for other women who

aspire to be educational leaders. One the one hand, this is encouraging in

the sense that this lack of transparency in selection has allowed women to

be placed into leadership roles within the school setting. On the other

hand, questions need to be raised about whether the Education

Authorities are really doing their job and how this impacts on their role of

providing quality education for the students of Solomon Islands. As Bush

and Middlewood (2005) have highlighted:

> Recruitment and selection need to be considered not in the specific context   of finding someone to do a particular job, but in the overall context of   planning the human resource needs of the organization…neglecting   effective recruitment and selection…and simply reacting to an employee's   departure by automatically replacing the person with another…can have   risks which may not become apparent immediately. (p. 125)

In addition, while Blackmore (1989) has argued that we should not merely be looking to increase the numbers of women in educational leadership but "go beyond the numbers game" (p. 95), in the context of the Solomon Islands, it is imperative that there be more women in leadership positions. This is so that their visibility will hopefully encourage other women to think of themselves as leaders. Seeing more women in leadership positions may hopefully motivate and inspire more women to take up leadership positions. This may start to address women's under -representation in leadership positions in education.

Lack of confidence

This study found that the women had low self - confidence and low self esteem which inhibited them in their leadership role. The findings of this study indicate that while the women lack confidence, it was not because they could not do their job, but for six out of the eight women, this was their first leadership role. This finding is in agreement with Shakeshaft's (1987) and Cubillo and Brown's (2003) findings which showed that the women's so - called lack of confidence has more to do with unfamiliarity with the territory than a lack of faith in their own abilities. In her ground breaking research, Shakeshaft (1987) highlighted that this lack of confidence is measured and defined by male standards where:

> Women have self - confidence in areas in which they have experience   (private sphere functions), whereas men have self - confidence in areas in   which they have been allowed to participate (public sphere functions).   Therefore low self - confidence might be viewed then, as a product of a   system that keeps women separated

from experiences that would help build confidence in the public sphere. (p. 84)

As such, Coleman (2002, 2005) notes that this lack of confidence is often linked to the fact that women, are in an environment where leaders are expected to be male or they would be compared unfavourably to men.

Another important finding is that the women attributed their lack of confidence to the influence of their cultural socialization patterns from an early age. From an early age, the women learn and practice scripts that are different to those of men (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Kilavanwa, 2004), where they are taught and are expected to respect and take care of their brothers and husbands and also not to answer back to the male relatives but must do as they are told (Pollard, 2000, Vaa, 2006). This was apparent from the comments made by the women in this study when they noted that they felt ashamed when they had to tell male teachers what to do because culturally it is not accepted for a woman to do that. This may hinder women's ability to do their job. There may be delays in the completion of assigned tasks and in some instance male teachers may not do what they have been asked to do by women leaders. This finding reinforces the point Pollard (2000) raises about the socialization of girls where indirectly "girls are taught to accept the traditional roles of subordination, and subservience to males" (p. 4).

A possible explanation for these findings is that these women are in a society where even though changes have occurred in nearly all aspects of the society, the hegemonic traditions and culture (Cubillo & Brown, 2003) are upheld. This suggests that any changes that happen in society, men

can adjust to adapt to these changes while women should continue to hold on to traditional stereotypical roles such as housekeeping and child – raising (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Hasibuan - Sedyono, 1998; Oplatka, 2006; Pollard, 2000; Strachan et al, 2007; Vaa, 2006). So when women are in positions of leadership, they are challenged. This contributes to the women's lack of confidence and low self esteem. Women in these situations need a place to share their leadership experiences with others who are experiencing similar circumstances. While this is a possible solution, some women may not see the importance of this or may not feel comfortable joining such a group. One explanation for this is that some people may not look too kindly upon such initiatives because of stereotypical attitudes such as women using such groups to gossip about others. To avoid this, at the very first stage, ground rules and guidelines need to be set where those who wish to join such groups must abide by. A suggestion too is that, an experienced facilitator be brought in to facilitate such initiatives.

Balancing work and family

In this study, the ascribed roles of the women in the domestic sphere, were found to have impacted on their leadership. The women felt that juggling family responsibilities at home contributed to them not being able to effectively carry out their job at school. This finding is consistent with other research which found that the dual role that women play; that of a leader and a wife can be difficult (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Coleman et al., 1998; Kilavanwa, 2004; Moorosi, 2007). This is more so for women

in Melanesia. As Kilavanwa (2004) noted "playing double roles at home and at work can be exhausting and adds pressure on them but they have to somehow manage it because they have to do it everyday" (p. 65).

