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Career progression of female librarians in public university libraries in Ghana

Olive Akpebu Adjah
University of Ghana, Ghana

Thomas Van der Walt
University of South Africa, South Africa

Abstract

The growing interest in gender issues and female employment has generated a number of studies and the library and information profession has not been excluded from this interest in promoting female equality in employment. This study investigates the career patterns of practising professional female librarians in six selected public university libraries in Ghana, in order to establish the enhancers and inhibitors they experience in their career progression. The study, conducted with a survey method, adopted the use of self-administered questionnaires for data collection. Quantitative data gathered from the 128 librarians were analysed to report on descriptive characteristics of respondents, while qualitative data, from open-ended questions, were analysed, using the narrative analysis technique, to present a profile of respondents and their career histories. The findings reveal females in the study were unable to meet requirements for promotion in their various public university libraries, which has resulted in very slow progress in their careers and even stagnated careers. The study concludes by recommending that there should be a career development support system for females, to help them overcome barriers to advancement in university libraries

Introduction

There is growing recognition, globally, of the importance of paying attention to gender issues and female employment, to promote gender equality so that women can enjoy an improved quality of life. The need to better articulate this concept of a gender system has led to much more research and conferences on the condition of women than previously (Durojaiye, 2005: 1). The Beijing Conference: The Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) (http://www.unwomen.org) presented an attempt to narrow the gap between men and women and to ensure that women enjoy equal opportunities with men. Anyanwu (2012: 14) who goes further to explain why focusing on female employment is important, reiterates this by stating that from a rights-based perspective, female employment should be enhanced because everyone deserves the same opportunities. However, according to Osei-Asibey and Grey (2013: 66), significant challenges remain for women's progression to top management positions and therefore they call for stronger policy efforts to improve gender equality and promote women's empowerment. These challenges were also perceived among women in most fields: bank managers in India (Rath et al., 2015); women in accounting firms in Australia (Adapa et al., 2015); female faculty members in medical schools in the United States of America (Surawicz, 2016), females in the Malaysian labour force (Subramannian et al., 2016), and senior-level female administrators in the sports division in the United States (Hancock and Hums, 2016), to mention but a few.

Haile et al. (2016) also reviewed and analysed several challenges confronting and denying qualified women the opportunity to reach the pinnacle of their organisations. They identified organisational cultures; gender stereotypes; failure to capitalise on the talents of women; differences in national culture; structural factors such as policies and work practices; male chauvinism; women's relegation to human

Corresponding author:
Olive Akpebu Adjah, Balme Library University of Ghana,
PO BOX LG24, Legon, Ghana.
Email: oakpebuadjah@ug.edu.gh

resources management positions and differences in pay and political power between men and women as some major hindrances to the career advancement of women. These inconsistencies suggest the need to address workforce issues, related to women in employment, to help in identifying the gaps in policy and implementation in the labour sector.

The library and information profession has not been left out of this drive to promote female equality in employment and as a result, women in librarianship has been a topic of discussion of a number of studies in the library profession. This interest in women issues is shared by the Women's Section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), now the Women, Information and Libraries Special Interest Group (WIL SIG). This interest group focuses on women as workers in the library field and aims at supporting females by improving their positions through career development and working conditions. Furthermore, the WIL SIG calls for the promotion, collection, research, publication and dissemination of information on the status of women in librarianship. IFLA further suggests that such research should 'identify discrimination in all forms including disparities in resources, programmes, and opportunities relating to women in librarianship' (IFLA, 2005: 1).

History attributes the entrance of women into the library profession to the influence of Melvil Dewey, an American library pioneer of the late 19th early-20th century. When Columbia College hired him in 1883 to become the head librarian, he persuaded the College trustees to open a library school. Librarianship as an occupation for women generated a number of debates among feminist thinkers within library-oriented circles, which led to the creation of a number of feminist support networks. More recently, these female issues in the library profession seem to be gaining greater importance in modern society and as a result attention has been focused on characteristics, career and mobility patterns of professionals, resulting in a number of researchers looking at these subjects from different perspectives.

Overview of previous studies on the topic

In the library field, Ladner (2004) looked at the career progression of 20 women librarians employed in special libraries in the United States of America, who were early adopters of the Internet. Participants in the study describe career progression in terms of an increase in job satisfaction, opportunities for professional enhancement, recognition of one's contribution to their organisations and the ability to balance work and family life. Ladner (2004) argues that these women seem to be replacing the male model of career progression with a model of professional growth, which does not measure success in terms of upward mobility on a so-called career ladder.

In Ghana, Amekuedee and Adanu (2006) investigated the status, occupational characteristics and career advancement opportunities of female librarians in public, special and academic libraries. The findings reveal that female librarians in Ghana could advance to any height without discrimination from their male counterparts in terms of remuneration or opportunities for development. Similar findings hold true in a study of women in United Kingdom (UK) academic libraries. According to Hadfield and Sen (2009), these UK female librarians have opportunities afforded to them to develop and progress into future senior roles. They came to this conclusion after a study that investigated women's success, their career path and potential barriers in career progression in UK academic libraries. Despite these opportunities, respondents in Hadfield and Sen's (2009) study indicated that long working hours, caring responsibilities, especially the burden of childcare and taking career breaks hinder their career movement.

Ariomerebi and Ifeakachuku (2013) surveyed female librarians in Nigeria. The study investigated interest and self-motivation as correlation of capacity building and career commitment among these women. The findings reveal that the majority of female librarians in Nigeria were not interested in the profession; however, having found themselves in the field they show commitment to growth in their careers. The authors lament that unfortunately, their capacity-building opportunities and efforts are very low and these have impact on their career development. Amune (2014) looked at male and female librarians in public university libraries in Edo State in Nigeria, to assess comparative determinants of job satisfaction. Interestingly, the findings reveal that female librarians in public university libraries were more satisfied with their working conditions and motivational packages than their male counterparts.

