

THE WOMEN AT WORK: SUPPORT EXTENDED BY CO-MALE WORKERS TO THE FEMALE WORKERS - A STUDY BASED ON THE EASTERN UNIVERSITY, SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Women are usually not given prominent places, mainly in the working environment, especially in the South Asian context. However, women have to play dual role in the social context, viz, a homemaker and an employee. She has to earn not only to satisfy her own self, but also to meet the financial burden of the family; mainly in the poor, middle and upper-middle classes in the Asian context. The male counterpart in the working environment has a role to support their female counterparts both officially and personally. This research is done to check the support extended by the co-male workers to the female co-workers in their working environment, with special reference to the Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The findings of the research are interesting that most of the male workers extend their support to the female co-workers mainly in the personal needs. However, the support is limited in the official works due to many reasons such as promotional related matters. Also, the research found out another interesting thing is that most of the female workers do not like to ask for help – both officially and personally – to their “senior” co-male workers. The reason they give is to respect the seniors. This is typically a South Asian mentality which is explored in this research.

Keywords: Support, Female Workers, Co-Male Workers, Working Environment, Official, Personal

1. INTRODUCTION

Women must break the soft, sweet image in order to succeed in their work endeavors. Being as fierce, stable, and aggressive as a lioness and working towards her goals without any distraction makes a woman achieve her goal with precision. There is a deeply ingrained idea in our society that men are the movers in the world of employment. They are the ones who make things happen. This may have been true fifty years ago, but today we are seeing a new and very interesting trend developing.

Women are making a great stride in their carries. But during the last few decades, there has been a tremendous increase in the population of the female workforce in many of the organizations. Women have excelled in all spheres of life. They are contributing to the national economy as much as the men are.

Usually, women are often forced to leave their careers for the sake of their families and peer pressure. It is a preset concept (or rather a misconception) in the society, especially in the South Asian culture that the family suffers if women work outside. However, women are in a situation to go to work for the following reasons such as to earn, learn, and to increase their self-esteem, be role models for the next generation, support the economy of the family, create employment for others, etc.

Gender balance and male domination are common issues around the world. There is no way, the female staff has to work in an environment with male staff. Generally, these opposite genders match very rarely unless they have a good and genuine relationship, especially in the South Asian context. Education, race, religion, and culture have some norms in terms of having relationships with the opposite gender. It changes from place to place around the world.

Working female and male together is the key factor for an institute and its betterment. A working place needs to maintain a peaceful environment. Only then an institute can reap the maximum of its inputs. Staff is the strength of any organization. Despite the level of income, female workers too join the labour force in almost all the labour market. These rates reflect participation in the formal labour market and many women are concentrated in low-paid and low-status jobs and employed in the unorganized sectors (Ali, 2010, p. 32; Pio & Syed, 2013, p. 142). Their participation rate in the informal labour market is higher than the formal sector, particularly among agricultural workers (Basu & Thomas, 2009; Pio & Syed, 2013, p. 141). It is also interesting to note how women in the Asian countries have become unpaid family workers, participating in economic activity, but not being paid or considered as economically active. In Sri Lanka, for example, from the total women employment rate, 20.5 per cent is said to be unpaid family workers as against only 3 per cent of employed men (Department of Census and Statistics, 2013). Though women succeed in education, getting suitable job for their education is not sufficient. Strachan, Adikaram, and Kailasapathy (2015) state that there is a huge amount of gender inequality in the workforce, especially in the South Asian context.

The co-workers and the co-officials have also the responsibility to maintain a gender-balanced environment in their working environment. Helping each other in any working environment, both officially and personally, is inevitable and that leads not only a good relationship, but also benefits the organization.

The educational sector is an important one for the young generation. These generations are the pillars of any nation. Educationists should maintain a good gender equity among them in the working environment to get the highest reap. In the Sri Lankan context, according to the Department of Census and Statistics 2022 Report, there are 423,000 people are working in the government education sectors which includes Higher Education Institute such as State universities. The State universities in Sri Lanka has the following workers distribution according to the UGC statistics of 2022 as of 31 December 2021: academics and non-academics 23,654. Out of which 10,713 are female employees (both permanent and temporary employees). The scenario at the Eastern University, Sri Lanka, there are 346 employees (permanent only) working and out of them 240 are female workers who are in different capacities from Senior Professors to the Office Assistants as of 30th September 2023.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the life span of a person, he/she spends most of the time at the office, when compared with their time spend at home and family members, as they are spending their time from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm. Staff needs to struggle and face challenges to overcome their constraints to perform efficiently in their profession mainly for their promotion. In the world of work gender equality has been constrained, therefore this paper identifies the constraints to promote innovative and practical actions in a gender-balanced working environment.

