

Women Librarians in Ghana: Their Status and Career Development

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Abstract

The study investigated the current status and occupational characteristics of professional women librarians in Ghana. The study also sought to establish their career advancement opportunities and to investigate factors inhibiting their career development. Another objective of the study was to find out how they were perceived by their male counterparts. Using data obtained through questionnaire, the study sought for information relating to the background of female librarians in Ghana, their work experience, status and career advancement opportunities. All the professional women librarians in Ghana were included in the survey. The population size was thirty-five. The findings reveal that women librarians in Ghana could advance to any height without discrimination. Also, they did not experience any form of discrimination from their male counterparts in terms of remuneration or career development.

Introduction

Discrimination against women has been a long standing issue which society continues to grapple with. This is especially so in Africa where gender roles are distinct. The women are occupied with domestic responsibilities, "which typically involve household chores and caring for the home" (Majanja and Kiplang'at, 2003). This may be due to the fact that in the past, more emphasis was placed on educating the male child rather than the female child. So that even if the female child grows up and wants to take on a job, she is left with limited choice. Typical female jobs include petty trading, subsistence farming and casual labour. These are low paying and low status jobs. The situation is, however, a lot different now because of improved access to education by women which has broadened their horizon and given them many job options. It is common therefore to find women all over the world in different professions and at different levels competing with their male counterparts.

Women in Ghana have also taken up the challenge to move away from the traditional roles normally associated with women. As a result women can be found in all the professions including librarianship of which they make up about 40.5% (Ghana Library Association, 2004). In the pursuit of their career, the professional women librarians compete with their male counterparts. The question this poses is whether gender has in any way affected the status of women in the library profession and their career development.

The main objective of the study is to investigate the current status, occupational characteristics and career advancement opportunities of professional women librarians in Ghana. Even though some research has been done on women librarians, no such

research has taken place in Ghana. It is to fill this gap that the research has been undertaken. Further, this study was motivated by a similar study of Kenyan women librarians by Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003). In that study, they found that, the status of women librarians in Kenya has consistently been lower than that of men in terms of position and remuneration. The researchers thought it would be interesting to find out whether a similar situation exists in Ghana. It is hoped that this study would throw more light on the status of women librarians in Ghana and add to the body of knowledge on women librarians in general.

Literature Review

Dasgupta (1998) in a paper presented at the 63rd IFLA Council and General Conference (Copenhagen, Denmark, August 31 – September 5, 1997) observes that in India, the status of women has been measured by the actual position occupied by women in society, family, place of work and within the economic power structure. The main dichotomy of the situation, she pointed out, is that when it comes to higher positions, there is a hierarchical discrimination because the decision makers allege that women lack business and decision making abilities. This justified their second-rate status within the profession. Her study, however, points out some redeeming features in the Indian situation. Hildenbrand (1989) draws attention to the fact that library feminists searching for equality have concentrated their efforts on pay equity and on increasing the number of women in managerial positions. For her, it is now time to concentrate on other fronts for gender equality. She points out that the literature on "women's work" including the so-called women's professions such as librarianship, nursing, and elementary school teaching, stresses that such work is usually devalued. The pay, status, career opportunities and working conditions in these occupations are generally lower for both the men and women in them, than they are in similar professions requiring similar levels of education and responsibility but not tagged as women's work. Another characteristic of these female-intensive professions is that the male minority is over-represented at the top positions and better paying areas.

In a similar vein, Heim (1982) points out that whether women are rising up the ladder of librarianship at an accelerated rate is still an open

question. A decade of activism on the part of women has resulted in no clear improvement of status. There have been gains and losses. A closure of the starting salary differentials (up to 1979) is outweighed by a continuing divergence of salaries in relation to time spent in library work.

