

**AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GENDER  
DISPARITIES IN FORMAL EMPLOYMENT-THE CASE OF THE  
PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF MALAWI**

**MASTER OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT DEGREE**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Political and Administrative  
Studies University of Malawi- Chancellor College in Fulfilment of the  
Requirements of Master of Human Resources Management Degree**

**AUGUST 2008**

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the text of this thesis entitled: “AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GENDER DISPARITIES IN FORMAL EMPLOYMENT-THE CASE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF MALAWI” is my own work and has never been submitted by anyone for an academic award.

MARY PENDAME

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SIGNATURE

AUGUST 2008

## **CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

We, the undersigned, certify that we have examined and recommend to the Postgraduate Studies and Research Committee and Senate for acceptance of this thesis entitled: “AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GENDER DISPARITIES IN FORMAL EMPLOYMENT-THE CASE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF MALAWI” submitted by MARY PENDAME in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts (Human Resource Management).

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## **DEDICATION**

This Thesis is dedicated to my late mother, grandmother, mother-in-law and all women in Malawi who continued to suffer effects of gender disparities in employment and all other economic spheres.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge the various contributions respondents to this study have made to make it a success. I would like to give special recognition to Managements of the various organizations I included in my study sample for giving me information regarding their organizations and permitting me to interview their staff.

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Finally, my special thanks should go to my husband and my three children for their various contributions without which this study would not have been successful.

## **ABSTRACT**

Gender disparities exist in employment and indeed in all other spheres of life the world over. Studies indicate that there are more men than women in employment. However, only a few studies have been done in Malawi hence the need to undertake this study in order to analyse specific determinants of disparities in formal employment in the private sector; since disparities are not only a social problem but also a developmental one.

To do this, a study sample of 38% of the total population (64 companies) was selected following the rule of thumb. To collect data, a questionnaire, face-to-face interviews and document review were used. Responses from interviews were manually recorded and later coded. Data was later entered in EPIDATA and analysed using SPSS.

The study indicated that men numerically dominated all sectors and occupational categories. Women were better represented in clerical category. Service sector and clerical category were female “preserves” while industry and skilled artisan category were male ‘preserves.’ Significant relationships existed between occupational category and gender; sector and gender.

Socio-cultural beliefs, norms and values influenced decisions on the education of boys and girls hence their participation in formal employment, women’s aspirations, choice of occupation and limited their career choices. They created discriminatory attitudes against women resulting in more jobs being offered to men than women and restricted their freedom of movement hence their access to job advertisements and jobs. Advertisement of some vacancies and not others by some companies disadvantaged women more than men.

The study recommends, among other things, the introduction of compulsory primary education and conscious raising programmes that will change cultural beliefs and biases in the minds of parents and society as a whole.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|       |                                                  |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------|
| ILO   | International Labour Organisation                |
| GDP   | Gross Domestic Product                           |
| USA   | United States of America                         |
| UK    | United Kingdom                                   |
| MCCI  | Malawi Chamber of Commerce and Industry          |
| ISIC  | International Standard Industrial Classification |
| SPSS  | Statistical Package for Social Science           |
| MPFP  | Malawi Policy Framework Papers                   |
| UNDP  | United Nations Development Programme             |
| UN    | United Nations                                   |
| MSCE  | Malawi School Certificate of Education           |
| JCE   | Junior Certificate                               |
| GABLE | Girls Attainment of Basic Literacy and Education |

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides background information on the differential access to employment opportunities worldwide for women and girls. The study seeks to advance the gender disparity discussion in Malawi by analyzing factors that influence gender disparities in formal employment in the southern region of Malawi. It also describes the position of women in employment in the Malawi economy in general, as well as in the private sector in particular. In addition, it gives a brief analysis of the problem and the objectives to be achieved. Main terms used have been defined and limitations pointed out ending with an outline of how subsequent chapters have been arranged.

## **1.1 GENDER DISPARITIES OF WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT- THE GLOBAL SITUATION**

For purposes of this study, the term ‘disparity’ refers to the condition or fact of being unequal, different or disproportionate in some respects such as gender. ‘Gender’ refers to “culturally defined, socially formed identities of men and women that are highly variable across cultures and are continually subject to change (Konrad Adenauer Foundation 2003, p.17). The study proceeds from the general observation that all over the world, including Malawi, men and women enjoy unequal opportunities in all spheres of life including the employment arena. A number of empirical studies both global and national confirm this observation. The World Bank (1999) data on gender differences for instance, indicate that women the world over have fewer employment opportunities especially in the formal sector. International Development Resource Centre (04/02/2005) carried out a major international study, which was undertaken to assess the extent of women’s participation in employment.

This study revealed that women face restrictions in terms of paid employment relative to men and that these restrictions vary across the world since division of labour and patterns of employment participation are influenced by societal rules, norms and conventions. The study also reveals that where there are large numbers of women in the formal sector, they are under-represented in higher levels and over-represented in lower levels of the labour market pyramid.

Furthermore, the study estimates women's employment participation in paid employment worldwide in 1999 to range from an average of 46.2 percent to 33.3 percent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, which includes Malawi, the participation is estimated at 42.3 percent in 1999. These figures may appear to be on the high side simply because they include women's participation in both private and public sectors.

Women's share of formal employment is much smaller in many countries. India, for instance, had only 15 percent of women in the formal sector in 1995 while in Sub-Saharan Africa women's share in formal sector employment in 1985 ranged from as low as 1.5 percent to 25 percent (International Development Resource Centre 04/02/2005, p.18-19). According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), Women of Africa's formal sector participation rates dropped from 57 percent in 1970 to 53 percent in 1990, with 2.5 million women losing their jobs between 1985 and 1990 due to retrenchments that targeted the lower jobs. The term 'formal employment' refers to employment in a formal organization where one is appointed a member at a specific point in time and is recognized. There are methods of assessing performance and of taking care of personal problems and that employment is governed by written rules that maintain order in the organization. There is a hierarchical authority structure with one leader. Each individual therefore contributes towards the achievement of certain goals. 'Informal employment' on the other hand, has been defined by International Labour organization Task Force on Informal Employment (2002) as employment without secure contracts, worker benefits, or social protection. It is comprised of self-employment in informal enterprises and paid employment in informal jobs. Unlike formal employment, it is often not organized and

therefore difficult to speak with one voice. In Malawi, statistics indicate that only 14.5 % of employed women were in formal employment in 1984 (Mkwezalamba 1990) and that they mostly dominated professions such as nursing, teaching, secretarial and sales. By 1989, the figure had reduced to 11 % (Torres and Motala 1999). Bolinger, Stover and Palamuleni (2002) estimated the figure of women's participation in formal employment in the formal sector at 10%, which was a further reduction.

These figures tell a very unfortunate story of women's disadvantaged position in formal employment. Considering the fact that women comprise about 50% of the global population and in particular, 51% of the Malawi population, it would be fair to assume that the above figures would be close to 50% as well. This differential access to employment opportunities has become an important and visible issue, as it is not only a social problem but also a developmental one.

Development studies indicate that there cannot be any meaningful development in any country without full involvement of 50% of the population. A study by the World Bank (2004) indicate that low participation of women in employment result in high economic dependency since the wellbeing of the population- including consumption of food, housing, health-care and other market-based goods and services is determined by not only how much each working person earns but also crucially, the portion of the population that works.

The economic impact of low participation of women in employment cannot be overemphasized. It results in different rates of return on education for men and women. When few women work, the world and indeed Malawi is foregoing the potential return on its investments in women's education. In Cote d' Ivore a study by Hoddinot and Haddat (1995) cited in World Bank (2004) indicate that greater participation of women in employment does not only increase household income but also what it is used for. For instance increasing women's share of cash income in Cote d' Ivore has resulted in

significant increases in the share of the household budget allocated to food, health and education as women's bargaining power within the family increases. It also decreases the share of household income allocated to alcohol and tobacco. The result has been improved standards of living, child education and reduction in mortality rates. Nationally, increased participation of women results in higher rates of growth in aggregate income GDP per Capita.

In terms of governance, there is significant cross-regional evidence that women in general are less prone to political corruption and nepotism than men (World Bank 2001) are. Improving women's access to jobs might therefore improve governance in business. It is against this background that the need to analyse factors that influence gender disparities in formal employment in the private sector in southern region of Malawi has arisen in order to establish the roots of the problem as the advantages of having many women in employment have already been outlined in previous paragraphs.

The study therefore seeks to advance the gender disparity discussion in Malawi by going a step further to identify specific factors that influence gender disparities in formal employment in the private sector in the southern region of Malawi. The study has departed from the general approach of concentrating on manifestations of the problem to specifically analyse factors responsible for gender disparities in formal employment in the southern region of Malawi. While most of the previous studies done in Malawi have concentrated on gender disparities in wage employment in the private and public sectors, this study has focused specifically on formal employment and private sector of the Malawi economy. The term wage employment refers to paid employment in both formal and informal sectors. In other words, it involves an exchange of labour for money.

Having acknowledged that gender disparities exist worldwide including Malawi, the results of this study together with previous studies will help in increasing public awareness of the existing gender disparities in employment in the Private Sector. It will

also act as a basis for determining specific interventions aimed at reducing the existing gender disparities.

## **1.2 STUDY SETTING**

The setting of this study is the southern region of Malawi. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita income of US \$ 170 in the year 2000. Its economy is predominantly agricultural as such it is very dependent on agricultural exports, mainly tobacco and tea. In the year 2002 its total population was projected at 10,650,426; 49 percent of which was male and 51 percent female (Matope 2002).

The Southern Region was chosen as the study setting because it is the centre of commercial and industrial activity. In addition to being the centre of commercial and industrial activity, the southern region of Malawi is the only region that grows tea and most of the cotton. It also grows sugar. The rest of the cash crops such as tobacco and maize are grown throughout the country (Matope 2000). It has 13 of the 28 districts in the country and a population of 5,345,045 in 2003 and covers an area of 31,753 square kilometers (Wikipedia 03/02/2006).

The thirteen districts in the region include Blantyre City, the largest urban centre and commercial and industrial hub of Malawi, which is located in the Shire Highlands of this Region. The other districts in the Region are: Zomba, Machinga, Mangochi, Balaka, Chiradzulu, Thyolo and Mulanje, Phalombe, Mwanza, Chikwawa, Neno and Nsanje.

Malawi's labour market comprises formal and informal sector. According to Bolinger et al., (2002), the formal sector employed 527,880 people representing 14.5 percent of the total employed in 1991 while the informal sector employed 3,121,888 representing 85.5 percent. Only about 10 percent of women in Malawi were employed in the formal sector.

The formal sector comprises the public sector and the private sector. The public sector in Malawi is those entities owned directly or indirectly by government, which by the nature of their activities have or should have financial autonomy. These include statutory corporations, trusts, authorities, treasury funds and limited liability companies, which the government directly or indirectly holds share holding.

Private sector refers to privately- owned enterprises, whether by nationals, foreigners, or a combination whose main purpose of existence is profit making. These private enterprises only invest when the profit they expect from investment is as high as an alternative way of investing the same funds. Whenever the future is uncertain, they may discontinue operations (Baumled 1980). The private sector was found to be a good case study chosen for this study because of the following reasons:

- its diversification in terms of activities which cover all industries and therefore employs substantial numbers of men and women which was good for the study since, among other things, it sought to compare gender disparities among the various sectors of the private sector.
- its emphasis on profit making which results in the selection of certain skills and competencies as division of labour and specialisation becomes important. Numbers of staff employed are based on production demands rather than the need to provide service as in the public sector. As such, each employee is selected to do the job they are skilled in and that each employee's productivity is frequently measured since output per employee is a very important measure of a company's performance. This entails the private sector, with the exception of unskilled labourers, largely employs qualified, skilled, competent and industrious staff. This too makes the private sector a good case study, as formal employment demands a certain amount of education and skill.
- Less corporate bureaucratic compared to the public sector. The result is quicker employment decisions and very few or no vacancies. The existence of many

vacancies would affect sampling since sampling elements would not be available for selection in some occupational categories.

- Culturally, the Malawi society, which is patriarchal, emphasizes on male dominance. Patriarchal societies refer to societies in which men dominate. Household work and childcare are regarded as women's chief responsibility while men are perceived as breadwinners. More importantly, men make the most important decisions in the home, workplace and in society in general.

### 1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Employment figures presented in 1.1 above indicate that globally there are more men in employment than women are. Malawi, being a member of this global community, is no exception. Her figures too speak for themselves. This is a big social and developmental problem. As pointed out earlier, these unequal opportunities in employment retard development hence a problem that needs to be given special attention and studied further in order to identify and analyse its determinants so that specific interventions could be made. The research question being addressed is thus: **what are the factors that influence gender disparities in formal employment in Southern Malawi?** In the light of the above information, the study hypothesizes that 'a combination of socio-cultural and employment- related factors influences gender disparities in formal employment in Southern Malawi.'