The objective of the study is to check how male staff are supporting the female staff in their working environment with special reference to the Eastern University, Sri Lanka.

This study is vital to find out the situation at the Eastern University, Sri Lanka and how co-male workers are supportive to the female workers.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The participation in the workforce and the level of their education are increasing in the modern workplace. More education generally equates to a higher qualification. More women are receiving higher education today than ever before.

Therefore, women are possessing official positions on the job web. It is now clear that more women are entering the workforce. The number of working women populations is more in this modern world. We can hardly find out any organization that does not have women employees. With the rapid growth in women's education, they are the job captures today. However, there are several challenges that impact women much more significantly than men. This will push oneself out of his/her comfort zone.

Okley (1974) and Laws (1976) state that women's relationship to employment is treated as a derivative of personal characteristics and relationships to family situations. Prior to the industrial revolution, the family economy operated as a cohesive unit; typically, all family members, regardless of age or gender, were engaged in productive labor (Tilly and Scott, 1978).

4. SAMPLING & METHODOLOGY

There are four sectors in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka: academics, non-academics, academic support, and administrative officers. The samples were collected from all the sectors. There are six faculties, containing academics and non-academics.

They are the Faculty of Agriculture (FAg), Faculty of Arts and Culture (FAC), Faculty of Commerce and Management (FCM), Faculty of Science (FS), Faculty of Technology (FoT), and Faculty of Health Care Sciences (FHCS). Out of these six, the data was collected from four faculties.

Samples were collected from 10% of the female staff from the faculties from the total population in all four sectors. Further, the main library was also considered as a library is one of the main parts in the academic section of any university.

Only female and male permanent employees of the Eastern University, Sri Lanka were selected randomly for conducting this research. The sample selection was done as follows:

Table 01: Distribution of Samples

Faculty	Male	Female
Library	6	5
Agriculture	1	5
Arts & Culture	15	6
Commerce & Management	4	4
Science	3	10
Total	29	30

A structured questioner was developed and distributed to the samples. Further, in-depth interviews had been conducted with the samples to strengthen the research. Quantitative and qualitative methodology was applied to analyze the collected data.

5. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

5.1 How do male staff in your office/section support your office work?

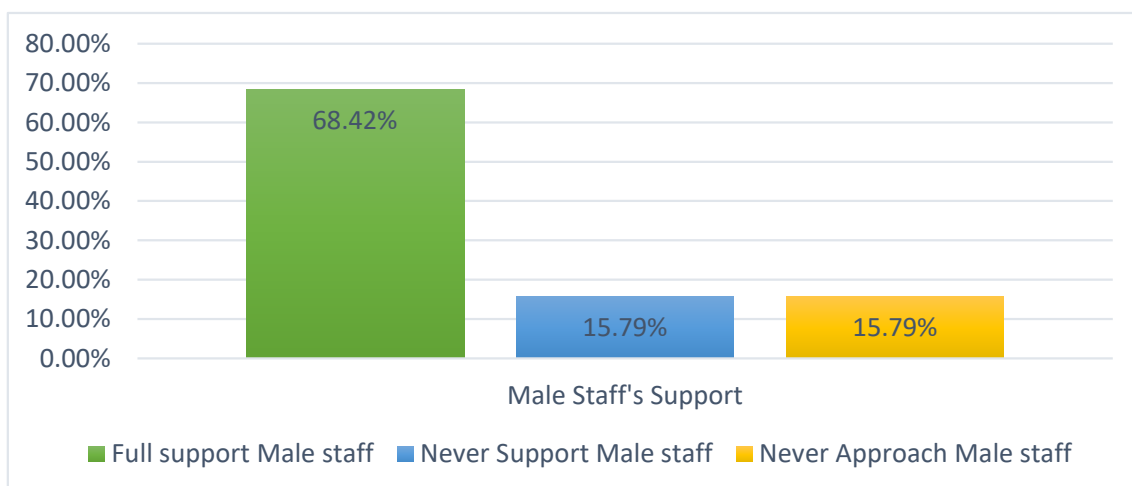


Figure 01: Distribution of Male Staff's Support in the Office Works

Based on the provided data, there were 13 samples where the male staff was reported to provide full support in sharing the academic workload. This suggests that the male staff members actively contribute to the office work and assist their female colleagues in completing their official tasks. However, there were also 3 samples where it was mentioned that male staff never support the female staff. This indicates that in these cases, the male staff members may not be actively involved in helping their female counterparts with their office work.

