EFFECTIVE FACTORS ON WOMEN'S PROMOTIONAL IN SPORT MANAGEMENT IN IRAN[i]

Mohammad Ehsani[1ii], Nahid Shetab Boshehri[2],
Hashem Koozehchian[3]
[1,3]Prof., Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran
[2]Dr., Shahid Chamran Ahvaz University, Iran

Abstract:

This paper examines women's position in Iran based sports organizations throughout the country. It is argued that: the so-called-neutral promotion process is biased against female candidates and in the end; it serves the purpose of reinforcing a male-dominated top management (Aitchison, 2003; Mckay, 1996; Shinew & Arnold, 1998).

The data were collected through self-administered questionnaire (α=.86) in 2009. The findings of the study reveal several key items in evaluating candidates for promotion. The variables of higher education, organizational commitment, political skills, family support, ICT skills, psychological factors and sport management skills ranked the upper intermediate level for the female managers, but organizational environment stood at the lower level.

In spite of these factors, women are absent from senior leadership positions and their powerlessness in hierarchy of Iranian sport organization is evidently shown. It is suggested that sport organizations bring about some changes aimed at supporting the women managers in fulfilling their needs.

Keywords: sport, management, women, promotion

[ii]Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Professor Mohammad Ehsani, Email: ehsani@modares.ac.ir

1.   Introduction

In the past three decades, Iranian athletes comprised of male athletes only. From 1980-2008 all women's sports activities were managed by women under a semi-separate organization yet still supervised by the Sports Organization. At the beginning of the separation, women athletes had many problems in areas such as management, coaching, referees, and so on; however, they could organize and train their related human resources. For example, before 1979, there were 32 female coaches and 10 female referees, 32'466 female coaches and 16'489 female referees in 2005, and still they could have not achieved any upper management positions in the national sports organizations (Dargahi, 2006). As Aguiar (2004) pointed out this situation of conflict was a good opportunity for Iranian women to get involved in sports management, coaching, and refereeing for their own teams. Iran encompasses 31 provinces and 46 sports federations only one of which is run by one woman president of the Physical Fitness Federation. The remaining 45 federations are run by men. In 2008, despite the separation of women sports activities, the women sports organization again merged with the Sports Organizations and then forced all federations, associations, and provinces to have a female vice president (88.9%). Although, every federation, association, and province has one female vice president, the executive board comprising five to seven members, is still male dominated; women have one vote, and men have the rest, which means all decision making in federations, associations, and provinces, and the Sports Organization is dominated by men (99.9%). (Shetab Boshehri, 2010). This proves the male domination in the National Sports Administration System. The representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions had been considerably marginalized.

Unfortunately, very limited academic attention has been dedicated to the study of Iranian women in the realm of sports management. The gender structure of the NSOs has rarely been under systematic academic investigation as a core issue in the scholarship of Iranian women in sports. The emphasis in most of the literature concerning Iranian women in sports is largely, if not exclusively, regarding female athletes on the playing fields, but female sports administration strive for a position in the male-dominated national sport bureaucracy. Although, women's disproportionate under-representation in key management works is touched upon in some works concerning Iranian women in sport, the issue has been approached only insufficiently.

Researchers have not taken a further step to deconstruct discriminatory organizational practices that account for women's disadvantageous position in management. Discussions on women's experience and the construction of gender

relations in national sports organizations are neglected and remained considerably under-explored. Compared with the increasing amount of research dedicated to studying women's organizational well-being in the decision-making and leadership of national and international sports, Iran lags considerably behind in this field of enquiry (Shetab Boshehri, 2010). The organizational culture embedded with deep-rooted gender disparity has not been fully examined. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to clarify the underlying reasons for persistent gender inequality in Iranian NSOs and, in particular, barriers to the promotion of women.

2. Background

Critics and feminist scholars emphasize on how gender is embedded with and enacted through sports, and how sport as an institution has been developed by and for men (Hartnann-Tews & Pfister, 2003). Factors such as the discrepancies between the top performances of women and men seem to legitimize existing gender hierarchies in sports. This functions as compelling evidence of men's superiority and makes the prevailing gender order in sports – as in society as a whole - appear as something "*natural*" and fair (e.g., Birell 2000).

