

CHALLENGES OF ALBANIAN WOMEN IN ACADEMIC CAREERS

Daniela Kalaja, PhD

Fatlinda Berisha Tahiri, PhD

University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Department of Social Work and Social Policy

Abstract

Education level is an indicator that speaks about the status of women and girls in society. Statistics data according to INSTAT publication "Women and Men in Albania" and the official data of the Ministry of Education and Sports show that despite the high percentage of female staff in the education system, the allocation of women in decision-making positions follows the traditional pyramidal model: the percentage of women directors does not exceed the figure 30 per cent in any of the levels of education. The dominant percentage of the full-time staff, with the title Professor, is men. During 2009-2010 the proportion male/female full-time professors with the title Professor in higher education system was 2.8: 1. In terms of public higher education there are 11 Rectors and there are no women Rectors, Deans are 32 and only 5 women Deans, 98 Head of departments and only 35 women Head of departments. Although girls comprise the largest number of graduation at all levels of education, and provide an important contribution in the field of education, their social status and economic is very unsatisfactory. The study is focused on exploring the challenges that women and girls face in the Albanian reality in career field and academic achievements. In order to fulfill the purpose and objectives of this research, as well as to address the research question of the study is chosen the qualitative approach. Career and academic achievements remain male-dominated areas in Albania. The percentage of women involved in career and academic achievement remains very low, a figure attributed to gender inequality in terms of attendance and benefit from higher levels of education. Academic women and girls perceive themselves as a minority group, in an environment completely dominated by men. The lack of socio-historical background and positive role-models of women participation in academic career is another important aspect in assessing the barriers and challenges faced by Albanian women and girls in the field of career and academic achievements. Marriage, divorce, head of household statutes and roles of

caring seem to be factors that prevent women and girls for academic career. These roles and statuses, control their work and career, positioning them always as the second ones. Overview, the difference between work, personal care and leisure time show a big difference between men and women. Another finding of the study highlights the differentiated of appropriate skills acquisition for an academic career. Although both sides have opportunity of involvement and commitment, men attain much faster and perform higher to titles and academic posts.

Keywords: Education, access, gender differences, gender stereotypes, gender balance, equality/equity, gender mainstreaming, discrimination, educational attainment/academic, career, gender sensitivity, gender structural inequality

Introduction

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Albania everyone has the right to education. The nine-year (primary education) and secondary education in public schools have free tuition. Article 18 of the Constitution determines that all are equal before the law and no one can be discriminated for reasons, such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political views, religious and philosophical beliefs, and economic, educational and social status. In principle, the legal framework of Albania guarantees to girls and boys equal and universal access to education.

The education level is an indicator that speaks about the status of women and girls in society (Neimanis, 2001). Statistical data according to INSTAT publication "Women and Men in Albania" and the official data of the Ministry of Education and Sports indicate that girls are more successful than boys in a significant number of gender indicators for education in Albania. Although girls compose the largest number of graduation at all levels of education, and provide an important contribution in the field of education, social and economic status is very unsatisfactory. Of course, they are factors other than education, such as the economic status, the culture, mentality, traditions, stereotypes, gender division of labor, legislation, geographic area, etc. (GADC, 2006). Although the percentage of women who graduate in the full time system in public and private higher education is nearly twice as large as that of men in each academic year in the study, the overwhelming proportion of academic titles ranging from the title Professor to Doctor belong to men. Career and academic achievements remain male-dominated areas in Albania. The percentage of women involved in career and academic achievements remains still very low, a figure attributed to gender inequality in terms of attendance and benefit from higher levels of education. Even though the number of women teaching in universities in the

last two decades has increased significantly, they represent almost double of the graduates in higher education, there are still no evident projections of a visible increase in the number of women with the title of professor. Researches support the idea that women face more obstacles in the university environment than obstacles that the American corporate managers and executives face. (West and Curtis, 2006, p. 4). Despite the large proportion of female staff in the Albanian education system, the distribution of women in positions of decision-making follows the traditional pyramid model: the percentage of women directors does not exceed the figure of 30 per cent in none of levels of education (SKBGJ-DHGDHF, 2011-2015). The dominant percentage of full-time staff, with the title Professor, is men. In 2004-2005 the ratio male/female full-time teachers with the title Professor in higher education system was 7.3: 1, while in 2009-2010, where is indicated the highest decrease of gender differences, the ratio becomes 2.8: 1. In terms of public higher education there are 11 Rectors and no women Rectors, Deans are 32 and only 5 women Deans, 98 Head of department and only 35 women are Head of department (SKBGJ-DHGDHF, 2011-2015).

In Albania there is no concern of lack of capable and qualified women but our society has historically been and still is more opened to men than women's achievements in the field of career. Women and girls for decades form the largest number of graduates with higher education in Albania. However, when referring to their socio-economic status, the situation still is very unsatisfactory. Women and girls suffer from the feminization of poverty in Albania and their social status is still far away from their aspirations and moreover does not respond to their investment in education.

The study is focused on exploring the challenges faced by women and girls in the Albanian reality in the field of career and academic achievements. To fulfill the purpose and objectives of this research, as well as to address the research question of the study is selected a qualitative approach. Analysis of interviews conducted in the framework of this paper is focused on the exploration of the factors that limit the opportunities for women and girls in the Albanian reality and their challenges in the field of career and academic achievement in education.

