



urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana

ISSN: 2175-3369

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná

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urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana, vol. 14, 2022, pp. 1-12

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-3369.014.e20210070>

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# Public Management and Gender: women experiences in entering and occupying positions in a Brazilian city

*Gestão Pública e Gênero: as experiências vivenciadas por mulheres no ingresso e na ocupação de cargos em um município brasileiro*

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**How to cite:** Costa, L. P da, Cappellari, G., & Vargas, K. de F. S. (2021). Public Management and Gender: women experiences in entering and occupying positions in a Brazilian city. *urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana*, v.14, e20210070. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-3369.014.e20210070>

## Abstract

Although there are shared experiences of women's lives, they are distinct considering the socio-cultural profile of a given location. From this perspective, research considering gender and management are limited in the Brazilian context. This article seeks to investigate women experiences in entering and occupying public management positions in a Brazilian city. This is a qualitative and exploratory research. Women who work in public management leadership positions were interviewed. The data were analyzed through interpretative analysis developed with the support of the NVivo®11 software. Women remain underrepresented in city management compared to the number of men who occupy the same positions and there is a clear gender gap. The results also highlight discriminatory practices, gender bias and cultural barriers. The research provides relevant insights into the relationship between gender and public management, it also reinforces the literature, since the findings are added to further researches to reveal the female performance challenges in public management. It proposes that still remains the challenge to change organizational and social attitudes.

**Keywords:** Women. Public Management. Experiences.

## Resumo

*Ainda que existam experiências da vida de mulheres que são compartilhadas, há distinções de acordo com o perfil sociocultural de determinada localidade. Nesta perspectiva, as pesquisas que consideram gênero e gestão são limitadas no contexto brasileiro. Este artigo procura investigar as experiências de mulheres no ingresso e na ocupação de cargos na gestão pública de um município brasileiro. Trata-se de pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa e caráter exploratório. Foram entrevistadas mulheres que trabalham em cargos de liderança na gestão municipal. Os dados foram analisados por meio de análise interpretativa desenvolvida com o apoio do software NVivo®11. As mulheres continuam sub-representadas na gestão municipal em comparativo ao número de homens que ocupam os mesmos cargos e existe uma clara disparidade entre os gêneros. Os resultados também*

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*destacam práticas discriminatórias, preconceito de gênero e barreiras culturais. A pesquisa fornece relevantes insights da relação entre gênero e gestão pública, também reforça a literatura, uma vez que os achados se somam as demais pesquisas ao revelar os desafios da atuação feminina na gestão pública. Propõe que o desafio de mudar as atitudes organizacionais e sociais permanece.*

**Palavras-chave:** Mulheres. Gestão Pública. Experiências.

## Introduction

As society has been transformed, female representation in government bodies has become essential to drive agendas of interest. Politics was an almost exclusively male space, which added to the delay in granting women's political rights, causing an imbalance in their political performance. Reasons for limited advancement include social and cultural stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, number of women in senior positions, responsibility for housework, childcare (Davidson & Cooper, 1992), discriminatory practices in hiring policies and association of male characteristics related to leadership (Schein, 2001).

Research highlights the predominance of male practices in the work environment, power relations in the decision-making process and the existence of informal relationships in gender support in the hierarchy (Metcalf & Linstead, 2003; Halford & Leonard, 2001; Acker, 1990). Although there are shared experiences of women's lives, they are distinct considering the socio-cultural profile of a given location. From this perspective, research considering gender and management are limited in the Brazilian context.

According to the rule established in 2009, 30% of legislative candidates must be women. On the other hand, 1 in 8 women candidates didn't receive any vote in 2016 (Santos, 2017). Women occupied about 15% of the two legislative houses in 2019, considering the 2018 elections and even 5 points more than the previous legislation, Brazil remains at the bottom of the world ranking of female presence in parliament, ranking 156th on the list of 190 countries (Montesanti, 2018).

