



*Society for Research
into Higher Education*

**Locating Academic Women in the Singaporean Higher Education
Sector: Challenges, Knowledge Gaps and Future Directions**

Research report

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Section 1: The Problem Statement

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) has gained considerable attention in the higher education sector internationally with the underrepresentation of women as academic leaders being a central research and policy priority. Despite the increase in scholarly attention, and in some international contexts national and institutional policy initiatives, gender equality in higher education leadership remains elusive.

To date, the extant literature has focused predominantly upon Western contexts. Research with a focus on women academics in the Asian context is relatively limited. Research has been conducted in Hong Kong (Aiston, 2011; Aiston, 2014; Aiston, 2017; Aiston and Yang, 2017; Aiston and Fo, 2020; Aiston, Fo and Law, 2020, Aiston, 2022), Mainland China (Zhang, 2000; Zhang, 2010; Rhoads and Gu, 2012; Zhao and Jones, 2016; Ruan, 2020; Tang and Horta, 2020; Tang and Horta, 2021) and South Asia (Morley and Crossouard, 2016).

To this end, we have no understanding of the position, status and experience of women academics in Singapore.

The current absence of publicly available gender disaggregated statistics for staff means that there is no relevant data with which to inform and evaluate effective policy implementation and progress cannot be monitored or managed across the higher education sector in Singapore.

There are seven publicly-funded universities in Singapore, including two world leading institutions (as per numerous rankings) - the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), alongside the Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) and the recently formed University of Arts Singapore (UAS).

As a small country with limited natural resources, developing talent capacity in a knowledge-intensive economy has been prioritised as crucial for the success of the state (Mok, 2008; Wong et al., 2007; Ng, 2013), in which 'universities in Singapore have become a vital part of the nation's strategy for economic reinvention' (Gopinathan & Lee, 2011, p. 296). However, it is not clear to what extent, and how, the talent of women as academics is being utilised.

In 2022 the Singapore government launched a White Paper on Women's Development (2022) outlining key initiatives, including increasing women's representation in leadership and strengthening support for caregiving by expanding parental leave and promoting workplace flexibility (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2022). These action plans align with several

SDGs goals, including SDG 5: Gender Equality; SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.

This research has been carried out at a timely point to dovetail with the state's focus upon gender equity in answering the following questions:

- ❑ What is the current position, status and experience of academic women in Singapore?
- ❑ What are the enablers and barriers to career progression, and entry to, senior leadership roles for academic women in Singapore?

This report is structured as follows. Section 2 will discuss the methodological approach to answering the research questions. Section 3 will present the main findings. Section 4 will discuss the launch of the findings in Singapore and the co-creation of a set of recommendations. Section 5 will outline the co-created recommendations and Section 6 will provide concluding comments.

Section 2: Methodology

The first stage of the research carried out an extensive data mapping exercise adopting Aiston's (Aiston & Yang, 2017) approach to map out the profiles of academic men and women via the institutional webpages of the seven publicly-funded universities in Singapore.

Publicly available data in Singapore captures only the number of 'university teachers' (until the year 2022), with women representing only 36% of the total university teachers' population in the publicly-funded universities (Department of Statistics Government of Singapore, 2022). Data related to gender, academic rank, discipline and leadership roles are not available. The mapping exercise, therefore, has generated a unique data set to explore the status and position of women academics in Singapore. The data collected is accurate as of December 2024.

The second stage of the research was to carry out a series of qualitative interviews to explore the enablers and barriers to career progression for women academics. The decision was taken to talk to women who had reached the rank of full Professor. Our aim was to explore their reflections on their own career trajectories. The mapping exercise had shown that in the disciplines of humanities, arts and social science (HASS) and science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) – across the universities – only 76 women had reached the rank of full Professor. Invitations were sent out to all 76 women. In total 19 women came forward to take part in the project (25% response rate), the majority being from NUS and NTU (17) and STEM subjects (15). Women full Professors at NUS and NTU account for 78% of all women Professors in Singapore. Almost all of the interviewees

had also held significant leadership roles. Ethics approval was granted by Teesside University's Ethics Committee. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

Section 3: Main Findings

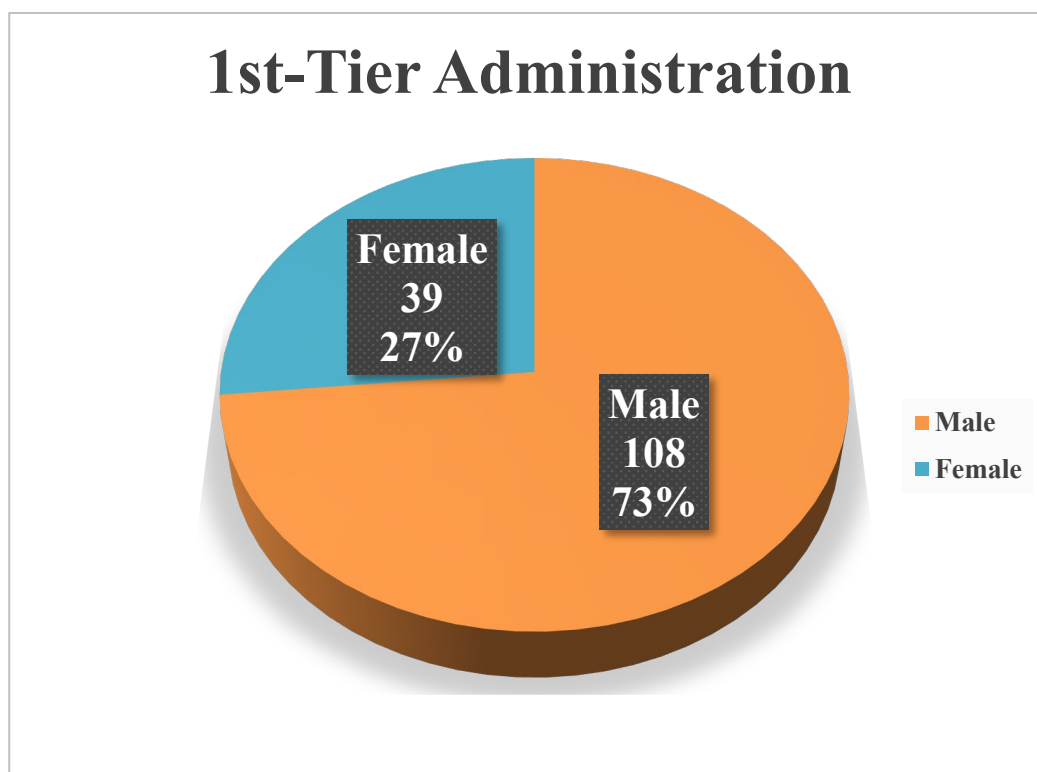
Absent Data, Absent Women: the quantitative data

Currently there is only one female President in Singapore.