Additionally, 3 samples mentioned that female staff members do not approach male staff for support because they consider them to be seniors, and they have other female staff members available to assist them. This suggests that in these instances, the female staff members may prefer seeking help from their female colleagues rather than approaching male staff members.

5.2 How do male staff in your office/section support in your personal life?

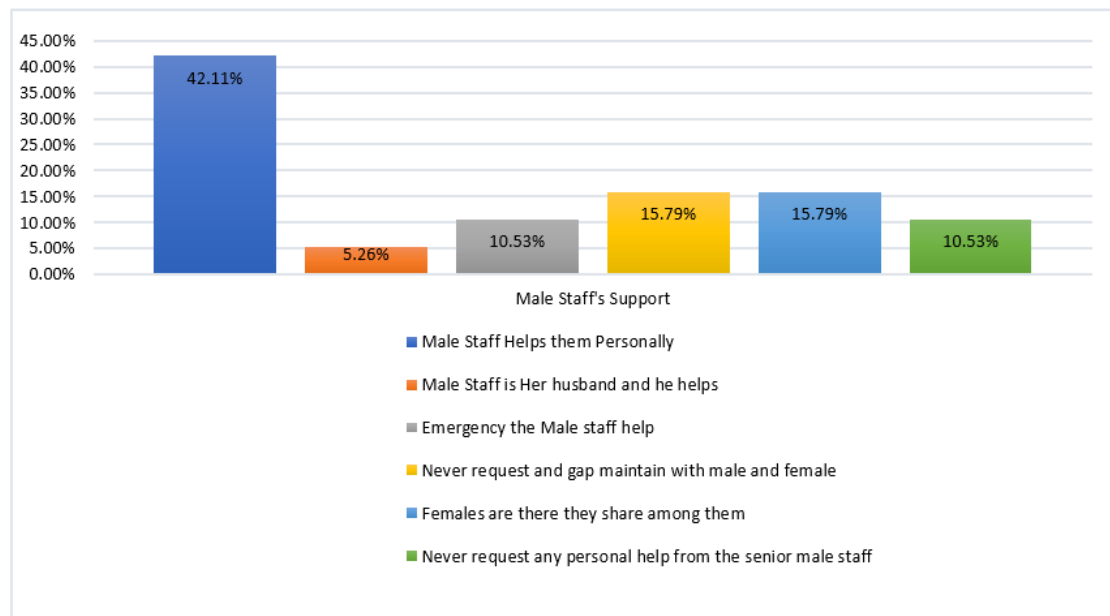


Figure 02: Distribution of Male Staff's Support in the Personal Works

- 42.1 agreed that male staff help them personally.
- 1 Sample agreed that the male staff is her husband, and he helps.
- 2 Samples said only in the emergency the male staff help.
- 3 said they never request, and a gap is maintained between males and female staff.
- 3 said females are there so they share among them.
- 2 said because the male staff are seniors therefor female staff never request any personal help from them.

Overall, the data suggests a varied range of experiences regarding personal support from male staff members, with some receiving assistance, others not requesting it, and some maintaining a gap or seeking support from female colleagues instead.