Career and academic achievements remain male-dominated areas in Albania. The percentage of women involved in career and academic achievement remains very low, a figure attributed to gender inequality in terms of attendance and benefit from higher levels of education. Academic women and girls perceive themselves as a minority group, in an environment completely dominated by men. The lack of socio-historical background and positive role-models of women participation in academic careers is another important aspect in assessing the barriers and challenges faced by women

and girls in the field of career and academic achievements. Marriage, divorce, head of household statutes and roles of caring seem to be factors that prevent women and girls for academic career. These roles and statuses, control their work and career, positioning them always as the second ones. Overview, the difference between work, personal care and leisure time show a big difference between men and women. Another finding of the study highlights the differentiated of appropriate skills acquisition for an academic career. Although both sides have opportunity of involvement and commitment, men attain much faster and perform higher to titles and academic posts.

Background and methods

The purpose of this paper is to explore the factors that limit opportunities for women and girls in the Albanian reality in the field of career and academic achievements in education.

The research question to explore this paper is: Which are the factors that limit opportunities for women and girls in the Albanian reality in the field of career and academic achievements in education?

To accomplish the purpose as well as to address the research question of the study is chosen a qualitative approach. Analysis of interviews conducted in the framework of this paper is focused on the exploration of the factors that limit opportunities for women and girls in the Albanian reality and their challenges in the field of career and academic achievement in education.

The study population

The study population involves women and girls who are currently academic staff at the University of Tirana. The study population was selected according to the following characteristics:

- To represent in a balanced way in number, the academic titles and degrees, ranging from the Ph.D. to Prof.
- To represent different disciplines/fields of study.
- To represent different civil statuses.
- To have at least 5 years of experience in the field of teaching and university career, an important criteria to apply for the PhD title and to be considered part of the university career.
- The academic staff was part of the Tirana University.

Tirana University was chosen for the variety of disciplines, because offers considerable number of academic titles and degrees, the long history of its existence and represents academic values.

The sample of the study

In this study participated 15 women and girls who were part of the academic staff of the University of Tirana. For the selection of subjects was used phenomenological approach and the purposive sampling, which consists in the selection of subjects under the same population according to variations and their representative characteristics based on important theoretically variables, in order to understand the phenomena in particular and in general terms (Glaser, 1978. Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). Characteristics for the selection of subjects were: (a) academic titles and science degrees, (b) the academic discipline, (c) seniority at work and (d) marital/civil status. Given that the purpose of this study was descriptive, it was decided the termination of interviews reaching "saturation point of information", determining that other cases were no needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon and the purpose of this study. The focus of the interviews was to provide information from a small number of subjects, chosen intentionally.

However, for determining the number of the sample was also followed the criteria on which the size of the sample is determined by the ability to give answer to the research question (Marshall, 1996), which requires a flexible research plan, interactive and cyclic sampling, collection of data, analysis and interpretation (Marshall, 1996). The researchers were involved themselves in the stage of designing the instrument and data analysis, the identification of saturation point was identified easily by the researchers.

The identification of subjects was conducted by the researchers, considering the fact that they are internal academic staff.

Characteristics of the subjects interviewed are presented in the following table:

<i>Age</i>	<i>Title Academic / Science Degree</i>	<i>Residence</i>	<i>Field of study</i>	<i>Civil status</i>	<i>Seniority at work</i>
<i>32-60 years old</i>	5 subjects with the title PhD. of Sciences; 5 subjects with the title Prof. As 5 subjects with the title Prof.	The 15 subjects live and work in Tirana	The subjects interviewed are part the areas of Social Sciences (2) Law (3) Economy / Finance (2)Astrophysics/ Physics (1) <i>History/Philology (1)</i> <i>Engineer/ Architecture</i> (2) <i>Biology (2) Foreign Languages (1) Sports (1)</i>	8 of the subjects belong to the civil status of married 2 of the subjects belong to the civil status of divorced 1 of the subjects belong to the widow civil status 4 the subjects belong to the civil status single	The subjects represent experience as academic staff of UT from 6 to 27 years of work.

The instrument

Given that interviews are used to gain understanding of the reality and personal views (Punch, 1998; Rubin and Rubin, 1995), based on life experiences, in this study was used this instrument to explore the factors that limit opportunities for women and girls in Albanian reality in the field of career and academic achievements in education.

Specifically, in this study it is used the semi-structured interview.

Issues for exploration were identified after reviewing the literature and secondary analysis carried out in previous phases of the study. During the interview there were no difficulties in understanding the questions, which is explained by the high level of socio-cultural of the subjects involved in the study.

The content and structure were designed to put the interviewee in a comfortable position and to encourage exploration through a "natural" conversation. The content and structure of the interview is organized in a logical order based on the purpose of the paper, addressing the research question and the characteristics of the sample (*purposive and phenomenological approach*) to be included in the interview. The first session of the interview aims to gain and explore general information about perceptions of subjects, today's situation of Albanian women in the field of achievements and academic career, context and historical factors and cultural heritage that have contributed to this situation, and to naturally shift to personal aspect of their experiences in this field. The last issues/questions to be explored are focused on their experiences and personal experience in this field, aiming to identify and explore the obstacles encountered, supportive factors and the actual and future challenges.

Throughout consultation with specialists in the field of qualitative research, it is measured the degree of accuracy of the instrument that is used in this research and, moreover, interviews were initially piloted on a small sample of subjects.

Data collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews. Once the subjects were identified, it was prepared an earlier contact with them to inform them about the study and their role. In the pre-meeting, after reading carefully the approval form, they were asked to approve it, throughout of which they were introduced with the aim, objectives, duration of their participation in the study and the ethical principles on which is based the study. In the pre-meeting it was decided the next meeting of the interview.

