Paper Title: Managing gender diversity in the National Health Service (NHS): An investigation of the role of mentoring and social capital

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Managing gender diversity in the National Health Service (NHS): An investigation of the role of mentoring and social capital

Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to investigate the role of mentoring and social capital in managing gender diversity in senior managerial positions. Gender diversity in the workforce in Britain is increasing (England, 2010; Davies, 2011), but organisations are yet to be successful in ensuring full integration of females in the workplace (Taylor, 2010; Ng and Wyrick, 2011). Mainstream management research historically marginalized gender (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011). This can also be supported by Dwyer, Orlando and Chanwick’s (2003) comment that management literature did not give sufficient attention to gender diversity. It indicates that management literature had failed to fully grasp the significance of managing gender diversity only a decade ago. However, it is now believed that research on gender and diversity is important in management studies (Metcalfe and Woodhams, 2012; Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011).

The percentage of women in the UK labour force is 46.4% while the percentage of men in the UK labour force stands at 53.6% (Catalyst, 2012). Among the people engaged in part-time employment, over 70% are women (ONS, 2012). These statistics reveal that women currently represent nearly half of the labour force but their representation at the senior organisational levels is poor (Coleman, 2011; LaPierre and Zimmerman, 2012; Applebaum, 2013; Muller-Kahle and Schiehll, 2013). In Scotland, only one-third of the managerial jobs are held by women and women earn 12% less than men in full-time employment (EHRC, 2012). According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2011) some of the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in senior positions are: the lack of flexibility in the organisations and the presence of outdated working pattern; underestimation of part-time work; and the tendency of women to switch to self-employment instead of waiting to be promoted to senior management roles. Coleman (2011) summarized the barriers to career progression of females as the result of: male dominated work cultures, especially at the senior levels; prevalence of gender stereotypes which portray males as the leaders and females as the subordinates; genuine and professed result
Moreover, women’s career progression is slow in professions traditionally occupied by men, such as academic Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) (Servon and Vissor, 2011; Isaac, Kaatz and Carnes 2012; Bevan and Learmonth, 2013). It is argued that sluggish progression is the result of persistent assumptions and stereotypes which see women as communal, dependent and passive and thus incapable of successfully handling the demands of a senior role (National Academy of Sciences National Academy of Engineering Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2006).

This research employs intersectionality as a perspective to analyse the extent to which the career development of women are affected when their gender intersects with an ethnic minority background. Ethnicity is taken into account because ethnic diversity in Britain is increasing rapidly (Aspinall, 2012; Heath, et al., 2013).

Therefore, the main objectives of the research are:

1. To investigate whether access to mentorship is likely to promote the career progression of females from different ethnic backgrounds; and

2. To analyse whether access to social capital is likely to promote the career progression of females from different ethnic backgrounds

**Setting the scene: an overview of managing diversity and related concepts**

Managing diversity has now become more important than ever before because of several reasons such as, globalization, the rapidly changing workforce demographics and the increasing consciousness among people of the fact that differences exist between individuals (Cox, 2001; Hays-Thomas, 2004; Thomas, 2005; Hite and McDonald, 2010). The practice of diversity management is prevalent in both public and private organisations (Kirton and Greene, 2009). The Human Resources area of organisations are primarily responsible for making opportunities equally available to people of all race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and physical ability (Shen et al, 2009).
A diverse workforce benefits organisations and society in a number of ways. For example, in business organisations, diversity is a pivotal source of competitive advantage (Basset Jones, 2005; Herring, 2009) and is linked to profitability (Richard, 2000; Jackson, Joshi and Erhardt, 2003; Ng and Wyrick, 2011). A number of studies were conducted to establish the business case of managing diversity and to illustrate the benefits that diversity management brings to all stakeholders of an organisation (see Cornelius et al. 2001; Mulholland, Ozbilgin and Worman, 2006; Ozbilgin et al. 2008; Davies, 2011). Proponents of diversity management indicate that diversity is important in the workplace as it enhances the effectiveness and productivity of organisations (Choi and Rainey, 2010) through broadening the perspective of employees, creating stronger teams, and adding to the resources required for problem solving (Cox, 2001; Herring, 2009). On the other hand, it has been argued that the benefits outweigh the potential costs of conflict and lower group cohesiveness (Skerry, 2002; Herring, 2009). The benefits of a diverse workforce are also emphasized by the theories of organisational change (Katz and Miller, 1986; Cox, 1993; Thomas and Elly, 1996; Cross, 2000; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000; Thomas, 2001; Zane, 2002).

