





Investigating the relationship between selected organisational factors and women's skills development aspirations and career progression: A South African case study

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Dates:

Received: 30 Mar. 2022

Accepted: 02 June 2022

Published: 10 Oct. 2022

How to cite this article:

Fitong Ketchiwou, G., Naong, M.N., Van Der Walt, F., & Dzansi, L.W. (2022). Investigating the relationship between selected organisational factors and women's skills development aspirations and career progression: A South African case study. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 20(0), a1958. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v20i0.1958>

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Orientation: There has been increased research in the past century on women within the workplace; however, women still face myriad gender-related challenges in their careers.

Research purpose: This research investigates how selected factors in and out of organisations affect women's skills development and career progression.

Motivation for the study: There is a pervasive perception that the rate at which women progress across hierarchy of work levels in organizations varies appreciably from the experience of their male counterparts.

Research approach/design and method: A positivist research approach was used, employing a questionnaire survey which was administered via an online platform to a sample of 412 women working within the service sector in the Gauteng province of South Africa, using a convenient non-probability sampling method. The relationship between the dependent and independent variables was analysed using the structural equation modelling approach.

Main findings: Results reveal that workplace support strategies and personal attributes influence women's skills development. Workplace support strategies, family responsibilities, personal attributes and skills development also play vital roles in women's career progression.

Practical/managerial implications: To promote gender equity and stimulate a career path for women, organisational support and deliberate women's skills development initiatives must be engendered.

Contribution/value-add: The empirical evidence demonstrates the positive effect that organisational support and personal responsibility have on women's skills development and their career progression, confirming that skills development is a predictor of women's career progression.

Keywords: career progression; service industry; skills development; South Africa; training; women; workplace.

Introduction

Most developing countries are still battling to adequately address and eradicate gender discrimination and inequality. Bosch (2017) and Moalusi and Jones (2019) opined that personal beliefs on gender, race, social revolution, cultural prejudice, gender bias and organisational structure continue to prevent women from fully participating in their workplaces. In spite of the attempts to reduce gender discrepancies in the labour market, disparities persist and need to be reviewed by governments, employers, workers and representative organisations (International Labour Organisation, 2018). Several countries have made progress towards gender parity, with noticeable improvements in 101 out of the 149 countries surveyed in the last 2 years. However, the process has been slow, and investments in women's talent is still limited in many countries (World Economic Forum, 2020). There are fewer women than men in general leadership and a greater disproportionate representation at senior and executive levels (African Union, 2018). Women around the world experience slower career development than men (Komalasari, Supartha, Rahyuda, & Dewi, 2017), thus making it difficult for them to progress to top positions. Whilst developed countries are successively making progress towards gender equality, most developing countries, including South Africa, still lag behind (International Labour Organisation, 2018; United Nations, 2019).

In South Africa, women still have a skewed representation in the workplace and in management across all sectors of the economy. Women are under-represented on corporate boards and top management roles. Only 29.4% of executive managers and 20.7% of directors are women, and at the topmost leadership hierarchy of corporates, there are only about 11.8% of female CEOs or chairpersons (Business Women's Association of South Africa, 2017). This fissure in female representation and particularly in leadership positions is a result of gender inequalities (PWC, 2018b). When compared with men, women's career trajectories are encumbered; hence, fewer women advance within organisations, and this disparity persists despite government legislation that affirms women and forbids discrimination against them (Moalusi & Jones, 2019). The myriad challenges women face in the workplace (Chetty & Naidoo, 2017; Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2019; Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim, & Mdlongwa, 2017; Steyn & Jackson, 2015) impact their skills development and career progression (Jáuregui & Olivos, 2018), aspects that are constantly hindered by their life patterns and organisational conditions (McKie & Jyrkinen, 2017).