5.3 How male staff are supporting you while sharing the academic workload?

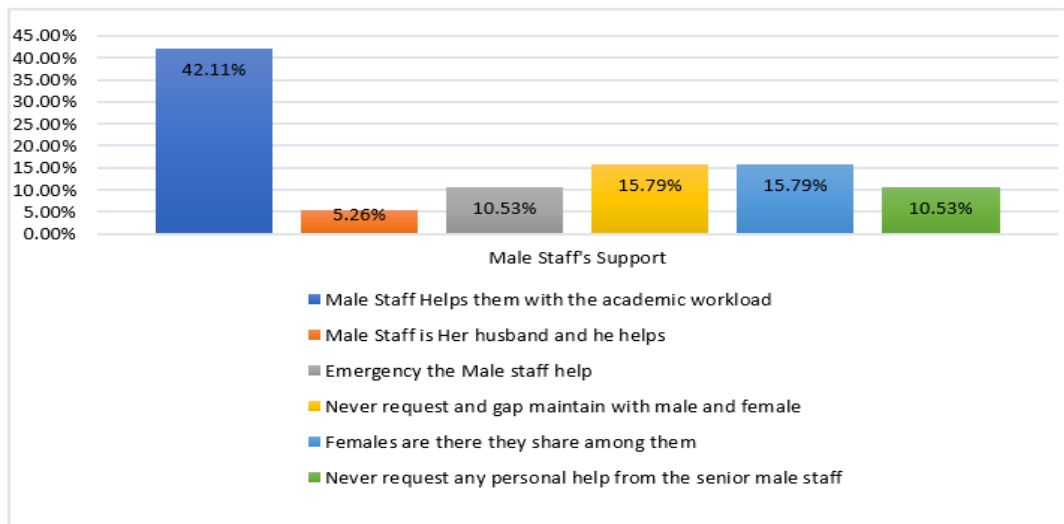


Figure 03: Distribution of Male Staff's Support in the Academic Workload

The data can be summarized as follows:

8 samples agreed that male staff helps them with the academic workload: This indicates that a majority of the respondents acknowledged that male staff actively assist them in sharing the academic workload.

1 sample agreed that the male staff helping them is her husband: One respondent mentioned that her husband, who is a male staff member, supports her in sharing the academic workload.

2 samples said that male staff helps only in emergencies: Two respondents stated that male staff members assist them with the academic workload only in exceptional circumstances or urgent situations.

3 samples said they never requested help and maintain a gap between males and females: Three respondents mentioned that they have never asked for academic help from male staff and intentionally maintain a separation or distinction between males and females in terms of workload sharing.

3 samples said females share the workload among themselves: Three respondents expressed that since there are female staff members available, they distribute the academic workload among themselves without involving male staff.

2 samples said the female staff never requested help from male staff due to their seniority: Two respondents mentioned that female staff members never seek academic assistance from male staff, possibly because the male staff is senior to them in rank or position.

It is important to note that the provided data is limited and represents the responses of a small sample group. The experiences and perspectives of male and female staff members in sharing the academic workload may vary significantly across different contexts and institutions.