Samuel (2018) points out that Rio Grande do Sul (RS) is the second Brazilian state with the lowest percentage of female mayors, second only to Espírito Santo. From the 497 cities in the state, only 34 are governed by women, about 6.8%. Therefore, it is understood that there may be several obstacles that hinder women's access to leadership positions. Given this context, the objective of this research is to investigate the experiences of women in entering and occupying positions in the public management of a Brazilian city.

This study uses the qualitative methodology to investigate the experiences of a women's specific group who work in city's management leadership positions in Santana do Livramento, located in the western of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) state in a region known as "Border of Peace", a dry border between Brazil and Uruguay. On the Brazilian side are Santana do Livramento with a population of 82.464 being 39.376 men and 43.088 women (IBGE, 2019), where the Uruguayan side are Rivera sheltering 64.465 people by the last census made in 2011 (INE, 2011). In the 2004 local elections in Santana do Livramento, only one woman was elected councilor, an event that was repeated in 2008. In 2012 and 2016 the number of councilors rose to two elected in each election (Eleições 2012, 2016). Considering that 52.25% of the population is composed of women, it is a compelling index. In addition, the city hasn't elected a female mayor yet.

This work presents an empirical contribution by researching in a Brazilian city context a theme capable of providing relevant insights about the relations between gender and public management, in addition to reinforcing the literature area, since the findings are associated with other research when revealing female role in public management.

To this end, the article is structured in four parts, in addition to the introduction. Next, it is presented the theoretical framework, afterwards the methodological path used in the research operationalization, followed by the presentation and discussion of the results. Ultimately, there are the final considerations of the study.

## Women's Struggle for Citizenship and Political Inclusion

The social role that men and women play is the result of a historical construction that negatively interferes with a woman's quality of life. Since childhood, society determines that men and women have different postures, in which women play the role of being subordinate and submissive to men. The big issue is that this inequality generates in society a stereotyped view that causes serious consequences, which also reflect in the labor market (Firmino et al., 2015).

Couto (2012) points out that the questioning of their roles in society and the need for better living conditions made women start the feminist movement. The rise of feminist movements took place in the 19th century, in England, through public demonstrations and demands in search of civil and political rights. In Brazil, the first feminist movement achievement was women's suffrage, in 1932.

The Brazilian Constitution of 1967, reinforced by 1968's Law 5,473, established the illegality of any direct or indirect act or norm to be discriminatory in relation to women selection for holding positions both in the public and private sectors at any level. However, this law had no effect in real life, given the lack of oversight of the problem of sexual discrimination by unions and government inspectors, and women avoiding legal proceedings because it is a slow and costly procedure (Barroso, 2016).

However, progress was made in the search for gender equality, since until the early 1990s women could not even work without her husband's permission, thanks to the constant female struggle in search of their space. It was women who questioned patriarchy, where the practice results in the dominance and marginalization of women. It was this questioning that began to change the hierarchical system that sometimes antagonized women (Kurzawa, 2003).

In a complementary sense, the next topic highlights women's struggle with the feminist movement, their demands in search of political representation and space acquisition in the public scenario.

## Women's Role in Politics

Feminism is a criticism that links women's subjection in the domestic sphere and their exclusion in the public sphere. From this, Farah (2004) explains that the feminism main objective is to transform women's situation in society, in order to overcome gender inequality. In addition, the feminist movement contributed to the inclusion of the gender issue on the public agenda.

Female representation is still very low compared to male's when it comes to public office, that is, public power is still predominantly male. The changes in the social and cultural environment although superficial, they generated a small increase in the propensity for women to participate in electoral disputes (Botelho & Scherer, 2016). However, this increase does not erase a fact: the laws and political decisions that directly affect women are made by men in Brazil, even today and as in all history (Miguel & Biroli, 2014). In the authors' understanding, legal barriers have been abolished, but the impediments and challenges of women entering the political arena still remain.