Purpose and problem statement

Gender factors make it difficult for women to focus on their skills and career development (Bakalim & Tasdelen-Karckay, 2017; Jaga et al., 2017; Moalusi & Jones, 2019). Although there is legislation to address gender disparities in women's skills development and career progression within the workplace, women continue to face several challenges (Alexander, 2019; Chetty & Naidoo, 2017; Oosthuizen, Tonelli, & Mayer, 2019). This study leans on historical records of gender inequality mindsets that regard women as vulnerable, weak, less self-determined, inferior or second-class humans with limited autonomy and legal rights (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018) to investigate factors that impact women's skills development and their career progression within the service industry.

Literature review

Theories and concepts discussed in this article provide context for this research and the rationale for approaches chosen to achieve research objectives.

Theoretical context

Feminist theories

Feminist theories aim to foster gender equality through the protection of women's rights (Gouws, 2019) by striving to end oppression, sexism and sexist exploitations (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Priyadharshini et al., 2021; Mohan, Hariharasudan, & Sangeetha, 2021). To date, the feminist agenda in South Africa has been driven mostly by the younger generation of women, who are keen to enforce their social and political rights through their dedication to achieving gender equality (Gouws, 2019). Liberal feminism relies on the ideology of gender equality, democracy, autonomy, justice in all spheres and affirming the intellectual and physical capabilities of women within the workplace (Baehr, 2017; Karim, 2020). Based upon this ideology, Nienaber and Moraka (2016)

affirmed that women should have the same social, political, legal and educational rights as men. However, policies in place have not automatically achieved the desired gender goals (Lwesi, 2019). Hence, there is a need to remove omnipotent, imaginary bottlenecks that deprive women of human capital development and career benefits.

Human capital development

From an economic angle, expenditures on human capital development are costs that command a price in the labour market (Alnachef & Alhajjar, 2017; Fallon & Rice, 2015); thus, organisations invest in employees when they perceive a return on their investments (Hideg, Krstic, Trau, & Zarina, 2018; Judrups, Zandbergs, & Kazakovs, 2015; Raheja, 2015). From a psychological perspective, the world consists of stimuli gathered in meaningful configurations, through which behaviours occur (Ismail, Abdul-Majid, & Musibau, 2017; Mulder, 2018). Employee development initiatives are prone to stimulate multiple employee behaviours that benefit the company. The system component of employee development further establishes that the world is an open system with inputs, processes and outputs with feedback loops (Mehta, 2019; Taulli, 2018). Well-developed women have a better chance to both earn more and grow within the workforce, if they are afforded proper and deliberate career paths.

Career models

Traditional career models are characterised by bureaucracy, vertical progression, rigidity, full-time employment and uninterrupted careers (Broadbridge, 2015; Herman, 2015). This ideology gives little consideration for the complex challenges working women face and ignores the multiple demands placed upon women, thereby forcing them to adapt to criteria dictated by a patriarchal world (Chanland & Murphy, 2017; Naudé, 2017). Women have increased in the workplace and many neither want to exit the workplace completely nor neglect their careers in favour of their family lives. Hence, rigid traditional career models are inappropriate for women in the contemporary world, giving room to modern career models that recognise the complexity of the career environment characterised by multiple breaks, nonlinearity, horizontal movements across organisations, periods of unemployment, increased instability, high mobility and increased personal initiatives (Rapuano, 2020). However, research on current modern careers is lacking in contextual aspects, creating the need for a more comprehensive and systemic approach to careers which is called sustainable careers. The momentum for sustainability in careers has grown in recent years in response to changing demographic, socio-economic, technological and business contexts (De Vos & Van Der Heijden, 2017; McDonald & Hite, 2018; Valcour, 2015). With sustainable careers, individuals are expected to take personal responsibility for their careers (Akkermans, De Vos, & Van Der Heijden, 2016) while organisations provide learning opportunities that enhance the future employability of employees (De Vos & Van Der Heijden, 2017; Rapuano, 2020) and assist them to manage their nonwork context (Reichel et al., 2022). Sustainable career models are multidimensional and evolving and thus ideal for women.