Simultaneously, the history of sports shows how women have continually sought for equal rights and equal access to various sports and sports organizations. In few countries (e.g., Nordic countries, China, South Korea) women have gained access in recent decades to powerful male sports such as football and ice hockey. Considering this, the distinctive feature of gender segregation as well as the process of gender equalization which characterize current institutional sports practices can, however, be seen as a double symbolic message regarding meanings of gender: equalization on the one hand and de-equalization, or asymmetric gender segregation, on the other. These two characteristics, however, pose interesting parallels to the gender arrangements in our modern societies. Thus, sports provide both arenas for cultural transgression as well as hegemonic images of insuperable gender differences and represent both a motor for and a challenge to the dominant societal gender order.

Birell and Theberge have presented this double potential in the following terms:

(…) if gender relations are ever to be transformed, that transformation may first have to be realized on the symbolic and ideological level, and it is on this level that sport works. Sport is an excellent site for examining how patriarchal relations are played out, for it is in sport that dominant notions of masculine superiority are produced as common sense.

It is in sport; too, that such common sense can be directly challenged and resisted by the appearance of girls and women who are capable athletes

Hovden & Pfister, 2006, (1994:365)

DeHass (2004) reported that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) found there were more female student athletes than male student ones but fewer female coaches than male coaches.

McKay (1996) argues that organization embedded with pronounced institutionalized gender patters cannot be analyzed in a gender -neutral way: *"Organizations are key sites where gender struggles take place and into which femininities and masculinities are both constructed and reproduced."* Hall et al. (1989), further assert that, *"… although the proportion of women in leadership positions at the national (or international) level in governmental and non-governmental sports organizations varies from one country to another, generally speaking, women are under-represented."* Despite the fact that women's under-representation in sports organizations has become an overt and universal issue across national boundaries, the underlying reasons attributed to the problem vary in different cultures and societies. An increasing number of empirical studies have documented gender relations within national sport organizations in a variety of countries (Cui, 2007). For example, Hall et al. applied Kanter's structure of opportunity, power, and proportions and Hearn and Parkin's dialectical relationship between organization and sexuality to their investigation of the gender structure of Canadian NSOs.

The potential reasons for women's under-representation and men's over-representation in influential positions in sport management can be described as overwhelming. Many reasons are associated with the assumptions frequently made about employment roles and women's and men's perceived abilities (McKay, 1996).

The most common reasons are related to assumptions about appropriate leadership characteristics, the organizational environment, and reward practices. To demonstrate, a commonly held belief is that leadership roles entail a commitment of time and energy beyond minimum job requirements, but women are often expected to deal with childcare and domestic responsibilities that must be negotiated above and beyond their public responsibilities (Frisby, 1992; Frisby & Brown, 1991; Hall, Cullen & Slack, 1989; McKay, 1996,; Mills, 1993; Rehman and Frisby, 2000). Men, on the other hand, are often expected to have fewer family responsibilities, and therefore can sacrifice more time to their work responsibilities (Hovden, 2000a). Other reasons for women's under-representation in the senior management of sport organizations are linked to the perceived *"naturalness"* of men occupying those positions.

Women who achieve levels of influence in sport organizations, therefore, may be considered to have done so only because they have expressed discourse of masculinity, which might not be welcomed by men (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003).

3.   Leadership in Sport

The sixth Brighton Declaration principle is about Leadership in Sport:

"Women are under-represented in the leadership and decision making of all sport and sport related organizations. Those responsible for these areas should develop policies and programs and design structures which increase the number of women coaches, advisers, decision makers, officials, administrators, and sport personnel at all levels with special attention given to recruitment, development, and retention."

It is widely recognized that women are not adequately represented in the decision making and leadership positions in sport, particularly in countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South America. For this reason, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided to explore this situation and create a working group committed to increasing the number of women in sport management's decision-making and leadership positions around the world.