Interviews were carried outside the University environment, in neutral environments. These premises were selected to minimize the

influence of other persons during the interview, as well as to minimize the risk of identifying them, and to have a neutral environment where they can speak naturally. Interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and were completed within the timeline which was determined to be appropriate to the interviewee, including mornings, late afternoons or weekends. None of the interviews was interrupted during the conversation.

To record the sessions was used a digital recorder to allow the applicant to concentrate on discussion and not in keeping records constantly. Interviews were recorded and were transcript within 24 hours of their implementation by the researcher. The registration was approved previously by the subject. These transcripts were coded and later were used in the analysis. The transcription within 24 hours maximized the researcher's ability to be involved in data collection and to reflect immediately the interviews analysis (Minichiello, 1995). Moreover, it became possible to reflect on the characteristics of the subjects and the specifics in meeting the career challenges and academic achievement in education.

Data analysis

To interpreting and categorizing data interviews was used the content analysis. In addition, it was used open strategies and axial coding. Data were analyzed independently, identifying, categorizing and coding specific elements of information, by separating certain parts of the data and determining their relationships with each other and with the whole, by identifying the general themes.

The researcher has analyzed data collected, reviewed and organized the amount of information received from carrying out the interviews, thus themes and interpretations that have emerged from this process to address the questions raised at the beginning of the study.

I.

Analysis of interviews and the presentation of findings

The evolution of mankind is filled with great achievements of people. However, it is very rare to find or hear about women who have had such an impact in the past or in the present, while human intelligence is the same for both sexes. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed).

Achievements and academic careers of women in Albania. Historical and cultural heritage factors

Interviewees stated that, throughout the history of the country Albanian woman has not had adequate opportunities to develop her personality as an actor in the public area, especially as a participant with equal rights to men in the academic and decision-making levels in education.

Social norms combined with education and employment opportunities have prevented most women to gain abilities and resources necessary to compete successfully.

History significantly influences the values and cultural norms of a country and in a patriarchal society like ours, we cannot speak about a value system that promotes and appreciates the participation of women in public life and especially in academic careers. Components or elements of a system of values that assess the Albanian woman are missing and they are still missing today. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

On regard to the historical factors, the interviewees stated that when it comes to historical periods, we can rely on three of them. The first period, it is before World War II, which portrayed the Albanian woman as a mother and housewife; the second is the Communist period and represents the pseudo-emancipation of the Albanian woman, the heroine that "reconcile" the state work and family obligations; and third period, the extended transition that is a combination of the two abovementioned. An important part of cultural and historical aspect also is attributed to the period of Ottoman occupation and the implementation of religious laws.

In some aspects, gender policies of the communism created the environment for further discrimination of women after the fall of communism in 1991. It is very likely that the most visible failure of the communist system was the fact that the private sector remained underdeveloped in Albania during the communist regime, despite significant percentage of inclusion of women in the public area. During the communist system almost all women worked outside home, and should take care of their families at the same time, thus carrying "double weight" of home and work.

When I remember that time even today, I am surprised myself where I had the energy to go forward. Everything was difficult. I had just brought to life a son. I used to wake up at 4 am, trying to take care of the house somehow, to prepare breakfast, and I was preparing my son to go the kindergarten (she points out: maternity leave was only 40 days at that time). I used to take the bus and by 8 am I should be in the faculty. There were days when I was going to bed feeling exhausted, I was recalling the daily routine and I could not even find the time to sit for one second throughout the day. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

I will never forget the kerosene stove ovens, washing clothes by hands and long queues of that time. Was this emancipation? (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

With the fall of communism this double weight is multiplied by the lack of common goods and the insufficiency of public facilities and social services for child care. Thus, the previous gender division of labor took a new dimension – men were focused more than before on public success, and

women were focused on family responsibilities under the new conditions and difficulties.

I remember that in that time I had to finish an important work for post-graduation and I read for months under candlelight. There was no electricity, and when it was we did not know what to do at first. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

The level of development of a country facilitates or inhibits the ability of women to academic careers. In countries with authoritarian and dictatorial system, women participation is too low or fictitious. In a country like Albania, which has such history, it is difficult to remove the old norms and replace them with new ones, more moderate and liberal. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed).

The withdrawal of women facing the challenges of qualifications and academic career is based on economic and social reasons, despite the male obstacles.

Albanian mentality, traditions and the unwritten customary rules which directly affect the role and status of women in society, which is carved in the educational and academic structure, does not support the woman to move forward, but is still applied the principle that "men are born for career" and therefore women's sphere of influence always remains the family. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed).

Another argument claimed by the interviewees is the lack of *socio-historical background and the positive role-models of women participation in academic careers*. Positive role-models are needed for their commitment and development in the academic sphere.

Throughout history of Albania there is a lack or there are overshadowed these positive models and qualitative examples of academic women who have built a career and a positive and successful image, and as a result to become models to be followed by all those women, who want to invest in their career and academic achievements. The achievements of women should be identified to encourage other women to follow in their footsteps. Creating positive models will serve to increase the self-esteem of women and girls in the career and academics achievements.

Even those few women who have been evacuated from our national history they have not embodied positive and amusing models from all. At times, they were combatants, heroine, almost mythologized, sometimes blemished from the era when they had lived. I know many successful women in my circle of friendship and professional network, but not much spoken about them and almost never is written about their contribution. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed).