As highlighted by Strachan (2007), teaching is a respected and sought after career option for both men and women in Melanesia because opportunities for paid employment are very limited. Therefore, while women in developed countries like New Zealand (Strachan, 1991) and Great Britain (Evetts, 1994) can choose to take time out from their career to raise their children, these women cannot. For the women in this study, while their traditional roles at home are still the same, the replacement of the traditional economic system with the new one that is based on cash has given additional roles to the women. With education and employment taking women away from home, instead of cultivating their own food, they now purchase food with cash (Pollard, 2000). Therefore, combining this with the limited opportunities for paid employment, women may not be able to take time out to raise their kids but have to manage this dual role the best way they can. This may impact on their ability to lead in schools because when there is a crisis at home, it is taken for granted that women leave what they are doing to solve the matter. An example is when children are sick, it is expected that mothers are responsible to take them to the doctors. In instances that both parents are working, women may have to take time off their jobs. When this happens, it impacts on their earnings but because women are still expected to carry on their traditional roles, their choices are limited.

Earlier studies in other developing nations such as Indonesia (Hasibuan - Sedyono, 1998) and Trinidad and Tobago (Morris, 1998) have shown contrasting findings. In these countries, it has been found that family responsibilities had not impeded women's careers as they had spouses that supported them as well as support from extended family networks. Nevertheless, all the women in this study said that their husbands supported them. This finding needs to be interpreted with caution because, while the women noted their husbands support in relation to their leadership roles, they have not mentioned whether this support is also shown in the home with regards to the men helping them with the domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and washing. For these women combining a career and family was problematic for them.

While the women in this study had support from their husbands, they noted that some other women may not. This lack of support from the husbands may have contributed to the under- representation of women in leadership roles in schools. Women may have been asked to fill a leadership position but their husbands did not allow them to accept such offers. This may be explained by the fact that because their culture sees men as being superior, this has resulted in limitations on women's freedoms, movement, opportunities and choices (Robertson cited in Strachan, 2007); where women face strong opposition from men which often results in violence (Kilavanwa, 2004). Men may feel insecure (Amnesty International, 2004; Brouwer et al., 1998; Kilavanwa, 2004) about having women as the bread winners so they may limit women's opportunities. Violence against women may be attributed to the

socialization process where men are taught to be outspoken, aggressive, strong and authoritative and women are conditioned to be submissive and silent (Pollard, 2000), so they do not retaliate when they are hit by their brothers or husbands. Vaa (2006) shares similar sentiments but also highlighted the role of Christianity with regards to this violence. She explained:

> The traditional view…women are to "obey" the head of the family (the husband/father). Such a view arose out of the church teachings, and again the Bible is the reference point…there is a prevalent male attitude, particularly among the less enlightened, that women are to be kept in line and hence deserve the violence they are subjected to. Sadly, these males perceive themselves as speaking with authority on such matters and their view is based on their belief in the teachings of the Christian Bible. (para.20)

This finding reinforces observations by Strachan (2007) who noted that violence against women has limited women's opportunities for participating in leadership.

How to address domestic violence is an issue. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, violence against women is prevalent in Melansian societies today (Amnesty International, 2004; Garap, 2004; Kilavanwa, 2004; Vaa, 2006). While a start has been made by the island nations with the widely ratified Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), there is still a long way to go. Only full implementation of CEDAW will ensure that this issue is addressed so that women's potential is fully tapped (Vaa, 2006) and thus women's access to and participation in leadership is accepted by the predominantly male societies.

Discrimination

The findings of this study indicated that there was overt and covert discrimination against the women. The present findings are consistent with other research (Bell & Chase, 1993; Clements, 1980; Coleman, 1996, 2002, 2005; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987; Skrla et al., 2000; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Strachan, 1991) and corroborate much of the previous research on women and educational leadership. The findings of this study had shown that women face discriminatory and sexist attitudes from members of the society but especially from the men in their schools because of being female. This study is in agreement with Coleman's (2002) findings where the women were strongly aware of the resentment felt by men in dealing with female leaders. These findings further support the idea of gender stereotypes in educational leadership where it centres on the unthinking belief that there is a natural order portrayed by male leadership and female subordination (Coleman, 2002). As such Evetts (1994) has argued that:

> The cultural power of sex role stereotyping needs to be acknowledged for this is the source of the managerial conflicts experienced by some women head teachers. When women are absent from senior management positions or only a minority of women hold such posts…then women are not characterized in terms of their authority and leadership abilities but rather in terms of their identities as women head teachers. (p. 93)

A possible explanation for these findings is that there is no gender equity policy in education in the Solomon Islands. As noted by Robertson, (cited in Strachan, 2007) the Solomon Island government is a signatory to the

Convention of the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations, 1979). The Solomon Islands Government had passed the national women's policy in 1998. Where this policy has been implemented still remains to be seen. More importantly, this policy needs to be adapted to the education sector. Maybe when there is a gender equity policy in education, we may start to see changes in addressing this under- representation of women in leadership positions as well as attending to other women's issues.