Schein's research (2001) reveals that management relates culturally and socially to male traits, devaluing female skills and qualities. Ardichvili (2001) and Ardichvili & Gasparishvili (2001) findings are similar insofar as male attributes were highlighted. According to Dawn Metcalfe & Afanassieva (2005), women in their work activities create a professional work identity, which characterizes development and organizational change. This professional identity is pointed out by Fondas (1997) as a feminization process that results in the devaluation of the occupation, recruitment implications and considers the female image as a criterion for entry, occupation and performance in the position.

Dawn Metcalfe & Afanassieva (2005) observe that there are job openings that specify "beautiful young candidates" and affirm the existence of resistance in hiring married women, since the social cost is significant in making recruitment decisions. The results from the research pointed out the cooperation between women, that is, the accomplice support in the work environment and also in social relations. The

researched women reached high positions in the Public Administration, however, they valued their husband's work more. For the authors, the corporate culture supports the gender gap in the public sector.

Couto (2012) reveals in his research the prejudice experienced by women in politics. Paula and Bauermann (2013), in turn, points out that some women need to choose to postpone or abolish building a family with children in order to be successful in their leadership position. Research shows that for women putting their professional career in the first place has a very high price to pay and the difficulty in reconciling professional and personal life. Other reports research from Paula and Bauermann (2013), also point out challenges for occupying managerial positions to be disparaged by her own husband, hostility for having a higher salary also with her appearance.

About women political representation, Sanchez (2014) presents an overview of Brazil and other countries with recent democratization showing that, at the same time they're on average half of the population of these countries, women still being a minor group inside the institutions. A contradiction that hinders the consolidation not only of women in the political sphere, but of democracy itself.

Porto et al. (2019) made a gender equity diagnosis and political representativity at the Chamber of Deputies, at the Federal Senate, at Presidency of Republic, at State Governments and at the Legislative Assembly, in the 27 Brazil federal unities and shown that, even there are some advances, the authors explain that is necessary to overcome the inequality and the gender discrimination in Brazil. Since 1997 the Brazilian electoral law requires the parties and coalitions to respect the minimum quota of women in the candidates list to the Chamber of Deputies, Legislative Chambers, Legislative Assemblies and City Councils. Even so in the last plea a lot of parties and coalitions were notified to breach the law.

This work seeks to investigate women's experiences in entering and occupying positions in public management in a Brazilian municipality. However, the methodological procedures used in the operation of this research are presented below.

## Methodological Course

This empirical research has a qualitative approach (Gioia et al., 2013), regarding the objectives is exploratory (Prodanov & Freitas, 2013) and is characterized as a case study in relation to the procedures (Yin, 2010). For data collection, a semi-structured interview was used (Berg, 2001) based on a semi-structured script adapted from Cintra (2011), Araújo (2013), Paula and Bauermann (2013) and Monteiro (2015).

Out of a total of 6 women who work in leadership positions in municipal management, 4 comprised the research sample, which were selected for convenience and accessibility, in different organizational areas in order to ensure representativeness and diversification in the results and analyzes. The interviews were recorded with the proper respondents' permission and subsequently fully transcribed. It is worth noting that the identity of the interviewees was kept confidential, for the purpose of presenting and discussing the results, the following identifications were used: E1, E2, E3 and E4.

Regarding data analysis and interpretation, the technique adopted was interpretative analysis (Severino, 2016; Westerman, 2011) and was supported by the NVivo@11 software (Saillard, 2011; Bringer et al., 2006). From the interviews, it was possible to understand the challenges and adversities faced by women in entering and occupying positions in the public management of a Brazilian city.