Conceptual context and development of hypotheses

Structural relationships between the constructs discussed below, and depicted in the conceptual framework in Figure 1, led to the development of hypotheses

Skills development

Skills development is the improvement of the qualitative aspect of a workforce that results in higher qualifications, improved capabilities and greater personal potential (Stacho, Stachová, & Raišienė, 2019; Vnoučková, Urbanová, & Smolová, 2015). Skills development happens when employees learn new things (Craig, 2018; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016) and develop themselves (Turaba & Casimir, 2015), hence allowing them to progress within the workplace.

Career progression

Progression happens when an employee moves from a lower position to a higher position (Osibanjo, Oyewunmi, & Ojo, 2014), usually accompanied by increased work responsibilities, authority (Heathfield, 2019; Prossack, 2018) and a new job title (Vasel, 2019). Previous findings show that skills development, in the form of education and training, impacts women's progression in the workplace (Afande, 2015; Rath, Mohanty, & Pradhan, 2019). This led to the development of the hypothesis that:

H1: Women's skills development is positively linked to their career progression.

Workplace impediments

The lack of support for education, inadequate skill development (Joshi, Neely, Emrich, Griffiths, & George, 2015; PWC, 2018b) and the lack of mentorship (Ames, Coplen, & Malloy, 2019; Oosthuizen et al., 2019) stall women's careers. Women's careers are also hampered by unfair promotion practices (McKinsey & Company, 2019; Vasel, 2019) and male domination within the organisation (Chetty & Naidoo, 2017; Islam, Jantan, Hashim, Chong, & Abdullah, 2018; Naudé, 2017). Likewise, women struggle in their careers when there is no support for work-family balance (Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019; Malek, Hassan, & Sabil, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020), and the absence of female role models is detrimental to women's careers (Athanasopoulou, Moss-Cowan, Smets, & Morris, 2017; Moalusi & Jones, 2019). Therefore, deficiencies in skills development support, inadequate mentorship, unfair promotion practices, male domination, lack of support for work-family balance and limited role models negatively impact women's careers, resulting in the following hypotheses:

H2a: Selected workplace impediments hinder women's skills development.

H2b: Selected workplace impediments hinder women's career progression.

Workplace support strategies

Unlike organisational impediments, some organisational factors promote women's careers. Facilitating developmental networks for women helps them ascend the organisational ladder faster (Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci, & Burke, 2017; McKinsey & Company, 2019). Similarly, learning and growth platforms (Mehta, 2019; Stacho et al., 2019; Tauli, 2018), women-oriented leadership development programmes (Ames et al., 2019; Knipfer, Shaughnessy, Hentschel, & Schmid, 2017) and career management assistance (Afande, 2015; Howson, Coate, & De St Croix, 2018) accelerate women's careers. Moreover, sponsorship initiatives, in which seniors use their authority to promote junior employees, positively impact women's careers (Chanland & Murphy, 2017; Kumara, 2018). Furthermore, when organisations encourage women-to-woman support, women are more likely to strive within the workplace (Ensour, Al Maaitah, & Kharabsheh, 2017; Faniko, Ellemers, Derks, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2017; Sheppard & Aquino, 2017). An overall gender-friendly organisational culture facilitates the development and advancement of women within the workplace (Jáuregui & Olivos, 2018; Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019; Mathur-Helm, 2018). Thus, networks, learning platforms, leadership development, career management, sponsorship, woman-to-woman support and gender-friendly cultures promote women's careers. Hence, the following hypotheses are tested:

H2c: Selected workplace support strategies promote women's skills development.