There are different types of diversity that the organisations need to manage, such as gender, age, ethnicity and disability. The focus of this paper is on gender diversity.

**Managing Gender Diversity**

The most cited definition of managing diversity is provided by Kandola and Fullerton (1998, p.8), “*The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people consisting of visible and non-visible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and workstyle. It is founded in the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everyone feels valued, where all talents are fully utilized and in which organisational goals are met.*” The word gender refers to the social connotation of being ‘a man’ or ‘a woman’ (Game and Pringle, 1984). Therefore from the definitions of managing diversity and gender, it can be inferred that managing gender diversity refers to managing a gender balanced workforce, where both men and women are represented in equal proportion to reflect their representation in the society.
According to Acker (2012), gender and organisations began to be theorized in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a result of criticisms from feminist scholars that conventional organisational research lacks adequacy due to the fact that they fail to recognize the importance of gender in working life (see, Acker and Van Houten, 1974; Kanter, 1977).

Over the years, the literature on the study of women and work with explanations for the lack of women in top managerial positions has been enriched by researchers. LaPierre and Zimmerman (2012, p.101) have classified the explanations of under-representation of women at the top into two basic categories. The first of the two categories are those that emphasize the characteristics of individual employees to explain their under-representation at the top. The second category focuses on the work environment to explain the under-representation women. The two categories can be seen in the work of Kanter, 1977; Reskin, 1993; Tharenou, 1999 among others. These two approaches eventually led to the development of the ‘pipeline theory’ and the ‘glass ceiling effect’. While the pipeline theory is based on the view that women’s progression to top management can be achieved as women gain more qualifications and work experience, the glass ceiling concept is focused on the obscure yet powerful forces that prevented capable, qualified women from reaching the top management positions (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Carceres-Rodriguez, 2011; Powell, 2012; Smith, Caputi and Crittenden, 2012).

However, gender does not always work alone in limiting women’s career. Females at the intersection of other protected characteristics, such as ethnicity, sexuality, religion etc. find it even more difficult (Shields, 2008) to progress their career.

The theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is rooted on the idea that gender inequality do not operate on its own, it intersects with other forms of inequality (Acker, 2012). Therefore to enhance gender diversity in organisations, understanding the concept of intersectionality is of particular importance.

Intersectionality and diversity management

Intersectionality provides researchers with a tool to research the discrimination faced by women at the intersection of race, religion, ethnicity, class, culture and other variables.
Intersectionality is currently an integral part of gender studies (Davies, 2008; Lewis, 2009; Kerner, 2012) and hence in understanding the management of diversity in organisations. Holvino (2010) and Alcazar, Fernandez, and Gardy (2013) stressed the importance of considering intersectionality before designing HR practices for managing diversity.

One of the major challenges for Human Resource Management (HRM) is managing diversity (Benschop, Y. 2001; Alcazar, Fernandez and Gardy, 2013) and one of the key functions of HRM is Human Resource Development (HRD). HRD is integral to the process of career development of all the people working within an organization (McDonald and Hite, 2005). The aspects of HRD that this research considers for managing diversity are mentoring and social capital.