Despite the large number of women in the profession, Moran et al. (2009) summarise what a number of other studies found, namely that there is a consistent pattern of discrimination against women. Discrimination and the marginalisation of women exist in the larger society resulting in the poor representation of women in top management in what Holden (1965) termed 'tokenism'. The inability of women to move beyond middle-management positions into senior executive status is also attributed to the presence of a 'glass ceiling'. This issue of a 'glass ceiling', an invisible or hidden barrier that stalls the career progression of women beyond a certain level (Simon, 1996: 6; Inman, 1998: 35–36; Haile et al., 2016: 36), appears constantly in literature. Jones and Oppenheim (2002: 104), for example, attempt to find out what glass ceilings there are to hinder the promotion of women in UK libraries. They identify lack of academic qualifications; salary differences; geographical mobility; domestic responsibilities; lack of female role models; lack of mentors and lack of ambition, on the parts of the women

themselves, as barriers to the progress of women. Moran et al. (2009: 226) add that women face more obstacles due to inequitable hurdles and other societal factors like child and elderly care, which limits mobility. Some of these issues account for stress at work and poor work/life balance among Association of Research Libraries (ARL) female academic librarians at track-tenure institutions (Galbraith et al., 2016: 71).

Bearing in mind Osei-Asibey and Grey's (2013), assertion, referred to earlier in this paper, looking at the gendered landscape of librarianship in Ghanaian public university libraries, one can observe that female librarians are unable to access top management positions even though Amekuedee and Adanu (2006) claim female librarians have opportunities equal to those of their male counterparts. The limited representation of females within the top-management level in Ghanaian public university libraries, which suggests the exclusion of females from the decision-making bodies, raises questions about the effectiveness of these 'equal opportunities' Amekuedee and Adanu (2006) refer to in their research. History has it, and to the best of the knowledge of the authors it is so, that ever since the first public university library was established in 1948 only five females (four Ghanaian females), until recently, in 2016 when one more Ghanaian female librarian was added to the list, have ever headed public university libraries. There is an indication that female librarians are unable to progress rapidly from middle-management position to top-level management.

Since females constitute a significant proportion in the labour force and even in the library and information profession, there is the need to establish factors that affect their participation in management. However, there is an apparent dearth of literature on Ghanaian female librarians to help explain the poor representation of women in the top administration of public university libraries. Against this background, the purpose of this article is to look at the career progression of female librarians in public university libraries in Ghana. It investigates the reasons why females are unable to move to top-level management of public university libraries in Ghana. It also probes further, to attain fuller understanding of career advancement among Ghanaian female librarians employed in public universities. In library circles and in this article career progression refers to the career development prospects of librarians (Noha, 201: 330), the pattern of development in their careers and opportunities for professional enhancement, especially for women trying to reach the pinnacle of public university libraries.

Research methodology

Research design

The design adopted for this study was the survey method. Surveys are chiefly used in studies that have individual people as the units of study, where persons must serve as respondents or informants (Babbie, 2005: 252). Respondents to this study were in various locations in Ghana and the survey method allowed for a systematic and structured method of acquiring information, on the same topic, from librarians in the various public university libraries, in a relatively short space of time (Gerhardt, 2004: 27). This design helped the researchers obtain information from librarians in the study area and gain insight into challenges librarians experience in the attempt to progress in their careers, especially using the open-ended questions.

Population

There are several public universities, institutions, university colleges and private institutions numbering over a hundred offering different courses in Ghana. In this study, all male and female professional and paraprofessional librarians, consisting of 220, from six selected public university libraries in Ghana, were the population of the study. The libraries are:

- University of Ghana, Legon, (UG)
- Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, (KNUST)
- University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, (UCC)
- University of Education, Winneba, (UEW)
- University for Development Studies, Tamale, (UDS)
- University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa. (UMaT).

These universities were chosen purposively because each of these university libraries have been in existence for more than 10 years and have well-structured systems for career progression. They also represent university libraries in various regions of the country, namely the Greater Accra Region, the Ashanti Region, the Central Region, the Northern Region and the Western Region, allowing the researchers to study the issue of career progression across several universities in the country. Although the study focused on female librarians, such analysis is most useful if related to comparable data for men. Hildenbrand (as cited in DeLong, 2013) points out that it is only through gendered history or an understanding of the position of women librarians in relation to their male counterparts that one can approach larger questions such as inequality in the workplace. In the absence of available data on Ghanaian male librarians, this study surveyed both male and female public university librarians in the selected libraries.

Data collection

The study, conducted with a survey method, adopted the use of a self-administered questionnaire for data

collection. The development of the questions was guided by the objective of the study, issues deduced from the literature review and the theoretical framework adopted for the study. The researchers also adopted and adapted questions used in similar studies identified in the literature review. Based on these, a questionnaire consisting of both structured, closed-ended survey questions that specify sets of responses in the form of multiple choices or a scale where respondents were 'forced' to choose from amongst answers provided, and unstructured questions, to which respondents were asked to provide their own answers. The definition of 'career progress' used in this study was indicated on the questionnaire as follows: 'career progress refers specifically to progression and advancement from exit of library school to the present level'. This was to ensure clarity of the meaning among respondents.

The questionnaire had all the three types of information, which solicited

- basic information: which related directly to the research problem;
- classification information: socioeconomic and demographic characteristics to classify respondents across different groups; and
- identification information: age and gender.

Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis. The researchers collaborated with a statistician who used Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16) to analyse quantitative data elicited. The descriptive statistical method of analysis was used for data analysis. Analysis of quantitative data, collected through closed-ended questions, was minimal and was done enough to provide descriptive statistics of respondents.