How do you assess the situation of Albanian women regarding academic achievements and career today? Have you achieved goals?

Academic women and girls perceive themselves **like a minority group, in an environment completely dominated by men.** Although a significant number of women and girls has join the academic life and state that they are satisfied by what they have achieved so far in the terms of investment for academic careers, they still are underrepresented at the highest levels. Women Rectors or Deans or those with the title Professor are minority in Albanian academic life. Because of the underrepresentation in the academic field, the interviewees stated that they tend to have less power and less opportunity to influence in decision-making or other initiatives undertaken for the promotion of gender equality and women rights. Many of them prefer to work individually and isolated, by devaluing their contributions.

Women are minority even when they are in majority. It's like at home, you know that the one to lead is the father. You have learned and accepted long ago this scheme and do not see it differently from the institution where you work. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed).

The percentage of women involved in academic careers and their achievements continues to be very low in Albania. The exclusion of women from government deprives public life and encourages the development of an unfair society which slows down the development of the country. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed).

Barriers and challenges faced by women and girls in the Albanian reality in the field of career and academic achievements:

Marriage, divorce, head of household and caring roles seems to be factors that prevent women and girls in academic careers. Interviewees stated that, these roles and statuses moderate their work and career, leaving them always the latter. The re-dimension the roles and responsibilities of women and men within the family remains a challenge for the Albanian reality.

Mothers are super heroine. My mother used always used to say this, but only now that I am a mother myself I believe it. No matter how I try to manage properly the time, I find it impossible. I can only work late at night when the whole family sleeps. Everyone is expecting something from me. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Despite being academic, women and girls must also take care of their homes. Women have a double weight, while simultaneously pursuing their academic career and fulfill the obligations that tradition brings, for which they receive little or no help from their husbands. An academic woman is concerned about the child care, cooking, housekeeping and hospitality. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Divorce has made me more responsible towards my obligations as a household, but this has brought difficulties to my career investment. Sometimes I feel lost. I am very steps back from my colleagues. It seems as if I won't make it. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Interviewees stated that the amount of time they devote to traditional roles of wife and mother, hamper them. In fact, most women do two jobs: one at work and one at home. The fact that they get married, have children and care for the family leads to the limitation of time and resources that they have available to devote to the academic career. Women's engagement in social life often depends on the amount of commitments in the domestic sphere, where as we know they are extremely overloaded with their roles as mothers, wives or head of household, and in some cases taking care also of the family environment. By the interviewees was showed that academic women's dual role as women/mothers and lecturer on another hand is a source of stress in itself, especially for young mothers. This is because, as a lecturer, they should be actively involved in lectures, research and publications in well-known academic journals. The number and quality of articles they publish legitimize the opportunities for promotion, despite their academic abilities.

Another explanation of the interviewees underline differentiated of appropriate skills acquisition for an academic career because of dualism. Although both sides have opportunity of involvement and commitment, men attain much faster and perform higher to titles and academic posts.

My husband and I fortunately or unfortunately, I cannot say it now; we both work in the academic field. To him everything is easier: the engagement in the family, at work, incomes, and spending time for himself. I need to reach everything with more commitment work and dedication and I cannot be equal with him. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Every woman, who works regardless of her status, bears on her shoulders the primary responsibility for housework and child care. Lecturers are often still taking care of children when they become part of the system. In this society where marriage and caring for children are the basic norm for a normal woman despite everything else, each of them aspires to strengthen both roles. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Although productivity at work is the responsibility of everyone, it seems that women are doubly loaded to meet deadlines when these combine the roles and responsibilities within the family, mainly with caring roles and social reproduction.

Flexible working hours and ease of loads of hours should be part of the management of academic staff especially for young mothers and female heads of households. Sometimes I wonder whether these people have children. Most of my colleagues have not even completed the maternity

leave. After six months or even sooner they have returned to work, someone from economic insufficient to survive or someone from the uncertainty that may threaten the workplace. On the other hand the care costs. Blessed is who has parents to help them. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Interviewees stated that the nature of work is another difficulty faced by academic women, especially married women or head of household. Work can often require constant trips out of town for meetings, lectures, conferences or workshops. Lack of opportunity (often because of marital status or head of household, economic, support system for childcare) to be included in these trips limits and reduces their opportunities for benefits and academic achievement. Here most disadvantaged head of household, and those with many children.

I chose the University because I thought that is a comfortable job for women particularly mothers, but I was wrong. It is stressful, because you have to be aware all the time of the recent events. When you enter the auditorium all eyes are on you. Then, it is followed by the scientific trainings, conferences, articles and trips. All of these require time, money and a lot of support from family. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Female lecturers are subject to a greater stress in their work compared to their male colleagues, emphasize the subjects interviewed. Teaching at the university is itself a stressful job. Some of the tension and stress is also the teaching loads and following student projects and a lot of other work practice. Other contributions may be following and management of graduate student thesis or dissertations, meetings and membership in several administrative boards or committees. With all these tasks, an academic woman can become a fussy mother, not a very cooperative colleague and be perceived as someone not very tolerant of those who surround her.

I remember that when I worked to finish my PhD thesis, especially in the last year, I was all the time with bad humor, stressed, ready to explode without reason. Articles, conferences, presentations, teaching, student leadership, instruction, and working on the computer endlessly ... I do not know if I counted all of them. Mother, wife, girl...