## Presentation and Discussion of Results

### Characterization of Interviewees and Participation in City Management

E1 is 64 years old, and has a bachelor's degree in Pedagogy, specialization in Scholar Supervision and Special Education, she has worked in the public sector for more than 40 years and in her last years of activity she was Regional Coordinator of Education in Rio Grande do Sul (RS) state. E2, in turn, is 49 years old, has

a high school degree and is coursing bachelor's in Laws, she was elected as a city councilor and has been in office for 3 years. E3 is 54 years old, has a bachelor degree in Pedagogy and Laws, she was elected as Deputy Mayor, a position she has held for 3 years; she worked at the Department of Transportation, at the Federal Chamber and at the Chamber of Deputies; she was chief of staff at the Ministry of Science and Technology, general director and assistant secretary of the Economic Development Council of Rio Grande do Sul state, undersecretary in the government of the Federal District, among other activities. Ultimately, E4 is 76 years old, has a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences and postgraduate degree in Sociology, she has worked as a Municipal Secretary of Education for 3 years was Deputy Mayor and councilor. Based on the presented data, it's possible to check that active women in actions and movements aiming for the city welfare have more chances to achieve leadership positions.

Kurzawa (2003) points out that women participation in positions of power is extremely important, since a country that excludes the contribution and potential of a large part of its population cannot be considered totally democratic. Along the same lines of thought, Monteiro (2015) highlights that despite several struggles and achievements, women's broad access to positions of power is still not a fact. These circumstances are demonstrated in the public management of the city under study where power is still predominantly male.

Women in leadership positions are in the minority, both in municipal secretariats where only two (2) of the 13 secretariats are run by women, and in the legislative branch which has only two (2) women councilors against 15 men. This fact reinforces the point made by Botelho and Scherer (2016), since women are being under-represented.

Even with all the qualities and skills, the number of women in the public sector is still far lower than male participation. Sectors such as the Secretariat of Education and the Secretariat of Health, which are usually stereotyped as feminine, often mistakenly assigned to women positions related to care based on their emotional and relational characteristics (Monteiro et al., 2015), they are among those that lead as the most unequal in number of civil servants, with 53 men and 25 women and 52 men and 29 women, respectively. These data are in line with Miguel and Birolí's (2014) statement, as entry into public management remains low for women. Table 1 shows the comparison between men and women in each secretariat.

**Table 1** - Comparison between female and male workers in distinct municipal secretariats

Secretariat	Men (public contest)	Women (public contest)	Men (contract)	Women (contract)	Men (internship)	Women (internship)
Secretariat of Administration	16	6	-	-	5	7
Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock	20	3	21	10	-	-
Secretariat of Assistance and Social Inclusion	18	28	10	13	4	10
Secretariat of Culture, Sport and Leisure	22	5	-	-	-	-
Secretariat of Economic Development	4	1	-	-	-	1
Secretariat of Education	53	25	-	-	-	-
Secretariat of Treasury	11	6	-	-	19	28
Secretariat of Public Works	19	5	23	6	-	1
Secretariat of Planning and Environment	11	9	-	-	-	1
Secretariat of Health	52	29	18	14	11	46
Secretariat of Urban Services	13	3	15	4	2	-
Secretariat of Traffic, Transportation	45	3	-	-	-	3
Secretariat of Tourism	3	5	-	-	-	2

Source: Adapted from Transparency Portal (2020).

Kurzawa (2003) states that women are increasingly occupying their space in public service, but as shown in Table 1, this isn't the facts in the studied city, once Health and Education departments have more men than women workers. However these aren't the only areas with a majority male population, the Agriculture Secretariat, Livestock, Supply and Agrarian Affairs, for example, has 20 men against only 3 women. It is noticeable that women's occupation increases in internship positions, mainly in the Secretariats of Treasury and Education. In a complementary sense, it is suggested that the increase in internship positions is related to greater flexibility, less workload, lower salaries and, sometimes, less valued occupations. E1 relates women's low participation in some sectors to their own omission:

When a political party is running for an election, it needs 30% of women candidates and they generally do not have it because of woman's own omission (E1).

Miguel and Biroli (2014) warn that the assumption that woman is disinterested in politics nowadays needs to consider that the time dedicated by women to domestic work a week is 150% higher than time dedicated by men. Thus, these inequalities need to be taken into account to understand why they remain under-represented as a group, in all spheres of Brazilian politics.