In Atlanta, Georgia, USA, in July 1996, at the 10th International Olympic Committee session, a paper presented by the Working Group on Women and Sport was ratified by the Executive Board. Four specific actions were adopted to increase the number of women in decision-making positions:

1. The NOC should immediately establish a goal to be achieved by 31 December 2000 that at least 10% of all offices held in decision-making structures (in particular all legislative or executive agencies) be taken by women and that such percentage should reach 20% by 31 December 2005.
2. The International federations, the national federations, and the sports organizations belonging to the Olympic movement should also immediately establish a goal to be achieved by 31 December 2000 that at least 10% of all positions in all decision-making structures (in particular all legislative or executive agencies) be held by women and that such percentage should reach 20% by 31 December 2005.
3. The subsequent stages to reach a strict enforcement of the principle of equality for men and women shall be determined by the year 2001.

4. The Olympic Charger will be amended to take the equality for men and women into account.

In 1996 in Lausanne, Switzerland, the IOC also organized a World Conference on Women and Sport. More than 220 participants from 96 countries attended the conference and support was given in letters from many presidents, prime ministers, and members of royal families around the world. The purpose of the conference was to assess the progress made on the issue of women and sport in the sports world, to exchange experiences and to outline priority issues to enhance women's participation in the Olympic movement.

The conference was based on five key themes:

1. Women and the Olympic Movement;
2. Women's Role in Administration and Coaching;
3. Culture and Women's Sport;
4. Women's Education and Health through Sport and Physical Activity;
5. Governmental and Non-governmental Support for Women's Sport.

Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the IOC, stated:

"We have already made some important achievements, but much still remains to be done. There are obstacles of all kinds whether cultural, technical, or economic. Therefore, a co-operative effort is required from the IOC, the International Federations, the National Olympic Committees, the sports organizations, governments, and inter and non-governmental organizations, and the media. The Olympic Movement is determined to make its contribution and to ensure that the twenty-first century will be the beginning of a new era for women in the sports world."

The latest report, "*Women in the Olympic Movement*", October 1998, states that the most of the recommendations have now been taken into account by the IOC, the NOCs and ITS.

"…the IOC strongly encourages, by appropriate means, the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures, particularly in the executive bodies of national and international sports organizations with a view to the strict application of the principle of equality between women and men".

http://www.womenandsport

According to the results of the Norwegian and German studies, the ideal leader of sports organizations is the most often a highly-educated, middle-aged man, in full-time employment in the high-income bracket, with a large network, with the knowledge and

the behavior of an insider, and "*demonstrative*" investment of time and energy (Hovden 2000; Doll-Tepper & Pfister 2004). No doubt , leaders in sports organizations portray the image that they spend a lot of time on their voluntary work, and most of them are convinced that this investment of time is necessary (Gernandt, 2005). Studies show, however, that performances are not automatically better if more time is spent on the work (e.g., Rapoport et al. 2002). It is thus a widespread myth in organizations that time is a good measurement of the quality of work and that the amount of time spent indicates the loyalty and commitment of workers and leaders.

Iranian sport is largely managed by the Sport Organization, which is the center for the national sports system and administrators all sport-related affairs across country. It is the basic functionary responsible for the daily sport operations of all the provinces and federations. At the present, the parliament has approved the Sport Ministry instead of the Sport Organization.

4.   Method

The study, from which the presented material was derived, has drawn on theoretical approaches of the analysis of organizations which gave rise to questions, hypotheses, and analytic tools to explain the gender hierarchy in the executive bodies of Iranian sports organizations. With these approaches gender differences can be observed with regard to the abilities, qualifications, experience, motivation and resources of women as well as their work in the family, careers in sport, structure and culture of their organization, significance of gender in relationships, attitudes, judgments, barriers and opportunities in positions of leadership.