5.4 Are male staff accepting your viewpoints in decision-making?

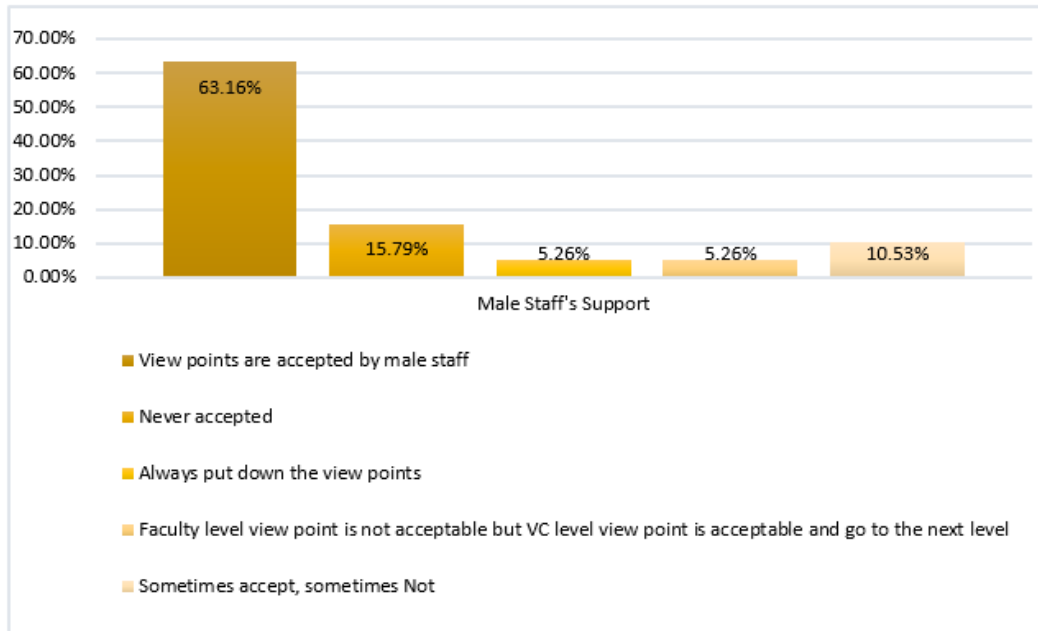


Figure 04: Distribution of Male Staff's Support in the Decision Making

According to the chart, 12 samples (or staff members) agreed that their viewpoints are accepted by male staff in decision-making. This indicates that these individuals feel that their opinions and perspectives are acknowledged and taken into consideration when decisions are made.

On the other hand, 3 samples stated that their viewpoints are never accepted by male staff. This suggests a lack of inclusion or disregard for the opinions of these individuals in decision-making processes.

One sample mentioned that their viewpoints are always put down by male staff. This implies that this particular staff member consistently faces opposition or resistance when expressing their ideas or suggestions.

Another respondent stated that at the faculty level, their viewpoint is not acceptable but at the Vice-Chancellor (VC) level, it is accepted and taken to the next level. This suggests a hierarchical discrepancy in the acceptance of viewpoints, where higher-ranking individuals may be more receptive to diverse opinions compared to lower-ranking staff.

Additionally, 2 samples mentioned that male staff sometimes accept their viewpoints, while other times they do not. This indicates a variable level of acceptance depending on the circumstances or the specific individuals involved in the decision-making process.

Overall, the chart illustrates varying degrees of acceptance of viewpoints by male staff in decision-making, ranging from complete acceptance to outright dismissal or inconsistency in acceptance.

5.5 Are they supporting you to take a key role in the department?

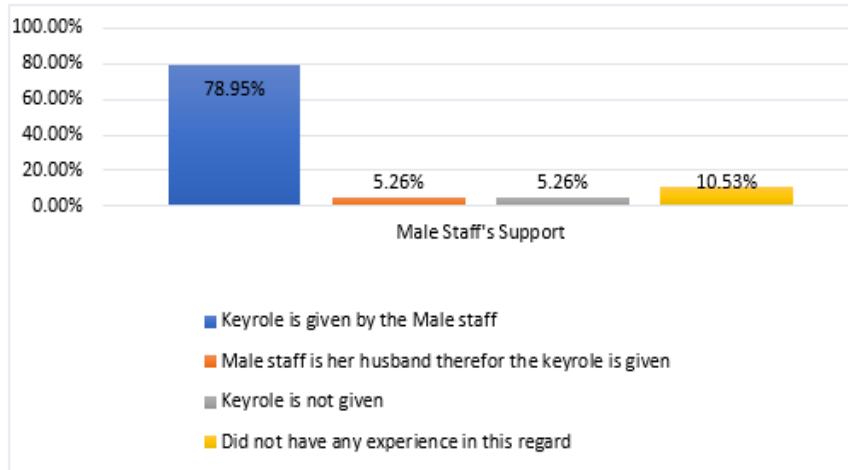


Figure 05: Distribution of Male Staff’s Support to Take Key-role in the Department

15 samples indicated that the key role is given by male staff members. Among these 15 samples, 3 mentioned that males are reluctant to take responsibility, so they give the opportunity to female staff members instead.

1 sample stated that the reason for giving the key role to a male staff member is because they are married to him.

1 sample mentioned that a key role is not given to anyone, implying that there might be a lack of support for individuals to take on such roles.

2 samples expressed that they did not have any experience or knowledge related to this matter, suggesting that they were not able to provide any information or insights.