Qualitative data analysis. Research respondents embed into text their emotions, experiences and meanings they attribute to their professional experiences and challenges they encounter in the attempt to progress in their career. Dwelling mostly on the open-ended questions, which attracted varied responses, the researchers extracted meanings from data. In line with the standards of qualitative data analysis, the research objectives were used to identify the major themes from data collected. It involved breaking down all information collected and arranging it into thematic areas, according to the thrust of the objectives of the study. Word documents were created, where textual data collected was listed, parsing out major categories that most comments fell into. Having investigated the patterns and common themes within the data, results were written in narrative form, using inductive reasoning to present findings.

Since the focus is on narratives of personal experience (Riessman, 2006), much credence was given to respondents'

expressions of feelings and perceptions of issues of career progress. The analysis is therefore supported by selected quotations of respondents and emerging themes and sub-themes presented with the frequency of their occurrences.

Administration of questionnaire

The questionnaire was pre-tested, amended and sent to the various libraries under study. Permission was sought from the various University Librarians and colleagues were identified in each library and entrusted to help distribute and collect the questionnaires on behalf of the researchers. However, one of the researchers directly administered and collected questionnaires from librarians in the University of Ghana (UG), making sure the group that pre-tested the questionnaire were excluded. A total of 220 questionnaires were sent out to the six libraries: 140 (62%) librarians responded out of which 128 (57%) were found usable.

Findings and discussions

Gender and ranks of respondents

Usable responses to the questionnaire were received from 128 librarians who formed a group of 55.5% males and 35.2% females with 9.4% declining to indicate their gender. Employees in public universities fall under three categories, namely senior members, senior staff and junior staff. Professional librarians who fall into the senior member category are holders of a Master's degree or above in Library and Information Science (LIS). The paraprofessionals are diploma to first-degree holders and are classified as senior staff of universities. This study looked at the first two groups of librarians to give a broader or more comprehensive picture of the state of the library workforce in Ghanaian public universities.

Table 1 gives a synopsis of respondents' profiles according to the two categories mentioned earlier. Respondents were made up of 75 (58%) paraprofessionals and 41 (33%) professionals, with 12 (9%) declining to declare their gender and therefore making it impossible to classify their grade of profession. Library paraprofessionals make up the majority of the library workforce and this is consistent with the demographic overview of the library workforce in the United States (Manjarrez et al., 2010: 8).

Grade of respondents

Respondents to the study comprised 47 professional librarians and their rank is presented in Table 2. Among the professional librarians surveyed, there is a heavy concentration in the grade of Assistant Librarian.

This is similar to the pattern in a prior study of Ghanaian public university professional librarians, by Lamptey et al. (2013), which observed that the majority of librarians (66.1%) are at the Assistant Librarian level.

Table 1. Ranks of respondents.

Rank (N=128)	Female	Male	Total (%)	
Paraprofessional	29	46	75	(58%)
Professional	17	24	41	(33%)
Unknown			12	(9%)

Table 2. Grade of professional librarians.

Professional Librarians (Grade) (N=47)	Frequency	%	Male	Female
Librarian	4	4.4	2	2
Deputy librarian	2	4.4	2	–
Senior Assistant Librarian	14	31.1	7 (64%)	4 (36%)
Assistant Librarian	26	57.8	13 (52%)	12 (48%)
Junior Assistant Librarian	1	2.2	–	1 (100%)
Total	47	100	24	17

Table 3. Grade of paraprofessional librarians.

Grade of paraprofessionals (N-83)	Frequency	%	Male	Female
Chief Library Assistant	6	7.2	4 (66.6%)	2 (34%)
Principal Library Assistant	15	19.3	10 (64%)	4 (26%)
Senior Library Assistant	32	38.6	19 (60%)	13 (40%)
Library Assistant	24	31.3	10 (50%)	10 (50%)
Junior Library Assistant III	1	1.2	–	–
Junior Library Assistant II	4	4.8	3 (100%)	–
Junior Library Assistant I	1	1.2	–	–
Total	83	100.0	46	29

Among the paraprofessionals (Table 3), 75 persons indicated their gender as against eight who declined to do so. Within this group are four (66.6%) males and two (34%) females in the Chief Library Assistant rank; 10 (64%) males and four (26%) females in the Principal Library Assistant group, with a high concentration of females in the Senior Library Assistant and Library Assistant category.

Data in Tables 2 and 3 shows that male respondents are in the lead, in rank, among professional and paraprofessional librarians in public university libraries. From the 75 respondents out of the 83 who indicated their gender there is clear indication that as the ranks move higher, the gap

widens between the female and male proportion suggesting that female librarians are not moving fast enough in their career to occupy the higher ranks in the profession. This is similar to the drop of pattern, at the level of Associate Professor, observed among female faculty members in medical schools in the United States (Surawicz, 2016:1433). The survey probed further to find reasons for this pattern and this is discussed at the latter part of the paper.

Career entry

The study attempted to find out the age at which respondents entered the library profession, to determine whether female librarians had enough periods of work life to satisfy the requirements for promotion in the profession. An argument Munde (2010: 89) raises is that many librarians frequently enter the profession as a second career; therefore, compared with other professions, librarians, especially the professional group, usually join the field at older ages. Jones (2010: 177) corroborates this by adding that prior to their decision to become librarians most individuals worked in other occupations and since most of them had no 'long-range plans' for entering the field most individuals enter the profession late in their careers. Therefore, survey subjects were quizzed to determine the age at which they entered the profession. Data elicited from the above response was cross-tabulated by gender and rank to find out how many males and females entered the LIS profession at a particular age (see Table 4).

Data in Table 4 indicates that out of the 128 respondents, 115 persons answered this question. From the response the majority of paraprofessionals 30 (69%) entered the profession when they were below the age of 25; on the other hand, 13 (31%) of professional librarians claim they entered the LIS field below the age of 25 and 12 (27.3%) at the ages of 26–30. Cross-tabulation by gender shows that the majority of male librarians 25 (58.1%) entered the profession below the age of 25, whilst the majority of women 21 (50%), on the other hand, entered between the ages of 26 and 30, which incidentally represents the second largest number of men entering at the same age. This is in contrast to findings among academic librarians in Nigeria, which revealed that more females than males come into the LIS profession at a young age (Arinola and Oyewusi, 2009).