The gender composition of what we term 1st tier leadership is shown in Figure 1. First-tier leadership refers to faculty holding a position at the level of Dean and above (to include titles such as Vice/Deputy/Associate President, Provost, Vice-Provost, Dean).

Out of 141 positions across the Singapore higher education sector at this level, 27% of 1st tier leaders are women.

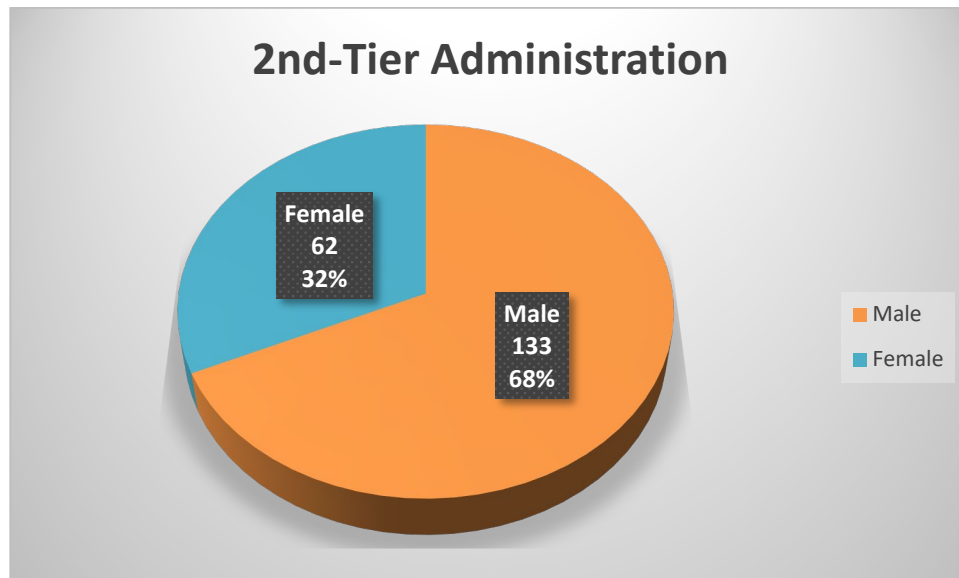
Figure 1: Gender composition of 1st-tier leaders in the seven publicly-funded universities



The gender composition of what we term 2nd tier leadership is shown in Figure 2. Second-tier leadership is faculty holding positions to include titles such as Associate/Assistant Deans of faculties, Head of Department, Director of School/Division/Cluster.

Academic women are only slightly more represented at this level (+5%) and account for 32% of faculty holding these leadership positions.

Figure 2: Gender composition of 2nd-tier leaders in the seven publicly funded universities



We asked the following question of these two data sets; is it the case that women are just as likely to reach senior leadership roles as men? Carrying out an odds ratio calculation to analyse the proportion of men and women reaching 1st and 2nd tier leadership roles relative to their representation in the academic population overall, table 1 shows that women are less likely to do so. Whilst a more recent figure for the total number of ‘university teachers’ is needed, this does give us some indication.

Table 1: Gender composition of 1st – and 2nd tier leaders in the seven publicly-funded universities as a proportion of all university staff

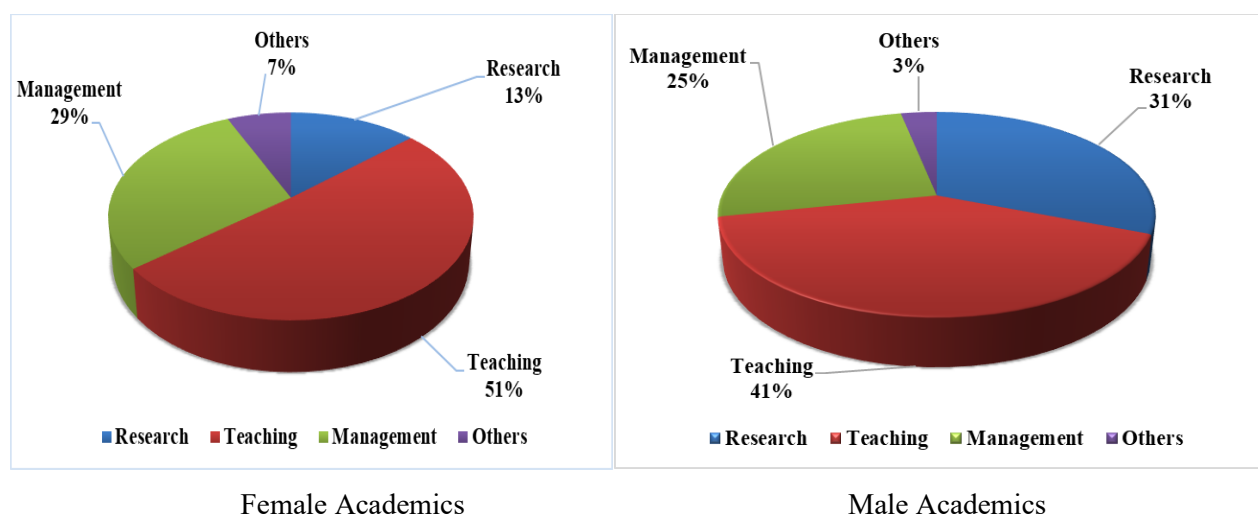
Gender	1st-tier administrators	2nd-tier administrators	Total number of full-time academic staff
Males	108 (1.4%)	133 (1.8%)	7362 (100%)*
Females	39 (0.9%)	62 (1.5 %)	4115 (100%)*

Source * <https://tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/table/TS/M850261> (2017)

In addition to analysing the position of women academics in formally designated leadership roles we were keen to explore the extent to which women were involved in what has been termed 'distributed' leadership roles. For the purposes of the analysis those members of staff who had indicated on their web profile involvement in the management of their department, programmes or research were included. Here we are looking at where faculty indicated the type of distributed leadership role they are undertaking; management (in a general sense, e.g. Deputy Head of Department), teaching (e.g. Programme Lead) or research (e.g. Director of Research Centre, Research lead).