5.6 When you are taking yourself to the next level in your career development how men are motivating you?

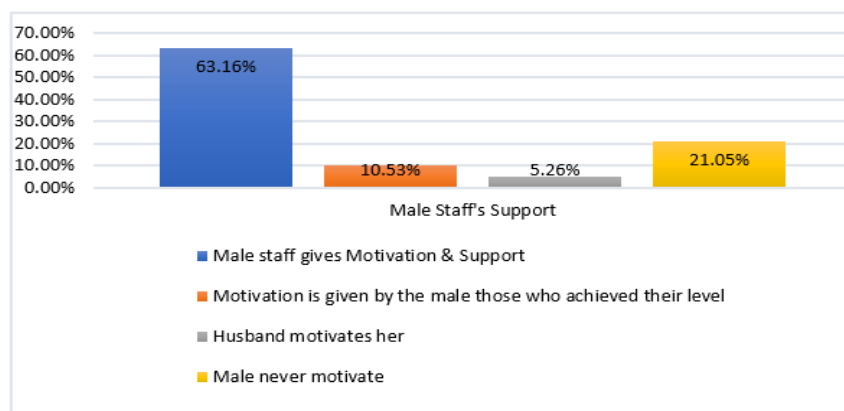


Figure 06: Distribution of Male Staff’s Support in the Career Development

12 samples agreed that male staff gives motivation and support to female staff to go to the next level: This indicates that a majority of the respondents believe that male staff members provide motivation and support to their female colleagues, helping them progress and advance in their careers.

2 samples agreed that the motivation is given by males who have achieved their level: This suggests that a couple of respondents believe that male staff members who have already achieved a certain level of success are the ones providing motivation and support to female staff.

1 sample agreed that only her husband motivates her: This response implies that one of the respondents mentioned that her husband is the sole source of motivation and support for her, rather than male staff in general.

4 samples agreed that male staff never motivate: This indicates that a minority of the respondents expressed the view that male staff members do not provide any motivation or support to female staff.

5.7 When opportunities arrive for scholarships and training are you getting a nomination from a male?

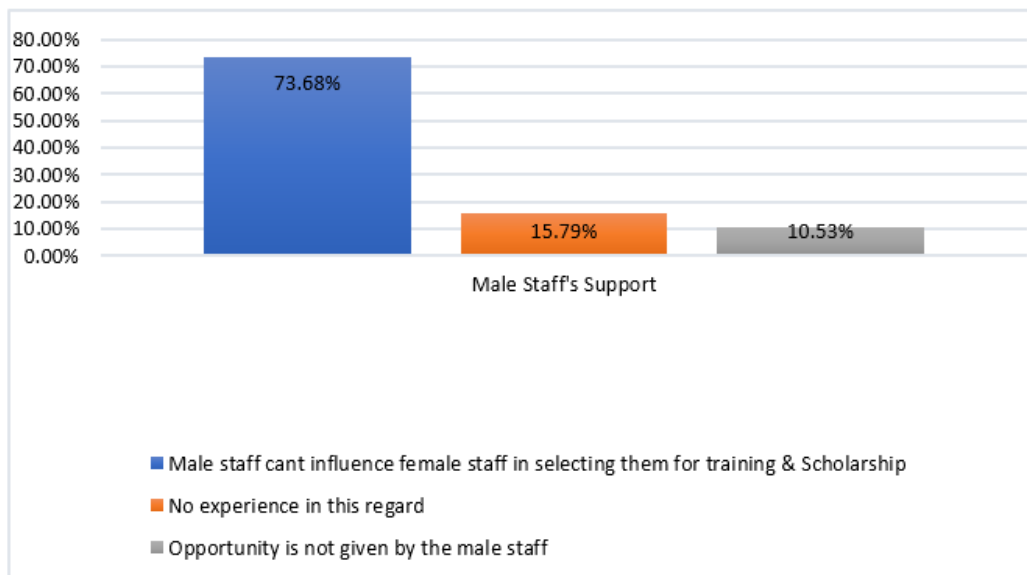


Figure 07: Distribution of Male Staff’s Nomination Style for Female Staff

Based on the data provided, it appears that a total of 14 samples agreed that male staff cannot influence the selection of female staff for scholarships and training. These respondents believe that such opportunities are determined based on factors such as seniority and relevancy, rather than the gender of the staff members involved.

Additionally, 3 samples reported having no personal experience or knowledge regarding the influence of male staff on the selection process for scholarships and training.

Furthermore, 2 samples stated that opportunities for scholarships and training are not given by male staff. It is unclear from the information provided whether these respondents believe that opportunities are given by other individuals or groups, or if they are suggesting that opportunities arise independently of any specific individuals.

Overall, the data suggests that the majority of the samples believe that male staff members do not have the ability to influence the selection process for scholarships and training, which is determined based on factors such as seniority and relevancy.