The age group 26 to 30 years is a very crucial period in the life of a Ghanaian woman because within this period, society expects a woman to have settled down to begin a family. Newton and Stewart (2013: 307) and Surawicz (2016: 1444) refer to this as societal stereotypes cast on women, expecting them to occupy and play the role of mother and nurturer. In most Ghanaian societies if a woman remains unmarried beyond the age of 30, the notion is that she is 'late' or getting 'late' in fulfilling such social

Table 4. Career entry by rank and gender.

Age at entry	Ranks (*N*=115)		Gender (*N*=111)	
	Paraprof	Prof	Male	Female
Below 25 years	30 (69%)	13 (31%)	25 (58.1%)	18 (41.9%)
26–30 years	32 (72.7%)	12 (27.3%)	21 (50%)	21 (50%)
31–35 years	7 (35.3%)	11 (64.7%)	16 (88.9%)	2 (11.1%)
36–40 years	2 (20%)	4 (80%)	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)
41–45 years	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
46–50 years	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
Total	75 (64%)	40 (36%)	68 (61.1%)	43 (38.9%)
Unknown	13		17	

Table 5. Career structure and progress for paraprofessional librarians.

Chief Library Assistant
Principal Library Assistant
Senior Library Assistant
Library Assistant
Junior Library Assistant III
Junior Library Assistant II
Junior Library Assistant I

Table 6. Designations in the library parallel to teaching staff faculty.

Professional librarian	Teaching staff
Librarian (only one post)	Professor
Deputy Librarian	Associate Professor
Senior Assistant Librarian	Senior Lecturer
Assistant Librarian	Lecturer
Junior Assistant Librarian	Assistant Lecturer

expectations. Even when women are economically independent, well-educated and self-sufficient they are still expected to have husbands. This age bracket of 26–30 years, therefore, is when a 'woman's demanding elite career collides with the family devotion schema' (Ariomerebi and Ifeakachuku, 2013: 36) a cultural schema that defines marriage and motherhood as a woman's vocation.

Such cultural or gendered expectations are so ingrained in the society that there is considerable pressure to marry young, engage in social activities of adult women from 20 years and above, since marriage and child-bearing are cultural expectations (Curry, 2011: 180; Nsarkoh, 1982: 25; Oppong, 1982: 83; Sarpong, 1977: 13). Most women sacrifice their careers to ensure that they are not seen as having failed in their role as a woman. This therefore puts the female librarian at a disadvantage because at this point there is divided attention or the need to make a choice between career and social expectations. Based on responses from the surveyed population, one can deduce that the careers of female librarians were tied to their personal lives. This was made evident in this study where 56.7% of female respondents indicated they sacrificed their careers to meet expected social responsibilities, moved from one library to another because of marital and family issues, and/or because their spouses relocated, inhibiting their ability to follow the structure for advancement in their profession.

Career structure and progress for paraprofessional librarians

Paraprofessional librarians are promoted depending on the length of service and vacancies available at each grade as exhibited in Table 5.

The highest rank among paraprofessional librarians is the Chief Library Assistant and least the Junior Library Assistant. To advance to the rank of a Library Assistant it is required that the candidate must have obtained a diploma in library/archives administration, awarded by a recognised university. Vacancies are advertised internally and qualified candidates are considered for promotion after having successfully passed an interview (Public universities in Ghana, n.d.).

Career structure and progress for professional librarians

Table 6 lists the five stages that professional librarians and their counterparts in the teaching field should progress through in the universities. Librarians in most university libraries around the world are given faculty status (Jayasundara, 2011:100).

The University Librarian, where applicable, enjoys the status of a 'professor' and other employees in the academic staff are the Deputy Librarians, Senior Assistant Librarians and Assistant Librarians. Academic status is an issue that applies specifically to professional librarians in university libraries and differentiates them from other groups of librarians (Fox, 2007: 545). Debates over academic status for librarians have been on-going and have generated a lot of literature in the LIS field (Ameen and Ullah, 2013: 8;

Opoku, 2013: 235). Some public university libraries in Ghana have now granted their professional librarians academic status, and in fact, most librarians, in recent times, are eligible for such status. This goes with the obligation of engaging in teaching which can be in the form of formal lectures or informal information literacy programme, active research, publishing, serving on committees, attending conferences and seminars. The criteria for tenure and promotion are similar to those for their counterparts in the teaching section of the university. In addition, the academic librarian is one who performs the traditional role of acquiring and making available collections to users (be it print or electronic) and to carry out these duties, an academic librarian must possess academic, professional qualifications and experience to progress in the university.

The grade of Junior Assistant Librarian requires a probationary period which normally lasts for two years and, upon satisfactory recommendation, the candidate moves to the next level, which is Assistant Librarian. An Assistant Librarian can only move to the grade of Senior Assistant Librarian and then to the grade of Deputy Librarian, upon meeting the conditions laid down for promotion. The university has laid down conditions and expectations from its academic staff, which guide career advancement and promotion decisions. One such expectation or requirement, as already mentioned in the preceding section, is that staff must publish and the quality and quantity determines the rate of progression in the university.

The biggest obstacle to career advancement among female professional librarians in the public universities, in this study, was the professional requirement accompanied by mandatory publication. Reasons that hinder their publication efforts mentioned were lack of time, heavy workload, the nature of the library profession, which requires constant job presence from 8.30a.m. to 5p.m. and family responsibilities. The responses in this study mirror reasons given by females in Edo and Delta States source, that is having to combine university work and family commitments especially where the children are young. Respondents claim domestic responsibilities slow down publishing and this slow pace prevents them from meeting publication requirements laid down in the conditions for promotion.