Some researchers have argued that women of colour experience discrimination on two fronts, race and gender (Bell & Chase, 1993; Chisolm, 2001; DuBois & Ruiz, 1994; Growe & Montgomery, 2000) which Blackmore terms as the double bind (1999). Doughty (1980) and Ortiz (1982) call it the dual barrier. However, the findings of this study do not support this previous research. It is interesting to note that even though the women come from different provinces, there is no mention of any discrimination based on their ethnicity. This may be because, as noted by Strachan et al. (2007), "gender plays a more significant role than ethnicity in the under-representation of women in leadership" (p. 37) in Melanesia. Because Melanesian's are the majority culture, (Strachan, 2007) it can be suggested that for women in Melanesia, ethnicity plays a minor role in discrimination than gender. Nevertheless, previous research had also highlighted that while women do experience discrimination, there is a tendency to ignore examples of discrimination (Coleman, 2002, 2005; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Skrla et al., 2000). More research needs to be

conducted in the Solomon Islands around this issue because of the

diversity of its population.

Lack of initial preparation, leadership training and on - going professional learning

Due to the complex nature of leading an organization such as a school, it

is important that, before anyone takes a leadership role they need to have

leadership and management training. People new to a post require initial

training and/or support in terms of the details of their actual role and

responsibilities as well as becoming familiar with and understanding the

culture of the organization where they will be working in (Earley &

Weindling, 2004; Kydd, Anderson & Newton, 2003). The findings of this

study have shown that there was no initial leadership or management

training for any of the women before taking up their leadership roles.

There was also no on- going professional support as well. This is also true

of many countries – both developed and developing. There are similarities

between the views expressed here and those described by Malasa (2007)

for the Solomon Islands, Puamu (1998) in Fiji, Kelep - Malpo (2003) for

PNG and other developing countries like Botswana (Pheko, 2008) where

the participants also identified this as one of the inhibiting factors

impacting on their leadership in the schools.

In the context of the Solomon Islands, not only did the women in this study

and participants in Malasa's (2007) identify this, but parents and members

of the school communities (MEHRD, 2004, 2005) have also highlighted

this issue. Furthermore, Malasa (2007) pointed out that this lack of initial

preparation could pose an enormous challenge to the growth and development of the leadership capacity of the principals, teachers, and students as well as the whole school system in the Solomon Islands.

This lack of initial leadership training may also impact on the aspirations of women as noted by the women in this study. An important finding in the context of this study was that women did not have the same access to leadership and management training as men. It seems possible that these findings are due to the androcentric nature of the organization where these women work. For example, if one looks at the leadership positions in MEHRD, the Education Authorities and also the majority of schools, they are predominantly held by men. Therefore, it is possible that these men (Blackmore, 1989; 1993; Blackmore et al, 2006; Coleman, 2002; 2005; Evetts, 1994; Hall, 1996) may have only chosen men to attend. These women are working in systems that privilege men. This may mean that women are excluded from participating in any organized leadership development. This also raises the question of whether there exists a professional development programme for women in the Solomon Islands. If there is none at this present time, I suggest that such programmes be initiated to offer women an opportunity to learn skills that will assist them in their leadership. Through such programmes, women may be motivated and inspired to take on leadership roles.

Another possible explanation for lack of training opportunities for women in leadership roles is that because few women occupy formal leadership positions in schools, they are left out of leadership training. Strachan (2007) has noted that addressing the under- representation of women in

educational leadership positions begins with gaining access to education. Therefore, because girls are unable to access education, this creates a flow on effect which impedes the participation of women (Brouwer et al., 1998; Strachan, 2007; United Nations, 2007) in educational leadership and subsequently their access to leadership training. This finding supports Kilavanwa's (2004) study showing that women's access to educational leadership was restricted by the "sites of gender inequality (male bias), division of labour, and the restricted access to education and resources" (p. 24).

One issue emerging from this finding is the need for initial leadership training and on going support for all those who lead in Solomon Islands secondary schools. This will equip leaders academically and professionally for their leadership positions in schools. The Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development is fully aware of this issue (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2005) and has proposed initiatives in MERHD's Education Strategic Plan 2004 - 2006 and the Education Corporate Plan 2006 - 2008, aimed at addressing this. In spite of that, Malasa (2007) has commented that the initiatives are merely addressing the planning, financing and management of the schools and very little is aimed at improving the leadership capacities of the principals. This suggests that leaders in schools are learning to be effective managers and some researchers argue that this is not the same as leading (Robertson, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992; Schein, 1985). Because of the hierarchical nature of the schools, this would mean that the women in this study are forced to do

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rather than decide; to implement rather than to lead (Robertson, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992; Schein, 1985).