5.8 How do the male staff motivate you in your work?

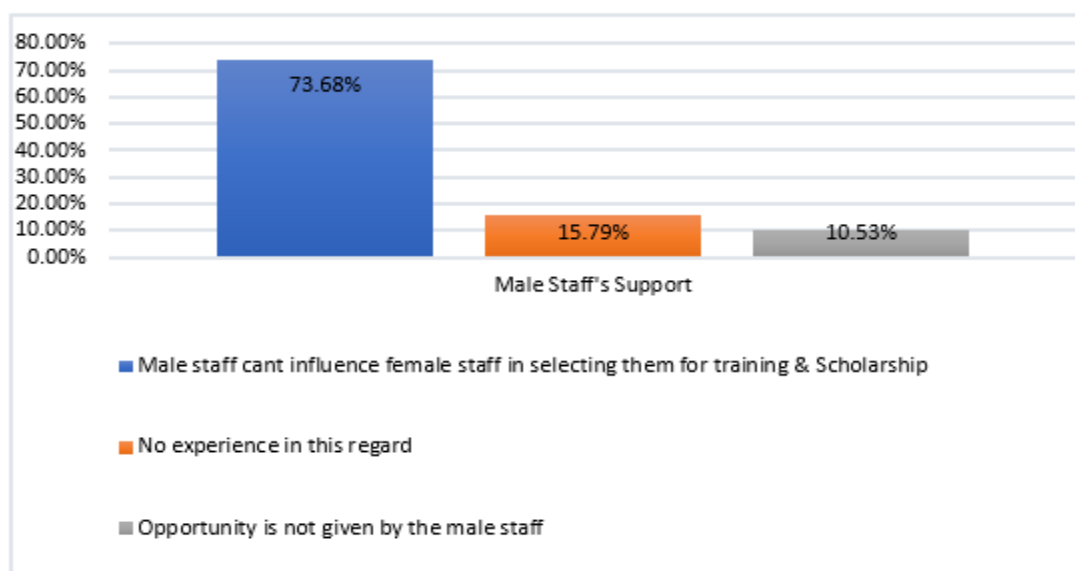


Figure 08: Distribution of Male Staff's Motivation Level to the Female Staff

10 samples agreed that motivation is given by the male staff: These individuals acknowledge that the male staff plays a role in motivating them in their work. However, the specific methods or approaches used by the male staff members are not mentioned.

1 sample stated that she is an intellectual and does not depend on motivation: This individual expresses a self-reliant approach to their work and states that they do not rely on external motivation, including from male staff members.

8 samples mentioned that motivation is not received from male staff and only negative thoughts are received: These individuals indicate that they do not receive motivation from male staff members. Instead, they claim to receive negative thoughts or possibly lack any positive support or encouragement from them.

5.9 When you get any challenges in your career how men are helping you to face that?

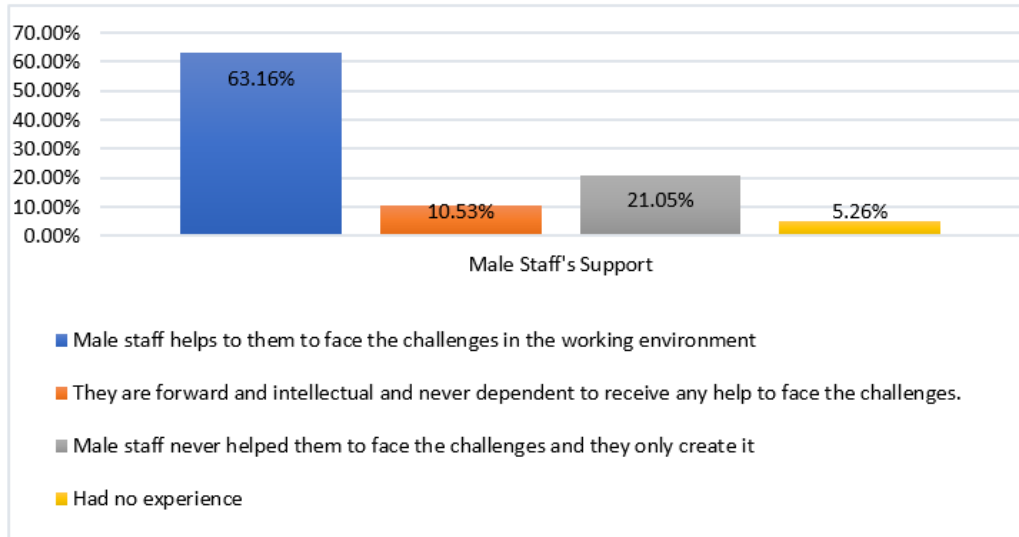


Figure 09: Distribution of Male Staff’s Supporting during Challenges

12 samples agreed that male staff members have helped them to face the challenges in the working environment. These individuals likely experienced support, guidance, or assistance from their male colleagues in overcoming career-related obstacles.