Figure 3 shows that women are more likely to be involved in teaching and less likely to be involved in research leadership. Research indicates that women are more likely have a greater input into teaching and student welfare, rather than research which is privileged in higher education (Aiston and Jung, 2015).

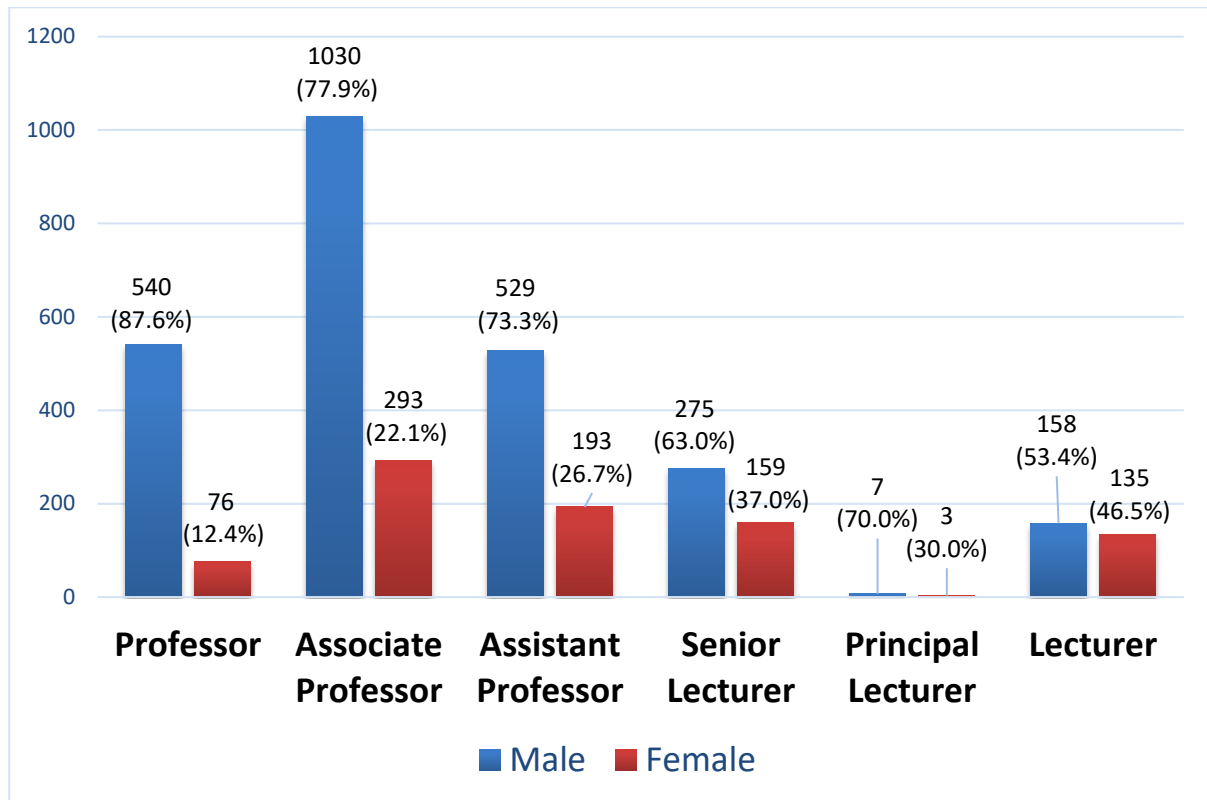
Figure 3: 3rd tier distributed leadership roles in the case study disciplines



Our next stage of analysis was to look at rank and gender across the seven universities and the case-study disciplines of HASS, STEM and Business.

Figure 4 shows that women are underrepresented at each rank compared to men. This difference is particularly marked between the ranks of Associate and Full Professor.

Figure 4: Rank and gender of academic staff across the seven-publicly funded universities: case study disciplines of HASS, STEM and Business



The analysis of women's rank as a proportion of the total number of women across the seven universities and case-study disciplines also shows a drop-off at each rank; with 35% of women at the rank of lecturer and only 9% of women at the rank of full Professor (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Rank of female academic staff across the seven publicly-funded universities across the case study disciplines (as a proportion of the total number of women)

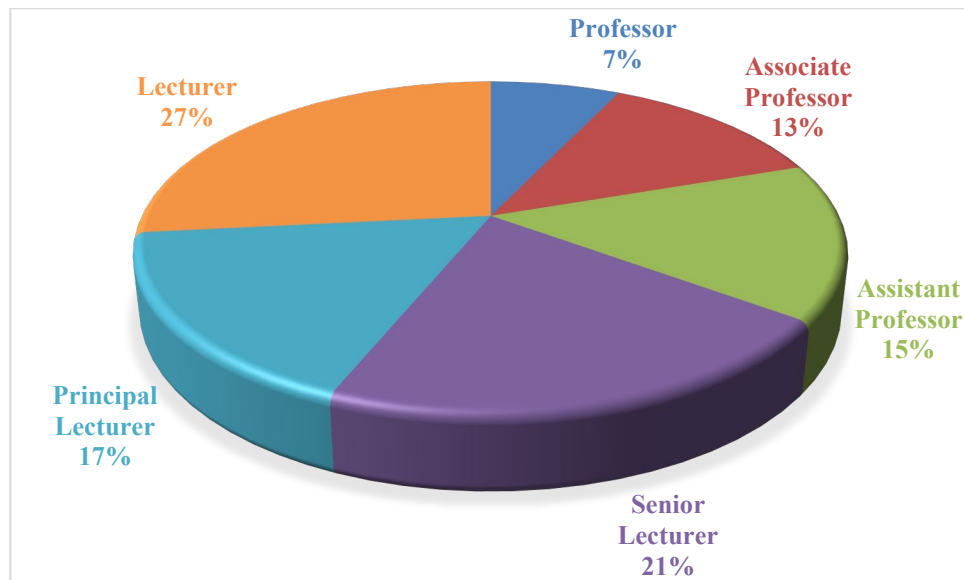


Table 2 provides the gendered profile at each rank across the case-study disciplines at each of the seven universities.