Thus it was possible, among other things, to identify an existing leader ideal that may also enable us to identify individuals and groups who do not live up to those ideals. Questionnaires were sent to all senior women officials and managers (30) in the Iranian sports organizations. Two reminders were also sent. The response rate was 83% (25). Reasons should be suggested for the relatively high response rate. It may be explained by the high quality of the questionnaire, or the topic of the project, "*The Factors of Achieving Sport Management for Women in Iran.*" The title evoked associations with feminism and gender quality policies, i.e. ideas and concepts that are currently not an issue of debate or in general a matter of interest in Iran. Men and many women do not consider equality an important topic. There is a widespread belief that gender equality has been reached and therefore there is no need for further debates (Borchorst & Dahlerup, 2003). This was at least the explanation given by the members which were senior officials delegated by the sports organizations.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section requested individuals' characteristics. The second section included 40 questions (Likert Scales) about management psychology, new technology, management skills, family support, political skills, commitments, and organizational environments. It was considered by 17 specialists in sport management departments at the universities of Iran and its content reliability was a=0.86 which was satisfactory. Also, there were open questions about women's barriers to high management levels of sport management organizations. Authors categorize the answers of the open questions according to importance of barriers.

5.   Findings

The data indicates female managers (100%) were entrusted with responsibilities at their place of work. The majority (96%) of women was able to control and monitor their personnel and provide a good atmosphere for them. The results showed that 92% of female managers had good knowledge and management skills; also, 84% of them used workshops to obtain updated knowledge. Another clear result of our study was that 88% of the responders had very good self-confidence for getting managerial positions. The data indicated that 96% of women maintained the same degree of satisfaction as men with regard to appreciation for their work in their organization, interpersonal relationships, degrees of influence, and opportunities to fulfill their ambitions. In risk management, 80% were confident about their knowledge and abilities. Around 80% of the respondents reported that they had not experienced opposition or a lack of support on the part of their organization and had little stress for their positions as managers. 64% of respondents believed that there was no difference between women and men mangers for personnel, while 72% believed that men personnel accepted women as managers. 84% mentioned they had no problems with women personnel and that they felt supported by them. 68% of respondents indicated that they received co-operation and support from their families. 88% mentioned that their husbands accepted their job responsibilities, and 76% believe that the manager's position is more important than household responsibilities. Also, 76% provided a political network and 56% had access to an organizational network. 60% of them used a person in a position of power to obtain their promotion. 64% used skills and communication for their promotion. 76% of women managers were familiar with management skills and 60% with new technology. 52% of the respondents reported that they were not only highly satisfied with their senior position in general, but also with the individual tasks and the interpersonal relationships, it entailed – in short, with the organizational culture and English

language for international communication. Although the organizational culture was male dominated, women were treated the same as male managers. 44% believed that sport organizations were divided into men and women sections and 48% believed that planners and decision makers were men. 72% of the respondents had no limitation for their suggestions and recommendations.

The data shows that almost half (48%) of the respondents agreed completely or partially with the statement that high level managers accepted their recommendations. The answers from the female respondents seem to make clear that they see themselves as gender neutral workers in their organization and that they are – or at least believe that they are – treaded and appreciated as such. They also stated that sports organizations are seen as gender neutral arenas, and they emphasized that quality of work is the crucial factor and not the gender for evaluation. The following sections outline the qualities identified from the research data (open question) as most salient in blocking women's promotions and constraining them from competing for senior management positions. It should be pointed out that even though some traits are seldom spelled out in official selection documents, they have a far-reaching impact on women's careers in Iran's sports organizations. The large majority of respondents seemed to share this attitude and lived up to the "*ideal leader*" image with a strong commitment and high degree of self-confidence (M=4.45, 96%; Table 1).

The data indicated that, the overwhelming majority of the respondents put the responsibility for the gender hierarchy in sports organizations either on individual women or women as a group. The explanations focusing on the supply side emphasize women's attitudes, capacities, and decisions. Similar tendencies and explanations have been observed in other studies of sports organizations. One of Hovden's (2000b) conclusions from a Norwegian study was that men in leading positions explained the absence of women most often as an individual problem.

6.   Discussion

Despite the fact that the Iranian sports system seemingly has no official rules that give an advantage or a disadvantage to either women or men, the lack of a rule obliging leaders to leave their offices after a certain period of time (e.g. four years) prevents new candidates from gaining access to executive bodies.