Career progress

According to Edem (1999: 76), career advancement prospects are very important to any person who enters a profession. Career progress or advancement is not one size fits all and mass career customisation recognises that even though every individual progresses through a similar career pattern, the 'travel' rates differ as one goes through different phases of life (Benko and Weisberg, 2009). Baro et al. (2009: 182, 186), Ogbomo (2010), Baro and Ebhomeya (2012: 207, 217) and Galbraith et al. (2016: 71) affirm that women have the extra burden of family responsibilities which militate against competing on equal terms with men. In many countries, female managers are subjected to gender-based barriers in organisations (Hyati and Barahmand, 2012: 57) and this is usually referred to as the 'glass-ceiling' already discussed. Renshaw (2001) argues that in addition to the 'glass ceilings' there are the 'sticky floors', a discriminatory employment pattern that keeps women at the bottom of the job scale making it difficult for a female to exert herself.

The 'glass escalator' (Piper and Collamer, 2001: 406, 408) on the other hand, is used to describe occurrences where men find themselves literally pushed into managerial positions, sometimes against their will. Men in most African societies are accorded the position of headship and this possibly exerts some pressure on men in workplaces. The source of such 'pressure' is however not clear, even though its impact is very visible. However, one can conclude that this could be attributed to the structure of 'power and responsibility at home' mirrored in the workplace, where men must be seen as breadwinners, masculine and at the helm of affairs whilst women should be seen as supportive and nurturing. Whitmarsh and Wentworth (2012: 58) believe this imposes expectations of certain levels of financial success and achievement competition on men.

Schott and Connor (2010) believe the glass escalator exists in the university library system where males try to excel at their job to distinguish themselves from their female counterparts and this phenomenon seems to exacerbate the situation because of the large number of men in technology jobs or the information and communication technology sectors in the library. An interesting point from Simpson (2004) about male workers in London and the south east of England is that the minority status of men in female-dominated occupations gave them career advantages. They moved rapidly up the hierarchy to which, some admitted, they were 'fast tracked' and under pressure to move into management positions. They also stated that they were given more responsibilities and opportunities for learning, got away with more mistakes without being reprimanded and older women were seen to take on a protective 'mother role' towards them. Men in the sample again indicated that their status as men gave them greater authority than their female counterparts proving that they are 'sufficiently male' (Simpson, 2004: 256–8, 364) even though in a female-dominated occupation. From experience as a worker in the university, one can safely conclude that there is the 'glass escalator' factor in the university system. This is because the researchers have observed that where, for example, a couple (both of them) work as lecturers in the university, the general trend is for the men to work hard to attain professorial status before their wives.

Career progress of female librarians

This 'pressure' and proof of masculinity possibly goes to emphasise the gap in gender, observed in higher ranks

Table 7. Female paraprofessionals and professionals at top grade.

Paraprofessionals

Age	Rank	Marital status	No. of children	Ages of children	Yr. of entry	Yr. promoted
46–50	CLA	Married	2	26/16	1984	2012
51–55	CLA	Single	2	27/25	1980	2012
36–40	PLA	Single	--	--	1997	--
46–50	PLA	Single	3	20/17/7	*2008	2013
51–55	PLA	Married	3	26/24/21	1997	2011
56–60	PLA	Married	2	25/30	1975	--

Professionals

Age	Rank	Marital status	No. of children	Ages of children	Yr. of entry	No. of yrs at position
46–50	SAL	Married	2	15/10	1994	7–8 years
46–50	SAL	Married	3	16/14/9	1993	7–8 years
56–60	SAL	Married	3	30/25/25	1984	Less than a year
56–60	SAL	Single	1	30	1978	7–8 years

Table 8. Year of promotion of respondent.

Year of promotion	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1990s	3	60	2	40	5	100
2000–2009	23	69.7	10	30.3	33	100
2010 & beyond	21	60	14	40	35	100

(Tables 2 and 3) where male respondents seem to have progressed to senior positions more than their female counterparts. Among the paraprofessional respondents, in this study, four females are Principal Library Assistants (PLA) and two, Chief Library Assistants (CLA), the highest position, among paraprofessionals. With reference to professional female respondents, four women have progressed to the position of a Senior Assistant Library (SAL) as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7 gives a synopsis of the biography and career history of paraprofessional and professional female librarians who are in the Principal Library Assistant (PLA), Chief Library Assistant (CLA) and in the Senior Assistant Librarian (SAL) grades. Among the paraprofessional librarians, two female respondents who had risen to the rank of CLA are aged between 46 and 55 years. The respondent aged 46–50 is married with two children aged 26 and 16; she was employed in 1984 and only got to the grade of CLA in 2012, after 28 years. The second female CLA is single with two children aged 27 and 25, was employed in 1980 and managed to rise to the top rank of a CLA after 32 years. For the PLAs, the next grade to the top position (CLA), four female respondents aged between 36 and 60, two of them married and the rest single, had managed to rise to that position. They entered the university library system in 1975, 1997 and 2008. Two respondents, in this category, declined to indicate the year they were last promoted. The female PLA whose details have been

marked with an asterisk (*) moved from a public library to a university library and the year of entry therefore refers to the date she joined the university library system. She happens to be between the age of 46 and 50 and having joined the system it took her five years to move to the grade of a PLA. The last respondent gained employment in 1997 and rose to the rank of a PLA after 14 years in 2011.

Among professional female librarians, four respondents aged between 46 and 60 managed to get to the grade of a SAL, which is two steps away from the top position. All except one is married and they have children whose ages range between 9 and 30 years. It took these female librarians 12, 13, 22 and 28 years respectively to move to the third grade on the hierarchical rank of professional librarians.