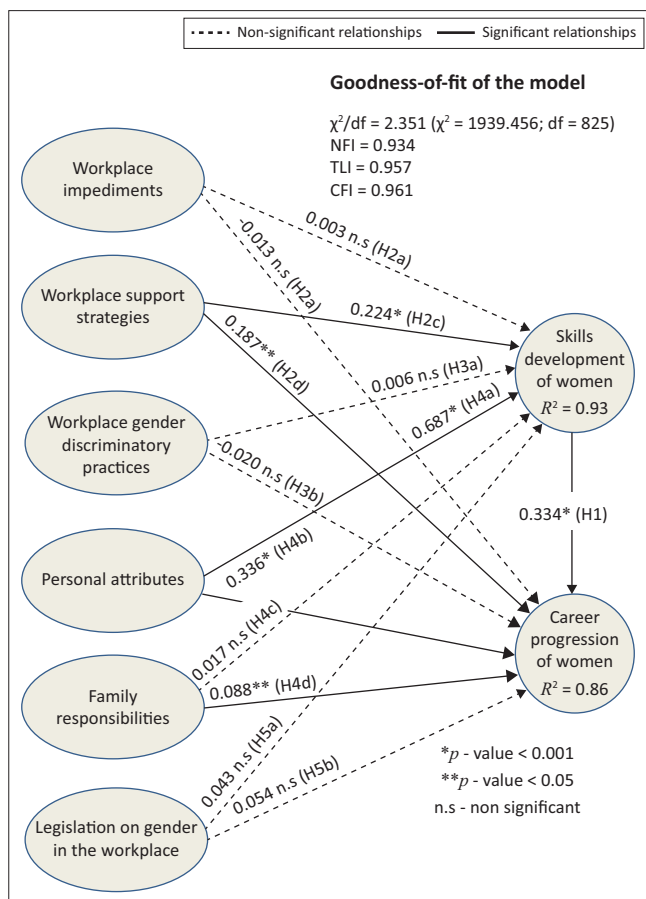


FIGURE 1: Results for factors affecting women's skills development and career progression.

H2d: Selected workplace support strategies promote women's career progression.

Gender discriminatory practices

Gender inequalities within the workplace continue because employers are failing to adequately address them (Pienaar, Naidoo, & Malope, 2018). Gender stereotypes (Bosch, 2017; Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019; Jáuregui & Olivos, 2018) and gender bias (Ames et al., 2019; Chanland & Murphy, 2017; McKinsey & Company, 2019) greatly impact women's careers. Furthermore, when women are treated based on their culturally assigned gender roles, their careers suffer (International Labour Organisation, 2018; Stewart, 2020). There is also evidence that invisible organisational barriers prevent women from rising to senior leadership (Chetty & Naidoo, 2017; Moalusi & Jones, 2019). Moreover, gender pay gaps in favour of men (Auspurg, Hinz, & Sauer, 2017; PWC, 2018a; World Economic Forum, 2020), unfair representation of women at senior levels (McKinsey & Company, 2019; Osthuizen et al., 2019) and sexual harassment (McKinsey & Company, 2019) are detrimental to women's careers. Moreover, the laxity with which organisations handle unfair practices plays a significant role in the eradication of gender malpractices which affect women's careers (Lahiri-Dutt, 2015; Pienaar et al., 2018). Therefore, discriminatory practices such as misconceptions about women's professional abilities, culturally assigned gender roles, gender bias, the glass ceiling, gender pay inequality, unfair gender representation at senior levels, sexual harassment and negligence in addressing gender discriminatory practices hamper women's careers. This led to the hypotheses that:

H3a: Gender discriminatory practices negatively impact women's skills development.

H3b: Gender discriminatory practices negatively impact women's career progression.

Personal attributes

Women's approaches towards their careers are critical for their professional success. It is imperative to put in the necessary effort to succeed (Bosch, 2017; Oosthuizen et al., 2019) and to take full responsibility for one's career to move forward (Prossack, 2018; Rapuano, 2020). In the same vein, exhibiting professional confidence (Athanasopoulou et al., 2017; Mathur-Helm, 2018), being optimistic about one's career (Ames et al., 2019; Faniko et al., 2017) and effectively communicating one's career plans (Afande, 2015; Howson et al., 2018) are vital for career advancement. This implies that effort, professional confidence, responsibility and optimism about one's career are vital for success. Hence, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H4a: Some personal factors impact women's skills development.