Importantly, there needs to be professional development opportunities solely for women because, as already mentioned in Chapter Two, women only make up 2.9% of the total principals in secondary schools in the Solomon Islands and this impacts greatly on their access to management and leadership training. In addition, because all the participants in this study are deputy principals and heads of departments, their access is more limited. This may be due to the hierarchical nature of the organization where authority is seen to be legitimately accorded to the principal, usually a male (Blackmore, 1989) so he will usually have access to any such training and other leaders such as the deputy principal and heads of department and teachers are left out.

If there is to be leadership training created solely for women leaders of the Solomon Islands, the process should be collaborative between the facilitators and participants (Saunders, 2005) so that women are empowered through the training (Strachan, 1991; Strachan et al., 2007). It is also vital that the programme is culturally appropriate (Strachan et al., 2007). For women in the Solomon Islands, any professional development programme created needs to take into consideration and acknowledge the diverse cultures and at the same time stay true to the needs of the women. This leadership development process should not only be for women in schools but also for women in other formal sectors and non – formal sectors of the community. The good news is that the current Solomon Islands government has established a Women's Ministry which is

responsible for addressing women's issues. The government now realizes that women's issues may not have received adequate attention and are serious about making changes to advance the status of women. One such area to investigate is that of social injustices especially in providing leadership development for women only.

Lack of consultation in the decision making process

This study found that there was lack of consultation in the decision making process between the women leaders and their male principals. A possible explanation for this is can be found in the culture (Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Strachan, 2007; Tuivaga, 1988; Vaa, 2006). As Strachan et al. (2007) have noted "culture significantly effects female's ability to participate in education and decision - making at all levels, including educational leadership" (p. 40). This lack of consultation may be attributed to cultural attitudes such as women's place in the home and only men should take part in decision making (Cox & Aitsi, 1988; Strachan, 2007; Tuivaga, 1988). This may explain why some male principals did not want to include women in the decision making.

Another possible explanation for the lack of consultation is that schools in the Solomon Islands are still organized in bureaucratic and hierarchical ways and so authority is accorded to the principal (Blackmore, 1989). According to Abbott and Caracheo (1988), bureaucracy is domination and domination is a form of power and authority. They also note that the term authority refers to:

> The capability of exercising power by virtue of the fact that an
> individual occupies a legally established position within a social

> institution… authority is conceived as a relationship between subordinates and superordinates. (p. 242)

Therefore, in this context, the principal has the overall authority. This overall authority may have been misinterpreted by the principal to mean that they alone should make decisions and so they do not discuss issues with those they work with, such as the deputy principals, heads of departments and the teachers in general. This may be seen as an abuse of power although this issue also has to be looked at in relation to the leadership styles of the principal. Moreover, it is possible, that this type of attitude reflects a power over type of leadership which Robertson (1996) argues is in direct conflict with current effective leadership theory which emphasises "power to and building communities and working collaboratively"(Para 9).

Women and educational leadership

The findings of this study have shown that while the women had no leadership training prior to taking their leadership positions, they identify with the collaborative style of leadership. The issue being that their stated responsibilities had them more focused on management tasks rather than leading. The bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of the organization, in this context -, schools, together with their stated responsibilities, does not give them opportunity to do so. In addition, because some are middle managers in the hierarchy, all the leading and managing is in the hands of the person at the top of the pyramid, in this instance, the principals who

may have a different way of leading and managing to that envisioned by the women leaders.

When asked what good leadership is, words used to describe this included team work, collaboration and participatory decision making, good management skills and relationship building with teachers, students and the larger community. These adjectives are consistent with those that come under the collaborative style of leadership. This style of leadership is most strongly identified with women leaders (Blackmore, 2002; Coleman, 2002; Court, 1994, 2005; Evetts, 1994 Hall, 1993, 1996; Morris, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1987). Blackmore (2002) commented that women are seen to be a new source of leadership talent because of their "caring and sharing propensities, their communicative and organizational skills and their capacity to listen and empathize with the needs of others" (p. 59). For collaborative leadership to take place, the school principal needs to establish external and internal linkages in order to facilitate the collaborative process for the school. Externally these linkages require better communication, co - operation, collaboration and coordination with school authorities and community agencies (Court, 1994; Fullan, 2002; Glanz; 2006; Southworth, 2005). Internally, the principal must establish trust and collegiality between teachers, students and administrators.