Morais et al. (2019) searched to identify the possible causes for women lower representativity in management positions in a public sector. By data based the authors found that the causes are the toughness faced by women to ascend in career, the toughness in arranging their professional and personal lives, the sexual and moral harassment at work and the major male representativity in the organizations, keeping the access to leadership challenging to women.

According to the interviewees, female leadership has several aspects specific to women, such as sensitivity, a broad analytical capacity, a different way of managing and the ability to not be influenced. Women have a unique profile focused on the social, because in addition to giving relevance to the problems that are also important for male leaders, women show special concern with guidelines such as health and education. These statements are supported by Burke (1994) and Paula (2013) studies.

Women have a rather unique profile, a different way of managing, but often prejudice and lack of recognition of their abilities become significant obstacles. Another factor that is considered relevant is to leave aside the cultural heritage of political disinterest and to believe in its potential.

I think that if we had less prejudice against women, more recognition of our ability on the part of the voters, it would be an opportunity to realize that we are as capable as men are. Our profile is one of dialogue, less authoritarianism, more empathy, I think it would opportune a greater presence of women in politics (E3).

The awareness woman has of her potential that she can participate and have courage to fight to get where she wants. There is a whole question of cultural heritage and it ends up being a limiting element (E4).

These results are supported by Metcalfe and Linstead (2003) and Adkins (2002) studies, as female characteristics are considered unequally. Sampaio et al. (2016) state that female political representation is still low compared to male. In a complementary sense, the following presents how access to leadership positions in city public management occurs.

## Access to Leadership Positions and the Experiences of Female Presence in City Public Management

E1 entered through the nomination of the state governor, but some time ago, she had already unsuccessfully tried to enter as deputy mayor through popular vote, the same way as E2 and E3. E4, on the other hand, also occupies her current position through nomination, but unlike E1, the nomination came

from the city government. Some time ago, E4 also had her leadership attributed through Brazilian's electronic ballot box, since she was a councilor and deputy mayor. Regarding this, it is clear that all interviewees have already had some experience in city politics, but today the forms of entry are divided between nomination and voting.

Sampaio et al. (2016) bring the concept that to claim equality is to know that there are differences, to fight not to be an impediment to the equal rights achievements. In this regard, when they were questioned about public policies that seek equality, they mentioned the acquired right of female presence in political parties being at least 30%. Another important factor revealed by this research is that the women's knowledge is seen as if they wanted to dominate others, assuming that a greater knowledge is something negative. The lack of conditions for women to participate in politics is also mentioned as a difficulty, since in events such as conventions or meetings there are no spaces for women to leave their children, that is, it is understood that politics has not adapted itself for women's taking part in it.

Women face many challenges, just the fact of assuming a candidacy is very demanding and the woman is the most responsible for children's education and homecare (E3).

Political parties themselves find it very difficult to see female candidates as priority candidates, the parties do not create conditions for women to participate and a party will hardly have a childcare system for a meeting, conference, congress or convention (E3).

The results are in line with Dawn Metcalfe and Afanassieva (2005), as the woman embraces multiple tasks, such as domestic work, childcare and professional activities. Women are struggling to achieve positions of power and prestige, but their greatest challenge is still to reconcile professional and personal life (Paula & Bauermann, 2013).

In relation to the challenges these women faced in reaching leadership positions, the survey reveals that they are several and quite diverse. The main challenge mentioned is also the most common, the women's division between family and career, because most of the time she is responsible for the children, the husband or partner and in some cases the parents.

Paula and Bauermann (2013) point out that intelligence, responsibility, leadership, dedication and technical knowledge are seen as essential attributes of a leader. When asked what characteristics they considered essential to exercise a leadership position, control, adequate training, honest, knowledge about the environment they will manage, were elements mentioned by the interviewees.

Control. The staff will perform a task that you are going to sign, so you have to trust that and check it (E1).

Leadership, inspiring people through ideas, examples. Training also helps, honest is fundamental (E3).

