

Cronyism as a coping strategy: How do female academics deal with the lack of emancipative support?

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to explore how female academics use cronyism to cope with the lack of emancipative support resulting from their intense teaching and research duties, poor representation at senior administrative levels, and their exhausting familial commitments.

Methodology: Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 female academics working full-time at four public universities in Egypt.

Findings: The findings showed that the low action resources (considering their unreasonable teaching loads, research requirements, and supervision engagements), emancipative values (the unfair representation of female academics at senior administrative levels) and civic entitlement (universities not serious about promoting gender equality) are perceived by female academics as a lack of empowerment that necessitates their adoption of cronyism as their main coping strategy. Moreover, in male-dominated societies, female academics who do not have the power to shape their work-related status tend to use undesirable behaviors such as cronyism to mitigate the negative consequences of the shocks they encounter.

Originality/ value: This paper contributes by filling a gap in human resources management in which empirical studies on the relationship between cronyism, emancipation, and career shocks have been limited so far.

Keywords: organizational cronyism, career shocks, female academics, theory of emancipation, public universities, Egypt

1. Introduction

A career shock is defined as "a disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one's career" (Akkermans et al., 2018, p. 4). Work related shocks have become a normality in a complex and uncertain world (Nalis et al., 2021). Individuals respond to shocks differently depending on how a shock is described (Nalis et al., 2021), and whether it effects early-career, mid-career, and late-career employees (Akkermans et al., 2021). Career resilience (Seibert et al., 2016) and adaptability (Mansur and Felix, 2021) are found to play a key role in responding to career shocks. Nevertheless, little is understood about the impact of career shocks on career development (Akkermans et al., 2018, 2021; Mansur and Felix, 2021; Pak et al., 2021). Moreover, recent studies emphasize individual agency as a driver of career development, while overlooking the influence of career shocks (Akkermans et al., 2018). These studies also overlook the role of context in shaping career shock implications (Van Helden et al., 2023).

Academics in general are exposed to career shocks beyond their control. These shocks have consequences for academic career decisions and development, and can be positive – promotion or pay rises; or negative – reduction in workforce or illness (Akkermans et al., 2021). This area has attracted minimal attention (Grace et al., 2015) and mainly among female academics (Van Helden et al., 2023). Despite the rise in the number of female academics and the improvement in their circumstances, gender inequality exists in higher education (UNESCO and Times Higher Education). Female academics face more gender-related challenges than males, including the glass ceiling, childcare responsibilities, and cultural stereotypes (Casad et al., 2021; Clavero and Galligan, 2021). Therefore, career shocks could pose unique barriers to women's perceived opportunities for career advancement (Van Helden et al., 2023).

In this research, it is argued that cronyism can be a coping strategy for female academics dealing with career shocks. Organisational cronyism is defined as granting privileges to subordinates based on relationships and connections rather than merit. This happens when a manager favours employees based on unrelated criteria or an exchange of favours (Begley et al., 2010) by forming in-groups and/or discriminating against out-group employees. Therefore, cronyism can result in the latter group feeling excluded and ignored (Bilal et al., 2021). The limited research available on cronyism demonstrates its negative impact on job satisfaction and advancement (Turhan, 2013). Nevertheless, an insignificant number of empirical studies has been conducted on organisational cronyism in the higher education sector (Shaheen et al., 2021).