 The women's comments about leadership also highlighted listening and helping others and putting the needs of others before their own. This view of leadership is closely aligned with servant leadership (Narokobi, 1983; Pollard, 2006; Sanga & Walker, 2005) where leadership is about service, helping and supporting others. This view of leadership is similar to those

expressed by women in Strachan et al.'s (2007) leadership programme in Vanuatu. As the authors have noted:

> This view of leadership is strongly influenced by Christian principles and values and reflects women's stereotypical role…and is less likely to challenge men's dominance in leadership. This suggests that those women whose leadership is servant leadership are more likely to be accepted as leaders because they are less threatening. (Strachan et al., p. 42)

While the women shared how they would like to lead, their stated responsibilities as outlined in the Solomon Islands Teaching Service Handbook (Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2007), limits their capacities. As highlighted by the women's response, these responsibilities focus more on the management aspect of leadership where great effort is put into planning and organizing the daily operations of the school (Calabrese & Zepeda, 1999; Duignan, 1989; Hoy & Miskel, 1991; Senge, 1990; Sigford, 2006). It can thus be suggested that the education system in the Solomon Islands still upholds the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the organization; a notion that current leadership theories disagree with, although there is still the need for such diligence.

An implication of this, is that-, conflicts may arise between leaders because of the different leadership styles. Another suggested outcome is to review the entire education system because as it stands right now, it still clings to management ideologies. While that is not a bad thing, current discourses of educational leadership, have gone beyond that. The Solomon Islands education system needs a review to take this into consideration. Maybe through the review, gender issues may start to be addressed in official documents like the Teaching Service Handbook.

Nevertheless, if a review is to be conducted, there has to be equal

representation of both genders because if the review panel is dominated

by one gender, particular the male, then the notion of gender equity may

remain unaddressed.

Robertson (2005) noted the critical point - that the school leader needs to

identify and understand which tasks are administrative, which are

management, and which form the real basis of educational leadership.

This finding has important implications for developing leadership training

and ongoing professional learning. As is highlighted here, there is a need

for leaders in Solomon Islands schools to distinguish between

management, administrative and leadership activities. Understanding the

distinction will assist them to understand and create strategies to lead

highly effective learning in their schools rather than retreating into the

relative comfort of efficient administration. As Robertson (1996) pointed

out:

> Principals must first and foremost think of their role as one of
educational   leadership…Principals must strive to resist the forces of
managerialism…Principals need help in developing and articulating
their   educational vision so that they can use management techniques as
tools…management should be a means to an end. (Para 1 - 4)

The influence of culture and gender on attitudes towards women

leaders

A recurring theme that permeated throughout this study is the influence of

culture and gender on attitudes towards women leaders. Culture and

gender are interwoven. The findings of this study have indicated that some

men do not take too kindly to women in leadership positions and behave negatively towards them. There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by the participants in this study and those described by Coleman (2002), Hasibuan – Sedyono (1998) and Oplatka (2006). Hart (1995) also noted that often, when women ascend to leadership positions in schools, those whom they are assigned to lead, immediately form negative expectations on the basis of a past, less than satisfactory-, experience with one woman in a position of power or on the basis of cultural stereotypes about women leaders. However, as also noted by the participants, not all men have negative attitudes towards women which previous study by Coleman (2002) has also shown. The culture of the society and gender have both greatly influenced and impacted on the leadership experiences of the women leaders in this study, especially in relation to their self confidence, family responsibilities and work life including discriminatory attitudes towards them.

It is evident from this study that women's participation in educational leadership is not only affected by structural or personal barriers but equally important are social barriers in the form of cultural expectations. These expectations are in terms of sex role stereotypes, traditional and historical influences. Moorosi (2007) argued that:

> These factors are so deeply rooted within schools as organizations and the society at large. They are therefore regarded as normal and gender neutral because they have always been the order of the day and because they are so deeply entrenched, they are difficult to eradicate. (p. 519)

Any plans for change needs to firstly identify the "gendered social practices both within schools and the society" (Moorosi, 2007, p. 519), then, find ways to tackle these issues as and when they occur so as to achieve broader and genuine gender equity. For this to be effective, it needs everyone to be involved in trying to eradicate these inequalities.