A cursory look at the ages of children, of the few women who have made it to these positions in Table 7, reveals that they all have children with ages ranging from 9 to 30 years, at the time of study. Another observation is that these respondents tend to have fewer children, between one and three, which suggests that respondents spent fewer years producing children. Among the paraprofessionals, the youngest (36–40) who entered the profession in the year 1997 is single and has no child. This respondent, though she did not indicate the year she was last promoted, could be described as a high-flier: in other words, she moved into the senior level position at a comparatively young age. 'High-flier' is a concept that is time related and is aptly
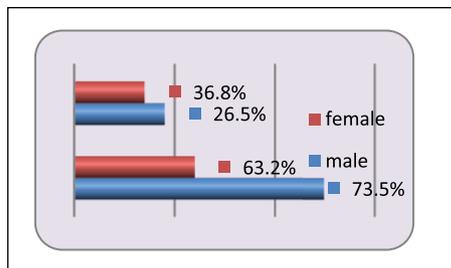
Figure 1. Respondents who wish to become University Librarians.

used to describe the ability to move fast from an early stage of a career and eventually reach the top of the job hierarchy (Ismail et al., 2004: 119). This gives credence to the argument by Bahr and Zemon (2005: 394) that women without children are twice as successful in achieving successful careers as those with children. It was however impossible to find out from the said respondent if her preference of career over family responsibilities influenced her choice of being single and childless.

From Table 7 and going by the date of entry into the profession, it is observed that the progress of female respondents is at a snail's pace.

For female librarians, as indicated in Table 8, progress is slow and more than 70% of female respondents can be described as having 'stalled careers' because they have not received promotion in the last eight years or more and there is no advancing in their career. One can conclude that females in university libraries are not able to progress in their careers as fast as their male counterparts do. This brings up the question of whether the pattern is prevalent as a result of female librarians not having career aspirations.

Career aspirations

For better understanding of this pattern an attempt was made to find out if respondents desire to progress in their careers as librarians. Therefore, the researchers investigated the career aspirations of the female respondents by asking if they ever desired to become the Head of a University library. A total of 106 out of the 128 respondents answered this question: 68 (64%) males and 38 (36%) females. From responses gathered (as shown in Figure 1) 24 (63.2%) of the female population wish to become the University Librarian as against 14 (36.8%) who have no such desire. Among the male population, 50 (73.5%) of males wish to become the University librarian as against 18 (26.5%) men who have no desire of getting to that position in their career due to ageism. This is an encouraging response from the female librarians, which suggests that all things being equal, the majority of females have career aspirations and they would wish to be in the helm of affairs in libraries.

Whitmarsh and Wentworth (2012: 48) summarised a number of studies that found that women's career choices most often reflect lower levels of aspiration and achievement. Even though some male respondents indicate that they have no interest in heading libraries, in most Ghanaian homes, though it might not be as prevalent in recent times, parental attitudes and practices regarding the position of sons and daughters affect the individual's self-worth. This 'cultural trap' emanating from the past and on-going socialisation is believed to have made women prone to low expectations, fear of success, lack of confidence, non-assertiveness, anti-authority holding and dependent (Davidson and Cooper as cited in ISSER/DPPC, 1998: 14–15). Despite this negative influence, it is encouraging to note that in this survey 24 (63.2%) female respondents desire to break through this 'cultural trap'.

From the open-ended responses, female librarians who did not wish to become University Librarians gave reasons such as

> Where I have reached and my age I don't think it will be possible (51–55 years).
>
> Because of age (51–55 years).
>
> Almost retiring (56–60 years).
>
> Because I realise that the process of getting there is a non-starter for me (56–60 years).

The first four samples of responses above suggest non-assertiveness, having given up and even suggest they do not intend to attempt the process which leads to the attainment of the position of a University Librarian. The findings indicate that older female librarians perceive age as an impediment to career progression. Age appears as an inhibiting factor when respondents talk about career retraining or going for further studies and in career advancement, similar to what Moore (2009) observed among 33 women aged 50 years and above in UK labour markets in London, Coventry and Oxford. Again, the three sample responses from this study, below, suggest low expectations and possibly lack of self-confidence among female respondents in the survey.

> I have not thought about it (41–45 years).
>
> Not particularly interested (41–45 years).
>
> Can't tell (51–55 years).

Prior research decades ago, termed this the 'Cinderella complex', an unconscious desire to be taken care of by others, based primarily on a hidden fear of being independent (Tilley 1988: 430). Hernon (2011: 279) repeated this more recently in a study based on 10 newly appointed directors, members of the ARL. A female librarian, who was almost a co-director, had spent her working career in the library and was a team member, had doubts about herself when she was appointed as a director of a university

library. Hernon (2011: 279) reports that the newly appointed female director was concerned about whether she had the necessary skills set; if she could stand the pressure of the position; if she had self-confidence to handle the new position, and if it meant a major lifestyle change. Hatcher (2008: 35) reports on studies that reveal that women do not apply for the higher administrative positions of director as men would. They were rather more likely to apply for a position of section head, or deputy positions as is evident in Oyo State (Nigeria) academic librarians (Arinola and Oyewusi, 2009: 2323).

Headship of libraries

Possession of a doctoral degree or a professorial status is gradually becoming one of the requirements for the appointment of a University Librarian in some Ghanaian universities. This new phenomenon is described by Salaam and Onidade (2009) as the 'pain of the new status'. In Ghanaian and Nigerian university libraries, with the exception of the University of Calabar, establishment of most universities allow for one University Librarian with one or two deputy University Librarians (Salaam and Onifade, 2009). Therefore, in some university libraries in Ghana, the overall headship is usually preferred and reserved for professors, who are most often brought in from academic departments to head university libraries. The emerging trend therefore is for a practising librarian to switch over to the LIS schools, engage in active publishing, get the title of a 'professor' and then nurse the hope of becoming the university librarian as is evident in instances in the history of one public university library in this study.