### 1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this study was to analyse factors that influence gender disparities in formal employment in the private sector in Southern region of Malawi. To analyse these factors, the study had to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To analyse disparities that existed in gender composition and occupational distribution in the private sector in the southern region of Malawi.
- To analyse factors that influenced disparities in gender compositions and occupational distribution.
- To make recommendations on specific interventions that can be made to reduce the disparities that exist.

## 1.5 STUDY RATIONALE

The literature review indicates that there is a vast amount of information on gender disparities in formal employment, specifically covering gender compositions, occupational distribution and factors responsible for these gender differences. However, most of this available information is from studies conducted in the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Europe or Asia. Apparently, these advanced economies, with the exception of Asia, started tackling issues of women in employment much earlier than in developing countries. Much as developing countries like Malawi can benefit from this pool of knowledge, she cannot fully rely on the achievements that these developed countries are making in the employment of women because of differences in the stages of development that these countries are; differences in socio-economic status of the people and differences in cultural norms and values.

Although there is recognition, in Malawi that women are under-represented in formal employment and indeed, in paid employment as a whole, the local literature reviewed reveals that not many studies have been done to identify specific determinants of gender disparities in formal employment in Malawi. Most of the studies done have concentrated on gender disparities in education where a lot of studies have been conducted and factors for lower enrolment of girls and women in schools and colleges as well as their high drop out rate have been established. Among them are studies by UNO (2002); Special Law Commission on Gender and the Law (2003); Konrad Adenauer Foundation on Gender

Relations and Political Participation (2003) all covering disparities in education and reasons for the lower enrolment, retention and achievement of girls and women compared to boys and men.

The few studies that have reported on the participation of women in formal employment have just mentioned it in passing. The concentration has been on paid employment, which includes both formal and informal employment. For instance, a study by Mkwezalamba (1990) reported that women's participation in paid employment was 14.5 percent and that they dominated the agricultural sector. He further reported that women were mainly employed in formal employment as teachers, nurses, stenographers and in sales. He did explore factors that impinge on women's opportunities in paid employment as being a combination of socio-cultural and economic factors without going into details. However, there is need to separate formal from informal employment because these two operate differently. As such, some factors that might influence disparities in formal employment may not influence disparities in informal employment. Similarly, some of the factors that might influence disparities in employment in the public sector may not influence disparities in the private sector.

The other study that has made mention of women in formal employment is the study by Torres and Motala (1999). This study reported that in 1989 the proportion of women in paid employment was 11 percent, suggesting a drop from the 1984 figure of 14.5 percent reported by Mkwezalamba (1990). Torres and Motala also reported that only 12 percent of the total labour force in Malawi was engaged in formal employment. Mention was made that the proportion of women in formal employment was substantially low without giving more information as to how low the figure was.

This study is expected to generate information on the specific determinants of gender disparities in formal employment in the private sector in the southern region of Malawi by getting views direct from both employers, male and female employees. Its conclusions

would be beneficial to employers in their future human resource planning as gender imbalances in their organizations would be made known to them. The conclusions will also be useful to scholars who may wish to do further research on the subject.

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY**

Being a descriptive study, the study design, has employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The combined approach was used in order to ensure that both numeric information that is subject to statistical analysis as well as qualitative data that is text-based to provide descriptive details is collected. The two approaches complimented each other and enhanced the credibility of the data. This study was conducted over a period of three months,, from February to April 2005.

### **1.6.1 STUDY POPULATION**

The study population consisted of 170 formal companies in the private sector in the southern region of Malawi. The study population was the target population itself. It was a finite population as there was a known number of items. A sample was drawn, as the entire population could not be included in the study.

### **1.6.2 SAMPLING**

The sampling frame for this study was a register of formal private companies in the southern region of Malawi, which were registered with The Malawi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) as at September 2005. Since the population was not homogeneous, it was stratified into homogeneous strata according to the sector of the Malawi economy they belonged to namely: Industry, Service and Agriculture as devised by ILO, which classifies economic activity based on the Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) of all Economic Activities. According to this subdivision, the

Agriculture sector includes: hunting, forestry and fishing; Industry includes: mining and quarrying (including oil production), manufacturing, construction, water, electricity and gas, while services include wholesale and retail trade and restaurants and hotels; transport, storage and communications; financing, insurance, real estate, and business services.

Taking into consideration that information required by the statistical method for sample size determination, which involves making assumptions about the degree of confidence and the degree of variation in the population, was not available, the rule of thumb method was used. According to Cohen and Mann (1992), this method uses a conventional or commonly accepted sampling ratio of about 30%. The method gives sample sizes close to those of the statistical method. When small populations of fewer than 1000 use a sampling ratio, a high degree of accuracy is achieved. The study therefore used an even bigger sampling ratio of 38 resulting with a sample size of 64.

After determining the sample size, the next step taken was to allocate samples to each of the three strata. To do this, proportional allocation method was employed whereby the sample allocated to each stratum was proportional to the number of units from each stratum as shown in Table 1.1 below:

**Table 1.1 Proportional allocation of sampling units**

| <b>Sector</b> | <b>Subpopulation</b> | <b>Proportion<br/>(total<br/>population/subpopulation)</b> | <b>Sample<br/>(proportion<br/>/sample)</b> |
|---------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Service       | 87                   | 0.51                                                       | 33                                         |
| Industry      | 61                   | 0.36                                                       | 23                                         |
| Agriculture   | 22                   | 0.13                                                       | 8                                          |
| Total         | 170                  | 1.00                                                       | 64                                         |

The second step taken was to allocate samples to each of the three strata using simple systematic random sampling whereby one sampling interval was used in all the three strata. Taking the example of service, this was done as follows:

- All units in the strata were numbered 1 to 87
- Sampling interval (k) was calculated ( $170/87 = 2.65$ )
- 0.1, which was a number between 0.1 and 2.65 also called integer was randomly selected.

Since the total population is not a multiple of the sample size, a technique described by National Statistical Service (2008) was adopted whereby the first random unit was 2.65. The second and subsequent units were arrived at by adding 2.65 to the integer (0.1) resulting in the selection of the following units: 3,5,8,11,13,16,18,21,24,26,29,31,34,39,42,44,47,50,52,55,57,60,63,65,68,70,73,76,78,81, 83,86. The advantage of this method is that it takes into account the size of each stratum such that the larger strata have large samples taken from them (ibid. 2008).

The third step taken was to select sampling elements. To do this, the sampling units were further stratified, as their populations were not homogeneous. This further stratification was based on sex and occupational category. Companies provided lists of their staff by sex and occupational category based on the following commonly used occupational categories: Executive and technical, administrative and managerial, clerical and skilled artisans and semi-skilled and unskilled labourers. Executive and technical categories comprised chief executive officers and highly technically and professionally qualified people like engineers, doctors, chartered accountants and lawyers to mention a few. Administrative/ managerial category comprised administrative jobs like administrators, supervisors and managers. Clerical jobs included all clerical jobs, secretaries, receptionists and salespersons. Skilled category included all skilled artisans, drivers and messengers; semi-skilled/unskilled category comprised labourers, cleaners and security guards.

In order to come up with the sampling elements, quota sampling was employed whereby 2 respondents (one male and one female) were taken in each of the five (5) occupational categories from each sampling unit. Ideally, all being equal, the total sample size should have been 2 respondents multiplied by 5 occupational categories and the result multiplied by 64 companies amounting to 640. However, the actual sample size was much smaller (459) due to a number of factors namely:

- Lack of female employees in some occupational categories resulting in the selection of only males in those occupational categories.
- Non-existence of certain occupational categories in some sampling units due the nature of their business

Quota sampling was used because it allowed members of all the three strata of the population to be represented in the sample. One male and one female were purposively and non-randomly selected for inclusion in the study sample. In addition to the sampled elements, purposeful sampling was used in the selection of key informants for inclusion in the study, as these could not be selected randomly. Instead, they were strategically selected based on the knowledge and experience they had with respect to the topic of study. They were mainly human resource managers or officers, one from each sampling unit making sixty-four (64). The sizes of these organizations ranged between those that employed four to those that employed over a thousand employees.

### **1.6.3 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND METHODS**

The following data collection methods were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data: structured questionnaire, which was handed to the respondents in all occupational categories except semi-skilled/ unskilled respondents. Data collected by the questionnaire included: demographic details; gender composition and occupational

distribution; factors responsible for the gender composition and occupational distribution in their organizations.

The benefits of using this method include: less time consuming and less expensive compared with other methods; easy to administer to many respondents; it allows for a common format for each respondent thereby making it easy for coding, analysis and comparison of data (RAR Technical Guide 2005).

The known weaknesses of this method are:

- strict adherence to predetermined questions that sometimes prevents collection of unexpected but relevant information;
- understanding of questions in different ways by respondents which poses as a challenge in comparison of responses:

These weaknesses were overcome by framing simple and straightforward questions which could not have different interpretations and which followed each other in a logical sequence. This method was used to collect data to address both objectives 1 and 2. It collected most of the quantitative data

The second method that was used was one-on-one semi-structured interviews also known as face-to-face interviews. This method was used to collect detailed qualitative information from key informants as well as respondents from all the occupational categories. One-on-one interviews were useful for getting information from respondents from the semi-skilled/unskilled occupational category due to their lower levels of education.

Questions were semi-structured, mostly open-ended and responses were documented in thorough detailed notes. Types of information collected included gender composition and occupational distribution of their organizations; factors responsible for the gender

composition and occupational distribution of their organizations; policies on minimum educational entry qualifications, training and development, recruitment and selection.

One-on-one unstructured interviews were chosen because they are renowned for giving a chance to interviewees to answer questions using their own words more than the interviewer but at the same time allowing the interviewer to probe for more details using their knowledge, expertise and interpersonal skills (Sewell 2005). As a result, all relevant issues were covered and interviewees' opinions expressed. The flexibility in the order and wording of questions, which varied from respondent to respondent, enabled the interviewer to encourage respondents to provide as much details and to be as frank as possible. This method was mainly used to address objective number 2, which is qualitative.

The major known drawback with the one-on-one semi-structured interview method is that different respondents respond to somewhat different questions therefore difficult to code responses and to analyse data (ibid.2005). By picking only themes from the different responses and giving each theme a number, the problem was overcome. Frequencies over total responses were calculated. The other problem of bias was overcome by doing more listening than talking so that the interviewee did more of the talking. Probing was only used where it was necessary to get more information on particular issues.

The third method that was used was document review whereby written documents provided by key informants in relation to study objectives were reviewed. Information collected included: numbers of people employed in the organization broken down by gender and number of employees in each occupational category broken down by gender, training and recruitment policies. This method was used to address objective number 1. The information reviewed was used to check the accuracy of information collected by questionnaire and from face to face interviews of key informants.

To collect valuable information from respondents an interview guide and a questionnaire were prepared. The interview guide was used to obtain responses from all respondents while the questionnaire was used to obtain responses from the employees from four of the five categories with the exception of semi-skilled/ unskilled category respondents. Guidelines for document review offered guidance on what needed to be reviewed in line with study objectives. It assisted in the review of written documents such as staff lists and occupational distribution lists.

#### **1.6.4 ANALYSIS**

After interviews, Chichewa responses were translated immediately and recorded in English. Only semi-skilled/unskilled respondents were interviewed in Chichewa, the rest were interviewed in English. To make sense of the data collected, coding was used whereby field notes were thoroughly read; themes that were relevant to the research problem were identified and categorized. Coding was then done manually by assigning numbers to the various themes for unstructured questions. These numbers were then sorted to see which codes emerged frequently. Once themes and patterns were established, coding was achieved by assigning each response a number. The numbers were categorized to represent attributes and screened for accuracy. Responses to structured questions from the questionnaire were entered into EPIDATA. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data.

Descriptive statistics was used to summarize, organize and simplify the quantitative data by presenting large amounts of data in tables and charts. Descriptive statistics provided summaries that enabled comparisons across the strata. Chi-square analysis was employed to test for significance of association between variables. Calculations were done by use of (SPSS) version 12.0.

## 1.7 LIMITATIONS

The sampling frame was a 2005 list of paid up companies in the formal sector. This list was obtained from MCCI. Possibly some formal companies were not registered members of MCCI at the time of the survey; as such they were automatically left out of the study. If all formal companies were paid up members, the sample would have been higher. Although the expectation is that, the numbers of men and women in the study population would increase; the proportions would not be affected, as these unregistered companies were not expected to be any different from those included in the study. This entails that the study results could not be not affected by the absence of the unregistered companies..

Some companies had no female employees while others had only one female employee each. All companies except for a few had only male or female employees in some occupational categories. In cases like these, only the available sex was interviewed, that is, instead of two only one was interviewed. This resulted in interviewing more men than women, and not 50-50 as planned. However, the expectation is that the exclusion of the unavailable sex would not affect the study results, as they could not be expected to give any information different from that provided by the other sampling elements.