Favouritism and dependence on non-performance-related factors in assessing, promoting, and privileging employees not only disturbs their colleagues, but also damages their sense of justice (Hoy & Tarter, 2004). Cronyism negatively impacts employees who are excluded from privilege, commitment, performance, and job satisfaction (Khatri & Tsang, 2003; Khatri et al., 2006; Begleyet et al., 2010). Cronyism differs from nepotism, which entails preferential treatment to a family member and other close people in terms of hiring, performance evaluation, and promotion, while cronyism mostly does not entail any influence on hiring decisions (Jaskiewicz et al., 2013). The main difference between cronyism and nepotism is that cronvism is broader and might be used on different grounds, such as race, political affiliation, ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender, citizenship, origin, friendship, and so on, whereas nepotism is traditionally directed towards family members and those who have close ties to the manager (Spranger et al., 2012; Weingrod, 1968). Moreover, cronyism is based on exchange and mutually beneficial relationships (Khatri et al., 2006). For example, a manager extends a specific promotion to an employee based on personal relationships, and in exchange, this manager expects unlimited obedience from this employee. Sustaining cronyism necessitates that what is exchanged needs to be valuable to both parties (Khatri et al., 2006). In cultures characterised by power distance, nepotism and cronyism develop many influential informal social networks and subsequently in-group (favoured) and out-group (not favoured) classifications (El Baz et al., 2018).

To the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous study has explored how female academics deal with the lack of emancipative support and no previous literature on the use of cronyism in the academic context has been found. Hence, the present study helps to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on female academics working in several public universities in Egypt in an attempt to explore the extent to which the lack of emancipative support represents a career shock for them and why they would use cronyism as a coping strategy. By doing so, this study contributes to the literature on career shocks by responding to calls from Akkermans et al. (2018) and Mansur and Felix (2021). It also contributes to the cohort of studies on the role of emancipative support in overcoming work-related hardships, particularly among minority-affiliated members (female academics in this case) (Welzel, 2013) and cronyism as a culture-specific strategy adopted by females in male-dominated societies (Mousa, 2022).

2. Literature review

2.1 career shock

Career shocks can have negative or positive impacts on career development. Positive career shocks, such as obtaining a research grant or promotion, can foster career development (Greco et al., 2015; Pak et al., 2021; Mousa et al., 2021a), and critical and novel workplace events may fuel employee creativity and outstanding performance (Chen et al., 2021; Mousa, 2022a, b). Conversely, negative career shocks, such as job insecurity or downsizing, can have damaging effects on career optimism and progression (Hofer et al., 2021). Short-term contracts may aggravate uncertainty and discourage young academics from developing their human and social capital (Petersen et al., 2012; Mousa, 2021b, c). Career shock consequences are also dependent on other factors. For example, the 2008 financial crisis was negatively associated with the fear of foreclosure (Ragins et al., 2014). Moreover, negative career shocks can have long-term positive consequences when certain psychological resources, such as career competencies and resilience, make such shocks more manageable (Akkermans et al., 2020). For instance, the loss of a job might be seen as negative

in the short run but an opportunity for career progression and/or change and hence more job satisfaction in the long run (Zikic and Richardson, 2007). This might also be the case for individual transitions from employment into successful self-employment (Rummel et al., 2019).

2.2 organizational cronyism

The word cronyism has its roots in the Greek word 'khronios', which means crony and denotes a longstanding friendship (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010). The first use of cronyism as a concept occurred in 1952 in the USA, when New York Times journalists used it to describe the appointment of some employees in an official postal administration based on personal relationships rather than merit. The incident occurred under the Truman regime (Dunar, 1984; Khatri & Tsang, 2003). Cronyism is defined by Oxford English Dictionary (1989) as "an interconnected group of people or organizations having certain connections which may be explicated to gain preferment, information, etc." It involves "a reciprocal exchange transaction where party A shows favour to party B based on shared membership in a social network at the expense of party C's equal or superior claim to the valued resource" (Khatri et al., 2006, p. 62). Organizational cronyism is defined as assigning more privileges (mostly undeserved) to subordinates with whom the manager or leader maintains relationships and/or connections (Khatri, 2017; Turhan, 2014; Zhang & Gill, 2019). Thus, merit is constantly neglected when practising cronyism (Khatri & Tsang, 2003). Only cronies – those who receive favourable treatment and privileges – experience job satisfaction, while non-cronies suffer from exclusion, marginalisation, inequality, and sometimes ostracism (Arasli et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2013). Engaging in cronyism necessitates the following four conditions: sharing network membership, no immediate return of favour, exchanging something valuable, and occurring at a third party's expense (Begley et al. 2010). Organizational cronyism is perceived as a biased employment relationship in which managers misuse their power by granting some subordinates more privileges based on anti-meritocratic factors (Bilal et al., 2020).