Table 2: Case-study disciplines by academic rank, gender and university

Institution	Gender	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Senior Lecturer	Lecturer
NUS	MALE	255 (90.4%)	432 (80.7%)	241 (75.5%)	114 (67.1%)	71 (63.4%)
	FEMALE	27 (9.6%)	103 (19.3%)	78 (24.5%)	56 (32.9%)	41 (36.6%)
NTU	MALE	194 (85.8%)	357 (81.0%)	163 (73.8%)	63 (65.6%)	27 (58.7%)
	FEMALE	32 (14.2%)	84 (19.0%)	58 (26.2%)	33 (34.4%)	19 (41.3%)
SMU	MALE	54 (80.6%)	77 (70.6%)	70 (64.8%)	16 (59.3%)	2 (66.7%)
	FEMALE	13 (19.4%)	32 (29.4%)	28 (35.2%)	11 (40.7%)	1 (33.3%)
SUTD	MALE	12 (85.7%)	32 (84.2%)	24 (75.0%)	34 (69.4%)	15 (68.2%)
	FEMALE	2 (14.3%)	6 (18.8%)	8 (25.0%)	15 (30.6%)	7 (31.8%)
SUSS	MALE	5 (100%)	35 (51.5%)	1 (100%)	31 (43.7%)	12 (46.2%)
	FEMALE	0	33 (48.5%)	0	40 (56.3%)	14 (53.8%)
SIT	MALE	17 (89.5%)	97 (78.2%)	30 (58.8%)	9 (81.8%)	
	FEMALE	2 (10.5%)	27 (21.8%)	21 (41.2%)	2 (18.1%)	
UAS	MALE	3 (100%)	0	0	8 (80.0%)	34 (55.7%)
	FEMALE	0	0	0	2 (20.0%)	27 (44.3%)

Figures 5, 6 and 7 show rank and gender by discipline. As expected, the number of women in STEM subjects at each rank is low compared to male faculty, with a drop off in the number of female faculty from the rank of Assistant Professor to Full Professor. In HASS whilst women faculty represent 39% of Associate Professors, only 20% are at the rank of full Professor. In Business women make up the majority of lecturers – although noting that the number of staff at this level is low – with their numbers decreasing through each rank, culminating in 19% of women at the level of full Professor.

Figure 5: Overall data of the seven publicly-funded universities by academic rank and STEM disciplines

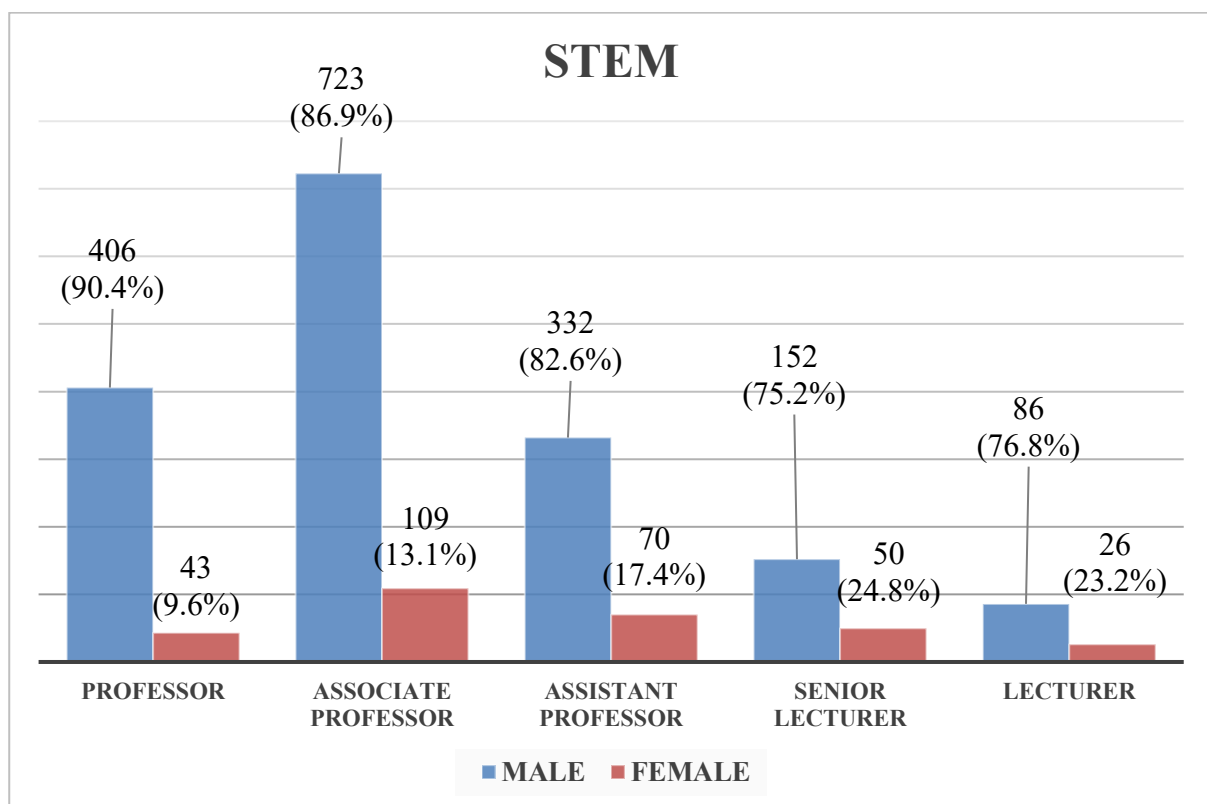


Figure 6: Overall data of the seven publicly-funded universities by academic rank and HASS disciplines