Questionnaires could not be administered to respondents from the semi-skilled/unskilled occupational category as some could not read and understand the questions resulting in the response rate of 73%. However, this group of respondents responded very well to one-on-one interview as already indicated in previous pages. Lengthy procedures in some organisations hampered speed of data collection. Obtaining permission and submitting visit schedules prior to any visit helped to overcome the problem to some extent. Time was another limiting factor in the collection of data but all effort was made to ensure enough data was collected.

Some closed organisations never believed that the data being sought was for purposes of writing an academic report. They felt they were being spied upon by government agents, and denied access to information and their staff. This delayed the data collection process, as repeat visits had to be planned later.

## **1.8 SUMMARY**

Studies in Malawi indicate the existence of gender disparities in formal employment as only 10% of working women were in formal employment in 2002. This necessitated that this study be conducted to analyse factors responsible for these disparities, as not many studies had analysed the factors. Data for the study was collected by the use of questionnaire, face-to-face interviews and document search. Data analysis was done using manual codes, descriptive statistics, and computer packages of EPIDATA and SPSS version 12.0. Although the study had a number of limitations, they did not affect the study results.

## **1.9 ARRANGEMENT OF CHAPTERS**

This dissertation is organized into the following six chapters: Chapter 1 gives background information on the gender situation in employment the world over as well as in Malawi, including relevant definitions. It also describes the study setting, the problem being studied, its major objectives and reasons why the study had to be undertaken by highlighting gaps in available literature. It also describes data collection and processing tools and methods employed and study limitations ending with information on how chapters have been organised. Chapter 2 gives a review of theories that explain the existence of gender disparities in employment as well as factors that influence them including relevant empirical studies that support the various theoretical assumptions. Chapter 3 presents findings and discusses the study results while conclusion and recommendations of the study are provided in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

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### **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews theories and empirical studies on gender disparities in formal employment and factors that influence these disparities. Three categories of theories are reviewed as classified by Anker (1997) namely: neo-classical and human capital theories; feminist and gender theories and institutional and labour market theories. Some of the assumptions made by each of the three categories of theories as well as their bearing on the study have been reviewed. Although there are many concepts that attempt to explain gender disparities in formal employment, this study springs from some assumptions made by the above three categories of theories which are relevant to the study.

#### **2.2 THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Despite the apparent overlaps in the explanations of various aspects of gender disparities by the three categories of theories, each has one or two concepts which have a bearing on the study. Neo-classical/ human capitalist theories explain that workers seek jobs that suit their education, experience, preference and constraints like domestic responsibilities. The theories further explain why women bring lower levels of education and in less relevant fields of study and why they acquire less formal work experience than men. This assumption acted as a guide in the data collection and in the analysis of factors influencing the disparities as attention was given to possible relationships that could exist between choice of occupation and education as well as choice of occupation and constraints such as domestic responsibilities.

Feminist and gender theories share views on the role of socio-cultural factors on the creation of inequalities between man and women. These inequalities result in their unequal access to education, training and employment thereby indirectly choosing who

should be educated and hence employed. The theories further explain that socialisation of boys and girls create different occupational aspirations hence the creation of ‘male’ and ‘female’ jobs. Marriages too influence choice of occupation and career progression of women due to family responsibilities that most societies place on women. The assumed relationship between societal expectations, norms and values and women’s participation in employment was very important for the understanding of factors that influenced gender disparities in the private sector since Malawi is a patriarchal society.

Institutional and labour market theories explain that companies discriminate against women in their employment decisions and that markets are divided into those that employ a lot of men (primary) and those that employ a lot of women (secondary). The relevant concept in this group is the labour market division concept, which is useful in explaining the gender compositions and occupational distributions in the three sectors.

The most notable overlaps between these groups of theories are explained below. Both neo-classical/human capital and feminist /gender theories explain that societal divisions of labour, beliefs, norms and values influence women’s education, choice of fields of study and occupation. Neo-classical/human capital, feminist/gender and labour market segmentation theories also share the assumption that men and women work in ‘male’ and ‘female’ occupations or segments. The various assumptions made by these theories are presented below:

### **2.2.1 NEO-CLASSICAL / HUMAN CAPITAL THEORIES**

Neo-classical/human capital theories assumes that workers and employers are rational and that labour markets function efficiently. The theories assume workers seek out the best-paying jobs after taking into consideration their education and experience or constraints like child care responsibilities as well as preferences (Ibid. 1997).

As has been stated that this study focuses on analysing factors that influence gender disparities in compositions and occupational distribution, it is important that the various assumptions relating to gender be looked at in order to be guided and not to lose sight.

Neo-classical/human capital theories make a number of assumptions some of which are presented below:

#### **2.2.1.1 WOMEN ACQUIRE LESS FORMAL WORK EXPERIENCE THAN MEN**

The first assumption is that household and child care-responsibilities cause many women to gain less work experience than men owing to early withdrawal or permanent withdrawal from employment because of marriage, or in order to care for young children. According to the theories, this implies women would rationally choose occupations with relatively low returns to experience, low penalties for temporary withdrawal, including occupations that are flexible in terms of entry and working hours. This further implies women cannot choose certain occupations due to lack of appropriate experience. A number of studies have supported the assumption. One such study conducted in the UK by Davidson and Cooper (1984) found out that a greater proportion of working women aged from 16-59 in the UK in 1980 worked part-time due to child caring responsibilities, hence acquire less work experience as compared with their male counterparts who work full time.

Findings of a similar study done in Malawi by Vaughan and Chipande (1984) indicate that women in the tea estates were usually employed as seasonal workers due to domestic responsibilities also supports the assumption. According to a study in America by Venable (2002), women make different choices, which affect how they work. They place more importance on their relationships, caring for children, parents, spouses and other members of the family. than on their careers. The study found that 71 percent of women in America prefer jobs with more flexibility and benefits than other jobs with higher wages. They are more likely to take time off to care for their children, which becomes an obstacle to building up attractive curriculum vitae and work up the corporate ladder. The study further found that women 25 years of age and over had been with their current employer 4.4 years, on average, compared to 5.0 years for men; and that women between the ages of 18 and 34 had been out of the labour force 27 percent of the time, in contrast

to 11 percent for men. Women of ages 45 to 54 who had recently re-entered the workforce after a 5 or 10-year break were competing with men who had had 20 years of continuous experience. One-quarter of American women therefore worked part-time in 2000 compared to less than 10 percent of men.

This assumption has relevant features that explain gender differences in employment as more years that workers spend in employment result in greater levels of investment in skill formation. Women cannot acquire greater levels of skill and probably find no reason to invest in skill when they know they will interrupt their employment in order to raise children. Because of this anticipation in the interruption of their careers, women choose low-status, low-paying jobs in which wages do not really improve with experience. Similarly, no employer will be interested to invest in on-the-job training for women who interrupt their employment. These theories ably explain the reason why many women are concentrated in clerical and other low paying jobs in the services (Anker 1997).

#### **2.2.1.2 WOMEN BRING LOWER LEVELS OF EDUCATION AND IN LESS RELEVANT FIELDS OF STUDY TO THE LABOUR MARKET**

The second assumption made by the theories is that in terms of employment, women bring to the labour market lower levels of education and in limited fields of study. Most are in fields such as secretarial, clerical, nursing and teaching. This limits women's choice of occupation (ibid 1997).

Inequalities in the educational systems of most countries have been identified to be the root of the problem. In 1998 in Malawi for instance, 80,912 boys against 49,762 girls sat for Primary School Leaving Certification Examination (Malawi Policy Framework Papers (MPFP) 1997/98-1998/99). Since these numbers keep on reducing in higher education, the result is that fewer girls leave school with academic qualifications that will enable them find employment in the formal sector. Furthermore, University of Malawi enrolment figures for the academic year 2000-2001 clearly show that girls enrol for

traditionally “female” courses. The Malawi Polytechnic that offers mainly male-dominated courses like accountancy, engineering etc. enrolled only 17.34% female students against 82.65% male students while Kamuzu College of Nursing enrolled 67.74% females and 32.25% males just because nursing is considered a female occupation (Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2003).

In conformity with findings of other studies, Africa Employment Report (1995) reported that in Africa, women’s access to education and training is still much lower than men’s.. Apart from access to education and training, the kind of training offered to women constitutes an obstacle to productive employment. Women indeed direct their attention towards sectors considered “feminine” like teaching, dressmaking, health-care, catering just to mention a few and not scientific disciplines and high technology, which offer brighter job and promotion prospects. This assumption implies that women occupy lower positions.

#### **2.2.1.3 PREFERENCE OF OCCUPATIONS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IS DIFFERENT**

The third assumption made by these theories is that men and women’s preference for particular occupations also influence employers’ preferences for them. Women prefer occupations which are considered “feminine” for example secretary, clerical worker, teacher and nurse. Men also prefer jobs that are “masculine” such as mechanic, medical doctor and driver. According to the theories, these preferences also influence employers in their employment decisions. When they need a mechanic, they are likely to employ a man and when they need a secretary they are likely to employ a woman. As the study covers occupational distribution by gender, it is important that concepts relating to choice of occupations by men and women be clearly understood so that they act as a guide.

The findings of a study in Malawi by Mkwezalamba (1990) which indicated that most women in paid employment in 1984 were in the agricultural sector concur with this assumption. Apart from the agricultural sector, women were largely employed as nurses,

teachers, and stenographers and in sales and that; there were few women doctors, engineers, accountants, managers and university lecturers. Other studies also indicate that in 1993, women accounted for 30-33 percent of teaching staff in 13 African countries (Africa Recovery Briefing Paper 1998). Similarly, in Latin America and The Caribbean women in 1986 accounted for 40-80 percent of all nurses and 40-70 percent of all teachers [UNDP 2006].

Also in support of the assumption are the findings of a study of Free Markets and Free Choices in the US by Post and Lynch (1995) which indicated that with equal protection under American Law, disparities in employment are because of women's own educational and career choices. The study indicated that in the year 1992, more than a third of the bachelor's degrees earned by women in the US were in the fields of communication, education, English literature, health professions, and the visual and performing arts. In the same year, 4 percent of women in the US who earned degrees did so in engineering and mathematics and less than 1 percent did so in physical sciences. A larger percentage of women earned bachelors degrees in business; and this dictates their place in the employment market.

The study further reveals that in 1993 one-half of all full-time female workers were employed in the following occupations: administrative support; executive; managerial and administrative; teaching; nursing; bookkeeping and accounting and clerical. These are believed to be women's logical and independent career choices. A similar observation to that made by Post and Lych (1995) was made by (Sharma 2005) in Asian countries. In her discussion paper on Gender Inequality in Education and Employment, she concluded that even where women have open access to all professions, they overwhelmingly opt for traditionally female occupations.

#### **2.2.1.4 WOMEN ARE HIGH COST EMPLOYEES**

The fourth assumption is that women are considered high cost employees because of higher rates of absenteeism, frequent lateness to work and higher labour turn over rate due to family responsibilities like leaving employment to care for a young child and inability to work late or work on official public holidays.

According to the theories, this affects the types of job employers offer women depending on the relative importance of each of these factors for each occupation. However, empirical evidence from a series of studies that were conducted in five developing countries of Cyprus, Ghana, India, Mauritius and Sri-Lanka by Anker and Hein (quoted in International Labour Review 1997) indicate that, contrary to popular belief, that the difference between male and female absenteeism rates are small, labour turn over rates were similar for men and women.

This assumption has been found not to take into consideration professional women who are so committed to their jobs and acquire more experience in their professions or those women who head households and have to work continuously to support their families. It however sheds some light on the misconceptions some employers have on women's attendance at work which prevent some formal organisations from employing them in certain capacities.

#### **2.2.2 FEMINIST/GENDER THEORIES**

Feminist/ Gender Theories are mainly concerned with non-labour market variables such as societies and family organization and their effect on women's education, training and employment. The basic assumption of feminist/gender theories is that women's disadvantaged position in the labour market is caused by, and is a reflection of, patriarchy and women's subordinate position in society. These theories explain the root cause of the problem of unequal access to education, training and employment mainly in patriarchal societies of Africa and Asia. As indicated earlier, that Malawi society is patriarchal, a

good understanding of this theory and its assumptions will be of crucial importance to the understanding of social-cultural factors and their impact on gender division of roles and responsibilities. The theories make three assumptions:

#### **2.2.2.1 FIRST ASSUMPTION: SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

According to these feminist/gender theories, societal norms influence people's behaviour and contribute to gender-based discrimination against women. These societal norms influence parents' decisions as regards education of their daughters. They give their daughters less education and in limited fields of study. Male children are therefore given better educational opportunities hence better labour market opportunities.

Socio-cultural factors refer to societal expectations, norms and values that societies have regarding participation of women in paid employment. These societal norms, values and expectations have been found to play a very powerful role in shaping human behaviour, in terms of both what is permitted and what is prohibited as well as governing the gender division of labour. Gender division of labour refers to the sharing of work between men and women.