When facing career shocks, some female academics actively engage in cronyism behaviours. According to the theory of social exchange, all relations are based on the principles of reciprocity or "give and take" (Kelley and Thibaut 1978) or "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours". Cronyism is a kind of reciprocal exchange in which favouritism occurs within social networks and personal relationships (Begley et al., 2010). Nevertheless, cronyism can also follow the principle of indirect reciprocity; in other words, "I scratch your back, and someone else will scratch mine" (Chen and Ren, 2023). Therefore, while nepotism is a type of favouritism based on kinship ties, cronyism is a broader concept which extends to non-kinship ties. For example, guanxihu in Chinese culture or wasta in the Arab Middle East culture refer to employee use of informal and personal connections to receive preferential treatment (Hutchings and Weir, 2005). This can include an increase in salary, promotion, positive appraisal reports, and so on. These practices could create challenges such as demotivated staff, unfair competition, negative performance, and high turnover (Khatri and Tsang, 2016).

Female academics may be disadvantaged by cronyism, for example, if a male professor favours his male colleagues over his female ones. This can lead women to be excluded from opportunities for research funding, publication, and promotion (Mama, 2003). Similarly, female academics may be overlooked for opportunities or collaborations if they are not part of the "in-group" of a particular department or research team, which leads to a lack of career advancement (Gómez Cama et al., 2016). Additionally, cronyism can contribute to a hostile work environment for female academics. If a male professor is seen as playing favourites or only promoting and collaborating with his male colleagues, this can create a culture of exclusion and marginalisation for women (Mousa, 2021a). Nevertheless, female academics can also be involved in cronyism behaviours to mitigate these practices. For example, Mousa (2022) found that female academics in Egypt used hypocritical phrases with their department chairs and spouses to mitigate the career shocks following the COVID-19 outbreak.

2.3 Emancipation theory

The theory of emancipation (Welzel, 2013) is one of the most significant theories in addressing the empowerment of females although it was later used by Mousa and Samara (2021) to shed light on the status of disabled employees in the public sector. In his theory, Welzel (2013) considers that the empowerment of females derives from the following three dimensions. First, 'action resources' reflect the extent to which females have access to all needed material and intellectual resources (Welzel, 2013). In this case, access to leading positions, information, and rational teaching and research loads are examples of the action resources that female academics may seek. Second, 'emancipative values' describe the extent to which female academics experience an inclusive workplace atmosphere and accordingly, would seek to occupy senior academic positions regardless of gender expectations (Welzel, 2013). Third, 'civic entitlement' refers to the extent to which universities are serious in decreeing laws and regulations that promote gender equality and cultural tolerance in the academic context (Welzel, 2013).

2.4 Female Academics in the Egyptian Higher Educational Context

Several studies have investigated the barriers facing female academics and causing their underrepresentation in senior leadership positions (e.g., Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016; Westoby et al., 2021). These barriers include heavy teaching loads, longer work hours, low self-perception, negative attitudes of managers and colleagues, and limited empowerment opportunities (Mousa, 2021a). Female academics are challenged with the conflicting demands and the pressure of balancing their work-life roles (Ahmad and Masood, 2011). In many cases, female academics compromise family life to meet academic commitments, which they consider as an individual failure (Toffoletti and Karen Starr, 2016). They might give priority to teaching and administrative responsibilities, which reflects negatively on their research activities and hence career progression (Misra et al., 2012).