As far as this study is concerned, Kanter's (1977) approach provides a useful tool to understand the situation of women in Iran's national sports organizations. Firstly, a woman places emphasis on organizational structures and processes, such as promotion. Secondly, the development of an analytical framework grounded in opportunity,

power, and proportions, provides an effective means to examine the so-called gender-neutral sport organizations and explains why and how women are deprived of access to equal promotion opportunities. These three variables, it was argued, play a part in the construction of gendered organizational patterns. They are interrelated in a sophisticated organizational structure and collectively create an organizational environment that shapes people's behaviors and determines their success within an organization, particularly the disadvantaged, such as women. All three factors are reflected and co-related in the promotion process and the criteria for candidate selection in Iranian NSOs. Leaders possess the power to influence how decisions are made, how scarce resources are distributed, and what activities are valued within organizations. However, the insidious gendered promotion criteria deny the women further development opportunities at a higher level of an organization's hierarchy.

Consequently, when women are disproportionately under-represented at the top of the administration hierarchy, their power to influence decision-making within an organization becomes limited.

The "*framing*" of gender issues, pointing to the contexts in which the gender hierarchy is described and discussed, seems to follow patterns which have emerged in other Scandinavian studies (e.g., Hovden, 2000b). For example, the respondents most often focus on the supply side, i.e. on women's individual choices and resources, without a discussion of the organizational conditions in which these decisions are made. The material also shows that senior officials in Iranian sports organizations were not very interested in the discussion of gender issues and hierarchies. The sports leaders looked upon the organizational structures and cultures as abstract, and gender neutral. Thus, it can be difficult to establish relevant arenas in which more critical views on organizational gender relations can be framed.

The active participation of women's families serves as a network and provides social support. Women possess this form of social support even more than their male counterparts. This may indicate that women need more resources directly related to sports than when they aspire to a leadership position in male dominated sports organizations.

These results seem to confirm the theory that female leaders in sports organizations must have the characteristics of the ideal leader to be accepted (Hovden, 2000b). They have acquired high professional and sport specific competencies, and they can rely on even more social support than their male colleagues, however, they do not possess as much power as the men in the organizations.

What does this signify and what can this result contribute to an explanation of the gender hierarchy in the Iranian sports system? In order to answer the question of

whether women in executive bodies represent a distinctive group with uncommon characteristics, comparisons should not be confined to their male counterparts; they should be rather related to the overall female population, as well. As mentioned before, 99.5% of sports, managers are men. On the basis of demographic statistics, it can be concluded that the respondents of the survey are not representative of the population as a whole with regard to either vocational qualifications or occupational/professional status: 60% of the women in the sample have undergone long-term higher education.

The socio-demographic and sporting backgrounds of senior officials bring to light factors which point to barriers hindering access to leading positions at both individual and institutional levels. This means that the "*fifty percent of women*" who have, as mentioned above, no considerable record of involvement as a member of sports clubs and who have less favorable social environment and support from their family. They do not have the qualities and experiences that are expected and do not fit into the preferred group of leader candidates in most situations. Thus, the "*average woman*" has relatively little chance of attaining a position of leadership in the world of sports. On the other hand, the question arises as to whether these positions of leadership are at all attractive for any woman and whether the status gained by them having a senior position in sports is of as much benefit to women as it is to men.

Why did the female claim that there were no major problems of opposition that they had to overcome in the course of their career? There is, of course, no single answer to this question, but we will put forward a few suggestions. The female leaders in this study represent those whose competence has been found "*weighty enough*" to be selected have shown the "*right qualifications*", have been able to compete with their male colleagues on seemingly gender neutral premises and have adapted to the dominant leader ideal (Hovden, 2000).

A potential barrier to taking up a position of leadership in a sports organization, which is at the same time a structural problem of such organizations, is the great amount of time that is consumed by the duties involved. Most organizations value the fact that their workers sacrifice their time for their work. Long working hours is, however, not the only factor which influences the outcome. How, when, and by whom the work is done is part of the gendered organizational culture and can be changed (Pfister, 2007).