In Malawi, gender-division of labour in the family has been identified by some studies as being responsible for the unequal education opportunities between boys and girls. The girl child, in the Malawian culture, is expected to perform all domestic work and take on motherhood responsibility from an early age. She is expected to marry and have children. Although boys are expected to learn all manly tasks, they are regarded as an asset and are sent to school. Girls go to school in early years, but they usually drop out as priority and encouragement is given to the boys' school needs, as boys are seen as breadwinners. Girls are usually discouraged from going to school since they are seen as child bearers (MPFP 1996/97-1998/99). This emphasis on domestic work and marriage has led to more girls staying at home while boys of their age attend school and therefore lower enrolment rates for girls at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Since education all over the world determines the type of work one undertakes as well as access to employment, many women in Malawi and in many other countries cannot enter paid employment. They are unable to compete favourably with men on the job market because their access to employment and achievement in employment is restricted by their responsibility for child-care since social values in almost all countries of the world assign major responsibilities for caring children on the mother. Consequently, large numbers of women either delay entry into paid employment or withdraw temporarily or permanently.

#### **2.2.2.2 SECOND ASSUMPTION: SOCIALISATION OF BOYS AND GIRLS INFLUENCE THEIR FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

Socialisation of boys and girls too has been identified as one factor that influences boys' and girls' future career aspirations. Socialisation has been defined as a process through which society's values and norms, including those of gender are taught and learned (Konrad Adenauer Foundation 1993, p.3). It is through socialization that messages of expected behaviour for women and men are taught and learned.

Parents' beliefs of masculinity and femininity influence the way boys and girls behave. Boys and girls behave according to their sexes and imitate models of same sex (Powell 1993). In compliance with these beliefs, girls and boys grow up with different career aspirations. While boys grow up aspiring for a wide range of occupations, although mostly dominated by men, such as engineering, accountancy and medicine, girls grow up aspiring for women-dominated occupations of teacher, nurse and secretary. According to Konrad Adenauer Foundation (2003), effects of socialization in Malawi can be seen on courses girls take at secondary school such as needlework and cookery. The trend continues at tertiary level with their taking subjects such as home economics, teaching, and nursing while boys take sciences and technical subjects, which tend to lead to better-remunerated jobs than those subjects taken by girls.

In support of the basic feminist/gender theories assumption, are the findings of a study by Special Law Commission on Gender and the Law (2003) which indicated that generally more boys than girls attend school in Malawi. For example in 1999, a total of 151,216 boys and only 91,524 girls enrolled in all secondary schools in Malawi. At university level, all the colleges of the university of Malawi enrolled 2960 males and only 1164 females. As for literacy rates in the same year 1999, the males' rate was 67% as compared to 33% for the females' (United Nations (UN) 2002). The above figures indicate, in addition to other factors, that girls' education is not considered as important as boys' education. These figures translate to the low employment figures for women.

The situation of women in the estates in Malawi as reported by Vaughan and Chipande (1984) confirms women are mainly employed as seasonal labourers because of gender division of labour in the household. Women have to look after the home and the children and can only give paid employment a small percentage of their time while men concentrate on their primary role of earning income for the household.

### **2.2.2.3 THIRD ASSUMPTION: MARRIAGE AS A BARRIER TO WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT**

Marriage affects women's participation in employment. It influences their participation rate, choice of and progression of careers. Unfortunately, studies indicate that most women over the world choose to marry. In the US for instance in 1993, 81 percent of women were married (Post and Lynch 1995). In Africa, about 50 percent of women are married by the age of 18 (Africa Recovery Briefing Paper 1998). The study identified marriage as a barrier to a women's employment. It indicates that marriage has a significant bearing on woman's career. It shapes her opportunities and is among her considerations when making commitments of time and energy. Marriage has been proved to reduce a woman's labour force participation rate.

The study by Post and Lynch further established that in 1993, 66 percent of single women in the US participated in the labour force against 59 percent. of married women. There is also vast evidence that women who choose to remain single, invest in education and work long hours and fare as well as men in employment in the US.

The UN conducted a similar study in Thailand in 1995. It looked at the influence of family on career planning. It found that the attitude of husbands is an important factor regarding women's participation in the labour force. Those women whose husbands were encouraging and supportive sought to continue with their current jobs while those whose husbands disapproved of their careers planned to seek new jobs in other establishments or simply quit their current job.

## **2.2.3 INSTITUTIONAL THEORIES AND LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION THEORIES**

These theories provide explanations on how institutions discriminate in their hiring decisions and how labour markets are divided into those that employ a lot of women and those that are dominated by men. They make two assumptions.

### **2.2.3.1 ASSUMPTION 1: EMPLOYERS DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN IN THEIR HIRING, AND PROMOTION DECISIONS**

The first assumption the theories make is that employers play an important role in determining who to be hired, promote and how much to pay. A study in the US by Bergmann(1974 cited in State Services Commission 2006) reveals that discriminatory practices in the US resulted in women being excluded in the good jobs and overcrowding in lower paid and lower skilled occupations as decisions are sometimes based on assumptions. Similarly, the artificial barriers that are based on attitudes and biases prevent qualified women from advancing within their organisations and reaching their full potential.

A similar study by UNDP (2006) found that social prejudices and stereotypes create an inclination to offer promotions to men in Latin America and the Caribbean because women's productive period is considered shorter than men's due to pregnancies.

The assumption has also been supported by the findings of a study of men and women in management by Powell (1993). It was found out that employers have a lot of opportunity to discriminate between male and female applicants in their hiring decisions more especially where recruiters are not properly trained on how to develop interview content so that interview questions are taken from the same topic areas. This study also indicates that sex does not affect evaluation of applicants if enough information about them is available. However, beliefs of the existence of "male" and "female" jobs, marital status, and physical appearance of applicants affect decisions if little or dissimilar information about applicants is collected.

Also in support of the assumption is a survey on public attitudes towards sex as a criterion in the recruitment process in Hong Kong in 1997 (ILO 2006). The survey found out that about 21.9 percent of the female employees in the survey reported having been denied employment due to their sex. This sex discrimination commonly took place at the decision-making stage of the recruitment process.

Among studies that support the assumption are enterprise surveys that were sponsored by (ILO) in Bulgaria, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, India, Ghana, Cyprus and Sri-Lanka between 1981 and 1993. In these surveys, employers were asked whether they preferred to employ men or women in certain occupations and types of work. Many employers indicated that a person's sex is an important consideration affecting hiring and promotion decisions. Most employers indicated they preferred to employ men to do repair and maintenance work, general production, professional work, and skilled operative occupations than women. In Ghana 21 percent of the employers interviewed

indicated they sometimes refused to employ women for fear they would become pregnant.

Furthermore, the institutional theories assumptions are also supported by the findings of a study in the US that explored the employment of women in management positions. It was conducted in 50 of the largest private industries in 2002. The study found that in 2002 women represented 48 percent of the labour force in the private sector but only 36.4 percent of officials and managers. Women officials and managers were mostly employed by the health care sector, legal services, employment services and scheduled air transportation and department stores and commercial banking while in manufacturing, investigation and security and courier services, women had lower probabilities of being employed as officials and managers.

It was further established that men have higher probabilities of being appointed a manager and that women have a higher probability of being managers in selected service industries. Among the possible explanations is the possibility of negative stereotypes about the skills and abilities of women by managers at headquarters of these industries (The US Equal Opportunity Commission 2006).

#### **2.2.3.2 ASSUMPTION 2: LABOUR MARKETS ARE DIVIDED INTO TWO SEGMENTS**

The central idea is that the labour market is divided into primary and secondary sector. The primary sector that has jobs with good pay, working conditions, job security and opportunities for promotion is male-dominated. Examples of jobs in the primary sector are engineering, accountancy, quantity surveying and production. While secondary sector, which has jobs with poor pay, poor working conditions, little job security and little chance for promotion, is female-dominated. Examples of jobs in the secondary sector are secretary, receptionist, clerk and salesperson (Doeringer and Piore cited in Anker 1997 volume 3).

Results from a study of occupational segregation by sex carried out by Anker (forthcoming as quoted in Anker 1997) indicate that the majority of men and women in the world work in “male” or “female” occupations respectively. The results also indicate that there is greater similarity all over the world in the types of occupations that are gender stereotyped. All over the world, men and not women are engineers because very few women train as engineers; women, not men, are nurses because very few men train to be nurses. The study confirms that indeed labour markets are segmented.

#### **2.2.4 SUMMARY**

This chapter has reviewed major theories that provide explanations for gender disparities that exist in employment all over the world. All the major assumptions of the theories have been reviewed in the light of the results of studies that have been undertaken by various researchers in the field of gender disparities in employment. These theories will guide in the understanding of the preceding chapters as well as in the interpretations of results as they touch on all aspects of this study. The next chapter analyses the results.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

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### **3.0 QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter constitutes the presentation and analysis of data obtained through the study survey. The results of the analysis are presented under sub-headings: response rate, gender, age, marital status, overall gender composition, gender composition by sector, occupational distribution by gender, factors influencing choice of occupation, factors influencing gender disparities.

#### **3.2 RESPONSE RATE**

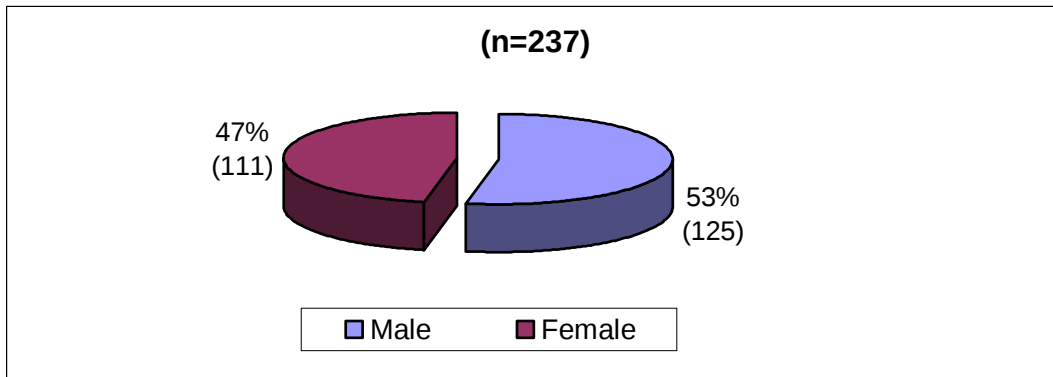
Out of 326 questionnaires distributed to respondents in the 64 organisations, 237 responded representing a response rate of 73%. The rate of response could have been higher if all respondents from semi-skilled/unskilled category were included. However, these were only interviewed using one-on-one interviews due their lower levels of education. Even if their questionnaire were translated into the vernacular language, some would still be unable to complete them, as they were barely literate. The good thing about this category was that their response rate was quite high at 95%. The reason for this was that, being subordinates, they were just organised to meet the interviewer at scheduled times.