**Mentoring and Social Capital**

Hezlett and Gibson (2007) contended that the understanding and application of mentoring and social capital are likely to remain very significant for the HRD professionals in organisations. McDonald and Hite (2005) categorised the responsibilities of the HRD function as bounded activities and boundary spanning activities. They identified mentoring as one of the bounded activities of HRD. Mentoring is very useful in promoting career development (Morrison and Glinow, 1990; Gubbins and Garavan, 2005; Noon, 2010). Boundary spanning activities are identified as: informal learning; networks; community involvement; and unconventional forms of mentoring. McDonald and Hite (2005) concurred with the view that networking opportunities, the informal ones in particular, are difficult to avail by minority professionals and managers (Ibarra, 1993; Combs, 2003; Forret and Dougherty, 2004). Therefore, based on the review of HRD literature, this current research investigates the role mentoring and social capital in promoting the career advancement of women from different ethnic backgrounds to senior managerial roles.
**Mentoring**

Mentoring of employees is of utmost significance for the development of human resources (Kram, 1985; Daloz, 1990; Segermann-Peck, 1991; Bozeman and Feeney, 2007; Peterson, et al., 2012). Mentoring is the process where a more experienced person supports the personal and professional growth of a less experienced person. The less experienced person is the protégé or mentee, and the more experienced person is the mentor. Mentoring is a mutually beneficial relationship, but the usual focus of a mentoring relationship in the workplace is the professional development of the protégé (Russell and Adams, 1997; Noe, Greenberger and Wang, 2002; Hezlett and Gibson, 2005, 2007).

Although mentoring is beneficial to the career success of both men and women (Allen et al. 2004; Ng et al. 2005; O’Brien et al 2008); there are studies that suggest that mentoring is particularly beneficial to the career success of women (Ragins 1997a; Ragins 1997b; Tharenou 2005). In a large scale, longitudinal study of mentorship in Australia, Tharenou (2005) found that mentorship support was more helpful for women in advancing their career compared to men.

**Social Capital**

Social Capital refers to the network of people that an individual is connected to and from whom they can obtain potential career benefits. Coleman (1998) identified social capital as a resource because this network is built upon trust and shared values and with an expectation of mutuality. The notion of social capital originates from Sociology (Portes 2000; Storberg-Walker, 2007), but it is used in numerous disciplines, including Human Resource Development (HRD) to explain, understand and determine a number of phenomenon (Coleman, 1988; Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994; Lin 2001; Fine, 2002; Storberg-Walker, 2007). For example, Bourdieu (1984) attributed the lack of women in senior managerial roles to insufficient social capital possessed by women. Similarly, Eagly and Carli (2007) also maintained that gender affects access to social capital, disfavouring women.

There is evidence to suggest that networking is essential in the current economy in finding opportunities of career progression both within and outside of an employee’s work organization (for example, Osnowitz 2010; Vallas, 2011; Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012). Kirton and Greene (2005) argued that social networks are male-dominated and females are
excluded from it informally by the practices and behaviours of their male co-workers. Thus, female career advancement in organisations is inhibited by their inability to access micro and meso level social capital (Miller, 2007). This demonstrates that although access to social capital could potentially aid women in their career progress, women fail to reap the benefits of social capital.

Finally, the review of the literature confirmed that women are underrepresented in senior managerial positions. It is seen that women face many hurdles, which are often invisible, in progressing their career. It was also seen that access to mentorship and social capital is likely to help in managing diversity at the senior managerial positions. Therefore, to assess whether access to mentoring and social capital can actually affect women’s career progression, the research attempts to answer the following questions derived from the literature review:

1. What is the effect of mentoring on the career development of females from different ethnicities to senior management roles?
2. What is the effect of access to social capital on the career development of females from different ethnicities to senior management roles?

**Research methodology**

The paper implements a qualitative and quantitative framework to triangulate and perform an intersectional analysis of the female gender and ethnicity in senior managerial roles within the research organisation. The quantitative data is analysed using the SPSS software package while the qualitative data is analysed using thematic analysis.