H4b: Some personal factors impact women's career progression.

Family responsibilities

Demands of family often interfere with women's careers (Malek et al., 2019; Mythili, 2019) and produce strains that make it difficult for women to fulfil their career ambitions

(Bakalim & Tasdelen-Karckay, 2017; Ensour et al., 2017). Family responsibilities limit the time available for women to invest in their careers, as women often have to split their time between work and family (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2019; Rath et al., 2019). These often lead to family pressures which stress women and make it difficult for them to engage in career-related activities (Neto et al., 2018; Stewart, 2020). Previous findings that family demands interfere, strain and pressurise women's careers, thus limiting the time they have to invest in their careers, led to the test of the following hypotheses:

H4c: Family responsibilities impact women's skills development.

H4d: Family responsibilities impact women's career progression.

Legislation on gender in the workplace

The South African government has promulgated legislation to promote gender equality within the workplace. The *Constitution of South Africa Act No.108 of 1996* (RSA, 1996); the *Labour Relations Act No. 66 of 1995* (RSA, 1995) and the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997* (RSA, 1997) ensure gender equity and gender fairness. The *Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998* addresses the equitable skills development of employees, especially for employees from designated groups (RSA, 1998b). In addition, the *Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998* promotes equitable representation at all hierarchical levels within organisations (RSA, 1998a), whilst the *Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Amendment Act No. 46 of 2013* aims to increase the ownership, management control and employment of black men and women (RSA, 2013). Although published, these laws (together with their associated policies and programmes) have not fully served their purposes as the day-to-day experiences of women still differ from promised standards (Alexander, 2019) and women are still disadvantaged in the workplace (Botha, 2017; Gipson et al., 2017). Hence the following hypotheses:

H5a: There is a link between adherence to related existing legislation and women's skills development.

H5b: There is a link between adherence to related existing legislation and women's career progression.

Methodology

Research design

This research espoused a positivist approach to test existing theories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A quantitative method was used, and the research embraced a descriptive and correlative approach (Apuke, 2017; Bryman, 2016) to investigate constructs and relationships between them.

Population and sampling technique

A total of 2000 women from the service industry were targeted to participate in the study and were sampled using a convenient nonprobability sampling technique (Bryman, 2016). However, a sample of 412 was secured, which is far above the acceptable research sample of between 30 and 500 suggested by Sekaran and Bougie (2016), at a confidence level of 95%.

Data collection and analysis

An online survey questionnaire was employed to collect data from 412 respondents within the service industry in Johannesburg, South Africa. The questionnaire consisted of 43 closed-ended questions and 12 biographical questions in a five-point Likert rating scale ranging from strongly disagree (rated 1) to strongly agree (rated 5). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and the results are discussed thereafter.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee, Faculty of Management Sciences (ref. no. GFK/2018).

Results

Descriptive statistics

The majority of respondents, 84.2%, were black African women, followed by mixed race women at 10%, white women at 4.1% and finally Indian women at 1.5%, whilst 0.2% of respondents' racial categories were unaccounted for. A total of 22.1% of respondents in this study were semi-skilled, and 51.7% were skilled workers or junior managers. Only 12.1%, 6.1%, 5.6% and 2.4% were managers, middle managers, senior managers and top managers, respectively. Also, 90.8% of these women were employed full-time, whilst 9.2% were part-time employees, indicating that most of the respondents have career growth potential.

Kline (2015) recommended skewness below ± 3 and kurtosis values below ± 10 as appropriate. Hence, findings in Table 1 reveal that the supposition of univariate normality was met and normality was supported; therefore, the maximum likelihood method can be used to evaluate fitness of the model. More so, apart from gender discriminatory practices, which have a mean of 2.5, the means for the other constructs are above the midpoint and standard deviation values range between 1.038 and 1.561, indicating a narrow spread of the values around the mean.