#### **3.3 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE RESPONDENTS**

##### **3.3.1 GENDER**

Out of the 237 respondents interviewed, 53% were male while 47% were female. See figure 3.1 below:

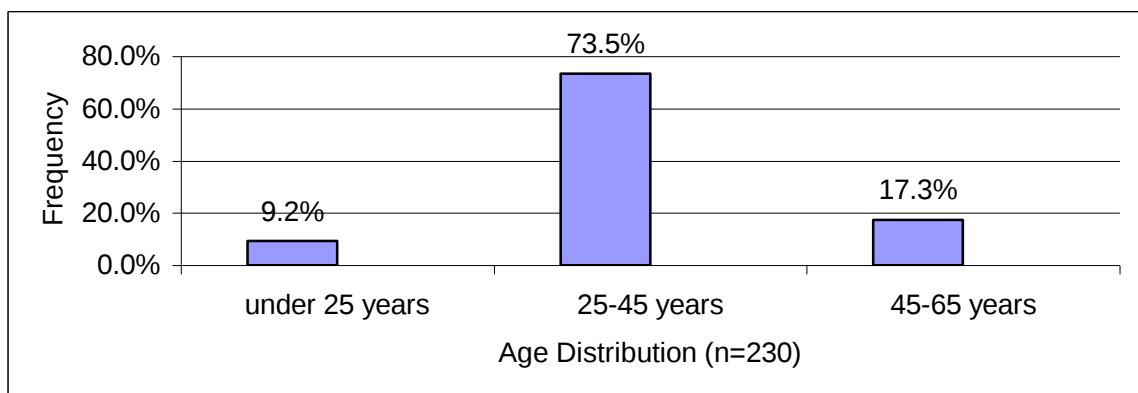
**Figure 3.1 Gender of the Respondents**



### 3.3.2 AGE

Most (73.5%) of the 230 respondents, who responded to the question on age, were aged between 25 and 45 years. Only 9.2% of the respondents were under 25 years while 17.3% were aged between 45 and 60 years. Out of the 230 respondents, seven respondents did not disclose their ages. This indicates that the majority of the respondents were mature workers who could give mature responses. (See figure 3.2 below)

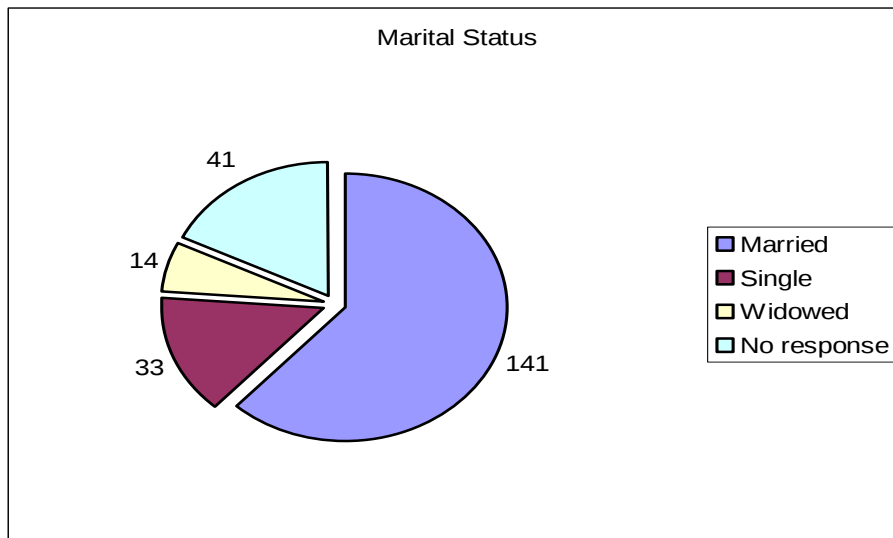
**Figure 3.2 Age Distributions of the Respondents**



\* 7 respondents did not disclose their age

### 3.3.3 MARITAL STATUS

Figure 3.3 Marital Statuses of the Respondents

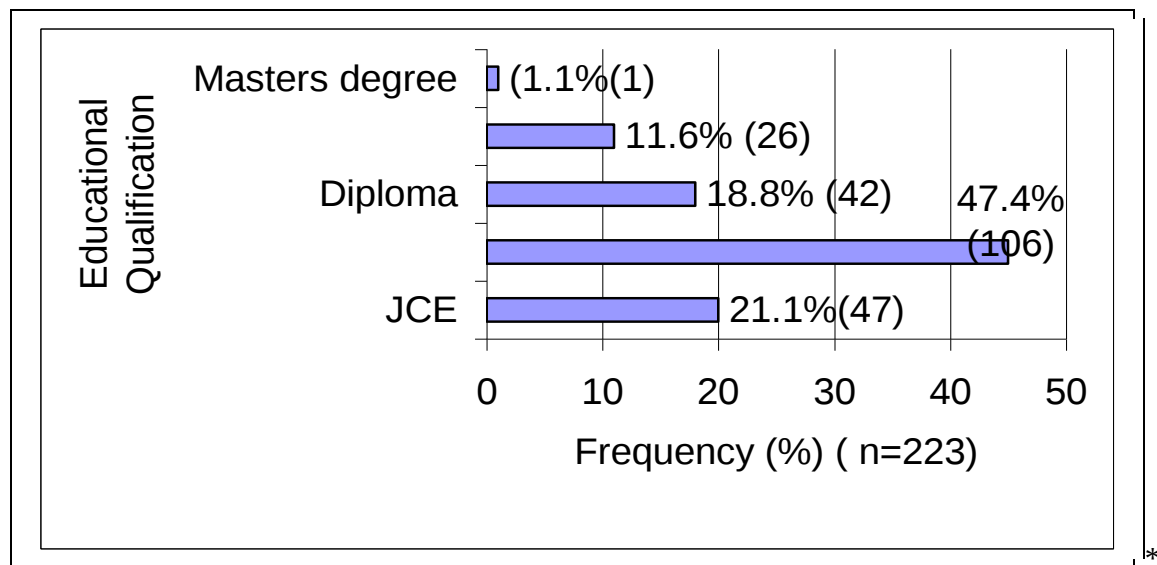


As figure 3.3 shows, most of the respondents, 72 % (141), were married while 17 % (33) were single and 7% (14) were widowed. Fourty one respondents did not disclose their marital status.

### 3.3.4 EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

Of the 237 respondents, 233 stated their educational qualifications. Of the 233, 47.4% were MSCE holders while 21.1 % were JCE holders and 18.8% were qualified with Diplomas. Only 11.6% (26/223) had bachelor's degrees and just two respondents had master's degrees. See figure 3.4 below:

**Figure 3.4 Educational Qualifications of the Respondents**



### **3.4 GENDER COMPOSITION BY SECTOR**

The profile of gender composition in the sectors revealed that there was gender imbalance in favour of men in the private sector. Of the 64 sampled organizations, there were 14,668 employees. Women's composition was just 2,561 representing only 17% of the total employees. Men constituted 83% (12,107) of the total employees as shown in figure 3.5 below. This finding agrees with that by International Development Resource Centre (2005) that women's share of formal employment was much lower than men's in many countries including Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Figure 3.5 Overall Gender Composition**

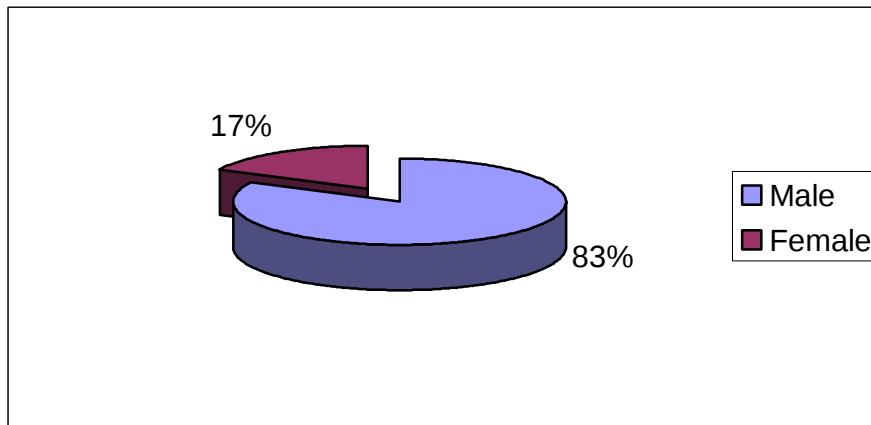
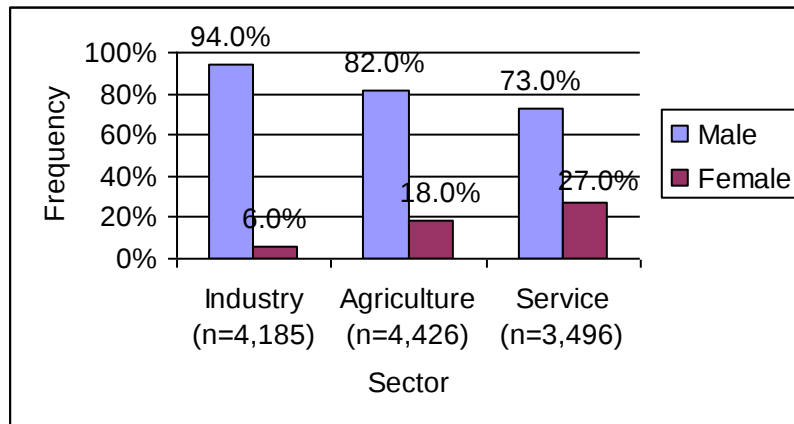


Figure 3.6 below gives a profile of the gender composition in the three broad categories in the private sector. The figure shows that men dominated entirely all the sectors forming over 80% of the total composition. Service sector was the largest employer of women followed by the Agricultural sector while the least employer was the industrial sector. This follows the general view that the nature of jobs carried out in industrial sector were not suitable for women hence the low numbers. Jobs in industry were believed to be hard and demanding a lot of time and energy as they involved lifting of weights like loading and unloading trucks. They involved standing for hours, working in shifts day and night and mostly with machines in dangerous and rough environments.

A test of association between gender and sector revealed a significant relationship between gender and sector (Chi-square=712.39, p-value=0.000). This showed that men were more likely to be employed in the industry sector while women were more likely to be employed in the service sector.

**Figure 3.6 Gender Compositions by Sector**

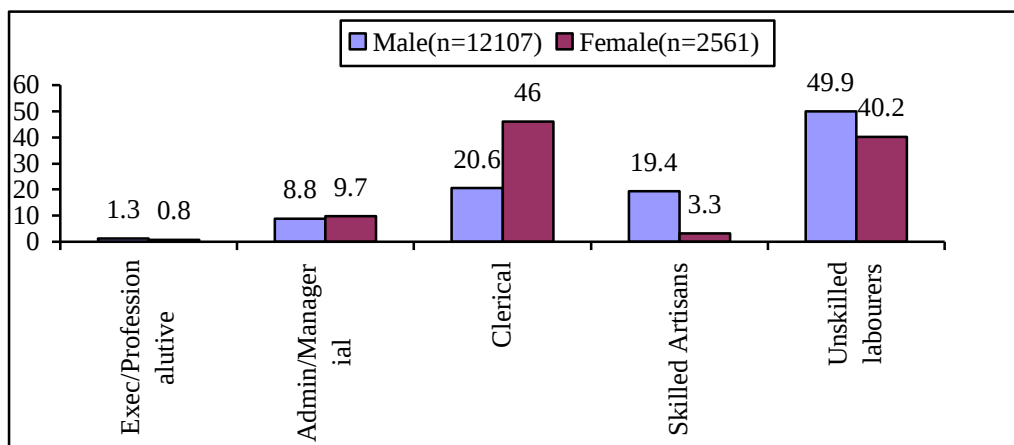


### **3.5 OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER**

In terms of occupational distribution, the number of women employees in all the five categories (namely, executive/professional, admin/managerial, clerical, skilled artisans, unskilled labourers) was much lower than that of men. Women were better represented than men in clerical and administrative/managerial categories as indicated in figure 3.7 .below. Of the 2561 employed women, those in the clerical category including secretarial and reception work constituted 46% (1178). Of the total number of unskilled women labourers, (1030), (917) were from the Agriculture sector. This indicated that industry and service categories did not employ many women as labourers. Only 20 out of the 2561 employed women were in executive/professional category compared to 1.3% of men. Jobs in this category included chief executive officers, chief accountants, human resource managers, engineers and Operations Managers. This could be attributed to several factors namely: women's lower educational attainment as compared to men.; women's choiceless preferences; women's belief in the existence of male jobs and female jobs; cultural norms and values and company recruitment procedures and practices. The difference between the number of men (2349) and that of women (85) in skilled artisans was an indication that it was a male 'preserve'. Overall, the differences between the numbers of men and women in all occupational categories were substantial and it could

right to conclude that men dominated women in all occupational categories. Chi-square test of association revealed a significant relationship between occupational category and gender (Chi-square=747.23, p-value=0.0000). This implies that male dominance follows the belief that certain jobs can only be done by men and not women. These findings concur with those of Anker (forthcoming as quoted in Anker 1997) which indicated that the majority of men and women work in 'male' or 'female' occupations.

**Figure 3.7 Occupational Distributions by Gender**



The better representation of women in the private sector, was attributed to a number of factors, as none of the employers had affirmative action to employ more women in their organizations. They all considered themselves equal opportunity employers. Findings of ILO (2007) study confirm these findings. The study reports that out of the total number of women employed globally in 2006, 41.6% worked in agriculture, 42.4% in services and only 17.2% worked in industry. Similar findings have been reported by studies elsewhere. For instance UNDP (1990), reports that in Africa about 20 percent of females in formal employment were in services, and only 5 percent in industry. Schultz (quoted in UNDP 2006) indicates that in Latin America, North Africa, East Asia and South and West Asia women in services ranged from 30 to 61 percent.

A number of studies attribute the high women participation in services to the fact that modern development involves expansion of the services sector which prefers women and/

or has a relatively easy entry point for unskilled workers such as women, thereby creating jobs for them (South Africa Special Commission Report 1997 and Harvard Asia Quarterly 2004). However, a study by Chodorow (1978) indicates that women have strong capacity to relate and to be selfless. Their work is emotional work, which replicate mothering. Women are concerned about other peoples' needs and therefore prefer jobs in services. They are preferred by employers in services, as the jobs mostly involve contacts with clients. Hochschild (1983) has reported similar findings. He indicates that most women are in services doing relational work that is emotional in nature because they have capacity to manage feelings. Women are socialized to manage emotions in the home and are therefore concerned with psychological needs. As a result, they are able to establish very strong emotional contacts with clients. A study by ILO (2007) confirms the above as it indicates that within services women take up jobs that are traditionally associated with their gender roles.