Helden et al. (2021) found that networks contribute to career advancement and academic leadership positions, particularly for men and mainly in the masculine academic context. Female academics lack support such as mentoring and role modelling to achieve career goals (Blood et al., 2012), academic promotion, and leadership appointments (Reed et al., 2011). For example, women academics are more likely than men to work part-time (Reed et al., 2011). Moreover, Guarino and Borden (2017) found that female faculty perform significantly more service than men in academia where they need to cultivate their ability to refuse service requests. This is commonly the case when the department chairs are male (Bowles et al., 2007). While men consider academic promotion as a positive career shock, women stated that fast-track promotion can have both positive and negative consequences and especially if they have childcare responsibilities (Van Helden et al., 2023). Gender-based caregiving expectations hinder productivity and increase stress and anxiety related to promotion and tenure success (Penney, 2015).

Mainly in conservative, patriarchal contexts, female academics are denied senior academic administrative positions due to the prevalent gendered socio-cultural values such as in the case of Egypt (Mousa, 2021b, c). In Jordan, Ensour et al. (2017) found that discriminatory laws and traditional family norms result in treating women as secondary breadwinners and rejecting their leadership which in turn harms their academic career development. Interestingly, El-Far et al. (2021) revealed that Palestinian academic mothers and non-mothers are placed at a disadvantageous position as "caregivers" and are consequently expected to extend their caretaking services to those close to them, to include their children, parents, siblings, and even students. Therefore, female academics in such contexts might be unwilling to take leadership positions unless they secure strong family support which is crucial for their academic career advancement (Nguyen, 2013).

The poor representation of female academics has been ascribed to social and organizational factors that hinder their career progression towards high cadre administrative and academic positions (Reid, 2015; Case & Richley, 2013, Mousa et al., 2020; Mousa & Chaouali, 2021, Mousa & Mahmood, 2022; Mousa et al., 2021a, b). For example, normalizing how positions at the top of the hierarchy are predominantly

masculine, while female positions are mostly at the lower end inhibits women from seeking management positions such as heads of department or rectors (Mousa, 2021a). Among the workplace distributive injustices that female academics face are wage gaps, sexual harassment, inequality in research funding or promotion opportunities (Patterson et al., 2009; Mousa & Abdelgaffar, 2022). However, most of the literature on the career challenges female academics face in higher education institutions is situated in the Western context (Eagly & Wood, 2013; Rhoads & Gu, 2012).

The contradictory and complex positioning of early- and mid-career female academics in the Egyptian higher education context has so far been undocumented in the literature. Few scholars have highlighted the contextual challenges encountering Middle Eastern and specifically Egyptian females (e.g., Mousa, 2021a, b; Mousa et al., 2021a, b; Mousa & Mahmood, 2022) or have investigated such challenges in other academic contexts. In these studies, female academics perceive gender biases from their male colleagues and social circle that depresses their ambitions to seek senior career opportunities, which they may forgo for peace of mind. Institutional prejudices limit female empowerment and boost masculine power distance (Mousa, 2021a). Many times, leadership is perceived as a transgression and associated with social and affective costs, so women are advised to conform to patriarchal norms or else risk their happiness (Ahmed, 2010). Building on biased interpretations of Islam, some male academics in power positions deny female colleagues from their right to be promoted or recruited to management positions (Mousa, 2021a, b, c). And socio-cultural values denounce the position of women in power. The dominance of a masculinist organizational and societal culture in the Egyptian and Middle Eastern academic context explains the suffering of female academics from gender prejudices and discrimination (Mousa, 2021a).

3. Research design

The present study uses a qualitative research design "to make sense of, or interpret phenomena, in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln,1994, p. 2) and "explore individual understandings and subjective experiences" (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 649) of cronyism as perceived and practiced by female academics in post-Covid-19 pandemic times. The choice of a qualitative design pertains to its usefulness in gathering critical information about social and institutions practices, as well as a particular phenomenon in an understudied socio-cultural context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, 2008, 1994). Because cronyism is still an under-researched research area (Pak et al., 2021) particularly in Egyptian higher education studies, using a qualitative research design would be best to examine the target organizational population and phenomena. 32 female faculty working full time at four, out of a total number of 26 Egyptian public universities, were recruited to participate in this study. Respondents were recruited via personal contacts using purposive and snowball sampling. Egyptian female academics, holding a PhD and at least 10 years of experience, were targeted as they struggle with on-job challenges and gender-based expectations at the professional and social levels. The demographic details of the sample are found in Table 1.

