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## **Gender inequality in holding leadership positions of academia: Evidence from the state universities in Sri Lanka**

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Gender inequality remains one of the major challenges for human capital development. United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5.5) aims to ensure women's effective participation and equal opportunities in leadership positions (UN, SDG report). Female employees face discrimination at the workplace and they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. Over the last few decades, scholars as well as policy makers emphasized the importance of establishing gender equality in leadership. However, most of these studies focused on corporate and political leadership and less attention is paid to gender inequality in leadership in academia. This study aimed to identify why female academics do not get into the leadership positions as male academics and to make recommendation to ensure the gender equality in leadership in academia. This study designed as two stage study, where the first part of this study was designed to understand the current composition of male and female in leadership positions in academia. To attain this objective, secondary data were collected from the published documents of University Grant Commission. These data showed that only a few female academics are holding the leadership positions. The second part of this study was designed to understand the reasons for why female academics do not get the leadership positions on par with male academics. To answer this question, we collected data from the female academics in state Universities of Sri Lanka via an online survey. The study results showed that family responsibilities, partner employment, previous experience, perception of it as an unattractive career option, and jealousy and discrimination from male academics as main reasons of female academics not getting into the leadership positions. Thus, we recommend policy makers to provide facilities such as day care centers, training programmes, equal opportunities for both male and female in committee and boards (e.g., senate), and encouragement for them to participate in leadership positions. Thus, this study provides a significant contribution to the theory and practice.

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