It is also worth noting that female involvement in industry was minimal only at 6 %. The figures revealed that there were disparities in gender composition. These figures slightly differ from the findings of Mkwezalamba (1990), which indicate that in 1984 agriculture employed more women followed by service and lastly industry. However, the 2007 study by ILO indicates that in 2005 agriculture was for the first time no longer the main sector of employment for women and that the trend had continued to 2006. The service sector has overtaken agriculture and now provides most jobs for women. This shift in sectors of employment order could also be one of the explanations for the discrepancy between the findings of this study and previous studies.

However, the fact that this study only concentrated on formal employment that requires a certain amount of professionalism and skill, which most women in the countryside would not possess, also offers an explanation to the situation. Mkwezalamba (1990) looked at women's wage employment in general which includes both formal and informal employment. This indicates that most women are employed in informal rather than formal agriculture sector in the southern region of Malawi. The findings also confirm the

findings of previous studies on agriculture, which indicate that the sector employs many temporary and seasonal labourers, a good number of whom are women who only want to work specific hours in a day in order to be able to combine domestic responsibilities and paid employment.

Industry employs the least number of women. This is attributed to beliefs that shift work and all manual and dirty jobs are only suitable for men as they demand energy and are carried out in dangerous environments. Globally too, fewer women than men are employed in industry in all regions of the world. ILO (2007) indicates that the situation is worse in developing countries and in the European Union where only 12.4% of women work in this sector compared to 33.6% of men. Other studies too attribute the smaller numbers of women in industry to the perception that work environment in industry is not hospitable to women (Office of Scientific and Engineering Personnel 1994). The US Department of Labour 1981 as (quoted in Women Scientists and Engineers Employed in Industry 1994) indicate that construction firms cite women's weakness and intolerance of harsh working conditions as an explanation for the lower employment levels of women in industry.

According to figure 3.7, which shows occupational distribution by gender, 46% of the total women employees were clerks as compared to men at 20.6%. This is an indication that women, due to constraints created by culture, chose clerical jobs which were mostly routine and involved less thinking and planning and therefore less strenuous. They involved little or no travel, that is, they were mostly deskwork under the supervision of departmental heads. These positions allowed women to knock off at five, as they did not require working late, over the weekends and during public holidays and involved little or no travelling. They are jobs that did not require high educational qualifications and experience. It was also easy to give excuses since finding a relief employee was not difficult. Some jobs in this category were an extension of the kind of jobs they did at home. Grindler as (quoted in Office of Scientific and Engineering Personnel 1994) argues

that women's passivity and compliance have been seen as befitting them for clerical work as well as other jobs involving boring, repetitive tasks.

However, Nielderle and Vesterlund quoted in *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2003) argue that women are ready to travel and move and relocate, and make the same commitments to the company, and aspire to leadership positions, as men but the problem is that employers have different expectations for men and women. This implies women can do better given opportunities by employers.

About 40.2% (1030) of the women were in unskilled labour category. Out of this total, (920) accounting for 92.3% were from the agriculture sector. This could be attributed to a number of factors such as: first, much of agricultural activity is undertaken in the countryside where job opportunities are limited. Second, most women in the countryside do not have necessary educational qualifications to enable them acquire jobs in the other categories.

About 9.7% of the women were in administrative and managerial category as compared to about 8.8% of men. This could be attributed to the fact that administrative jobs are more or less related to home-management and hence women find them much easier because they do not involve much planning but a lot of organization. A study of gender differences in occupational employment in the UK by Wooton (1997) indicate that differences were less pronounced among employees in managerial positions as women accounted for 40% to 60% of employees in most managerial jobs. Post and Lynch (1995) further indicate that half of all women workers in the US were in administrative support, executive, managerial and administration, teaching, nursing and clerical categories.

Some 3.3% of women were in skilled artisans category compared to 19.4% of men. A number of factors could explain this disparity: first, there existed cultural beliefs that artisan's jobs were "male jobs", therefore not many women trained in trades. Secondly,

women consider artisan jobs as dirty jobs, as they always want to look their best, (these jobs require use of protective clothing). Wooton (1997) also indicates that in the UK the most pronounced occupational differences existed in this category. Women made up only 1% of automobile mechanics and carpenters.

Executive/professional category employs 0.8% of the women as compared to 1.3% of men. This disparity could be attributed to women's lack of educational and professional qualification to take up jobs in these categories. A study by the Centre for Labour Market Research and Information (2004) indicates that fewer women seek further studies or post-graduate studies after getting their first job. This could explain their fewer numbers in the top jobs. However, results of this study indicate men and women were given equal opportunities as regards placement in the various positions in the organizations.

When asked what influenced their choices of occupation, most respondents indicated that they had limited choices to make as they grabbed what was available on the employment market as shown in table 3.1 below. The table also indicates that apart from the limited choice on the employment market, educational and professional qualification influenced choice of occupations followed by personal interest.

**Table 3.1 Factors influencing choice of occupation**

| <b>Factors influencing choice of occupation</b> | <b>Frequency(n=220)</b> | <b>Percent(%)</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Limited choice the market offered               | 77                      | 35%               |
| Capability or training                          | 66                      | 30%               |
| Interest                                        | 62                      | 28%               |
| Society's expectations on male and female jobs  | 11                      | 5%                |
| Influenced by parents                           | 2                       | 1%                |
| Wanted to do what men do                        | 2                       | 1%                |

**\*17 did not respond**

Labour segmentation theories are thus right in their assumption that labour markets are segmented. The results of this study show that women were better represented in the clerical and in administrative/managerial categories while men dominated executive, skilled artisans and semi-skilled/unskilled categories.

The results of the study support neo-classical/ human capital theories that point out how women are less qualified than men for certain occupations because of differences in their education and years of experience. The assumption that men and women train in different fields has also been confirmed by differences in occupational distribution. Most women did not train as mechanics or engineers and similarly most males did not train as secretaries and nurses.

### **3.6 FACTORS INFLUENCING GENDER DISPARITIES IN EMPLOYMENT RATIOS AND OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION**

When asked to state factors influencing gender disparities in employment ratios as well as occupational distributions, 68% of the 213 respondents mentioned women's lower educational attainment as compared to men, 46% stated the belief that certain jobs could only be done by men and not women, 42.7% mentioned women's lack of confidence and aspirations ( see table 3.2 below):

**Table 3.2 Factors influencing gender disparities**

| <b>Factors</b>                                                   | <b>Frequency<br/>(n=213)</b> | <b>Percent<br/>(%)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Women's lower educational attainment as compared to men          | 145                          | 68                     |
| Belief that certain jobs could only be done by men and not women | 98                           | 46                     |
| Women's own lack of confidence and aspirations                   | 91                           | 42.7                   |
| Belief that women could not manage to travel or transfer as      | 14                           | 6.6                    |

|                                                         |    |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|
| often as the job demands                                |    |     |
|                                                         | 12 | 5.6 |
| Women pull each other down due to jealousies            | 5  | 2.3 |
| Lack of encouragement                                   | 3  | 1.2 |
| Women are not given opportunities to take on challenges | 9  | 4.2 |

**\*24 respondents did not answer**

### **3.6.1 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

Due to their lower educational attainment compared to men, most women could not take up appointments in the private sector since formal employment requires employees who have some educational qualifications and skills.

The general view was that the root of the problem was the disproportional representation in the Malawi education system. The Malawi education system was blamed for educating more men than women. The University of Malawi as well as all the technical colleges had been male-dominated for a long time thereby reducing chances for women's involvement in formal employment in the private sector. This could also be attributed to the role of parents. Many parents viewed girls' education as being unpredictable due to the many obstacles that existed; girls as opposed to boys dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancies. Girls were also likely to marry early due to poverty in families where families failed to provide basic needs while boys from poor households continued with their education despite their lack of basic needs. A number of reasons were given for the lower levels of education of girls compared to boys as shown in table 3.3 below:

**Table 3.3 Reasons for poor education of girls**

| <b>Reason</b>                                | <b>Frequency<br/>(n=197)</b> | <b>Percent<br/>(%)</b> |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Early marriages due to poverty in the family | 136                          | 69.0                   |
| Parents prefer educating boys to girls       | 131                          | 66.7                   |

|                                                                                   |     |      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Preoccupations with household chores from a young age at the expense of education | 117 | 59.5 |
| Lack of encouragement from parents due to their belief in male and women roles    | 77  | 39.3 |
| Lack of role models                                                               | 51  | 26.2 |
| Recruitment procedures                                                            | 2   | 1.2  |
| Initiation ceremonies                                                             | 2   | 1.2  |
| Most women who were employed were related to bosses                               | 2   | 1.2  |
| Poverty leading to dropping out of school at JC                                   | 2   | 1.2  |

**\*40 respondents did not answer**

The respondents were also asked if given a chance, they would pursue further academic or professional studies to improve their current position in the company and 96% of those who responded said yes while 4% said no. Those who said no cited lack of;

- Support from management in form of educational loans,
- Encouragement from immediate bosses.
- Time.
- Encouragement from spouse.

The percentage of those who answered yes to the above question was very encouraging, only the responses were not disaggregated to know how many of these responses were from women respondents.

### **3.6.3 Socio-Cultural Attitudes**

Though women were mostly found to be working in lower cadre job categories, given a chance, 47.8% (101) of those that responded would like to work in the top management level while 30.0% (63) would like to work in the middle management position. Less than 25% of the respondents said they would like to work in the lower management position given a chance. See table 3.4 below. The majority of the respondents indicated high aspirations.

**Table 3.4 Level of organization respondents would most like to Work**

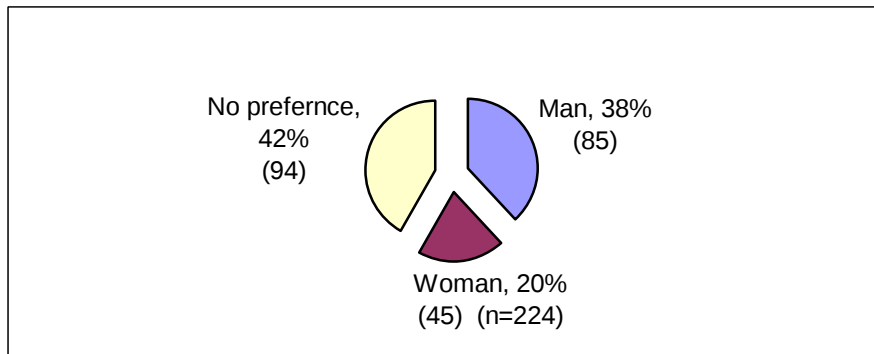
| Level of organization | Frequency (n=211) | Percent (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Top management        | 101               | 47.8        |
| Middle management     | 63                | 30.0        |
| Lower management      | 47                | 22.2        |
| Total                 | 211               | 100.0       |

**\*26 respondents did not answer**

Asked who they would prefer to be their immediate boss between a man or a woman, 38% of the respondents said they would prefer a man, 20% would prefer a woman while 42% indicated they had no preferences (see figure 3.8 below).

The results in Table 3.6 below were an indication that the majority of employees did not mind whether they had a male or a female boss.

**Figure 3.8 Gender Preferences for the immediate boss.**



**Table 3.5 Reasons for Gender Preferences**

| Reason                                                              | Frequency (n=119) | Percent (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Men were more productive than women                                 | 57                | 48.0        |
| Women in higher positions were selfish                              | 36                | 30.0        |
| Men were natural leaders and that Management was a men's profession | 19                | 16.0        |

|                                   |    |      |
|-----------------------------------|----|------|
| Men were more understanding       | 12 | 10.0 |
| Women were not born leaders       | 7  | 6.0  |
| Women do not support fellow women | 2  | 2.0  |
| Women were sympathetic            | 5  | 4.0  |
| Women were honest                 | 2  | 2.0  |
| Women took issues too seriously   | 2  | 2.0  |

\* 11 respondents did not answer

### 3.6.2.1 Perception of Successful Women

Asked how they viewed successful women in their organization, 38.0% of the respondents said they viewed them positively as role models, 32.6% said they viewed them positively as being courageous in society where men dominated while 12.0% viewed them as deserving (see table 3.7).

The reasons given in Table 3.7 below indicate that generally women were accepted as leaders and that not many respondents felt women were not good leaders or did not deserve to be leaders.