Structural equation modelling

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse data, using IBM SPSS Amos version 27. This analysis technique is ideal to represent, test and estimate theoretical models and to explain the extent of variance (Ramlall, 2017). The confirmatory factor analysis and the structural model analysis are discussed next.

Confirmatory factor analysis

This section provides statistical evidence of the construct validity, which consists of model fit indices, reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Model fit indices: The maximum likelihood estimation method in SPSS Amos 27 was employed to test the structural model. In line with Hair et al. (2014), prior to testing the hypothesised relationships, the model's fitness was assessed and results indicated a satisfactory fit [chi-square = 1939.456; $p = 0.000$; $df = 825$; chi-square/degree of freedom (CMIN/DF) = 2.351; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.819; normed fit index (NFI) = 0.934; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.957; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.961; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.057]. Chi-square ratio of the model is less than 5, indicating a good model fit (Bentler, 1989, 1990). The CFI and TLI exceed 0.90, also signifying a good model fit (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). Likewise, NFI exceeds 0.90 (Byrne, 1994) and the RMSEA value is below 0.08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993), indicating an acceptable model fit. Hence, the structural model (hypothesised research) fits the data. The structural model in Figure 1 can therefore be confidently used to test the hypothesised relationships in this study.

Reliability and validity: This section reports on the reliability and validity of the scale.

Reliability: Reliability is the extent to which the measurement of a given construct yields consistent and stable results (Taherdoost, 2016). Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha are often used to measure the reliability of a scale (Field, 2013), and the acceptable value for both is 0.7 (Malhothra et al., 2017). Findings presented in Table 2 reveal that the composite reliability (CR) coefficients range from 0.897 to 0.986, and the Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs range between 0.906 and 0.986, thus indicating a good level of internal consistency and reliability for the eight constructs.

Convergent validity: Convergent validity is the extent to which a set of items only measure one latent variable in a similar direction (Hosany, Prayag, Deesilatham, Caušević, & Odeh, 2015). Table 2 reveals that all factor loadings (FLs) are at least 0.5 and the average variance extracted (AVEs) estimates above 0.5, suggesting convergent validity of the model (Malhothra et al., 2017).

Discriminant validity: Discriminant validity is the degree to which a construct or latent variable discriminates against other constructs or latent variables (Taherdoost, 2016). Table 3

TABLE 1: Normality test and central tendencies.

Assessments	Family responsibilities	Workplace support strategies	Workplace impediments	Gender discriminatory practices	Career progress	Personal attributes	Skills development	Legislation on gender in the workplace
Skewness	0.590	0.174	0.956	0.665	0.194	0.156	0.145	0.232
Kurtosis	-0.506	-1.304	0.262	-0.332	-1.261	-1.669	-1.628	-1.347
Mean	2.55	2.93	2.27	2.50	2.92	2.87	2.90	2.85
SD	1.123	1.299	1.038	1.049	1.258	1.561	1.536	1.370

TABLE 2: Statistical results of reliability and convergent validity tests.