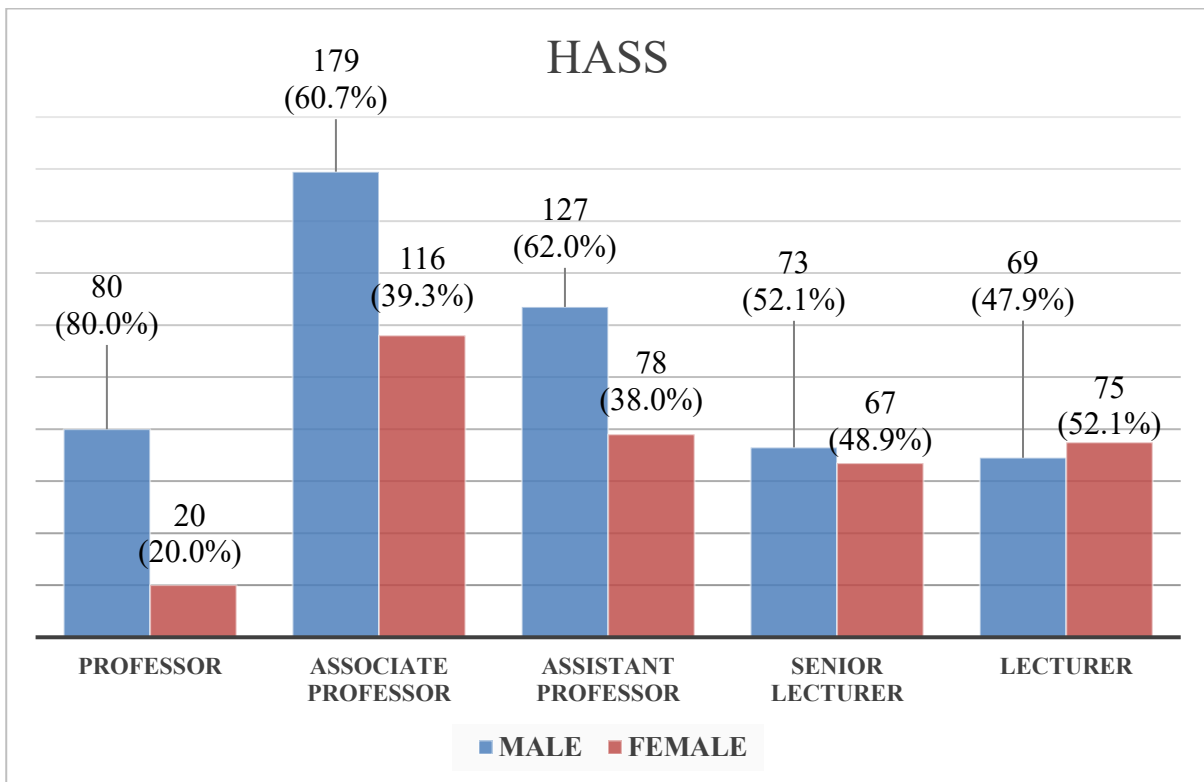


Figure 7: Overall data of the seven publicly-funded universities by academic rank and the discipline of Business

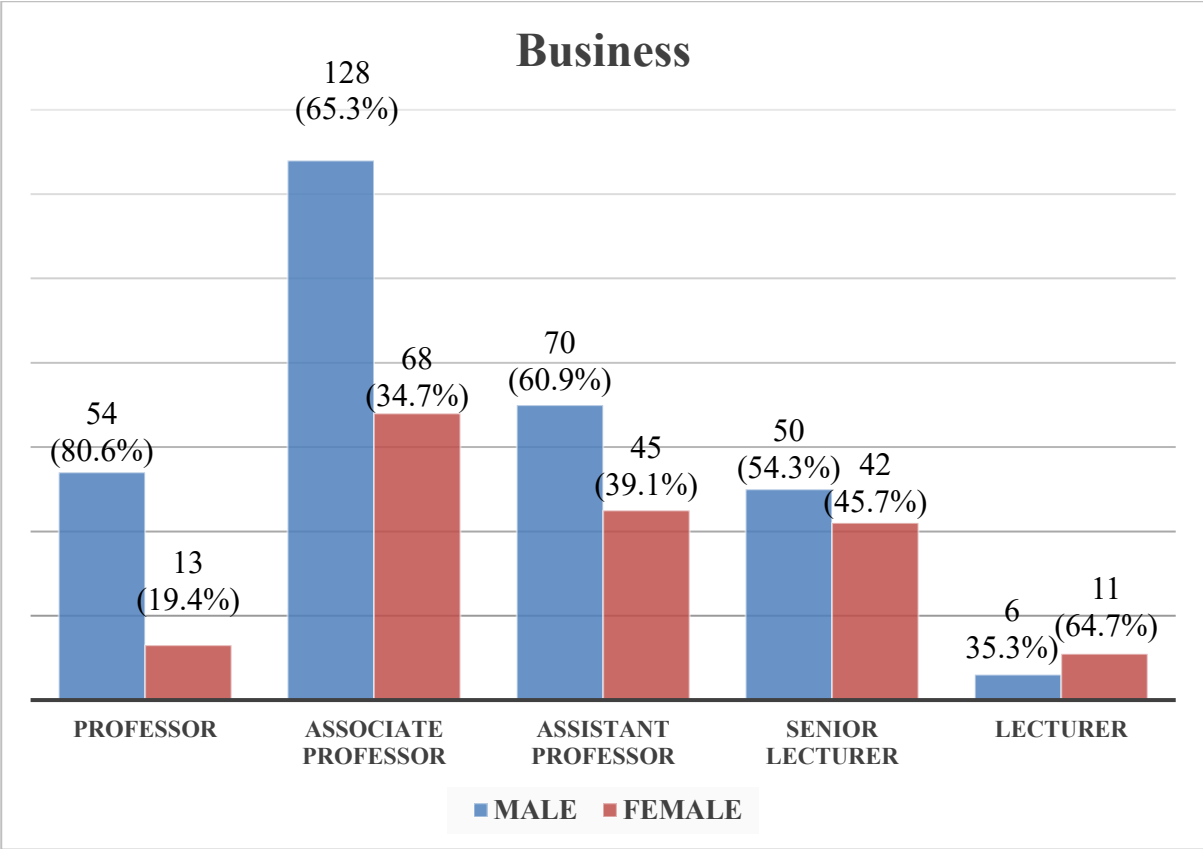
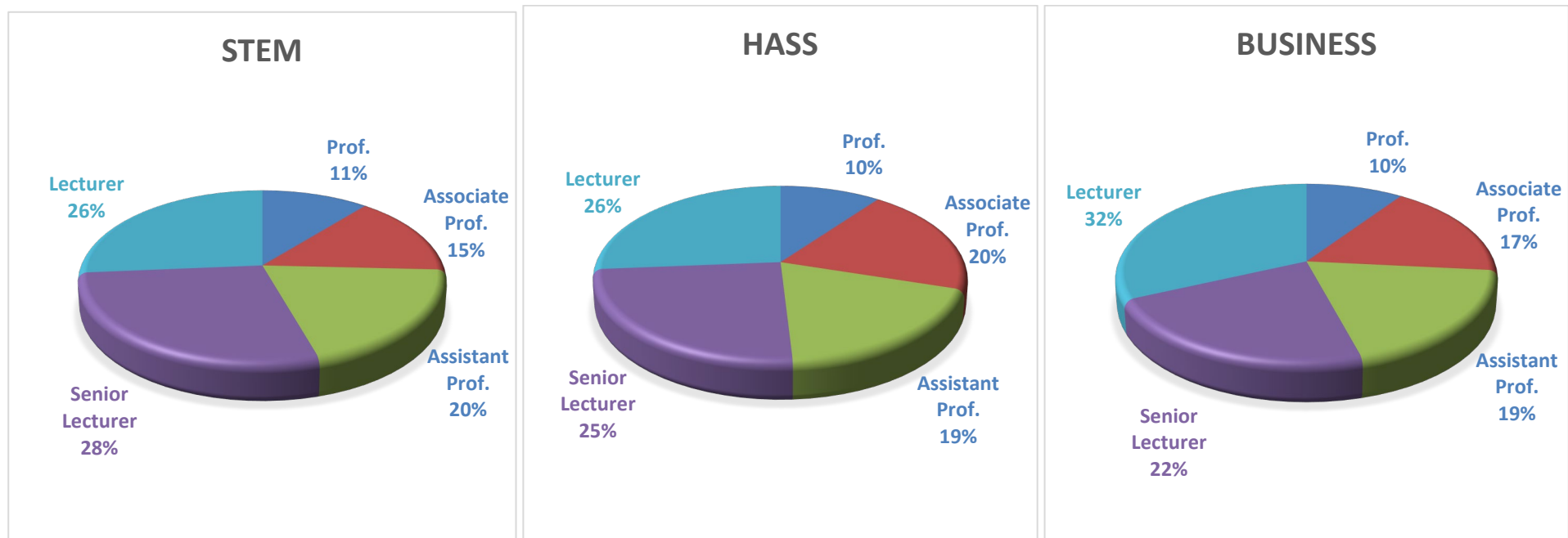