(Insert Table 1 here)

Acknowledging the sensitivity of the topic and concerns of Egyptian female academics about the intolerance to radical perspectives and absence of academic equity and free discourse on human rights issues, the authors of this study assured participants that their responses would only be used for research purposes and would be confidential and anonymous. Before the interviews, participants were told that they could refrain from responding to any question or withdraw from the interviews at any time. During data analysis, identifiers were removed from transcribed interviews and replaced with codes. In focus groups, respondents answered questions about cronyism practices they experienced, observed, heard about, or benefited from in academia. Interviews were conducted in Arabic, the mother tongue of the authors, and lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. Transcripts were translated into English and back to Arabic then to English again by different authors to ensure accuracy of translation. Because the research topic is critical, not all respondents accepted to have their interviews recorded, so the authors had to take detailed notes.

All participants were encouraged to reflect on their experience of cronyism and how they might have experienced, heard about, and handled it after Covid-19 global pandemic. Authors manually coded and analysed interview data following three steps (Strauss & Cobin, 1990). First, data analysis was done for each university separately to help identify the contextual experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of academics working there. Second, the authors analysed and related data to build research themes. It was also necessary to investigate how respondents use and handle cronyism. According to Alvesson and Karreman (2011), researchers need to encourage respondent sensemaking and to consider their discourse as a social tie connecting researchers, participants, and research construct(s) in a study. Nevertheless, Alvesson (2011) cautions that not all data needs to be codified as careful analysis is necessary to get a rational interpretation, which this is only occasionally possible. Interestingly, the authors found significant profundity in interviewee reflections and comments, which shed light on how female academics in the Egyptian public university setting employed the phenomenon of cronyism to navigate crises, handle heavy workloads, and/or balance work and family responsibilities during regular and crisis times.

4. Findings and discussion

In their definition, Akkermans et al. (2018) consider career shock as a disruptive event outside one's control which prompts thinking about one's career. The hardships experienced by female academics in the addressed universities are perceived by them as career shocks because removing/managing them necessitates a change in the social norms (to fully accept that a female academic could be a dean or president of a university for example) and a redesign for job duties of female academics (to fully allow them to balance between their familial obligations and job responsibilities). Unfortunately, female academics understand that they currently have no option but to continuously obey their direct chairs of the departments and deans of faculties in return for a favorable set of work conditions. Such exchange of favors is an exercising of cronyism (Begley, 2010; Arasli et al., 2006). We explained how cronyism might be used by female academics as a coping strategy for their work-related shocks by using the three dimensions of emancipation theory (Welzel, 2013). Accordingly, the following are the three constituted themes.

4.1 Action resources

According to Welzel's 2013 theory of emancipation, action resources represent one of the three dimensions for empowering females. In the case of female academics, action resources might point out to the extent to which those female academics can get a reasonable teaching load, research support, supervision activities, and seminar participation, and accordingly, they can secure a balance between their academic responsibilities and familial commitments (Ahmad & Masood, 2011; Misra et al., 2012; Mousa, 2021a). Unfortunately, in Egyptian academic context, female academics have to actively engage in intense academic duties, while at the same time they are required to meet their familial obligations to avoid any blame from chairs at work, who are mostly male, and husband at home (Mousa, 2021a; 2022).