How many times I have told myself not to let stress to dominate me, but it was impossible. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Albanian women's achievements in education in general and academic career in particular, are obviously related to marital and family situation. While marriage in Albania continues to be a constant phenomenon, the average age of marriage has increased significantly for both sexes, while has increased the number of divorces and head of household. The life strategies for girls has changed, they get married in a later stage and have

fewer children. But still family value and children dominate the professional career in the mentality of the Albanian society. Academic women and young girls state that they are part of these dilemmas and difficulties. The interviewees that belong to this group stated that they hesitate to create families because they see this step as an obstacle to their career investment.

I have decided to invest all my efforts at the moment to investment for education and career. It is not that I do not believe in the family, but I believe it would be very difficult for my research work. I notice the difficulties my colleagues face. Albania remains a patriarchal system, unfortunately still nowadays, in the conception and function of the marriage. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

It seems that in the attitudes of women and girls to investment in education, a drawback is as well the economic situation of income. Mainly head of household, mothers with many children, say that they have less chance to invest and attend continuing education, training, qualifications, etc. Problematic situations for other subjects interviewed, which recognize that they are often forced to do other tasks (mainly expertise), or take the overload teaching schedule to meet the desired level of income, because payments provided from the workplace are inadequate. But of course they are affected by other factors, mostly related to social welfare policies and lack of support services for these categories.

I have spent endlessly for my qualification. Translation, purchase of books, photocopies, traveling. I had to work extra to cover costs. The salaries in education are insufficient. I was arriving home exhausted and had to sit down and to start writing. Now again I have to work extra to survive that faculty salary, although I am qualified, it is impossible for me. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

The scientific qualification process in UT is expensive; despite that for us, that are part of it, has facilities. Universities in the world pay for scientific training of their staff, while here is the opposite. Because of gender stereotypes and the lack of encouraging policies, the process for women and girls becomes even more difficult to cope with. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

About the factors that have helped to cope with the obstacles encountered most of them dedicate their career achievements to the help and support of their spouses. Other factors identified to help them are the parents, relatives and in some cases the presence of a supporting employee at the role of childcare and social aspects of reproduction. Subjects emphasize the fact that despite the obstacles encountered, academic facilities where they are part and colleagues have been supportive and encouragement factors for them to advance their career investment.

Without the support of husband and my parents I would never made it. I find no words to thank them. Do you believe that I have two children and I felt blessed in this regard? Honestly I would make it out differently. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Interviewees stated that part of the challenges faced by women and girls in educational achievement and academic careers are structural obstacles, which could aggravate the situation and emphasize more traditional norms and mentality in the country. Structural obstacles are referred to the level of education, employment and income. In Albania there is no concern of lack of capable and qualified women but that "our society has been historically and is more opened to men than women's achievements in the field of career. Women and girls for decades constitute the largest number of graduates with higher education in Albania. However, when referring to the status of their socio-economic situation is still very unsatisfactory. Women and girls suffer from the feminization of poverty in Albania and their social status is still far away from their aspirations and does not respond to their investment in education.

Women and girls have said their word. They have been investing in their education for decades, and at this point they have overpassed the boys and men. It is the state and institutions responsibility to analyze why women twice more educated than men, lose and are not adequately represented, although they invest in education and in capacity building. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Men are where the power, prestige and income are. In education it is more than obvious. The higher you go up the more you find them represented. Even in subjects like social sciences or humanitarian, which are not their domains, they are still there. It's like the high school teachers in the 9-year cycle that despite being all women there are male leader. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Their next challenge is gender stereotyping in which the power and independence are not traditionally cultivated in women. It seems that they feel guilty when assessing themselves because faith itself is not culturally cultivated in them. Women and young girls since childhood are socialized as fragile and secondary to the role and importance in the society.

A very important challenge identified by the study refers to war within specie and the lack of support and assistance to colleagues as an influential factor. Academics women and girls are criticized if speak up or are directly and negatively evaluated, and especially by women themselves. Women often do not support the career of their colleagues and most of the occasions in a majority level they support or vote their male colleagues. The interviewees claim that often conflicts or competition within a species can be

created as a result of age differences, the hierarchy of positions, of preference, social activities, friendship circle, etc.

Lack of networks is another challenge faced by women. Unlike their male counterparts, who use the networks / informal links to learn and benefit more from colleagues, although women have much need for this support, they lose more information and cooperation opportunities. Added to this is the fact that in addition to hard work which they cope at home, they have little or no free time to join forces with other women who are in the same situation. Therefore, it is not a surprise when we see that academic women seem unconcerned about problems around them. Lack of support between them, whether formal or informal, reduces and devalues their efforts to the career and academic achievements.

The fight inside damages us many times more than all the obstacles together. We say it often, we know that exists and it is still happening. It's natural to look with envy the achievements of other colleagues and this is my opinion that we know how difficult it is to come somewhere and when we see that the other has reached we feel threatened, incompetent and jealous of their success. It comes natural to support men in career but there is a little support for each other and to gather for our interests. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

I have tried running as part of the decision making in my faculty and I felt very bad when I learned that my colleagues didn't support me. This further aggravated the relations of friendship within my department. I suffered a lot the situation. I think I will not try anymore; it has left a very bad taste all that history. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Academic institutions are masculine cultural environments and women are constantly under pressure to their performance in this kind of environment. Often, the research conducted and led by women are more criticized than those generated and run by men. Academic evaluations commissions have male dominance and as such are more supportive for male academic work and more restrain and prejudicial for female work. Part of this dominance is expressed in the language articulated between colleagues and students in the professional relationship between them. Frequently to a male figure is attributed without merit the title professor by colleagues and students, although he may not merit this title, and often it is encountered the opposite for women in higher education where, although they have invested in their careers and academic titles, usually strikes called by contempt simply teacher or professor.