The issues raised here are issues of social justice. The concept of social justice focuses on marginalized groups which are those groups that are most often under-served and under - represented (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Leadership for social justice is about working for change wherever inequality is found (Strachan, 2006). In particular, it is "a deliberate intervention that challenges fundamental inequities that arise...due to the inappropriate use of power by one group over another" (Furman & Shields, 2005, p. 123). While this may seem a daunting task, those of us who are concerned with social justice issues must work to find ways to bring about change, especially in the implementation. For without hard toil, women's issues will remain stagnant. One good example is the Solomon Islands national women's policy (Solomon Islands Government, 1998). After a frustrating five year history of rejection and procrastination, the national women's policy was finally passed in parliament. Wallace (2000) noted that while there were clear guidelines for addressing gender inequality through the policy, the problem and level of commitment and support for their effective implementation remains. Moreover, this policy may not specifically be related to the education sector so there is still a lot of work needing to be done. As Strachan (2004) highlighted, "social justice work is hard work and it takes courage. It also never ends, it is an ongoing

process, we never reach the goal but we are always working towards it" (p. 3).

Summary

The above discussion has affirmed much of the current discourse on the theory and practice of women educational leaders. In particular, it has identified and discussed aspects of women's experiences in the selection for leadership roles and responsibilities, self confidence, family responsibilities and discrimination, lack of initial leadership training and on going support and lack of consultation in the decision making process- as well as discussing the women's perception of what they believe good leadership is. The present findings are significant in at least two major aspects. They reveal that the bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of the school has impacted the women's leadership especially in relation to decision making and access to leadership training as well as providing them with the opportunity to lead in the way they prefer.

More importantly, this study has highlighted the significant effect that a society's culture and male domination has on the views and leadership experiences shared by the women leaders. This suggests that the marginalization of women continues in the Solomon Islands through discriminatory actions and attitudes towards women in leadership positions in secondary schools.

The concept of social justice focuses on marginalized groups which are those groups that are often under-served and under-represented (Dantley

& Tillman, 2006). In this case, it is the women of the Solomon Islands. The challenge now is where to from here? These issues raise important implications for all leaders, especially leaders in the government who are responsible for policies as well as those that are in the community and in the schools. Further studies on the current topic are therefore recommended.

In the concluding section, further suggestions will be provided for future research and discussion on the limitations of this research as well as recommendations about what can be done to address the issues arising from the interviews with women leaders.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study has shown that the women had not planned their careers as they were automatically appointed to their positions of leadership. It was also shown that there was no initial preparation and leadership training as well as no on-going professional development. This had impacted on the women's leadership in their various schools. Furthermore, an important finding also highlighted was that where leadership and management trainings were offered, women did not have the same access as men.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that discrimination against women is evident in the Solomon Islands. This is due in large part to the influence of traditional cultural practices and customs which are patriarchal. Patriarchal dominance is shown especially through the discriminatory attitudes and the lack of consultation with these women leaders. In addition the women have also spoken about their lack of confidence and the challenge of balancing family responsibilities and work in relation to their gender and culture and how this had impacted on their educational leadership. These findings suggest that the marginalization of women continues in the Solomon Islands through the discriminatory actions and attitudes shown towards women in leadership positions.

The second major finding was the way that the women would like to lead differs greatly from their stated responsibilities. This can be attributed to the bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of the organization that they are working in, which impedes women by not providing an avenue to show their style of leadership. In general, therefore, it seems that women and their experiences in the Solomon Islands continue to be marginalized. Taken together, these results suggest that the influence of gender and society's culture greatly impede the efficiency and role satisfaction of women's leadership in the secondary schools.

The current findings add to a growing body of literature on the educational leadership experiences of women in developing countries- especially women in the Pacific region, and in particular in Melanesia. The current findings add substantially to our understanding of the influence of society's culture and especially the role it plays in sustaining male dominance, which greatly impacted on the leadership experiences of women. As such, the study has gone some ways towards enhancing our understanding of the challenges that women in Melanesian society experience in educational leadership. This research will serve as a base for future studies, especially for other women scholars from the Solomon Islands and other Melanesian sisters who want to continue with highlighting the issues that impact on women's ability to actively participate in educational leadership.

Limitations of the current study and further research

On reflection, there are limitations related to this research which must be considered. First, the current study included the experiences of women leaders working in urban schools. Women in other provinces, particularly rural schools, and their experiences may or may not be similar to those women working the urban centres. A second limitation was that I was unable to engage women principals in this study as the few that were in these leadership roles were not willing to participate. While I am only speculating, one possible reason for this unwillingness to participate maybe that they do not want to share their leadership experiences out of fear, especially leading schools that are male dominated. On the other hand, they may not want to participate because I feel that, being a young woman, they may not see my research as being important. Regardless, because of the hierarchical nature of the organization as already mentioned in previous sections, I feel that women who are principals may contribute another view- point especially in reference to challenges and decision making because their position in the hierarchy is above that of deputy principals and heads of departments. Therefore, further research on women and educational leadership needs to continue so as to broaden the scope and focus to include women who are working in both urban and rural schools, in particular the latter so that we can really get a much clearer picture about women in educational leadership in the Solomon Islands.