"My colleagues and I suffer from extreme schedules of teaching, research, assessment, supervision, and other administrative and departmental duties. I myself can hardly balance between my role as an academic and my role as a wife. My family really sacrifices because of my job." Respondent 15

Admittedly, familial obligations unnegotiable in male dominated societies such as in Egypt while work-related ones usually are (Ensour et al., 2017; Mousa, 2021b). In cultures characterized by power distance, the informal social networks and in-group engagement might shape the dissemination of work-related responsibilities, rewards and outcomes (ElBaz et al., 2018). Consequently, female academics are always keen on staying aligned with the directions and decisions of the department chairs of to get some work privileges (e.g., lighter teaching load, more opportunities for research funding, etc.) (Mousa, 2022). In other words, female academics tend to actively show cronyism activities (e.g., continuous obedience to chair of departments and ongoing support for their decisions) to get preferential treatment. According to Arasli et

al. (2006) and Robinson et al. (2013), those who are cronies always perceive favorable treatment, report job satisfaction, and rarely complain about inequality and ostracism.

"The key to guaranteeing reasonable work hours is to obey the chair of my department. I have to make him trust me; otherwise, I will suffer." Respondent 11

"I am always shocked with an overwhelming demand of academic responsibilities. However, as a female academic working in a job dominated by males, I will not find it easy criticizing and/or repudiating their decisions. If anyone gets the impression that my department chair dislikes, all of them, including the dean of the faculty, colleagues and even non-academic employees will ostracize me. Saying nice words to my leaders might work as a solution." Respondent 32

4.2 Emancipative values

The second dimension needed for female empowerment, as illustrated by Welzel's 2013 theory of emancipation, is emancipative values. In the case of female academics, emancipative values reflect the extent to which they guarantee a fair representation at senior administrative levels, find an inclusive work atmosphere to supports development, promotion, and other positive work outcomes that are assigned or disseminated through merits (Welzel, 2013; Mousa, 2021c). Unfortunately, female academics usually complain from their underrepresentation at the senior administrative and research positions (Westoby et al., 2021). This is also the case in the Egyptian academic context in which female academics face many career disadvantages mostly because of the lack of support they perceive from work leaders and conservative social norms which prevent females from occupying leading positions (Mousa, 2021c). Such second-class treatment and marginalized status in academia are mostly perceived by female academics as career shocks.

"To whom should I complain? The chair of the department is male, the dean is male, vice rectors of the university are males, and the rector/chancellor is male. They hardly ever acknowledge what a married female academic suffers from when trying to fulfil her motherhood commitments together with her academic ones." Respondent 2

In an attempt to overcome such barriers, some female academics engage in cronyism behavior by showing obedience, saying nice words, and complying with their department chairs (Chen & Ren, 2023). They mostly think that cronyism behavior is a way for quick promotion, light job responsibilities, and positive assessment. More specifically, female academics adopt a give and take principle in which they give obedience or conformance in return for some work-related advantages (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978).

"Life is based on a give and take principle. Doing what my leaders want entails good treatment, a friendly job atmosphere, light teaching schedule, and the possibility to take days off. Why should I risk and oppose what those leaders decide!? I simply do what most of my colleagues do." Respondent 7

"Only those who obey our dean receive good treatment and find opportunities to be members in academic committees/events and other activities that entails some financial bonuses." Respondent 22

4.3 Civic entitlement

The third dimension of empowering females as explained by Welzel's 2013 theory of emancipation is 'civic entitlement'. In the case of female academics, civic entitlement describes the seriousness of universities to ensure gender equality and cultural tolerance among their male and female members (Welzel, 2013). The shocks (e.g., poor representation at senior administrative positions, intense teaching load, and limiting duties that interfere with familial commitments) show that the addressed universities are a step behind in initiating adequate civic entitlement for the addressed female academics (Penney, 2015; Nguyen, 2013; Mousa, 2021a, b). Consequently, many female academics have no choice but to engage in cronyism

behavior to guarantee sharing membership in a network, exchanging something valuable, and secure returns for the adopted cronyism (Begley et al., 2010).