Commissions and academic titles by the name itself seem to have been created by men for men. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Increasingly academic career is becoming more difficult. It seems as if the rules are set for limited opportunities to others, and when they see that

they can do it the process is hampering even more. And in this regard, women and girls seem less favored. Evaluation commissions have male dominance and when they judge the work of their colleagues seem to be guided by stereotypes; male colleagues are more tolerant and cooperative. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

The percentage of women in teaching staff in university education, is decreasing, the higher is the hierarchy of power. This is also an indicator of the dominant masculine culture that exists in the academic world. The lack of gender policies that include the lack of a functional mechanism to lobby and advocate on real and tangible way for the rights of women in academic careers, it seems that is one of the challenges to be faced. In this regard it should be implemented concrete policies and actions targeting gender vertical differences in the education system, both in terms of academic titles as well as in the gender representation.

Aspirants to join the academy, especially women and girls, have a long and hard journey ahead. The highly dynamic nature of employment, socio-legal norms and gender discrimination between the sexes are obstacles that cannot be easily overlooked. Achieving a balance in all professional and private aspects has always been very difficult due to competition and increasing expectations by the faculty. (Quote from one of the subjects interviewed)

Discussions/Conclusions

Career and academic achievements remain male-dominated areas in Albania. The percentage of women involved in career and academic achievement continues to be very low, a figure attributed to gender inequality in terms of attendance and benefit from higher levels of education. According to many researchers, higher education is in crisis (Gappa, Austin and Trice, 2007; Hult, Callister and Sullivan, 2005; Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006). Although the number of women who teach in universities, has increased considerably in the past two decades, projections of a significant increase in the number of women with the title of professor, are not yet evident. Gappa, Austin and Trice (2007) stated that "the traditional academic career leading to professors continues to be affected by male models and norms" (fq.75). Researches support the idea that women face more obstacles in the university premises than the obstacles that American corporate managers and executives face. (West and Curtis, 2006 fq.4).

Academic women and girls perceive themselves as a minority group, in an environment completely dominated by men. Although a significant number of women and girls has joined the academy and say that they are satisfied by what they have achieved in the area of investment for academic

careers, they still are underrepresented at the highest levels. Because of this minimal representation in the academic field, the interviewees say that they **tend to have less power and less opportunity to influence in decision making or in other initiatives undertaken to promote gender equality and women rights**. Many of them prefer to work individually and isolated, by further decreasing their contributions. "Women leaders in universities should use their positions to influence the institutions where they work until the institutional structure itself equally accepts masculine and feminine roles and until women's issues become public issues. August and Waltman (2006) stated that women should focus on methods of their professional performance. They identified several factors as the nature of work, teaching, research, assessment of colleagues, access to resources and collectivity as factors that should be considered when deciding on career.

Findings from the study point out that the lack of **socio-historical background and positive role-models of participation of women in academic careers is an important aspect of the assessment of the obstacles and challenges faced by Albanian women and girls in the field of career and academic achievements**. Throughout history of Albania there is a lack or there are overshadowed these positive models and qualitative examples of academic women who have built a career and a positive and successful image, and as a result to become models to be followed by all those women, who want to invest in their career and academic achievements. The achievements of women should be identified to encourage other women to follow in their footsteps. Creating positive models will serve to increase the self-esteem of women and girls in the career and academic achievements.

Findings from the study highlight that marriage, divorce, head of households and caring roles seem factors that prevent women and girls in academic career. These roles and statuses, control their work and career, positioning them always as the second ones. The re-dimension of roles and responsibilities of women and men within the family remains a challenge for the Albanian reality. Academic girls are part of these dilemmas and difficulties. The interviewees belonging to this group declare that they hesitate to create a family because they see this step as an obstacle to their career investment. Research studies show that more and more women are delaying marriage or pregnancy due to academic career. Sociological studies of the labor market often aim to analyze gender differences in terms of employment and career development. These studies highlight the barriers that women face in the building and developing a career, due to the process of biological and social reproduction that society expects them to be engaged.

Subjects involved in the study state that the **amount of time they devote to traditional roles of wife and mother** prevent them. In fact, most

women do two jobs: one at work and one at home. The fact that they get married, have children and care for the family leads to the limitation of time and resources that they have available to devote to the academic career. The time that women spend for performing parental and family caregiver often makes their age and social status, a barrier in the process of recruitment by various employers (Hansen, 2005). 95% of women and only 39% of men in age group 15-64 years, in Albania deal with housework, caring for children, prepare meals, shopping and other activities related to unpaid work during days of the week. Women's work is strongly dominated by the unpaid work while men are dominated by hard work paid off. At a general level, the distinction between work, personal care and leisure time is a big difference between men and women. (INSTAT, 2011, p.10, 11). Another finding of the study highlights the differentiated acquisition of appropriate skills for an academic career. Although both sides have opportunity of involvement and commitment, men attain much faster and perform higher to titles and academic posts.