**Data Collection**

The data for the research was collected from one of the fourteen health boards in Scotland. The types of data collected were primary data and secondary data. Primary data were collected through questionnaire surveys and interviews. The source of secondary data was relevant documents and statistics that were obtained from the organisation. The questionnaire data and the documents and statistics collected from the Scottish NHS Board are used to understand the nature of reality in the organisation. Whereas, the data obtained through interviews helped in understanding people’s interpretation of the reality.
The primary data were collected from the male and female senior level managers of the organisation. All senior managers were identified based on their pay scale which was in bands 8 and 9. The pay system of the NHS has three pay spines or series of pay bands. One of the series is for the employees in the remit of Doctors’ and Dentists’, one for employees who are under the extended remit of the pay review body for nursing and other health professionals; and the last one is for other NHS staff who are directly employed, but it excludes the most senior managers. The employees in the remit of Doctors’ and Dentists’ were not included in this research.

Questionnaire

A list of 639 senior employees was obtained from the organisation. The list consisted of 460 females and 179 males. It was possible to successfully send out the questionnaire to a total of 633 participants. A total of 257 responses were obtained. Finally, 242 out of the 257 responses were complete and useable for analysis. This gives a 38.23% response rate, which is acceptable.

Among the respondents, there were 179 females (74%), 62 males (25.6%) and 1 person identified himself/herself to be in the gender reassigned category. The ethnicities of the respondents were Scottish (72.3%), Irish (2.9%), British (21.5%), Indian (0.4%), mixed background (2.1%) and other (0.8%).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 13 senior managers, who were spread over all the area covered by the NHS Board. Each of the interviews lasted between 40 minutes to 1 hour 40 minutes. Out of the 13 interviewees, 10 were female and 3 were male. The age of the interviewees ranged from 34 years to 61 years and the ethnicities represented are British, Scottish, Irish, Indian, German, Middle-eastern and mixed background.

Research Findings

Findings are obtained by analysing the primary data using SPSS software package and thematic analysis. The secondary data collected from the NHS Board were analysed to establish the research problem and help in answering the research questions.
The secondary data collected from the NHS Board showed that the percentage of females dropped significantly from salary Band 5 to Band 9. In November 2013, there were 88.83% female employees in Band 5, but only 37.50% at the top salary band, which is Band 9. This clearly shows that females are not represented in equal proportions in all levels of management. Although over 80% of the employees in the junior and middle-managerial levels in the NHS Board are women, the most senior management level is very male dominated. Therefore based on this data, it can be concluded that the glass-ceiling is prevalent in obstructing the career progression of females to senior management roles.

Table 1. Percentage of female employees in salary Band 5 to Band 9 as of November 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female%</th>
<th>Band 5</th>
<th>Band 6</th>
<th>Band 7</th>
<th>Band 8A</th>
<th>Band 8B</th>
<th>Band 8C</th>
<th>Band 8D</th>
<th>Band 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>88.83%</td>
<td>84.82%</td>
<td>81.35%</td>
<td>76.81%</td>
<td>77.06%</td>
<td>70.27%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is also evident by comments made by the interviewees:

“At the management meetings, the majority of the people around the table are females, but when you are higher up in the organisation I think the balance is either you know there might be a slight more percentage of males or there will either be an equal percentage of males and females but in comparison to the whole gender diversity of the organisation it is not reflected at a higher level. I don’t think it’s reflected at a higher level” - Respondent Female 1 (RF1)

“when I sit on our management team meeting there’s someone from NHS Lothian, NHS Grampian, NHS Tayside and NHS GG&C and its all men, I’m the only woman” – RF2

**Ethnicity of female employees in the organisation**

Data on the ethnicity of the female employees from salary band 5 to salary band 9 show that among the 37.50% female employees in salary band 9, the majority were Irish at 66.67% while only 33.33% were Scottish. There was no other ethnic group represented among the females in band 9.

The range of different ethnic groups represented by the female employees from salary band 5 to salary band 9 can be grouped into the following categories: Asian, Caribbean, White – British, White – Irish, White – Other, and Mixed or multiple ethnic group. However, the
ethnicities of all the female employees from pay Band 5 to pay Band 8D are not known as some declined to disclose their ethnicity.