Figure 8 shows the analysis of women by academic rank and discipline as a proportion of the total number of women in the case-study disciplines across the seven universities. What this figure shows is a strong visual similarity between the disciplines in relation to the extent to which women are likely to reach each rank. For example, as a proportion of women in each subject area there is striking similarity in the percentage of women who reach the rank of full Professor.

Figure 8: Rank of female academic staff across the seven publicly-funded universities across the case study disciplines (as a proportion of the total number of women academics)



Challenges and Enablers: the qualitative data

Interviews were conducted with 19 full Professors between January and March 2025. Interviewees were asked to reflect upon their career trajectories, highlighting what had helped them to reach their current rank and any challenges they had faced, related to their gender or discipline, or a combination of both. Aspects of the quantitative data were also shared with the interviewees to elicit their opinions as to why women faculty are underrepresented in senior leadership roles and as full Professors and what support/strategies/policies might begin to change this situation. Thematic analysis was carried out (Braun and Clark, 2006). The initial analysis was carried out independently by each member of the research team with a particular focus upon the challenges and enablers, leading to a comparative analysis, culminating in a number of themes that are presented below.

Challenges

No. 1 Work-Life Balance: the effect on promotion and leadership opportunities

- ☐ Women academics can face significant challenges in balancing professional responsibilities with family obligations (particularly in Asian society, although recognising that Singapore compares more favourably to other Asian societies). Societal expectations of women as primary caregivers in a fast-paced, demanding and competitive environment brings challenges
- ☐ Maternity leave and childcare responsibilities can affect promotion timelines
- ☐ Women academics may travel less for international conferences which is critical for visibility and promotion: senior academic positions require international recognition/'presence'
- ☐ Limited networking opportunities (e.g. having to avoid evening events, reducing travel) due to familial responsibilities
- ☐ Women faculty may have to justify gaps in their CVs due to family commitments which male counterparts typically do not face
- ☐ As a junior member of faculty – the point at which you might have children – developing a research profile becomes challenging

'I think in general people should not judge tenure only based on numbers, so research grant is a dollar value, publications maybe they can count how papers a year, what was the impact factor when they come up with all sorts of metrics right? So these are numbers I think. People should not look into numbers too religiously because people can manipulate numbers, right...The tenure committee should consider maternity break as a compelling factor when

looking at Professor as a holistic individual. So someone might not have been as productive as the male counterpoint who doesn't have a maternity break right, but if the individual continues to publish good papers – probably less in quantity and she has a good reputation in the field and a lot of potential..’ (Interviewee 0014)

‘...oh that is the perception or the requirement that the female should be the one taking care of the home, more than the male right...I think this does impact, I have to travel less and I have to explain to the promotion board, when I apply for my promotion, why I don't have oversees international conferences...but in the end, the board actually understand...’ (Interviewee 004)

No. 2 Gender bias and stereotyping

- ☐ There may be perception that women are less committed to their careers due to care-giving responsibilities
- ☐ Women are more frequently asked to take on administrative duties which can affect their time for research – women tend to accept extra administrative responsibilities whilst male colleagues are more likely to decline such roles
- ☐ Gendered expectation of behaviour which reinforce traditional roles – examples given being women asked to take minutes at meetings (if no administrator present), ordering food for events
- ☐ In professional settings women can be addressed by their first name whilst male colleagues are given their formal title
- ☐ Asian women expected to be submissive – can be labelled as difficult women very easily

‘I was given the task, you know, like to look into refreshments for (student) orientation...then when it comes to writing your CV...what am I supposed to write?...I know \$3 will give me what kind of food [laughs] \$10 will give me [laughs]...I can't write expert in buffet spread.’ (Interviewee 005)

‘...sometimes the men expect me to take minutes of the meeting, even the whole room consists of academic staff, it's like a woman would take minutes of the meeting, and if there is a buffet lunch to be served, they expect women to be the one opening the cover and helping with serving.’ (Interviewee 006)

No. 3 Gender bias and stereotyping: *leadership*

- ☐ Women viewed as team players rather than team leaders
- ☐ In an Asian context women can stand out if they volunteer and this is not seen as positive
- ☐ Women in leadership roles must navigate perceptions around assertiveness versus traditional gender roles
- ☐ Challenge of how women in leadership roles conduct themselves – likely to be surrounded by more men – and how to be seen as professional and not too aggressive but also not a ‘pushover’
- ☐ Smaller pool of women to draw upon for leadership roles – and a sense that the prestigious roles go to male colleagues – particularly research roles

...‘I feel that in a Asian kind of background, if you’re a male dominated department you (males) always, you know, show up to volunteer...most of the time female colleagues will be team player, not being considered a team leader, yeah...you know society kind of perspective to a woman, you know, what you should do, what you shouldn’t do, especially in Asian environment...you know, pop up to volunteer in certain things, the male colleagues will not have a very positive perspective about you.’ (Interviewee 001)

‘...in very senior administrative positions, the men will get the best position first and in the university the best position would be Vice Provost for Academic...Vice Provost for Research...so these kind of plum positions for academic and research would go the man and the woman will be...Vice Provost for Student Life.’ (Interviewee 006)

No. 4 Establishing a research profile and promotion

- ☐ Women researchers may find it more challenging to secure research funding, or be involved in large, prestigious projects which can impact on their advancement.
- ☐ Difficult to get to be a PI on a research grant if you have never left Singapore
- ☐ Asian women at international conferences can find breaking the white male ‘club’ difficult
- ☐ Gender biases can affect the way funding decisions are made
- ☐ In going forward for promotion women have ‘stringent requirements of themselves’; if they go up for promotion once and fail, they are reluctant to go again. In contrast male colleagues are more likely to apply again and again until they succeed.