**Table 3.6 Perception of Successful women in the organization**

| <b>Perception</b>                                                                                                                                  | <b>Frequency<br/>(n=216)</b> | <b>Percent<br/>(%)</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Positively as role models                                                                                                                          | 82                           | 38.0                   |
| Positively as being courageous in society where men dominate                                                                                       | 70                           | 32.6                   |
| Deserving                                                                                                                                          | 26                           | 12.0                   |
| Accepted their authority                                                                                                                           | 21                           | 9.8                    |
| Negatively as having progressed through evil means, that is, going out with bosses                                                                 | 16                           | 7.6                    |
| As a threat to the success of fellow women in the organization since most senior women acted as bottlenecks preventing other women from succeeding | 12                           | 5.4                    |
| Hard- hearted                                                                                                                                      | 5                            | 2.2                    |
| Some were selfish                                                                                                                                  | 2                            | 1.1                    |
| Others were supportive                                                                                                                             | 2                            | 1.1                    |

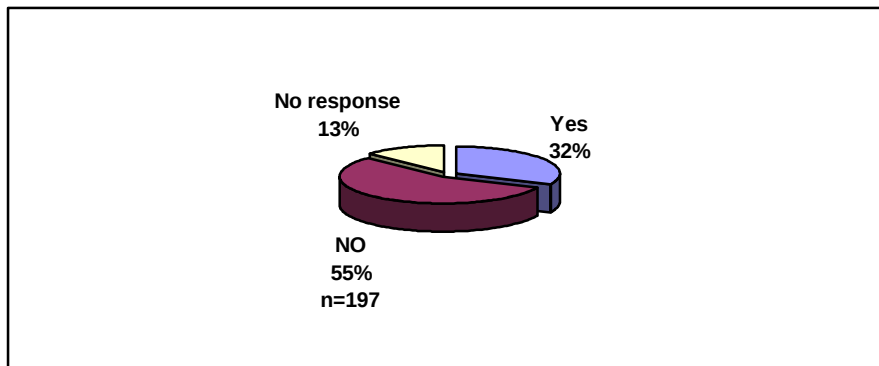
|                                  |   |     |
|----------------------------------|---|-----|
| Accepted them like fellow humans | 2 | 1.1 |
| Some had attitude                | 2 | 1.1 |

**21 respondents did not answer**

The respondents were asked if there were highly, academically and professionally qualified women in their organizations who were holding positions lower than their qualifications and the responses were as shown in figure 3.9 below.

The majority 104 (55%) said there were no highly academically and professionally qualified women holding positions lower than their qualifications in their organizations. Only 59 (32%) said there were. This implies that generally, women are not discriminated against in terms of placement and promotions based on their qualifications.

**Figure 3.9 Highly qualified occupying positions lower than their qualifications**



As said earlier in the thesis, Malawi has been educating and training more boys than girls. This contributed to the lower rate of women's participation in the private sector and created a situation whereby employers in the private sector had no choice but to employ the available human resources in the labour market.

However, this situation was not peculiar to Malawi. It was a worldwide problem. In the year 2000, except for Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean, the rest of the world was educating more boys than girls, the worst scenario being South Asia (World Bank 2002). World Bank, despite holding the view that education is the tool towards the

achievement of gender equality in employment as well as in other spheres of life; was quick to point out that equal access to education is not the sole step towards gender equality as there are other differences that persist elsewhere, in the labour market, for instance. A good example is Fiji where women's position in employment stands in contrast with their relatively equal formal position in the basic levels of the education system. At both primary and secondary levels, there are no substantial differences in overall enrolments of boys and girls. Similarly differences in enrolment levels at the university are not large, yet women accounted for about 30% of total paid employment in 1994 (ILO 2006). In addition, despite the fact that boys and girls go through primary and secondary education at roughly the same rate, overall participation in training is imbalanced in favour of males.

ILO (2007) is also of the view that basic education does not always translate into better employment opportunities. Women need to continue to gain knowledge and skills beyond those gained in youth. It attributes the discrepancy in formal employment between adult men and women to lack of lifelong learning opportunities for many women. The discussion seems to point out that access to education is not the only limiting factor to women's employment opportunities. Access to training is another factor. The education and employment situation in Fiji is applicable to many other countries, developing and developed due to unequal access to training opportunities, which result in their enrolment at a much lower rate in training programmes. This in turn leads to narrower range of jobs available to them. Similarly, enough evidence is available that even if women receive the same training as men, they will still have problems to access good jobs due to direct discrimination in hiring and promotion. However, Malawi, due to the stage of socio-economic development she is at, improved access of women to basic education would undoubtedly improve numbers of women in formal employment in the private sector. Figure 3.9 also shows that women who were highly academically and professionally qualified were not discriminated against in placement and promotions, which is in contrast to the above findings. Responses in Figure 3.8 also show that the majority of respondents did not mind whether their immediate boss was male or female. This agrees with the results in Table 3.7 where 38% of the respondents showed they had a positive

attitude towards women in senior positions. However, the 32% who said that women occupy positions lower than their qualifications cannot be ignored. It is an indication that sex discrimination was a barrier to access to employment as has been documented in the proceeding paragraphs.

Cultural norms, values and beliefs of the Malawi society were also said to have an effect on the education of women and girls. The Malawi culture was considered the creator of all inequalities that existed in Malawi, be it in education or employment. The Malawi culture has always emphasized on male dominance. Men were believed to be born leaders and lead women at the level of the family, the community and the national level. Because of this belief, the boy-child was regarded as the future breadwinner and head of his family. He was therefore, given preference when it came to education whereas the girl-child was taught household chores to prepare her for marriage.

These cultural norms and beliefs were not peculiar to Malawi. For instance, a study by UNDP 2005 (quoted in ILO 2006) found that in Latin American countries whenever resources are scarce, parents choose the male-child to receive professional training saying the girl-child will get married and be economically sustained by her spouse. A study in India where families put emphasis on patrilineal system of marriage, boys and girls are given different status and different educational goals. Families are more willing to invest in the education of boys as it will benefit them directly. Whereas the daughter's education will after marriage benefit her husband and his family ( Mukhopadhyay et al. 1988). Most researchers share the view that cultural norms and beliefs remain a challenge in most developing countries. Unless cultural and traditional biases and the general mindsets of people change, every girl's right to education will remain unachievable.

The nature of a company's business was regarded as one determining factor for the employment of more men than women. Companies in manufacturing, motor, transport, freight and forwarding, building and construction employed fewer women citing the very

nature of the work carried out as being unsuitable for the participation of women. The majority of men and even some women reported that women would not manage to work long hours, stand for long hours and work in stressful conditions and dangerous environments. Similar findings were made by a study in New Zealand, which indicates that only 12% of women work in building and construction; 29% in transport, storage and communication while 19.4% in gas, electricity and water (State Services Commission 2006). The study further indicates that despite efforts to encourage women to enter traditionally male occupations, the changes are slow.

Women themselves were given a share of the blame for being choosy. Women were said to prefer certain occupations and not others resulting in most women being employed in a few specific occupations. Some researchers however are of the view that women's choices are not out of choice. A number of factors restricted their choice of occupation or profession. Cultural norms for instance established gender discrimination in occupational categories. Research on occupational segregation by sex (Anker 1997) indicates that the majority of men and women in the world work in "male" or "female" occupations and that there is considerable similarity all over the world in the types of occupations which are gender-stereotyped. As a result, employers have a certain sex in mind when they advertise positions.

Even if there was no discrimination and that the Malawian woman was free to take up any occupation, respondents believed women would still have a problem balancing up requirements of the world of work and the world of home. This was because the same culture continued to be blamed for placing domestic responsibilities to women. Women's domestic responsibilities forced them to choose certain occupations and not others. In this case occupations preferred were those that were flexible in terms of entry, transfer, maternity leave, or extended leave of absence such as teaching, nursing, secretary, clerk. Unfortunately, these jobs offered few challenges and had few opportunities for advancement. Some studies agree that the choices of occupations women have are not "real" choices due to the strong nature of social factors that influence their choices (State

Services Commission 2006 and Demaki et al. 2005). The work of Wilson 2005 (quoted in Allen 2007) also reveals that women do not have real choices when those choices have cultural barriers like care of children. She has described women's choices as 'choiceless choices'. However, some studies indicate that women live in a free world. They have free choices only that they place marriage and domestic responsibilities before their careers (Post and Lynch 1995; Venable 2002). However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that these cultural barriers affect both men and women in the sense that their choices of jobs are influenced by cultural expectations. Men, being breadwinners, choose jobs that will give them enough income while women who are expected to perform domestic roles choose jobs that have greater flexibility so that they are able to cope with both job and family responsibilities.

These findings confirm the basic assumption of Feminist/Gender theories which explain why most occupations in which women train, not only in Malawi but in many countries of the world, are "female" occupations such as secretary, administrative assistant, receptionist and administrative manager which reinforce their femininity or in other words mimic their domestic responsibilities. They also explain why women acquire less experience than men do because they are preoccupied with child-rearing responsibilities. It also explains why women opt for clerical jobs, which are not very demanding in terms of time and other demands so that they knock off in good time for their domestic responsibilities at home.

Another factor that was found to restrict women's participation in employment was marriage. Just like domestic responsibilities, marriage had an influence on the type of jobs women chose. It was also found to affect women's career progression due to career breaks because of child bearing which is an integral part of marriage. Most married women knocked off at the exact official knocking off time of 5pm and did not want any extension of the working hours. Women did not work over weekends and during public holidays and most of them refused when asked to work during public holidays or weekends. Some respondents indicated that some women refused to work late, while

their male counterparts work and earn themselves promotions due to their dedication to duty and availability when their services were required. They further said women refused transfers even if it was on promotion because they would not leave their husbands and work elsewhere, while their husbands would accept transfers. They could leave their families and work far from home for months. Women showed a lot of respect for marriage. The belief by most of them was that unmarried women were not respected in the Malawi society.

Some of the studies on the effect of marriage on career choice and progression confirm these findings. A study by Post and Lynch (1995) in the US indicate that there were more unmarried women in employment as compared to married women (66% against 59%). In the same year, 77% of married men were in employment in the US compared to the 59% of married women. By contrast, the unmarried women spent as much time at work as their male counterparts and invested in further education while the married counterparts spent less time at work and did not invest in further education as much as the unmarried ones due to marital demands in the home. Sharon Bender (2007) made similar findings in a study of High School girls that indicates that many of the girls in the study would not combine family and career. They would opt not to work while their children are young or would chose careers they considered less demanding and easier to leave for a few years. In Japan marriages are becoming fewer as most female high school leavers opt to delay families or not to marry at all in order to acquire more education and compete with men on an equal basis as they feel their careers will be disturbed by family responsibilities (Women's Issues 2000). Evidence is vast that marriages interfere with employment demands.

Companies' employment procedures were also another key factor that influenced gender disparity in formal employment. Some 35 (55%) of the companies in the study advertised all posts while 29 (45%) only advertised senior positions in the local media and not the rest of the positions. This lack of advertising of vacancies for low positions by 45% of the companies would affect women more than men mainly because they could not manage to

do door-to-door job search or sit on company gates all day long seeking employment due to the same domestic responsibilities they had. Women's career aspirations differed from men's career aspirations. Women were not as aggressive as men were when it came to job seeking probably because married women took careers as secondary. A study in the UK by Brown et al. (2001) shows some similarities to these findings. The study found out that advertising vacancies in newspapers increased the number of applicants but because it also increased costs, other 'free' recruitment methods were used. Generally, employers filled their vacancies from the pool of applicants available to them and only advertised one-third of the vacancies. Those employers that never advertised junior posts in this study cited the lack of need to do so as they received letters of applications for lower jobs every day while others also cited the high cost involved.

The general feeling among employers was that even if vacancies were advertised, more responses would come from males and not females. If the vacancy were in trades, then 100% responses would come from males. The employers' feeling on the advertising of vacancies and women's responses are confirmed by the findings of a study in the UK by Grimwood and Poppleton (1993) which indicate that when looking for jobs, women do not apply if they do not meet all the requirements of the job specification. They believe they do not have the necessary skills and attributes while men still apply and believe they will be able to pick up quickly the skills they lack once on the job. Nevertheless, Pettman (1979) sums it all as he is of the view that if jobs, careers and training opportunities were made available on an equal basis, there would be no reason in terms of inherent qualities why women should not aspire to almost any suitable job, and perform in it successfully.

Apart from recruitment and selection procedures, employers were blamed for discrimination whereby preferred to recruit men and not women. This discrimination was culturally influenced as some employers just had negative beliefs regarding the performance of women and the fact that women and men possess different characteristics. This finding sheds some light on the institutional theory's assumption that employers determine whom to hire. The industry sector in this study is a good example of

a sector where employers decide to employ more men than women convinced that the nature of their business require male participation. Inquiries into equal opportunities in Australia, the UK and the US between 1990 and 1995 by The House of Representative Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, the Hansard Society and The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (State Services Commission 2006) respectively indicate that there is direct discrimination in both private and public sectors. There are prejudiced attitudes towards women. These result in women experiencing problems of appointment to senior or professional positions or advancement within their organizations. Discrimination is generally viewed as the last obstacle in the recruitment and advancement of women as qualifications are no longer considered at this point as the most important prerequisite in the selection process.