Gregory and Ramirez (2000) also discuss the steady rise of salaries for librarians in the United States of America and observe that average beginning salaries for 1999 library and information graduates is 6.5% increase over 1998 average. They, however, expressed surprise that the average salary for women rose only to 5.2% in 1999 while that of men leaped to 12%. Cheda et al. (1978) in their investigation carried out to establish salary differentials of female and male librarians in Canada found out that although men had a higher position on the average than women, this did not explain the difference in salaries. The difference between female and male chief librarians mean salaries was \$4,584. This could be explained somewhat by an age difference – men were an average of two years older than women in this position. Also more women had interrupted careers than men. Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003) discuss women librarians in Kenya, their status and occupational characteristics. They conclude that the status of women librarians in Kenya has consistently been lower than that of men in terms of position and remuneration. Apart from the few women who hold top positions or have ventured into automation, the majority still specialised in cataloguing, circulation and children's work. These are often referred to as routine and hardly promote ascension to higher levels in the profession.

Jones and Oppenheim (2002) carried out a study to determine if the UK library profession suffered from so-called intraoccupational segregation, whereby men dominate the senior positions within the profession's institutions. Particular attention was paid to the so-called "glass ceiling" whereby women find a barrier to promotion when they reach their forties even though up until then, enjoying a reasonable successful career. A "glass ceiling" is an unofficial barrier to an upper management or other prominent position within a company or other organisation which certain groups particularly women are perceived to be unable to cross due to discrimination (Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia, 2005). The perceived barriers they considered include lack of academic qualifications, salary differences,

geographical mobility and domestic responsibilities. Others are lack of female role models, the need for mentors and lack of ambition. Their results indicate that "glass ceiling" issues in the libraries are still concerns for many women in the profession. The lack of qualifications does not seem to pose a barrier to promotion. The main barrier appears to be mainly due to domestic responsibilities, particularly taking a career break to bring up children. They conclude that for many women the "glass ceiling" is imposed by themselves.

Ogunrombi, Pisagih and Udoh (2002) examine the contribution of female librarians to library development in Nigeria from 1960 to 2000. Their study reveals that only few female women librarians were appreciated and cited in Nigerian biographical works. Their study also shows that, the status and role of women librarians in Nigeria is marked by an "explicit pattern of discrimination". The literature review shows that even though some research has been done on women librarians, no such research has taken place in Ghana. It is to fill this gap that the research has been undertaken.

Methodology

A survey approach was used in this study. The survey method is widely accepted as a means of getting needed information. Data for the study was collected using a questionnaire. Questions were asked relating to type of library, highest qualification and marital status. Other questions dealt with number of years worked, current rank, how male colleagues viewed their female counterparts, and career advancement opportunities.

Population and sampling

The concept of population is fundamental to survey research. For this study, the entire population was surveyed. It is possible to survey an entire population if it is of a manageable size and this is known as a census survey (Saunders et al, 1997). Sampling is therefore not required. The population for this study was thirty-five professional women librarians. Professional women librarians are defined in this study as Ghanaian women with postgraduate qualification in librarianship working in Ghana. The researchers used Alemna's (1995) *Librarians in Ghana: A Who is Who and Annotated Bibliography* and Ghana Library Association's

(2004) *Directory of Libraries and Library Professionals in Ghana* to identify the population for this study. Data for the study was obtained from copies of the questionnaire filled by the women librarians. Thirty-five copies of the questionnaire were distributed to female professional librarians in all the university libraries (public and private), the public library system, special libraries and the Department of Information Studies at the University of Ghana. Some copies of the questionnaire were distributed personally by hand while others were sent electronically as email attachments. A period of six months was allowed for respondents to return their copies of the questionnaire.

Responses were coded and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For easy interpretation the frequencies and percentages were used. Cross tabulations were also made of some of the responses obtained.

Findings and Discussion

Out of thirty-five (35) copies of the questionnaire distributed, twenty-seven (27) were completed and returned. This gave a response rate of 77%. Table 1 shows the response rate by type of library.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by type of Library

Type	Frequency	%
Academic library (state-owned)	19	70.4
Special library	4	14.8
Academic library (private)	2	7.4
Public library	1	3.7
No response	1	3.7
Total	27	100.0

Table 1 reveals that majority (70.4%) of the professional women librarians were employed by the public academic libraries. This is not surprising since there are more public universities, which have been in existence much longer than the private universities. This result is similar to what Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003) found out. The study shows that majority of

the women surveyed worked in state academic libraries and few of the respondents worked in private university libraries and public libraries.