Female employees in Band 5 and Band 6 are most ethnically diverse. In Band 5, there are 0.31% Asians, 0.03% Caribbean or Black, 0.21% is from mixed or multiple ethnic groups and 1.25% of the female employees are from other white background.

As shown in Table 2 below, female Asian employees are only represented in Band 5, Band 6 and Band 8A. The highest percentage of female Asian employees is in Band 6 at 0.37%, and the lowest in Band 5 at 0.31%. While, the representation rate of Asian females is only 0.32% in Band 8A. Female Caribbean is only represented in pay band 5 at 0.03%. However, the highest percentage of females who identified themselves as White – British is in Band 8D at 28.57% while the lowest percentage of White – British females is represented in Band 5 at 7.01%. The percentage of White – British females increases sharply from band 7 at 8.16% to Band 8A at 14.94%. Another significant rise is percentage of White – British female is seen from Band 8C to Band 8D. At Band 8D, it almost doubles to 28.57% from 15.38% in band 8C. Also, White – Irish females are only represented in salary Band 5, 6, 7, 8A and Band 9. Their representation is very low in the first four bands at only 1.26% on average. Nevertheless, there is a significant leap in the percentage of White – Irish females in Band 9 at 66.67%. Similarly, White – Scottish females are represented in all the bands. However, the percentage of White – Scottish females is generally inversely proportional to increasing salary bands. The highest percentage is represented in Band 5 at 67.29% and the lowest in Band 9 at 33.33%. Conversely, females from other white backgrounds are only represented from Band 5 to Band 8A. The lowest percentage is in Band 5 at 1.25% and the highest percentage is in Band 8A at 2.38%. Similar to females from other white backgrounds, females from mixed or multiple ethnic groups are also represented from Band 5 to Band 8A. Their highest percentage is in Band 6 at 0.37% and the lowest is in Band 5 at 0.21%.
Table 2. Ethnicity of female employees in Band 5 to Band 9 as of November 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Band 5</th>
<th>Band 6</th>
<th>Band 7</th>
<th>Band 8A</th>
<th>Band 8B</th>
<th>Band 8C</th>
<th>Band 8D</th>
<th>Band 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.31%</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
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<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White - British</td>
<td>7.01%</td>
<td>8.21%</td>
<td>8.16%</td>
<td>14.94%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White - Irish</td>
<td>1.15%</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
<td>1.54%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White - Scottish</td>
<td>67.29%</td>
<td>66.17%</td>
<td>67.14%</td>
<td>65.58%</td>
<td>61.90%</td>
<td>57.69%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White - Other</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>1.48%</td>
<td>1.65%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed or multiple</td>
<td>0.21%</td>
<td>0.37%</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>ethic group</td>
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The data presented in Table 2 clearly indicates that females from ethnic minority backgrounds struggle to progress to the senior managerial levels of the organisation. Therefore, it can be concluded that when gender intersects with ethnicity it is even more difficult for females to progress their career.

The next sections explore whether access to mentoring and social capital is likely to promote the career progression of females and females from ethnic minority backgrounds.

**Mentoring**

72.6% male and 64.8% female questionnaire respondents indicated that they had never been mentored. Out of the 35.2% females who were mentored, 19.6% indicated that it had helped them in their career progression. However, among the 27.4% males mentored, 17.7% indicated that it helped them progress their career. This indicates that males find mentoring more useful for career progression compared to females.