As can be seen in Table 1 and also in the model both of which were drawn from the study, the respondents were asked about commitment and responsibilities as well as about their relations to the organizations. The assumption that women handle tasks differently from men and that their competence is not as greatly appreciated in sports organizations as that of men, was not supported by data material. The majority of the

respondents (96%) described themselves as being just as responsible and committed and nearly as self-confident as their male colleagues. The majority (92%) of those surveyed believed that their management skills and qualifications are as good as men's, followed by management skills (92%), psychological and personality factors (88%), communication skills (80%), family support (68%), political skills (64%), ICT and up-to-date management skills (60%), support of the environmental and cultural organization (48%).

It should be noted that the low presentation of women in executive bodies is regarded as a crucial problem. On the other hand, there is a fairly large group who considers gender equality issue as simply important, and a relatively large number of senior officials were either undecided or indifferent. In their comments on the questions, those who were "*indifferent*" frequently stated that they did not care about gender but solely about the competence of the person holding office. They commented on this issue like this: "*If women try hard enough, they can make it,*" or "*According to my experiences, there is always a place for good people.*" In the wake of the new women's movement, the lack of female executives in sports organizations again became an issue on the agenda of the women's movement inside and outside of sport, and the lack of regulations governing terms of office was criticized as detrimental to women. Although it was decided at one point in time that leaders should leave their positions after eight years, this rule was never given the opportunity to take effect (Trangbaek, 2006).

7.   Concluding Remarks

The study shows that the majority of female respondents claim that they have not experienced certain gendered barriers from the sports organizations and that they have not been confronted with gendered stereotypes. However, in their attempt to explain the male dominance in sports organizations, male and female leaders drew stereotypical pictures of women giving priority to their families rather than organizational work and having no ambitions to gain leadership positions. This can be interpreted as similar to findings referred to in studies of work organizations: the stereotype of women as disinterested and uncommitted workers, which prevents women climbing the career ladder.

The respondents' reasons for the lack of women in leadership positions follow the organizational logic of apparent gender neutrality. The images of the latter ideal were considered as gender neutral, but the ideal leader characteristics mentioned were in accordance with other similar studies shaped by implicit masculinity (e.g., Hovdon 2000). Acker (1990), for example, has stated that this type of seemingly "*gender neutral*"

leadership represents a barrier in the recruitment of women. With regard to women's position in sports in Iran, it could be concluded that the female respondents in this study represent an absolute exception in all aspects.

The reported lack of barriers as well as the considerations linked to the gender hierarchy of sports organizations should consider the fact that the female sports leaders who took part in this survey are members of executive sports bodies. It may be assumed that they have adapted to the structures and cultures of their particular organization and have internalized, among other things, the planning and management as well as the dominant ideology. They have fulfilled the demands and succeeded in making a career in the sports system and thus have positive experiences and feelings regarding their work. This may contribute to the inter-operation of the organization as gender neutral and also to the fact that they hardly see barriers and conflicts which prevent women from following their example. The culture of the organization, especially the myth of time as an indicator of commitment and success, may contribute to a situation in which women do not feel motivated to aspire to a voluntary office at a senior level. The results of the quantitative survey presented provide an insight into the backgrounds, the attitudes, and the experience of male and female leaders in the Iranian sports system and contribute to some explanations of the complicated issue of the gender hierarchy in sports organizations. To develop a deeper understanding of this issues more qualitative analyses are needed, e.g. analyses which make use of methodological triangulations and include interviews, discourse analysis, and observations. However, the perspective of the "*insiders*" in this study has many blind spots and can be supplemented by other and new perspectives, e.g. The perspective of those women (and men) who cannot enter or do not want to enter a career in sports organizations. A closer identification of gendering processes which prevent "*outsiders*" from taking on leadership responsibilities in sports organizations would contribute to both and extend knowledge within this largely unexplored field of research in Iran.

