

Abstract

In spite of tremendous feminization of the legal profession, the problem of low career advancement of women to senior positions anticipates global and local attention to prevent gender based discrimination and to ensure equal career opportunities (e.g. Samararatne, 2020; Sommerlad, 2002). Goal 5 and 16 of United Nation's Sustainable Developmental Goals for 2030 (UNSDG's) collectively emphasize the importance of ensuring gender equality and promotion of non-discriminatory laws and policies at workplaces for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). Against such international obligations, the percentage of women judgeships represented at the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka was 18.2% while percentage of men judgeships reported as 81.8%, which was disproportionate with the percentage (65.1%) of women lawyers enrolled in 2017 (Department of Census and Statistics, 2017). Samararatne (2020) reaffirmed that apart from judiciary gender disparity at high-ranking positions is a common problem visible throughout the legal profession of Sri Lanka. Even though previous literature examined the impact of structural factors on women career advancement, studies have rarely concerned with the psychological factors such as perceived gender ideology. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of perceived gender ideology and career choice on career advancement of women in the legal profession.

Therefore, the study adopted a quantitative approach followed by a cross sectional survey, covering 360 women lawyers in mid and late career stages. The purposive sampling method was used to select the sample. Data collected through self-administered questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Analysis of a Moment Structures (AMOS). 360 usable questionnaires forwarded to data analysis based on the purposive sample of women lawyers in mid and late careers. The empirical data revealed that women's perceived gender ideology has a significant impact on their career advancement. Further, career choice of women lawyers mediates the relationship between perceived gender ideology and career advancement. In contrast, career choice has not found to have a significant relationship on career advancement in the given context. Moreover, in terms of three parameters of career choice i.e. authenticity, balance, and challenge, this study has discovered that except challenge other two resulted insignificant relationships with perceived gender ideology and career advancement.

In addition, the study theoretically contributes to examine the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) theory by introducing perceived gender ideology as a parameter that matters to career advancement by adjoining with the Gender Identity theory. The KCM is challenged when applied to mid and later career women in the legal profession of Sri Lanka. In terms of managerial contributions, the study is important to develop appropriate personality traits within women lawyers during legal education and throughout their career development in order to meet respective career expectations and then to advance their careers to senior positions appropriately. Higher education institutes responsible for legal education could guide future women lawyers to make suitable career choices after identifying or transforming gender identity accurately to assure their professional growth. The study advances existing literature relating to career advancement of women by uncovering the psychological factors within women such as perceived gender ideology which impede career advancement. Also, application of the kaleidoscope career model in a significant professional context re-assures the originality of the present study.