Construct	Item	Factor loading	<i>p</i> -value	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Number of items
Workplace support strategies	ORGSUP1	0.947	***	0.978	0.978	0.862	7
	ORGSUP2	0.959	***				
	ORGSUP3	0.934	***				
	ORGSUP4	0.947	***				
	ORGSUP5	0.904	***				
	ORGSUP6	0.906	***				
	ORGSUP7	0.899	***				
Workplace impediments	IMPED1	0.902	***	0.963	0.963	0.813	6
	IMPED2	0.900	***				
	IMPED3	0.918	***				
	IMPED4	0.905	***				
	IMPED5	0.906	***				
	IMPED6	0.879	***				
Skills development of women	SKILDEV1	0.972	***	0.986	0.986	0.945	4
	SKILDEV2	0.978	***				
	SKILDEV3	0.969	***				
	SKILDEV4	0.97	***				
Career progression of women	CARPROG1	0.935	***	0.963	0.963	0.84	5
	CARPROG2	0.944	***				
	CARPROG3	0.93	***				
	CARPROG4	0.938	***				
	CARPROG5	0.832	***				
Personal attributes (non-workplace)	APPRO1	0.89	***	0.983	0.983	0.922	5
	APPRO2	0.965	***				
	APPRO3	0.977	***				
	APPRO4	0.983	***				
	APPRO5	0.984	***				
Family responsibilities (non-workplace)	FAMRES1	0.702	***	0.906	0.897	0.688	4
	FAMRES2	0.759	***				
	FAMRES3	0.938	***				
	FAMRES4	0.897	***				
Workplace gender discriminatory practices	GENDESC1	0.688	***	0.955	0.952	0.715	8
	GENDESC2	0.794	***				
	GENDESC3	0.83	***				
	GENDESC4	0.86	***				
	GENDESC5	0.883	***				
	GENDESC6	0.901	***				
	GENDESC7	0.887	***				
	GENDESC8	0.898	***				
Legislation on gender in the workplace	IMPLEM1	0.942	***	0.976	0.976	0.911	4
	IMPLEM2	0.957	***				
	IMPLEM3	0.965	***				
	IMPLEM4	0.954	***				

***, Indicates significance at 99% confidence interval.

indicates that there are no discriminant validity concerns between the constructs because all their AVE square roots exceed their own inter-construct correlation values (Malhotra, Nunan, & Birks, 2017). Hence, convergent and discriminant validity are supported in this study.

Structural model analysis

After obtaining good model fit results, we estimated the significance of each relationship in the conceptual framework and the variance obtained (R^2). The standardised regression coefficients and the significance of relationships are presented in Figure 1. Beta values indicate the strength and direction of the relationship, whereas *p*-values estimate the significance (for *p*-values below 0.05) (Pallant, 2010).

Out of the 13 hypotheses, 6 relationships were significant whilst 7 were non-significant. Career progression was statistically and significantly associated with skills development ($\beta = 0.334, p = 0.000$). Therefore, hypothesis H1 is supported. Likewise, the workplace support strategies construct was significantly and positively associated with skills development ($\beta = 0.224, p = 0.000$) and career progression ($\beta = 0.187, p = 0.004$). Hence, there is support for hypotheses H2c and H2d, respectively. Results also indicate that personal attributes have a significantly positive relationship with skills development ($\beta = 0.687, p = 0.000$) and career progression ($\beta = 0.336, p = 0.000$). Consequently, hypotheses H4a and H4b are accepted, respectively. Similarly, family responsibilities are statistically and positively linked to career progression ($\beta = 0.088, p = 0.005$); therefore, hypothesis H4d is accepted.

TABLE 3: Correlation matrix to assess discriminant validity.

Constructs	Family	Support	Impediments	Gender discrimination	Career progress	Approach	Skills development	Legislation
Family	0.83	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Support	0.618	0.928	-	-	-	-	-	-
Impediments	0.49	0.366	0.902	-	-	-	-	-
Gender discrimination	0.526	0.449	0.714	0.845	-	-	-	-
Career progress	0.641	0.879	0.354	0.428	0.917	-	-	-
Approach	0.627	0.891	0.376	0.457	0.911	0.96	-	-
Skills development	0.63	0.909	0.377	0.457	0.914	0.957	0.972	-
Legislation	0.625	0.908	0.32	0.389	0.864	0.893	0.892	0.955

Overall, workplace support strategies, workplace impediments, personal attributes, family responsibilities, workplace gender discriminatory practices, legislation on gender in the workplace explain up to 93% of the variance in skills development of women ($R^2 = 0.93$) and 86% of the variance of career progression of women ($R^2 = 0.86$), respectively. Personal attributes are the greatest predictor of women's skills development ($p = 0.687$) and their career progression ($p = 0.336$), followed by workplace support strategies ($p = 0.224$).