- ☐ Men tend to promote themselves better in their promotion dossiers
- ☐ Women don't put themselves forward for promotion – if they need to benchmark against full Prof in a comparatively ranked institutions then they feel their CV does not meet the requirements (possible linked to familial responsibilities)

'...female academics seem to have a more stringent requirement of themselves when they are ready to go for full professor...I have seen some female faculty, if they have gone once and then they fail, they rather don't go again, but I have seen males who've gone once, failed second time, failed third time, failed fourth time, get it.' (Interviewee 008)

Enablers

No. 1 Policies/Initiatives and Supportive Infrastructures and Senior Leaders

- ☐ Government Policies - to promote gender equity in the workplace (e.g. Work-Life Harmony)
- ☐ University Policies – clear tenure and promotion guidelines, including tenure clock extensions for women
- ☐ Reconsider the age limit for awards (e.g. young researcher) so as not to disadvantage women
- ☐ Diversity on important decision-making panels
- ☐ On-campus childcare facilities
- ☐ Flexibility e.g. in working hours + to pursue own research agendas
- ☐ 'Sensitive Management' - Early career researchers not taking up too many service/administrative roles
- ☐ Supportive Chair for Research – to attract early career women and enable their research
- ☐ Leaders encouraging women to come forward

'...she's now taken over a...senior role...so she's been inviting women faculty over the course of a lunch...and she's encouraging women to apply, like apply, don't be shy, apply we want to support you, we want more women full professors.' (Interviewee 001)

'...I think the maternity leave and the paternity leave, I think those are very very helpful.' (Interviewee 019)

No. 2 Mentoring

- ❑ Mentorship: pairing of younger academics with senior Professors to guide them in their career progression
- ❑ Champions, mentors – both male and female right from the beginning of their careers – not just peer to peer, but also senior leadership
- ❑ Support from mentors to strategise – in relation to research (e.g. how can a research project be designed to generate several papers and then which journal to target)

'I need to thank our Vice Dean of Research...he's very supportive of me...whenever I need anything, any advice I can text and call him and he always gives good advice without asking for anything in return. So you can tell from a person, you know, there are some people just very calculative and nothing to do with them, they will not respond.' (Interviewee 003)

'Yeah, I have been actually very lucky and that's why I always stress how important it is to have / actually my mentors are all informal mentors. I think maybe two or three times, I might have so-called formal mentors, but I think they all contributed equally...and I call them mentors, well as long as they are senior professors and they are very helpful and my entire academic career I have been very lucky.' (Interviewee 015)

No. 3 Role Models

- ❑ Seeing women in leadership roles challenges the stereotype women can't be leaders
- ❑ More women in senior management potentially leads to a greater understanding of the challenges women might face

'...how to promote women in leadership and make them more visible and allow them to shine...they then become role models.' (Interviewee 010)

'...so they're starting to do some initiative just to focus on women and workshop and things like that. So they are starting to move. I guess, as it happened in Europe, I think what is uhh [pause] it's very important that they see other women progressing, you know, it's like you need to have role models and probably here there are not many role models, because it's still / because, in a way,

yes, you can go to a course and blah blah blah, whatever, but I think you need to see people who made it, so that you know you can make it.' (Interviewee 013)

No. 4 Networking and Collaboration

- ❑ Research Collaborations; being integrated into large research teams and projects, thereby facilitating access to resources and funding
- ❑ A research support platform for women researchers (including PGR students and postdocs) providing scholarships, travel grants and networking opportunities (e.g. POWERS)
- ❑ Women's networking opportunities - share the challenges, practical support (for women with children, what are the 'time guzzlers' and how to alleviate some of this)

'...so we have this initiative called Powers, p-o-w-e-r-s. You can search for it, Powers at NTU, it is a platform that we specifically support female researcher...these are quite a good platform for us to be coordinated and then we have a sort of a voice, a voice, as collectively as female researchers...A lot of events we invite the senior leadership, the President, VP, to join the event and then we/our female faculty then have one more platform to directly talk to university senior leaders.' (Interviewee 004)

Section 4: Launch of the Findings

The findings from the project were launched in Singapore at NTU in collaboration with Women@NTU and the British Council to coincide with International Women's Day 2025#Accelerate Change (March 7th, 2025: <https://www.ntu.edu.sg/women/IWD/iwd2025>). As part of this event, key senior stakeholders from across the Singaporean higher education sector were invited to a roundtable discussion to discuss the findings of the project, led by Sarah Aiston. The roundtable discussion began by asking stakeholders to consider their understanding of equality versus equity and what approach they think the sector is currently adopting. Equality is largely defined as treating women the same as men, whilst equity recognizes that in order to create equality of opportunity and a level 'playing field', marginalised groups may require different needs and resources to bring about equity (Aiston and Walraven, 2024). The discussion was then focused around three key questions; Where would the sector like to get to? How can the sector get there? How would the sector measure change?

Section 5: Co-created Recommendations

The following recommendations have been co-created with the interviewees and key stakeholders across the sector. This report will enable further consultation with the interviewees and key stakeholders at the roundtable event. In addition, the report will be circulated more broadly to women academics at different ranks to capture their input. The outcome will be a White Paper to be presented to the Ministry of Education.

The recommendations are made at three different levels: Higher education sector in Singapore (macro-level); University (meso-level) and for individuals (micro-level).