Occupational Characteristics of Women Librarians in Ghana

All the women in the study were professionally qualified to be employed by the different libraries. Nine (9) of the respondents, which accounted for 33.3% had Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree in Library Studies. Seven (7) of the respondents (25.9%), had Post-graduate Diploma in Library Studies. The number of women with Master of Arts (M. A.) degree in Library Studies was seven (7). This finding also corroborates the findings of Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003). Their statistics indicated that women librarians in Kenya possess high qualifications which compared favourably with those of their male counterparts.

Majority of the respondents, (15 or 55.6%), with varying qualifications were in the rank of assistant librarian position. Six had postgraduate diploma in library studies, four each had MA library studies and M.Phil library studies degrees. Two of the respondents were university librarians. It is interesting to note that none of the two ladies who were at the rank of university librarian had an MPhil qualification. Currently the MPhil is mandatory rising to the position of university librarian in Ghana's public university libraries. Obviously, the majority of the ladies need to take career advancement and development seriously in order to get to the apex of librarianship. Nine of the respondents (33%) had an MPhil degree of which four were at the assistant librarian grade. With this mandatory qualification, it is gratifying to know that it is just a matter of time for the respondents to rise up the professional ladder in a public university library.

The study revealed that fifteen (15) of the respondents were heads of their various sections. Ten (10) were heads of their libraries and two (2), university librarians. Being in a position of responsibility implies fair number of women librarians operate in decision-making roles. This finding is contrary to what Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003) found out from their study that; although women librarians have requisite qualifications to earn them higher positions, only a few held top positions. Their case may be attributed to the *glass-ceiling* syndrome.

Perception of Female Librarians by Male Counterparts

On the issue of whether the male counterparts of female librarians earned more for equal work done, the study revealed that, there was no discrimination. While an overwhelming majority of the respondents (96.3%) acknowledged that there was no discrimination, another 85.2% stated that their male counterparts saw them as their equals. In their study, however, Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003) reported that majority of the respondents observed that their pay package and other remuneration were not commensurate with work done. Similarly, Gregory and Ramirez (2000) expressed surprise that in 1999 in the United States of America, the average salary for women rose only to 5.2% while that of men leaped to 12%.

Career Advancement

The study shows that majority of the women had been sponsored for further training and still many of them had been sponsored to attend conferences or seminars or workshops. More than 75% of the women reported that their selection or non-selection for training or to attend conferences, workshops or seminars was not gender-biased. This shows that the employers do not put any obstacles in the way of the women librarians where career advancement is concerned. The study further revealed that gender was not an obstacle to going up the career ladder. Majority of the respondents (74.1%) admitted this. The researchers therefore conclude that for women librarians in Ghana, the proverbial *glass ceiling* is not an issue.

The researchers had thought that family responsibilities might be a factor that the women librarians might have to contend with in their career advancement, as Jones and Oppenheim (2000) found out in their study. This, however, turned out to be the opposite in the Ghanaian situation. A little over half of the respondents did not see family responsibilities as an obstacle to career development. It is interesting to note that 26 (96.3%) of the respondents, that is, indicated that they had children but only seven (25.9%) out of the twenty-seven respondents battled with family responsibilities and career advancement (See Table 2). Similarly, Majanja and Kiplang'at (2003) found that majority of their respondents indicated that family commitments did not interfere with job advancement.

Table 2: Interference of Family Responsibilities with Career Advancement by Marital Status

Marital Status	Interference of career advancement with family responsibilities			Total
	Yes	No	Don't Know	
Single	0	3	0	3
Married	6	14	3	23
Divorced	1	0	0	1
Total	7	17	3	27

Conclusion

From the study it can safely be concluded that the status of women librarians in Ghana is under no threat, in terms of remuneration and position. Whether the female librarians advance in their career or not is entirely a decision of the professional women librarians themselves. There is a no external obstacle to the professional advancement of female librarians in Ghana. Any obstacle perceived could be self-imposed, as was found out in the study carried out by Jones and Oppenheim (2002). There is also no unfair competition in the workplace between the men and women. The status of women librarians in Ghana in terms of position, remuneration and career advancement opportunities is at par with that of their male counterparts.

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