### **3.6.3 SUMMARY**

Disparities were evident in both compositions and occupational distributions of men and women in the sectors. A combination of socio-cultural factors which influenced education of men and women, their choice of occupation, aspirations, division of family responsibilities, their movements and access to job information and which created discriminatory attitudes in employers and companies' recruitment practices influenced these disparities. The proceeding chapter presents conclusions drawn from the study and makes recommendations.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

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### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides some general conclusions about the findings of this study and recommendations on what could be done to solve this problem of gender disparities in employment in the private sector in Malawi. It is divided into three parts:

- Conclusions on gender composition and occupational distribution by gender
- Conclusions on factors influencing the disparities
- Recommendations

#### **4.2 GENDER COMPOSITION AND OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER**

The study established that gender disparities existed in composition and occupational distribution in the private sector in Malawi. The sector employed far more men than women (83% against 17%) and that men numerically dominated all occupational categories. It was the clerical category that had a significantly higher percentage of females than men. Females were also better represented in the administrative/managerial although the difference between the two percentages was small. The results also established the existence of male and female preserves.

#### **4.3 FACTORS INFLUENCING GENDER DISPARITIES IN COMPOSITION AND OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION**

The study established that that there was no single factor that was responsible but a combination of factors that complemented each other as follows:

- Education, which is the key to profitable employment, was one of the major factors that was found to limit the employment of women in the private sector. Women's lower educational attainment compared to men's was given the highest rating by

respondents of the study indicating the importance of education as a tool to entry into formal employment. Culture also played a bigger role in limiting women's and girls' access to education as it encouraged boys to go to school while girls were not, hence limiting girls' access to formal employment as well. As a result, girls end up marrying even before completing their primary education. Culture indirectly chose who should work in future and who should not.

- Most women lacked career aspirations as compared to men. The results indicated that most of the women in employment did not take up professional studies after getting married due to either laziness, domestic responsibilities which demanded that women should get home in good time, or reluctance of their husbands to let them attend evening classes. Some women never applied for internally advertised senior jobs. They were unwilling to take on more responsibilities which could be in conflict with domestic responsibilities. Some refused promotions for fear of being held accountable for actions and omission of their juniors. Women as opposed to men were scared of taking risks while their male counterparts grabbed all opportunities and progressed. As a result, the majority of women in the private sector worked in the clerical category partly because these jobs did not require professional qualifications on entry.
- Cultural norms, values and beliefs played a big role in the choice of occupations of both men and women resulting in the majority of the females being in the clerical category followed by those in the semi-skilled/unskilled category, while for males, the majority were in the latter category followed by the former category.. The clerical category could be said to be a “female preserve” since as many as 46% of the females compared to 21% of the males were in this category. The category of skilled artisans was a “male preserve” as only 3% of the females compared to 19% of the males were in this category. Cultural beliefs have influenced the emergence of a situation where men have a bigger share of jobs since in many organisations, these “male preserves”, which include the category of semi-skilled/unskilled labourers, generally employ higher numbers of staff than the other categories.

- Malawi culture respects married women. The unmarried women are usually regarded as prostitutes. As a result, most young women married soon after completing their MSCE or graduating from the universities or colleges. Some did so even before securing jobs. Once women take on family responsibilities, they fail to compete with men on the job market as they put family affairs first. Because of time constraints and cultural restrictions to their freedom of movement, married women cannot aggressively search for jobs just as men do to the extent of doing door-to-door job searches. In this case, the men find jobs while women are preoccupied with house chores.
  
- The nature of company business was used by some employers as a criterion for the employment of many employees of one sex as opposed to the other. Companies in manufacturing and distribution, for instance whose jobs demand working in dangerous environments and with dangerous machines and which involve lifting of weights employed more males than females. Companies in the transport industry too employed more males than females as their jobs involved travel. Construction industry only employed women as clerks in offices as they considered their work environment to be too harsh for women.
  
- Most women took up clerical and administrative jobs not out of real choices. They just obeyed the dictates of culture in their choices as culture had already defined which jobs they would take up in the formal sector. Their lower levels of education, which were also the result of the same cultural influences, also dictated which level in the hierarchy they would be.
  
- Women were disadvantaged by companies that did not advertise all their vacant positions in the local media as this amounted to lack of offer of equal opportunities. Women ended up losing out in terms of work experience as they could not do door to

door job searches as men did. But even when the vacancies are advertised in newspapers and on the radio or television, men are more likely to apply because they have access to such media than women.

- Discrimination against women in some companies resulting in the employment of hardly any males and only few females. This was another barrier to women's employment participation rates. The belief that certain jobs were only suitable for males in some sectors such as in construction, motor, transport, freight and manufacturing companies, for instance, resulted in discriminatory recruitment practices.

In summary, gender disparities that existed in the composition and occupational distribution in the private sector were created by socio-cultural factors, which had an influence in all areas that affect employment. In addition, recruitment practices of companies in the private sector affected the employment of women more than that of men.

#### **4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study makes the following recommendations:

- The government of Malawi should introduce continue and enhance career talks in both primary and secondary schools, which should be done by successful professionals.
- Primary education should be made compulsory and that parents who do not send their children to school should be severely punished.
- Government extended (GABLE) programme to help all girls from poor households at primary, secondary and tertiary level.

- Government through Ministry of Local Government should initiate conscious raising programmes, which should aim at changing cultural beliefs and biases in the minds of parents and the society. Parents and community leaders should be civic-educated on the benefits of educating all children, boys and girls alike so that cultural beliefs of the boy as “bread winner” as well beliefs in the existence of “male” and “female” occupations should be eliminated.
  
- Government, through the same Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training in consultation with the social partners in employment, should develop a policy to enable women with family responsibilities to engage in employment without problems. This should include provision of affordable child-care facilities within their areas of work and introduction of part-time work and flexible working hours. Although women on part-time jobs would earn less than those on full- time jobs, they would still benefit on continuity of employment and gaining of some work experience.
  
- For employers to understand the role they can play in the reduction of inequalities in employment, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs should in collaboration with ministry of labour and vocational training organize awareness programmes for relevant government officials, employers’ and workers’ organizations, Industrial Relations Court ( IRC ) officials, lawyers and the Malawi Law Commission.
  
- The Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs should introduce radio and television programmes aimed at civic-educating husbands on the need to put behind cultural norms and values that ridicule men who do housework, and take active roles in the management of their households. This would help reduce the burden on women of family responsibilities for marriage should not be a constraint to the employment of women.

## 4.5 SUMMARY

The study aimed at analysing factors that were responsible for gender disparities in the composition and occupational distribution in the private sector in the southern region of Malawi. This section summarises the main findings. It goes further to illuminate on the impact the identified disparities are expected to have on the performance of the private sector as well as the development of the country.

Firstly, the study found that disparities existed in the compositions of men and women in all the three sectors and that men numerically dominated all the three sectors. Secondly, it was found that women were better represented in the service sector while men dominated the rest of the sectors. However, men's numerical dominance varied with some sectors and occupational categories employing far more members of one gender than the other. For instance, industrial sector and skilled artisans' occupational category were found to be male 'preserves' while service sector and clerical category were female 'preserves'. The study further found that significant relationships existed between sector and gender on the one hand and occupational category and gender on the other.

Thirdly, Socio-cultural beliefs, norms and values were found to have some influence on decisions parents made on the education of boys and girls hence their participation in formal employment. Socio-cultural beliefs, norms and values influenced women's aspirations and choice of occupation and limited their career choices. They restricted their freedom of movement hence access to job advertisements which in turn restricted their access to jobs. Cultural beliefs were also found to create discriminatory attitudes in some employers who believed in the existence of 'male' and 'female' jobs. Fourthly, choices made by some companies to advertise some and not all vacancies disadvantaged women more than men.

These findings have implications on the private sectors performance. Firstly, the low participation of women, who form 51% of the total population in Malawi, in formal employment, meant the private sector did not have a large pool of skills to choose from.

In addition, the private sector was missing out on female leadership which could improve corporate governance since women have proved to be less prone to bribes than men (world Bank 2004)..

At national level, the government of Malawi was missing out on returns from its investment on women's education. It is a proved fact that money in the hands of a woman lead to improved family health, children's education and diet, resulting in reduced mortality rates and higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (Hiddinot and Haddat 1995 quoted in World Bank 2004).

Since cultural beliefs, norms and values are similar throughout the country, these disparities and their influencing factors could be applicable to the whole private sector. It would be beneficial if future research focused on the economic impact of the low participation of women in formal employment in Malawi as this would give a complete picture of the problem.

## **APPENDICES**

### **5.1 APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANTS**

- Q1. What is the gender composition of your company?
- Q2. If one sex outnumbers the other, what is the explanation for that?
- Q3. Where are women mostly found in your organization chart and why?
- Q4. How many women occupy managerial positions and why?
- Q5. Between men and women in your organization, which group has more educated people than the other and why?
- Q6. Does your organization have a training policy? If so, to what extent do women utilize the available training opportunities and why?
- Q7. Does your organization have written recruitment procedures outlining steps that must be followed in recruitment of new staff?
- Q8. In terms of occupational distribution, are women spread throughout the organization chart?
- Q9. If not, what is the likely explanation?
- Q10. What is the attitude of employees of your organization towards successful women?
- Q11. In your opinion what could be the other possible reasons for gender imbalances in the gender composition and occupational distribution by gender in your organization?

## 5.2 APPENDIX 2: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

### **ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GENDER DISPARITIES IN FORMAL EMPLOYMENT- THE CASE OF PRIVATE SECTOR IN MALAWI**

Dear Respondent,

I am a student of Master's Degree in Human Resources Management at Chancellor College, conducting a survey on factors that influence gender disparities in formal employment. The findings of this study will be used solely for academic purposes and will be treated with strictest confidence. Your cooperation in filling out this questionnaire will be greatly appreciated.

#### **Note**

Please kindly answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

#### **SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS**

Q1.Name of Organization\_\_\_\_\_

Q2.Department\_\_\_\_\_

Q3.Name of Respondent

(Optional)\_\_\_\_\_

Q4.Sex        Male ☐                      Female ☐

Q5.Age

☐ Under 25years

☐ 25-45years

☐ 45-60years

Q6.Marital Status

☐ Married

☐ Single

☐Widowed

Q7.Highest Education Qualification

☐Doctorate/PhD

☐Master's Degree

☐Bachelor's Degree

☐Diploma

☐MSCE

☐JCE

☐PLSC

Q8.Position held \_\_\_\_\_

Q9.Length of Service\_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION B: GENDER COMPOSITION AND OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION**

Q10. In your opinion, is the number of female and male employees in this organization the same?

☐Yes

☐No

Q11. Which is the dominant gender?

☐Men

☐Women

Q12. Are women spread throughout the organization chart?

☐Yes

☐No

Q13. If no in Q12 above, please explain

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Q14. If there are more men than women, where in the organization are the women mostly found?

- ☐ Top Management
- ☐ Middle Management
- ☐ Lower Management
- ☐ Clerical and below

Q15. What are some of the reasons that explain why women hold the position mentioned in Q14 above (**Multiple Response Allowed**).

- ☐ Women's lower educational levels as compared to men
- ☐ Cultural expectations where women are expected to be inferior to men
- ☐ Women's own lower career aspirations as compared to men
- ☐ Management's negative attitude towards promotion of women into senior positions
- ☐ Management's provision of unequal training opportunities thereby giving preferences to men than women
- ☐ Other reasons, please specify

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Q16. Could you please tell me how many women occupy managerial positions?

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Q17. Please explain your answer to Q16

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Q18. Are there highly academically and professionally qualified women who are occupying positions lower than their qualifications in your organizations?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes in Q18 above, please explain

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### **SECTION C: EDUCATION**

Q19. What do you know about the educational levels of women as compared to men in your organization?

☐ More women than men are holders of MSCE and above

☐ More men than women are holders of MSCE and above

Please explain your answer to Q20 above

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Q20. Given a chance, would you pursue further academic or professional studies to improve your current position in the company

☐ Yes

☐ No

Q21. Please explain your answer to Q20 above

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Q22. If your answer to Q21 is NO, what could be the limiting factors now?

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#### **SECTION D: SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS**

Q23. a) Given a chance, which of the following levels of your organization would you most like to work?

- ☐ Top Management
- ☐ Middle Management
- ☐ Lower Management

b) Please explain

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Q24. a) Given a choice, would you like your immediate boss to be a man or a woman?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ No preference

b) Please, explain your choice

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Q25. How do you view successful women in your organization?

- ☐ Positively as being courageous in society where men dominate
- ☐ Negatively as having progressed through evil means, that is, going out with bosses
- ☐ Positively as role models since majority of women are not highly educated and hence not highly placed in society.
- ☐ As a threat to the success of fellow women in the organization, as most senior women act as bottlenecks preventing other women from succeeding.

☐ Other reasons (Specify)

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Q26. What influenced your choice of occupation?

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Q27. In your opinion, what are some of the socio-cultural factors that influence gender disparities in your organization?

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME**

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