2 samples agreed that they are forward-thinking and independent, and therefore did not require any help from male staff members to face challenges. These individuals likely have a self-reliant approach and feel confident in their own abilities to tackle career challenges.

4 samples stated that male staff members never helped them to face challenges and instead created additional difficulties. These individuals may have experienced a lack of support, discrimination, or negative interactions with male colleagues that hindered their ability to overcome career challenges.

1 sample had no experience to share regarding male staff members' help in facing challenges. This person did not provide any specific information about their perspective or encounters in relation to this topic.

5.10 Do the co-female staff help in the same way as that of the co-male staff?

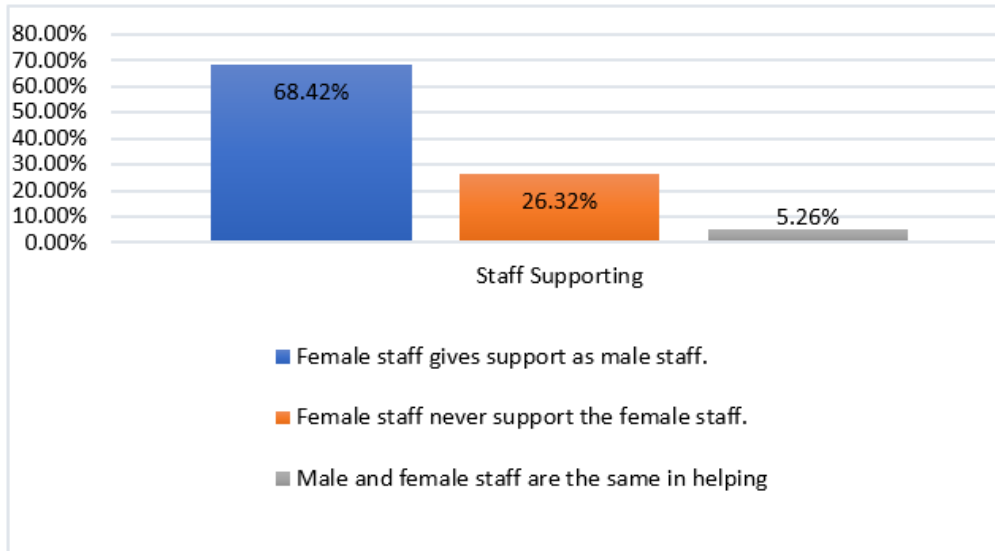


Figure 10: Distribution of the Support Rendered by the Female Staff to the Male Staff

Based on the given data, it appears that there were 13 samples where individuals agreed that female staff provides support in the same way as male staff. This suggests that these respondents believe that both male and female staff are equally helpful in providing support.

However, there were also 5 samples where individuals agreed that female staff never support other female staff. This indicates that these respondents perceive a lack of support specifically from female staff towards their female colleagues. It is important to note that this represents the opinion of the respondents and may not be reflective of the actual behavior of female staff members.

Additionally, one sample stated that both male and female staff are the same in terms of helping. This suggests that this particular respondent perceives no significant difference between the support provided by male and female staff.

6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

It is noted from the above discussion that almost more than 70% of the male staff support their counterpart female staff in their official, personal, and motivational levels. However, it is also noted that some female staff do not want to seek help (or support) from the male staff due to some reasons such as that they think it is not good to ask for help from the senior male staff, which again is a social norm that some female staff think so.

It is recommended that male staff must further come forward to support their counterpart female staff and the organization too must give such environment for its own growth. Further, the attitude of the female staff must also be changed that seeking support and help from the “seniors” is an additional one that many people usually do not have to make use of their

experiences. Once this attitude is developed among the so called “junior” female staff, they would get more support from the experiences of the “senior staff” whether they are male or female.

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