Assuring Gender Equality in the Academy Even in Times when Neoliberal Principles Prevail

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Abstract

Although there have been many interventions due to a societal paradigm shift and legislation demands in achieving gender balance in academia, underrepresentation of female academics mainly remains. It seems that it is especially critical for women to achieve work-life balance. The purpose of the current study is to reveal the insights about professional lives of the academics employed by a case study faculty that features the unique supportive strategies that contribute to attracting and retaining female academics. To gain the required data interviews were conducted. The sample spanned two assistant professors, eight associate professors, and four full professors. The results thus indicate that although academic profession increasingly features heavy workload, it seems that women can pursue an academic career and also have children. Stereotypical stance is slowly fading away, and workplaces are becoming increasingly family-friendly environments, including academia where women slowly gain equal position. However, the causes of eradication of gender discrimination might be of different nature, namely the excessive workload that academic profession features might not be attractive to men. Beside this, there might be an even greater issue, namely the neoliberal paradigm that erodes academic principles of freedom and independence. Additionally, the academic profession is becoming less prestigious, lower paid, and features less secure employment. Some assume that the new neoliberal paradigm minimizes gender bias but the assumed gender-neutral practices cover the existent gender inequalities. Some women, especially those in the leading positions, are being exploited by such “libratory” opportunities. Therefore when trying to combat gender issues in academic environment, it is essential to fight for an alternative to neoliberal practice.