Here are some comments made by the female interviewees on mentoring:

“I think I did find it (mentoring) useful I think, but I don’t think I used it right, I don’t think I used it effectively” - RF 1
“my mentor helped to tease out the skills that I was not recognising myself as having, what he said was that I lacked confidence in moving my career forward and he helped tease out those issues”

“I have found it (mentoring) useful and I know that people I have managed have found it useful so I have mentored people and I have been mentored and I think it is a really good way of helping women.” - RF 2

“I think it’s (mentoring) a really useful tool and I think that mentoring is really helpful. I think I certainly wouldn’t be precious about it at all, if people want to look out with the service to be mentored, either professionally, managerially, I think to do some shadowing of peoples roles I think gives you an insight into what people do”. – RF 12

Social Capital

The majority of the questionnaire respondents said they did not meet their managers socially. Only 27.27% of them acknowledged to meeting their managers socially. However, during the interviews it was quite apparent that social capital is utilised in the organisation to obtain promotion to senior managerial roles. It was discovered that the concept of social capital is widely misunderstood. Many regarded it as a process where people went for social drinks and played golf with their bosses as means to gain promotion. Once the voice recorder was switched off, one of the managers interviewed accused the CEO’s wife of being unfairly promoted to a key role within the organisation. The researcher was able to verify the comment from a newspaper article. Thus there was a general sense of disapproval associated with the concept of social capital within the organisation. When the concept of social capital as a feature of HRD was explained to the interviewees, they agreed that if used appropriately, it has the potential to benefit all employees.

Some of the comments made by the interviewees demonstrate the use of informal social capital to progress one’s career. Nevertheless, it was found that engaging in individual social capital building activities and consequent career progression is not always viewed favourably by all employees. For example, one of the senior managers said,
“you can also look at who do you associate with, if you are associated with the chief exec or the chairman then it is more likely you are going to go up the career ladder much more quickly and that’s a given and we see it and its happening, it happens in our organisation, and that’s a sad thing when that happens because what we are doing is not promoting the right people what we are doing is promoting on who you know and not what you know.” - RF1

The interviewees confirmed that social capital building activities that are sponsored by the organisation are likely to benefit the career progression of women from all ethnic backgrounds along with men. For example, one of the senior managers commented, “I think any connection into a networking group is an enhancement to people’s careers whether they are male or female. Again, it would help women but it would help anybody if you could get into the right networking group that has the right people in it with people who are interested in what you are doing, yes it can help.” – RF2

However it was also noted by some of the interviewees that, often the opportunities of networking are arranged by the organisation at hours that inherently exclude certain groups of people, for example women with family responsibilities as can be seen in this comment, “There’s been a series of what they call breakfast senior management events and it’s been run by our chief executive and it is supposed to be open to managers within the organisation who want to get tips and to find out you know how different pieces of improvement work or you know managerial skills and things and they’re really interesting topics and you know you can see the type of people who would be invited to that and who would make a massive huge effort to go there but they are at 7.30-8:00 o’clock in the morning and for somebody like me who’s got a child to get to school and I work around about my family I’m never going to be in a position to be able to make it. I’m sure there are friendships and things that come out of these supposedly informal kind of events for progression but I, you know you’re excluded immediately. You’ve got a child who’s got to go to school.” - RF 4

Overall, the interviewees expressed the view that building social capital is beneficial to the progression of women’s career regardless of ethnicity. They believed that women of all ethnicity would benefit from access to social capital.
Conclusion

The research findings clearly suggest that human resource development activities in the form of mentoring and access to social capital can contribute to managing diversity at the top levels of the organisational hierarchy. At the NHS Board where the research was conducted, it is observed that although women are represented in high numbers at the initial levels of the hierarchy, their proportion declines disproportionately at the top levels. Similarly to gender, ethnic representation also declines significantly as the hierarchy increases.

The findings of the first research question revealed that although females in managerial roles perceive mentoring to be very important to their career development, they also admitted to failing to utilise the benefits of mentoring to the full extent.

Building social capital was also seen as crucial to the career development and progression of female employees from all ethnic backgrounds. However, there were mixed views on social capital as some saw it as being misused to gain unfair promotions within the organisation. The second research question also unveiled that females with family responsibility are sometimes systematically rejected from social capital building events.

Finally, this research contributed to knowledge by investigating the role of mentoring and social capital in the career progression of females from different ethnic backgrounds who are performing managerial roles in the National Health Service.
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