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Are women less susceptible to corruption?

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With half of the world's population being female, gender equality in political representation has always been an issue of importance. Alongside, the constantly raised question of women in general being above corruption has also been widely discussed.



Are women open to corruption when holding high office – on the whole, does corruption impact women on the same scale it does men. These are questions that warrant answers even as we scream out loud about gender discrimination.

WB study

A World Bank study held in 150 countries covering Europe, Africa and Asia confirmed that when there is a higher representation of women in government, there were lower levels of corruption. Transparency International undertook a study covering 60,000 households in over than 60 countries and the conclusion was that women on the whole were less likely than men to pay bribes.



Although it seems to be confirmed that women are less likely to engage in corruption, a United Nations Development Fund for Women (Unifem) study showed that women are indeed more vulnerable than men to the impact of corruption when holding public office. As primary caregivers for children and families, women require health and support services more and are likely to face sexual extortion in lieu of bribes as well according to the study.

Women MPs' role

The role of women parliamentarians in the fight against corruption was highlighted at the Fifth International Conference of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (Gopac), which was held recently in the Philippines. Gopac, committed to ensuring excellence in parliament representation throughout the world, brought

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together over 170 parliamentarians and 400 observers and was considered as excellent launching pad for gender based research into this widely discussed topic.

Corruption as an issue does highlight the need for transparency whether in the private or the public sector, whether it concerns men or women. It is typical to find cases of sexual favours being demanded from women when they need certain services, whether from a public sector official or a private sector individual. The same scenario plays out in many offices as well. For some women, granting such favours ensures promotion, recognition and outright gratification in going up the ladder. But for hundreds of other women who seek promotion and recognition for their qualifications, ability and talent, corruption remains a key obstacle in getting ahead.

Impact

On a global scale, it is observed via many studies undertaken by bodies such as the UN that corruption does impact women in a significant way since women in the developing world belong to the majority of the world's poor. It renders them helpless and in situations where they must fend for their families and children, the levels of corruption demanded can often result in victimization.

The Gopac sessions highlighted the social, political and cultural discrimination faced by women, making it difficult for them to access public services and facilities. Political institutions and systems continue to be male dominated throughout the world and in such circumstances, women in legislative positions have a bigger responsibility to ensure that gender based corruption is minimized.



On the other hand, there have been fingers pointed at women holding high office on charges of corruption. A most notable case has been France's Christine Lagarde who heads the IMF. She is facing corruption charges that go beyond her IMF years into her time as France's Finance Minister. She is expected to file answers to allegations that claim she mishandled a financial dispute that resulted in the French Government having to pay disgraced tycoon Bernard Tapie around 400 million Euros.

In 2010, China's much celebrated woman mayor , Li Qihong, faced corruption charges of inside trading. Although much of her work as a mayor was recognized and feted, Qihong was taken in for questioning on charges of abusing her power for personal gain.

There will always be the women who by access into the echelons of higher office, shed their gender inhibitions and are not likely to be above corruption. Such women do not limit themselves in the roles of traditional mother and wife, thereby loosening their ties to typical concerns that other women fret about. Most of them do not think or limit themselves to such roles and can easily rub shoulders with men whether in getting work done or getting a bribe to get something done.

Although most women have been happy to play the role of the whistleblower on corruption and related scandal, not every woman it seems is up for the task. For the majority, the shame of being highlighted in scandal combined with a deep sense of commitment towards the good name and future of the family and the children matter more. Yet, there will always be others who will not mind the grey cloud in favour of gratification – power corrupts as we all know and that goes without saying for both sexes, regardless of circumstances.

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