"Although females have proven their success in many leading positions, they are denied to take advanced responsibility in academia. It is a combination between social norms and work culture. Do you think that one individual or specifically a female academic like me can change the norms!? It is best to avoid clashes and focus on what makes me feel comfortable doing my job." Respondent 24

"Generally, female academics are voicing their work-related dissent amongst themselves because of the poor representation we find in leadership positions. Frankly, I don't expect any prompt solution for the hardships we experience. It might require a political decision a change in social norms, and a readiness from both female and male academics to work under the leadership of a woman. Until this is realized, I have no option but to always keep in line with my leaders' decisions, practices, and requirements." Respondent 4

5. Implications

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The first theoretical contribution lies in finding out that the low action resources (considering their unreasonable teaching loads, research requirements, and supervision engagements), emancipative values (the unfair representation of female academics at senior administrative levels) and civic entitlement (universities not serious about promoting gender equality) are perceived by female academics as a lack of empowerment that necessitates their adoption of cronyism as their main coping strategy. The second theoretical contribution lies in discovering that in male dominated societies, female academics who lack the power to shape their work-related status tend to use undesirable behavior such as cronyism to mitigate the negative consequences of the shocks they encounter. The third theoretical contribution lies in expanding the scope of emancipation theory (Welzel, 2013), which was developed to illustrate that females in Western countries can be empowered through action resources, emancipative values, and civic entitlement. Moreover, in non-Western male-dominated countries, the inadequacy of the three dimensions proposed by Welzel (2013) might prompt female academics to engage in socially unacceptable behaviors such as cronyism to improve their work conditions.

5.2 Practical implications

Given the findings of the present paper, we propose that the administrations of the addressed universities start to rethink the academic responsibilities assigned to female academics. In male-dominated societies like Egypt, female academics have familial obligations and personal commitments that are challenging to balance with their roles as scholars (Mousa, 2021a, b). Moreover, their intense teaching and research duties become career shocks that drive many of them to engage in cronyism. Hence, a rational set of work-related duties could be a solution to avoid such shocks and the cronyism in the work context. Second, the administration of the universities in this study should devise a new mechanism for designing the relationship between academic leaders (deans of faculties and chairs of departments) and female academics. Specifically, the feelings of female academics as being treated as second-class scholars has to be addressed and managed to develop a healthier work atmosphere. Third, establishing a unit for the inclusion and empowerment of female academics might also be perceived as a recommended option for promoting justice, developing capabilities, and assigning equitable work responsibilities among female academics in an attempt to reduce socially unacceptable behaviors, such as cronyism.

6. Limitations and avenue for future research

Addressing only female academics without considering their male colleagues, chairs of department, and deans of faculties might limit the ability to constitute a full detailed picture about the relationship between career shock and organizational cronyism exercised in the addressed universities. Focusing only on public

universities while excluding the public ones might hinder the ability to generalize the findings. Concerning future research, it is proposed that interested scholars quantitatively address how the demographic characteristics (age, work experience, marital status and number of children) of female academics affect their engagement in cronyism behavior. Moreover, interested researchers might ask the same research question for both male and female academics in private universities. Furthermore, future researchers might also think about how ensuring an adequate implementation of the emancipative capabilities (action resources, emancipative values, and civic entitlement) shape the behavior of female academics in male dominated societies.

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Appendix

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Participants/ respondents	Academic major	Academic title	Years of experience	Religion
1	Business	Lecturer with PhD	15-20	Muslim
2	Business	Lecturer with PhD	15-20	Muslim
3	Business	Lecturer with PhD	15-20	Muslim
4	Business	Lecturer with PhD	15-20	Muslim
5	Science	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
6	Science	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
7	Science	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
8	Science	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
9	Education	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
10	Education	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
11	Education	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
12	Education	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
13	Education	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim

14	Education	Assistant 10-15 professor		Muslim
15	Art	Assistant 10-15 professor		Muslim
16	Art	Assistant professor	15-20	Muslim
17	Art	Assistant 15-20 professor		Muslim
18	Art	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
19	Art	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
20	Art	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
21	Art	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
22	Art	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
23	Art	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
24	Art	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
25	Art	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim
26	Art	Assistant professor		
27	Law	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim

28	Law	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim			
29	Law	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim			
30	Law	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim			
31	Science	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim			
32	Science	Assistant professor	10-15	Muslim			
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