Obstacles to career progress

Responses from female librarians do not suggest that they were overtly discriminated against in their workplace. However, the age at which the majority of these women enter the profession (26–30 years), as stated earlier, is a crucial period in the life of a Ghanaian woman. Most important domains in the life of an adult are work and family and for most individuals these are regarded as 'backbones of human existence' (Aziz et al., 2011: 151, 153). A historical study reveals that in the colonial era, although Ghanaian women combined reproductive and productive roles, they were obliged to choose between career and marriage or between career and the production of children. For example, as late as 1951, a form of discrimination that served as an obstacle to serving female officers in Ghana, was that they were made to leave the service on their second pregnancy (Perbi, 1992: 69–70). Hostility of existing structures to the lifestyles of women makes it seem easier for single women, or women without children to cope with career advancement as opposed to married women with children. Individuals who have jobs, which provide

meaningful work and opportunities for promotion and financial reward, usually require extra devotion. This extra devotion often forces workers to progress rapidly in their career at the expense of building a satisfying and involving family life.

Females play a vital domestic role irrespective of their academic status. Anunobi et al. (2012) describe these roles as the 'triple roles' or 'work-life integration (Surawicz, 2016: 1436) and to succeed in their careers in academic settings, females need to go the extra mile. This demand could be in the form of taking care of children, the home and even the aged and at the same time trying to invest the required time and energy, at work, to support career advancement and success. Based upon responses from the survey population about the problems they face in the attempt to progress in their career, the study attempted to classify these problems by age brackets to see what issues run through the various stages of the lives of these female respondents. In this paper, a respondent referred to as single, suggests that the subject never married, is divorced or separated.

Female respondents up to the age of 30

Twelve females up to the age of 30, single, except for two married respondents, mention that even though they wish to upgrade themselves, finance is a major problem. There is always a long wait in the attempt to obtain study leave from the university, which is frustrating. Other challenges mentioned are the fact that they never had mentors and that they were ignorant of promotional avenues available to them. There is also the issue of family problems especially settling down, starting families and coping with the pressure of caring for younger children

Female respondents between the ages of 31 and 40

Eleven respondents in the age bracket of 31 to 40, six of whom are single, the rest married with children between the ages of 10 months and 13 years, also raised the issue of study leave and finance and added that they had no opportunity to upgrade themselves during the earlier stages of their career. At this age, these respondents are not considering going to school. One respondent, who has a first degree indicated, 'Presently the university's policy on further studies is not conducive to help progress in my career'. They also complained about a lack of funds to further their education, inability to publish and the long wait for promotion. The group stated that childbearing and marriage are factors that prevent them from gaining promotion in their career. One respondent, a single mother states emphatically 'she has to take care of her three kids to go to school and this prevented her from progressing'. These are very important and crucial issues in the 'ever elusive'

work-life balance, which is now referred to as the work-life integration (Surawicz, 2016: 1434), one of the major factors that serve as barriers to the advancement of women.

Female respondents between the ages of 41 and 50

Nine respondents in this group who are all married with children except one single parent of three, report that they have challenges combining family life, more specifically, marriage and motherhood with work and family upkeep. They also express concern about the long wait for promotion and the inability to find time, especially as one respondent put it 'in the night of everyday' to work and carry out research to publish.

Female respondents aged 50+

In the 50+ age brackets, there are 12 respondents, all of whom are married except for two respondents who are single parents. All have grownup children between the ages of 13 and 38 years. In this group are respondents with two different lines of reasoning. One group thinks that at this point, all they need to do is

> Just work hard.
>
> Perform the library duties diligently.
>
> Come out with publications.
>
> Work hard to attain the ultimate.
>
> Ability to plan and be disciplined to implement the plans.

The second group of respondents seems to be on the edge of giving up because they think they are well advanced in age. Comments like 'Am too old' go to confirm this state of despair and point of giving up. For this group family problems, financial difficulties in the attempt to further their studies in the formative stages of their career, lack of mentors and unclear promotion avenues were some of the challenges they identified. They also seem to look back and blame themselves for lack of planning which they attribute to the absence of a system of motivation and mentoring. The inability to create time to publish in the earlier stages of their career was a major issue respondents in this age group mentioned. It is evident in their responses that they look back with regret, and conclude that for now it is too late to attempt to catch up. Members of this group had spent their earlier years raising children and missed opportunities to upgrade themselves. A notable comment from a single mother in this group is her lament of lack of support from her family to raise her young children in the early stages of her career. This, she believes affected her progress in her career and therefore she could not fulfil any of her career aspirations.

From the above narrations, the survey results show that major problems hindering career advancement prospects among Ghanaian female librarians working in public university libraries are the combination of family duties and responsibilities with professional duties. There is confirmation that there is family interruption, which constrained their career advancement. All married women with children in this study confirmed that marriage and childbearing had a negative effect on the pace of their career progress. The impression given by respondents is that the traditional role of homemaker and mother interfered with every stage of their career lifecycle. This stress decreases as the children enter adolescence but that unfortunately happens at a time when these mothers have already missed a number of opportunities, which could cost them in terms of promotion and participation in training and career development activities. Such respondents (mothers) who attempt to progress in their career when their children are grown are best described as 'late bloomers' (Schreiber, 2002: 9) – blooming too late to rise to the top hierarchy position in public university libraries. For persons who were able to make it to the upper-level and top-level management, they did so rather late because of such social expectations and responsibilities. This combination of roles left respondents with inadequate time and strength to engage in active publication productivity, which is one major criterion used for promotion amongst professional librarians with academic status. Since these respondents are unable to publish, they cannot compete effectively with their male counterparts to reach the rank of a University Librarian.