The nature of work is another challenge faced by women and girls in the field of achievement and academic career, especially those married or heads of households. Often the work may require continued commitments trips or national or international meetings, lectures, conferences or workshops. Lack of opportunity (often because of marital status or Heads of households, economic, supportive systems for childcare) to be involved in these commitments limits and reduces their opportunities for benefits and academic achievement. Here most disadvantaged seem to be heads of households and those who has many children. Drago and others (2005) identify a term called "prejudice against care" (p. 22). They suggest that although maternity has been institutionalized within higher academic institutions, faculties rarely use them for fear of a negative reaction. They also found that universities build their strategies to avoid negative feedback from the use of these family policies. Williams (2006) says that women hesitate to use the advantages of these policies that support their functions as an employee or a mother of children because they are disadvantaged by gender stereotyping that hinders their advancement more than the other gender. It identifies two restrictive factors: "the glass ceiling" and "the maternal wall" (fq.16). The first limitation is often used to describe the limitations of women's professional growth generated by unidentified barriers faced by women and girls in the process. And this explanation leads naturally to the second limitation, maternal wall. Williams notes that the conditions attached to motherhood, hamper many women to approach slightly to this ceiling.

The study identifies the fact that women and girls lecturers at the academy **are subject to a greater stress in their work compared to their**

male colleagues. Teaching at the university is itself a stressful job. Some of the tension and stress is also teaching schedule loads and research, writing articles for conferences, seminars and workshops, correcting exams, deadlines, following student projects and other full work practice. Other contributions may be following and management of graduate student theses or dissertations, meetings and membership in several administrative boards or committees. On all these tasks, an academic woman can become a fussy mother, a not very cooperative colleague and be perceived as someone not very tolerant of those who surround her. Despite the growing competition and the absence tutorial and lack of extra hours, many women are trying to be "ideal workers" (Drago and others. 2005; Gappa, Austin and Trice, 2007). This model requires long hours of work and dedication to a career which can hamper family commitments. Jonathan and Stone (1989) noted that lecturers women and girls who live under high pressure and stress, show concerns and constant fatigue signs. Stress and its effects can have serious consequences on mental health, their psychological and personal.

It seems that in the attitudes of women and girls to investment in education, a drawback is as well the economic situation of income. Mainly head of households, mothers with many children, say that they have less chance to invest and attend continuing education, training, qualifications, etc. Problematic situations for other subjects interviewed, which recognize that are often forced to do other tasks (mainly expertise), or take the overload teaching schedule to meet the desired level of income, because payments provided from the workplace are inadequate. Aguirre (2000) strongly emphasizes these inhibiting factors for these women. Among others is ranked the reward system that is unable to consider other family obligations of women, social isolation, research and increased representation in service sector activities and community meetings. According to the research done by the American Association of University Professors, Aguirre maintains that "the salary gap between men and women is not narrowed; it is even deepened more when referring to the level of assistant professor" (fq.61).

The lack of gender policies that include the lack of a functional mechanism to lobby and advocate on real and tangible way to the women rights in academic careers, it seems that is one of the challenges to be faced. In this regard it should be implemented concrete policies and actions targeting gender vertical differences in the educational system both in terms of academic titles as well as in gender representation. Flexible working hours and ease of loads should be part of the management of academic staff especially for young mothers and heads of households. The re-dimension of the roles and responsibilities of women and men within the family remains a challenge for the Albanian reality. Based on the literature, many women's

colleges in Australia, Canada and the UK feel to be "victims" of marginalization (Skelton, 2005; Kjedal, Rindfleish and Sheridan, 2005; Wyn, Acker and Richards 2000). Australia has experienced part-time job growth. In the institutions of the United States national anti-discrimination a policy and its support to gender equality it is situated its implementation since 1980. However the increase of the percentage of women in academic life has advanced with much slower rhythm. Inequality in women and girls is manifested in the form of low academic achievement, low salary and teaching load growth compared to men (Kjedal, Rindfleish and Sheridan, 2005). The increasing of male figure in most public space in Australia, has forced some women to speak up publicly by saying that many of them have followed the policy of personal favors with other male colleagues and were able to reach agreement on options that was not offered for women (Kjedal, Rindfleish and Sheridan, fq.438). In this way social norms in Australia cannot maintain an official policy of increasing the duty of men skipping their female colleagues.

Chinese higher education institutions offer a comparative perspective of a world power that has a social and political system traditionally different from the rest of the world, especially the West. In this area, China has established several policies that produce equality between men and women (Gaskell and others., 2004, p. 512). Chinese Communist tradition has always emphasized social equality and equal access to any facility or service, but in recent years, due to the intensification of trade relations with foreign countries gender inequality is increased: "An official line on gender equality has given life to a greater expression of different beliefs about women in public space "(Gaskell and others., 2004, p. 515).

The main goal of gender equality policies in education is challenging roles and traditional gender stereotypes. There is a lack of action by policy-making structures focusing simply on general definition of problem. While different countries have implemented various instruments to improve the situation, there is a lack of general strategies. For example, although it is hold forth the concept of gender equality, only some countries have identified the goal why we should achieve this equality, and very few countries have been able to successfully implement this strategy in the field of education. Despite the long list of measures undertaken to change traditional gender roles, only a few countries have translated them into concrete action plans (European Commission, 2007).

Despite the above factors, it can be mentioned **the structural obstacles which may aggravate the situation and emphasize more traditional norms and mentality in the country.** Structural obstacles referred to the level of education, employment and income. In Albania there is no concern of lack of capable and qualified women but that "our society

has been historically and is more opened to men than women's achievements in the field of career. Women and girls for decades constitute the largest number of graduates with higher education in Albania. However, when referring to the status of their socio-economic situation still is very unsatisfactory. Women and girls suffer from the feminization of poverty in Albania and their social status is still far away from their aspirations and does not respond to their investment in education.