Discussion and implications

From the findings of this study, it can be inferred safely that there are higher probabilities for women to experience career progression when their skills are developed (H1). These findings are in synch with Afande (2015) and Rath et al. (2019), who found that education, training and development impact women's progression within the workplace. Through the active promotion of women's skills development, organisations (and individual women) can facilitate career progression. This study's findings further revealed that women will be more likely to engage in skills development activities and progress when there is the right organisational support (H2c and H2d). These revelations are congruent with the plethora of previous findings, which all affirm the relevance of organisational support for employee's skills development (Coetzee, 2017; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; McKinsey & Company, 2019; Mehta, 2019; Rapuano, 2020; Stacho et al., 2019; Stachová, Stacho, & Vicen, 2017; Taulli, 2018). The given findings accentuate the relevance of organisational support in promoting women's skills development and their career progression (through initiatives such as support in networking, learning and growth, leadership development, career management, sponsorship, gender-friendly culture and woman-woman support).

More so, women's approach towards their own skills development and career progression is vital for their career growth. When a woman makes an effort, takes responsibility, expresses her career ambitions and exhibits optimism and confidence, she is more likely to engage in skills development activities (H4a). These results are in tandem with previous findings that individuals have a significant role to play in their skills development (Khalid, Rehman, Muqadas, & Rehman, 2017; Howson et al., 2018; Vnoučková et al., 2015). Similarly, women who have positive attitudes towards their careers stand a better chance of progressing in the workplace

(H4b). These results coincide with previous research which stipulates that women's advancement in the workplace greatly depends upon their personal attitudes (Ames et al., 2019; Prossack, 2018; Rapuano, 2020).

Furthermore, the career progression of women is impacted by their family responsibilities (H5b), implying that improvement in family responsibility will improve chances for career progression. This is because family-related demands, strains and time constraints put pressure on women's careers as confirmed by previous findings that family responsibilities weigh on women's career progress (Bakalim & Tasdelen-Karckay, 2017; Husin, Ghazali, Abdullah, & Hadi, 2018; Stewart, 2020).

Limitations

Despite the contribution of this study to research on women's progression within the workplace, few limitations were encountered, which provide scope for further research. Although hypotheses were informed by existing literature, relationships between women's skills development and workplace impediments, gender discriminatory practices, family responsibilities and legislation on gender were not statistically significant (H2a, H3a, H4c and H5a were rejected, respectively). Similarly, no statistical association was found between women's career progression and workplace impediments, workplace gender discriminatory practices and legislation on gender (H2b, H3b, H5b were rejected, respectively). Contradictory findings to the hypothesised relationships could be retested in subsequent studies. Controversial result may also indicate the need to further test the unpublished research instrument for validation. Also, due to low response rates and time constraints, the sample for this project was limited to women within the service sector in Johannesburg, which reduces the extent of generalisation of its findings. More insight could be gained from research on women from specific professions (e.g. accounting, insurance, finance) within different provinces or nations or even a comparative study between genders or one on men's career progression.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article investigated factors that impact women's skills development and their career progression within the service sector in Johannesburg. It concludes that women need to put in the required effort and take full responsibility for their careers. Also, corporations and national authorities need to be

proactive in eliminating gender discriminatory practices, employ strategies that promote women's careers and design systems to support women in their dual roles, thus ensuring a healthy work-life balance. A paradigm shift and differentiated approach become necessary to enhance and realise impactful results from organisational efforts geared towards women's development and progression within the workplace.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

F.K.G. carried out the literature review and data collection for the first draft of the article. M.N., as the main supervisor, worked on the conceptualisation and refinement of the first draft and data analysis. F.v.d.W. was co-supervisor and attended to the appropriateness of the methodology design. L.W.D., as the co-supervisor, focused on language editing, technical issues and data presentation.

Funding information

Funding for this study was provided exclusively by the Central University of Technology, Free State.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors, and the publisher.

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