Other factors that hinder respondents from reaching their highest rank in the library profession are the inability to upgrade oneself to meet the required qualifications, financial constraints, the inability to access study leave with pay, ambiguous and poorly structured university policies and lack of mentors. Delong (2013) who did a review of publications about career advancement of women librarians, states that in a survey of 135 women in Canada; mentoring was ranked highly in importance for career success and attaining the headship positions. Respondents in Delong's survey explained further that such anti-mentoring or deprivation behaviour could be defined as experiences that discourage women from progressing in their career. Such acts, the survey indicated are expressed in the areas of responsibility, information, recognition and approval, solidarity (pitting women against one another) and subtle forms of gender bias, which discourages female ambition and supports the glass ceiling many women experience in their career progression.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study established that societal expectations of females, age, family responsibilities-career conflict, failure to publish, not being able to pursue higher academic programmes, inability to participate in professional enhancement and

professional activities are some inhibitors to the progress of female librarians. The findings also indicated these resulted in a late start in the profession (in terms of career advancement), despondency and the 'sense of having given up' among female respondents.

For younger females, most of who are paraprofessionals, the possibility of upgrading to the status of professional librarians and eventually heading a public university library seem very bleak. For paraprofessionals, it is very difficult to move from that position to the status of a professional librarian because they are trapped in a mobility barrier. The option available for moving from the paraprofessional to the professional group is to enrol for a first-degree course. After this, the candidate must pursue a Master of Arts followed by a Master of Philosophy programme to qualify as a professional librarian. This makes the qualification process long, tedious, frustrating and in most cases impossible, especially for females.

Financing or sponsoring further studies is another major impediment to career progress because most librarians are unable to upgrade themselves without such support. Respondents complained about the lack of encouragement from employers to pursue further studies. There is always a long wait to benefit from study leave opportunities available to staff. One major setback to the access to further education is the fact that the only library school in Ghana is located in the University of Ghana in Accra, the capital town. This is not to the advantage of female librarians, especially married ones with young children, living outside Accra. Where a female librarian has young children, it will be difficult to leave the home to go to Accra, for two semesters a year, to study.

Even though this study was conducted among females in six public university libraries in Ghana, and therefore the results may not necessarily be generalised to female librarians in other types of libraries and to the entire country, recommendations offered will be useful for policy makers to enhance the career progress of female librarians. The early identification of a career choice and preparation in the chosen career could aid career development. Opportunities to further one's education, mentoring, professional exposure both locally and internationally, and active research and publishing could help respondents compete competitively with their male counterparts. University promotion policies, promotional avenues and career advancement prospects should be made known to females, early in their careers, upon appointment, to help plan towards reaching goals. They could be encouraged to make inquiries about these policies for clarity through seminars and workshops. If possible, such documents could be part of a package given to new appointees. Though this is not a uniquely female problem, the adverse effects on women are more severe. This will help female librarians to navigate the politics of a university environment, to draw career plans to fit into the social roles and responsibilities expected of them by society.

Female librarians can be encouraged to engage in scholarly activities such as attending conferences, presenting papers and publishing in refereed journals. Female librarians with potential for publishing can be mentored to help conceptualise research topics and publish these findings in reputable journals. Mentoring of librarians and information professionals has been a frequent topic for discussion in library literature since the 1980s (Boon, 2007) and it has been recognised as a key element in professional development of librarians working in academic libraries. For Griffin (2013: 85), mentoring is a key component for successfully navigating the tenure and promotion processes in academia, which he argues should be considered a means to contribute to the career success of women employed in universities. Mentoring at an early stage in a person's career is a crucial career and professional development opportunity for women. Wilson et al. (2009) believe that no society can exist without older and experienced members passing on acquired wisdom to new members. This study suggests that more experienced female librarians can co-author or co-present research papers with new female librarians at conferences and even at departmental seminars. This will help build the confidence of newer ones who may be apprehensive about publishing and presenting papers.

Heads of libraries should arrange for time off for research or 'release time' (Dimitroff, as cited by Connaway and Powell 2010:11) into work schedules. Women especially should be given the needed 'push'. In most university libraries in Ghana, even though professional librarians are accorded academic status, not much is said about sabbatical leave. Such leave can be very helpful because it allows staff to take a break away from teaching and administrative routines to engage in research and publishing activities. Female professional librarians should take advantage of this provision in the conditions of service to take time off from the 8a.m. to 5p.m. work schedule to engage in active publishing. This will increase the size of the pool of female librarians for promotion.

All prospective students who wish to pursue a course in library and information studies have to enrol in the Department of Library and Information Studies of the University of Ghana, in Accra, the only institution that offers courses in librarianship in Ghana. What it means is that in all the regions of Ghana, students must compete for admission in one library school. This study recommends the establishment of library schools in other public and private universities across the regions of Ghana, possibly with a number of them offering distance modes of education, options that pertain in some universities, for instance the University of South Africa (UNISA). This will ensure an increase in the number of librarians who can further their education and at least allow flexibility of choice for females, outside the capital city, Accra, who wish to be close to their families.

Female librarians should seek out and engage in service activities by offering to serve on committees, which have influence on policy within the university system. There is the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG), the Federation of University Senior Staff Association of Ghana (FUSSAG) and the Teachers and Educational Workers Union (TEWU) and Legon Ladies Club (LELAC) – channels females can use to initiate major revision of policies, which can ensure gender-sensitive decisions. It is recommended that female librarians develop or improve their advocacy skills, which according to Jordan (2012: 42) involves being visible in the community and library, active in community organisations and building relationships with decision makers. These could result in the drawing up of policies that could enhance the career progression of female librarians in public university libraries.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Author biographies

Olive Akpebu Adjah is a senior assistant Librarian in the Balme Library of the University of Ghana. She worked in the Institute of African Studies Library, in the University of Ghana for several years. Currently she is the head of Electronic Resources. She holds a PhD from the University of South Africa, Pretoria and has an interest in researching into the library science/profession and gender and information needs of identifiable groups.

Thomas van der Walt is a professor in the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. He worked as a professional librarian in an embassy and university libraries for nine years before becoming a lecturer. He has postgraduate qualifications in Library and Information Science; Museum Science; Archival Science and Cultural History. He is the editor of *Mousaion: South African Journal for Information Studies* and has published more than 60 articles in academic journals and monographs. He teaches mostly at Master's and Doctoral level.