Recommendations

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice which are outlined below.

1. It is recommended that to address the lack of initial leadership training and more importantly, the limited access that women leaders have to training, there be opportunities for leadership development for women only. This approach needs to be one that the women participate in, from the planning to the implementation stage, so that they feel a sense of ownership- but more importantly, a program that empowers them and develops their leadership skills in the process.

2. It is also recommended that a network for women be formed by women for women so that women have a safe haven to come to, to unwind, discuss and share with other women leaders about the issues they face so as to empower one another, to gain strength and courage to continue to move forward in their leadership. It is easier to make change as a group rather than as an individual. Women's groups and other leaders in collaboration with non – government organizations and the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs need to organize educational awareness on various topics regarding women, especially considering the important roles that they play in society as well as aiming to reduce the negative attitudes towards women.

3. It is recommended that the government in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children and the Ministry of Education must fulfil CEDAW obligations and formulate policies that recognizes the rights of women so women have equal access to education, to jobs and training in order that women's issues start to be addressed. Unless the Solomon Islands government adopts policies that address issues of social injustice, gender inequality and women's rights, the issue of the under- representation of women in educational leadership will continue and in general, women will continue to be marginalized.

4. It is recommended that the government through the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, develop a gender equity in education policy so that gender equality may be addressed.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the findings of this research will be useful for current leadership like the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs in the Solomon Islands as well as the National Council of Women. To bring about change regarding this social justice issue of access and opportunities to education and educational leadership as well as focusing on the societal attitudes towards women in the Solomon Islands, will need a lot of hard work, commitment and dedication on the part of all women and men. It is hoped that the key findings of this

research may start to initiate positive steps towards changing this social injustice.

There are a number of important changes which need to be made. The Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs together with the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development must start work on a gender equity policy to address issues like gender inequality in employment and access to education and leadership for girls and women. While this is one solution, the hard task will be in the implementation of such a policy- especially when attitudes towards women, continues to be influenced by cultural patriarchal norms still prevalent in Solomon Islands society. Needless to say, all women must start to take a stand to fight against these injustices against them, not separately, but as one. Collectively, we are stronger. While waiting for such policy, the onus is on us, the women of Solomon Islands. What can we do? I suggest that we start with our children. Encourage our daughters to go to school. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to attend tertiary education must disseminate the knowledge that we have acquired and share our experiences with other women. Through this, we may empower them to do the same.

While we can do so much, the biggest question though is how can we tackle the organizational and structural barriers? There needs to be a shift in the way organizations in the Solomon Islands are organized. Hopefully, this will be a shift that acknowledges the importance of the roles women play, especially in leadership, and provides opportunities for women to actively participate in decision making.

If Solomon Islands' women are to fight for their rights, the starting point should be within the strengths valued within the local community. Keeping the balance between the culturally oppressive agendas and good practices of the community will enable an outlook to the future that is holistic and achievable. Therefore, women in leadership roles should foster relationship mechanisms that combine both western and local values to enhance the securing of a firm ground in the quest to raise the status of women in the Solomon Islands.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Information letter to the Permanent Secretary of MEHRD

20th August 2007

To: The Permanent Secretary,

Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development

P.O Box G28

Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Dear Sir,

Subject: Seeking permission to carry out a research project on 'women and educational leadership in secondary schools' in Solomon Islands.

I am writing to request permission to carry out a research project, under the supervision of Rachel Saunders from the University of Waikato, School of Education, with eight women who are currently in leadership positions in Solomon Islands' secondary schools. The research is part of my Master of Educational Leadership degree.

The research explores women's views and perceptions about their experiences in their current leadership positions in secondary schools. As a woman and a current secondary school teacher, I have an interest in this area as I have aspirations to become a principal someday. By exploring with my colleagues their perceptions and reviewing current literature on

the topic, I hope to develop a better understanding about the educational leadership experiences of women in Solomon Islands' secondary school.

The research will involve interviewing eight women teaching in Solomon Islands secondary schools.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will shed light on the barriers that women face in this profession with regards to positions of principalship and heads of departments as well as getting a better understanding of the way that leadership in secondary schools is perceived by women.

The research process will involve one face to face interview with each of the eight women in October 2007. The research will adhere strictly to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations (2000) and the relevant sections and requirements of the Research Act of 1982 of Solomon Islands (Research Act, 1982, Solomon Islands) which provides guidelines governing any research activity in the Solomon Islands. Any information collected will be solely used for academic purposes.