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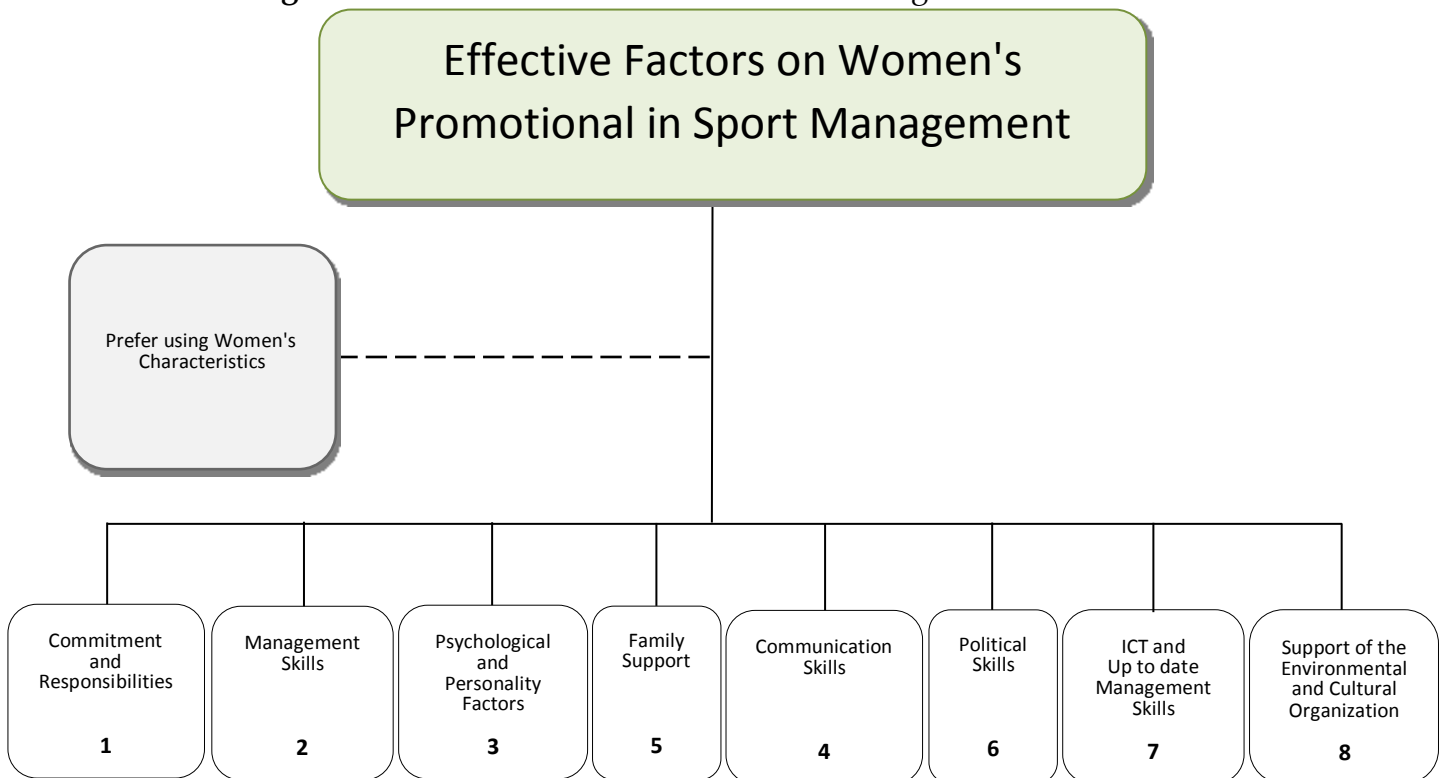
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Appendix 1

Table 1: Mean, SD, and Percentage of Impact Factors on Female Managers

Variables	Mean	SD	Lowest	Highest	Percentage %
1. Commitment & Responsibilities	4.45	.40	3.75	5	96
2. Management Skills	4.27	.36	3.67	5	92
3. Interpersonal Communication	4.02	.57	2.75	5	88
4. Psychological Personalities	4.01	.54	2.86	4.71	80
5. Family Support	3.78	.79	2.25	5	68
6. Political Skills	3.60	.55	2.50	4.75	64
7. Technology Knowledge	3.32	.67	1.75	4.50	60
8. Organizational Environment	2.81	.63	1.88	3.88	48

Diagram 1: Hierarchies' Model of Women Managers' Promotion in Iran