Ensuring women's access to decision-making in all fields and at all levels is essential in the framework of national and international efforts that aim at a more inclusive and democratic governance. This right is not limited only to politics, but includes participation and leading role of women in public life in general, the private sector and civil society (Economy and others., 2006). The data show that in public decision-making, women continue to be seriously underrepresented. In most institutions are women in middle levels and especially in low ones, while men occupy more and more senior positions.

Participation of women in the labor market has been decreasing. Women's participation rate in the labor force in 2009 was 51.8%, compared with 56.2% in 2007. **Women in Albania have less access than men to start a job as a consequence unemployment rate is higher in women.** The employment rate for the population age 15-64 in 2009 was 53.4%. This indicator was 64.3% for men and 43.6% for women. The employment rate for women has declined since 2007 when it was 49.3%. The unemployment rate among women in 2009 was 15.9%, compared with 12.2% for men in the same year, while in 2007, the unemployment rate for women was 12.2%. Indicators of long-term unemployment (as defined by the standard, long-term unemployed are those unemployed for a period of one year or more) show that women are more likely to remain unemployed for a longer period than men. The difference between them is significant, respectively 10.6% to 7.8%. This gap has deepened over the years. Since 2007, long-term unemployment for women has increased: from 8.8% to 10.6%. Moreover, among the discouraged unemployed, women account for about 70%, which means these women and girls do not require entering the labor market. Discouragement often comes from a lack of social care services for children and the elderly. **Women continue to be underrepresented in job status, power and authority;** and especially over-represented in some sectors, especially in health and social work, education, agriculture, finance, and manufacturing. In all other sectors men dominate, by showing a much greater diversification in the employment of men. Professional horizontal and vertical separation of women and men has as a result a continuous gap and significant gender wage. **Although women begin with higher educational levels, and maintaining educational lead throughout the age**

groups, the average salary of women is 17.63 per cent lower than that of men. The gender wage gap is even greater among workers with less education and almost two times higher in rural areas compared to the national average (SKBGJ-DHF, 2011-2015).

Traditionally, though women bear the load of the family, they are less likely than men to control the resources and tools they need to fulfill these responsibilities. The high level of unemployment, the performance of unqualified jobs, lack of training opportunities, poor access and lack of freedom in the use of family planning methods, being subject of violence, abuses or arbitrary within the family, as well as the underrepresentation leading public and political structures **affect the deepening and the feminization of poverty in Albania.** In the recent years the number of women heads of households has increased, mainly from divorce (where the divorce rate in 2009 was 17 per 100 marriages compared to 9 per 100 in 2001.)

Priority in the provision of economic assistance and other benefits of social temporary are women heads of households, mothers with many children and families that have orphans or born out of wedlock (mother, daughter). Prioritizing the needs of women as women with many children, unemployed, elderly, etc., is in some municipalities and communes, but not accompanied by supportive policies for them (MPÇSSHB, 2011). Specialized social services for women at risk and in need often given to national service center, which make it difficult to access them. Social portrayal of older women and those with disabilities is almost absent. Their economic situation, normal living services, for food and medicine sources are no evident. Local policies and services coming from various NGOs typically for older women and those with disabilities are sporadic.

Even **social support of women's career through institutional favorable policies** to facilitate their work with children and families is one thing still in silent. Career women find themselves extremely heavy, which reduce their professional growth rate. Social services aim at vulnerable groups and not the social welfare of other groups.

Findings from the study showed that academic institutions are masculine cultural environments and women are constantly under pressure for their performance in this kind of environment. Often, the research conducted and led by women are more criticized than those generated and run by men. Academic evaluations commissions have male dominance and as such are more supportive for male academic work and more restrain and prejudicial for female work. Historically, men have cultivated and effectively use their personal and professional networks to develop their career. Consequently, they have access to resources and paths already established for career impact and support. Often, "knowing how" to

gain technical skills is necessary, but not sufficient to achieve success in their professional career. But "knowing to whom" you turn for advice, guidance, role model and career development can be a key factor in taking career stairs (McGregor and bases, 2001, p. 54). It is already known that high positions are associated with higher financial ratings and various packages of social and moral rewards.

Another very important barrier identified by the study refers to **war within a species and the lack of support and assistance to colleagues as an influential factor**. Women often are not supporting their career colleagues and occasionally in majority they support or vote their colleagues. Williams points out also the conflicts that exist in the relationship between women themselves. If a woman uses the faculty permit, another woman may be asked by the department to take over some of the duties of her colleague. This can create problems or abnormality if any of them, with such load has postponed the wedding or creating a family to invest in her professional career (Williams, 2006). Williams says women worry if they can be perceived as beneficiaries of extra benefits, especially when these benefits come from male directions, perceptions that may disturb the relations with colleagues. Divided lines can be created as a result of age, location or social activity with men (Skelton, 2005). It is very important to understand that "being a woman in the academy does not necessarily make you feminist" (Skelton, 2005, p. 327). Skelton says that women are under pressure to define their roles as social actors. Her research found that women of different generations "count incidents of sexism and masculinity in the academy when frequently women of higher positions, in some cases feminist, are marginalized and discriminated by women themselves" (p.329)

On the other side, the study documents that **the lack of networks** is another challenge that women faced. Unlike their male colleagues, who use the networks / informal links to learn and benefit more from colleagues, women although have much need for this support, they **lose more opportunities for information and cooperation**. Lack of support between them, whether formal or informal, and reduces and devalue their efforts for career and academic achievement.

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