Higher Education Sector in Singapore

- ❑ Ministry of Education to collect and publish (for benchmarking purposes) national level gender disaggregated data
- ❑ For the sector to come together via Senior Leadership teams, including the research funding agencies, to have 'buy-in' from the very 'top'
- ❑ Set goals for the sector – but avoiding tokenism or superficial measures – thereby challenge gendered stereotypes around leadership and cultural expectations of women's societal role
- ❑ Greater data collection and public reporting by the funding agencies (NRF and A*Star). For example, number of awards granted to women as Principal Investigator + \$ value of award; gendered breakdown of the types of researchers hired
- ❑ Funding to support women academics establish their research careers, for example via Post-Doctoral Fellowships, or start-up research grants from funding councils

Universities in Singapore

- ❑ Ensure the metrics for promotion represent multiple definitions/packages of success (e.g. service/administration recognized not just publications) and are understood as disciplinary specific (e.g. norms for different disciplines will vary in relation to impact factors and \$ in research funding)
- ❑ Senior leaders to ensure that women are given roles that contribute to/are highly valued for their promotion prospects, and relatedly workload models have clear guidelines on teaching and administrative hours thereby protecting time for research
- ❑ Ensure transparency in the promotions process and that the metrics for promotion are understood, including hints and tips for the 'unseen' activities or tasks that support progression

- ❑ Put in place mentorship schemes for promotion at each level with mentors and mentees matched on what each wants to achieve; consideration could be given to whether a voluntary scheme would be more likely to succeed
- ❑ Training for mentors provided and recognition for their work
- ❑ Workshops run by senior women with women faculty around promotion and tenure, with a feedback loop to senior leaders on the challenges and enablers
- ❑ Consideration of ways to support women faculty with their research careers at a point when they are facing significant life challenges (e.g. mothers with young children and caregivers for elderly family members) which can include, a focus on quality rather than quantity of publications for promotion metrics, exploring if the extended tenure clock does adequately 'reverse' the lost opportunities (e.g. developing research grants) when caring for children and if 'gaps' in CVs are not detrimentally affecting women's chance of promotion
- ❑ Encourage Self-Advocacy in Annual Reviews and train faculty (especially women) on how to use annual reviews to proactively discuss promotion readiness and express interest in leadership roles, thereby addressing hesitation or fear of self-nomination.
- ❑ Consideration given to if metrics are disadvantaging women faculty – e.g. if attendance/travel to international conferences and a condition/expectation of overseas sabbaticals is deemed necessary to support international standing, how might women faculty with children, who are unable to travel frequently, be guided and supported to develop international networks and international collaborations and increase their visibility?
- ❑ Faculty positions to be open/advertised, including internal leadership opportunities, with universities actively identifying women who would be suitable for leadership positions
- ❑ Women faculty to be represented on important decision-making committees, but acknowledging that there are fewer women faculty and that those contributing should have compensation for their time in ways that are not detrimental to their promotion (e.g., reduced teaching load for administrative roles should not be used against them in promotion evaluation), since it is likely they will be called upon for numerous committees
- ❑ Leadership training, which need not necessarily be women's-only training, but might incorporate some women's only workshops, e.g. to address gender-specific challenges and provide strategies for women to overcome obstacles in progressing to senior roles
- ❑ Universities to establish a central resourced means (e.g. committee, working group, unit) to bring together key stakeholders to initiate, monitor and evaluate equity interventions
- ❑ Promotions committees to be advise/trained on how to avoid potential bias in the decision-making process, with referees (writing letters of recommendation) equally being given clear guidelines (e.g. to ensure higher standards are not being asked of female candidates and

women's career breaks due to caring responsibilities are not putting them at a disadvantage)

- ❑ Encourage the formation of women's networks to share experiences and knowledge to support women to navigate challenges (e.g. pregnancy and menopause) and broader workplace inequalities and provide a platform for practical advice and emotional support
- ❑ Encourage women to pursue ambitious career goals without the fear of being labelled negatively (e.g. 'childless career woman' or 'too aggressive') and foster a culture in which women can pursue these goals without facing a backlash
- ❑ Allyship Training for Male Faculty via informal workshops or reading groups where male faculty can explore inclusive practices and reflect on diversity in their networks, cultivating allyship and inclusive research cultures.

Individual Faculty in Singapore

- ❑ Be proactive in seeking out mentors – which may be informal – who have a specific capability or expertise which would support your career progression
- ❑ Ensure that independent scholarship can be demonstrated by not overly focusing upon co-authoring with a PhD advisor; alternatively look to publish with peers and develop an international network of co-authors
- ❑ For male colleagues to reflect on the diversity of their research teams/networks and to seek out women academics with relevant expertise to foster an inclusive research culture

Section 6: Concluding Remarks

The interviewees spoke positively about how their university's are beginning to make inroads into creating inclusive environments for women, with the challenge now being to continue and further this work # Accelerate Change.

Going forward it is important for the sector and senior leaders to consider the following three assumptions:

Assumption No. 1

It is argued – known as pipeline theory – that if the number of women entering higher education as undergraduates has increased, then so it follows, that women will enter and rise through the academic ranks – it is just a matter of time. *But* research indicates that this is clearly not the case

and the findings discussed in this report corroborates this finding. Intervention is required if women are to be more equally represented in senior leadership roles, including at the rank of full Professor (Aiston, 2015).

Assumption No. 2

Standards for academic employment and advancement are *portrayed* (and herein lies the danger) as neutral, objective and universal. The statement 'we pick the best person for the job' is not uncommon. But what does this fail to recognise? Unconscious bias and gendered career trajectories which is extensively highlighted by international research (Aiston, 2011).

Interviewees largely held a strong belief in the system being meritocratic and that the system *should* be based on merit; academic women do not want or seek to be promoted by anything other than the quality of their work. As also discussed by both the interviewees and stakeholders, however there was the recognition, for example, that the metrics can potentially disadvantage women.

Assumption No. 3

International research has shown that there is a gendered research productivity gap. This 'gap' is largely attributed to women's family commitments.

However, research has indicated that the correlation of children with research output showed that children did not significantly impact on the research productivity of academic women (Aiston, 2014; Aiston and Jung, 2015). What can account for this gap is that women become more heavily involved in teaching and administration.

An over-reliance on an explanatory framework that positions family-related variables as central to the research productivity gender gap might well be drawing attention away from significant structural and systemic practices within the profession that disadvantage women (Aiston and Jung, 2015).

The next stages of this research are twofold. First – depending on further funding – to reach out to women academics across the sector for their views, particularly, early-career and mid-career women. Second to develop a White Paper which embeds international best practice, where possible, to underpin the set the of recommendations.

In conclusion, the co-created recommendations made in this report provide a framework for the higher education system in Singapore to introduce interventions to retain and attract female talent to the sector and additionally play a leading, *significant* role in the promotion of gender equity in the ASEAN region and Asia more generally.

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