I am seeking your permission to carry out my research in any of the following schools; King George Sixth, St. Nicholas, St. Johns Community High School, Honiara High School, Mbokona Community High School, Bishop Epalle, Naha Community High School, Florence Young Christian School, Tuvaruhu Community High School and White River School.

For any queries please feel free to contact me through phone (07)8562041 or email: sma14@waikato.ac.nz . Alternatively you can contact my Supervisor, Rachel Saunders at ph: (07)8384500 ext 7731 or email: rachs@waikato.ac.nz

By copy of this letter the various Education Authorities are informed of my intention.

Yours faithfully

Shalom M. Akao

cc: Education Authority Honiara City Council

cc: SSEC Education Authority

cc: Education Authority Church of Melanesia

Appendix 2 Invitation letter

20th August
2007

Dear_____

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research project.

I wish to invite you to participate in a research project I am undertaking
under the supervision of Rachel Saunders at the University of Waikato,
School of Education. The research is part of my Master of Educational
leadership degree.

The research explores women's views and perceptions about their
leadership experiences in secondary schools. As a woman and a current
secondary school teacher, I have an interest in this area as I have
aspirations to become a secondary school principal someday. By
exploring with my colleagues their educational leadership experiences and
reviewing current literature on the topic, I hope to develop a better
understanding on the barriers and constraints that women face. The
question I will base my research on is:

How do women in Solomon Islands secondary schools perceive
educational leadership?

It is hoped that the findings of this research will shed light on the barriers
that women face in this profession with regards to the positions of
principalship and heads of departments as well as getting a better

understanding of the way that leadership in secondary schools is perceived by women.

The research will involve interviewing eight women who are currently teaching in secondary schools in Solomon Islands. The research process will involve one face to face interview at your school or other venue of your choice in October 2007. The interview will be conducted in a language that you feel comfortable speaking and will be tape recorded and transcribed soon after. Each interview session is expected to last approximately one and a half hours. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you so that you will have the opportunity to confirm its accuracy and add any other detail you believe relevant.

This research will strictly comply with the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations (2000) and the relevant sections and requirements of the Research Act of 1982 of Solomon Islands (Research Act, 1982, Solomon Islands) which provides guidelines governing any research activity in the Solomon Islands. Should you agree to participate and at a later stage you decide not to, you are able to withdraw from the project at any stage up to the point that you confirm the accuracy of your interview transcript. Thereafter withdrawal would be highly problematic as data from your responses would have been used in the analytical process.

 Your right to anonymity and privacy will be respected during and after the research process. Any information shared will be solely used for academic purposes of this research, unless your permission is obtained for other uses. Neither you nor your school will be referred to by names, only by pseudonyms.

I am aware of how busy you are. However I do hope you will consider being part of this research project. For any queries please feel free to contact me through phone (07)8562041 or email: sma14@waikato.ac.nz . Alternatively you can contact my Supervisor Rachel Saunders at ph: (07)8384500 ext 7731 or email: rachs@waikato.ac.nz

If you are willing to participate, please indicate this by signing the consent form below, and return to me by Friday 28, September 2007.

Yours faithfully

Shalom M. Akao

Appendix 3 Consent Form

I …………………………………………………….., have read and understood the

   (Please print your name)

Nature, of the research project and agree to participate as requested.

I understand the regulations governing this research and grant consent for my interview to be tape – recorded.

I understand that my identity and that of my school will be kept anonymous and any information provided by me will be treated as confidential.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time but up to the point where I confirm the accuracy of the interviewed transcript and the analytical process begins.

Signed:…………………………………….   Date:……………………..

Appendix 4 Interview Schedule

Welcome statement, Introduction to interview…

Personal

    a) How long have you been teaching in secondary schools?
    b) What is your role in your school?
    c) What responsibilities do you have at your school?
    d) What do you believe good leadership looks like, feels like, and sounds like?
    e) What opportunities do you get to show leadership?
    f) How do you show leadership in your school?
    g) What were some of the challenges you experienced being in this leadership position? Eg: Views of others, decision-making processes…
    h) How do you view your own leadership?
    i) What are your aspirations for further leadership positions?

Context

    j) What was the selection process for this leadership position like for you?
    k) How was it advertised? How did you find out about it? What was your process for applying? What were the criteria for applicants? What processes took place? What was helpful to you through the application process? Was there anything that was not helpful?

l) How do you perceive women leaders are viewed in your school, community…?

m) Who has supported you in your leadership role? Eg: Family, colleagues…

Prompts:

What do you mean by that?

Can you clarify that for me?

What would be an example of…?
Tell me more about…

Why would that be so…

How do you know…