The findings are in addition to those pointed out by Burke (1994), as women have their own management characteristics, adopting a unique and distinct posture from men. Monteiro (2015) highlights that there are two ways to justify the sexual division of labor, by biological factors or by social construction. The biological differences for a long time justified the women's suffrage, which submits men to the professional sphere, while assigning women tasks related to home, children, the elderly and the sick.

However, this is not the interviewees' reality, they all have children and for most of them, the balance between work and motherhood is not a problem. E3 and E4 report that they did not have difficulties to combine both, while E1 counted on her mother's help to balance her personal and professional lives.

My son is already a man today, but when he was little and I needed to work 8 hours a day, which was my workload, I counted a lot on my mother who lived with us and helped me (E1).



I had 3 children until I was 23, I attended two colleges and I always worked, my children have no doubt about the love I feel for them and the responsibility I have for them (E3).

I work here in the city council as a councilor and I work in my house. I go to college in the afternoon and I work in the Church, for me this is natural (E2).

The findings of this research contrast Paula and Bauermann (2013), who says that women need to choose to postpone or abolish the building of a family with children in order to succeed in their leadership position. The author highlights that women are discriminated against in their work environments, being overlooked in salaries, promotion and prominent positions. In the same line of thought, Couto (2012) points out the prejudice of women in the political environment, as if the political space for women was a space of prostitution.

One of the interviewees declared to not have difficulties in arranging her professional and personal life, but her mother helped to take care of her children. This is relevant information once it shows that other women are helping her and probably the social class are related, which suggests in this way the relation of the female intersectionality concept proposed by Crenshaw (2002).

Bilge (2009) explains that intersectionality it's transdisciplinary and seeks to learn the complexity of social identities and inequalities through an integrated focus. The approach goes beyond the multiplicity recognition of oppression systems (gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, disability and sexual orientation) and postulates their interaction in the production and reproduction of social inequalities.

The research reveals different realities among the interviewees, while one believes she has never suffered discrimination and the other shows that she does not pay attention to this issue, the other two report moments when they were clearly discriminated against. E3 states that she was removed from her position and had to take legal actions to win the right that was given to her by the electoral process and she suffers from constant embarrassment attempts with the intention that she resigns her position as Deputy Mayor. E4, on the other hand, experienced prejudice for being a single mother, for having a stable relationship with a person who had a previous relationship and for not choosing marriage.

I was removed from all positions in the City Hall, there is an obvious attempt to embarrass me, with the intention that I resign from the mandate, this is a sexist attitude, it is a cowardly attitude and if I were not a woman maybe the attitude would be different (E3).

I believe there should be and there always will be, where even the majority are men, but I don't see it with my own eyes, so I don't have that concern (E2).

There was a certain restriction from people who looked at me differently as if I had taken someone from someone, which is something that does not exist. In the world people live with whomever they want. I felt that there was a certain limitation by others in relation to the option I made (E4).

Another fact that draws attention is that the women who most report having gone through difficult and prejudiced situations are those who occupy higher positions and have higher education. The findings increase the Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018) assertion, once that higher the positions, higher is the discrimination suffered by women. The authors consider that discrimination starts since a woman enters the labor market that many do not even realize the situation in which they find themselves and do not consider certain comments in their daily lives as offensive, even if they are present.

Regarding the challenges and achievements, the data shows that the women interviewed in the midst of professional and social difficulties, such as being seen as a stranger for living and studying alone in another country and being prevented from exercising their position, they seek to develop policies or projects to help other women. E3 helped reorganize her party and create a secretariat at city, state and national levels. However, according to Paula and Bauermann (2013) women's achievements and progress do not eliminate discrimination and prejudice. In this sense, the other women interviewed also have

projects aimed at women, but when asked about their achievements and challenges, they did not talk about their projects and/or their achievements, it is suggested that this happened because the challenges were more striking in their careers.

When I went to Europe I was seen as someone strange, bizarre, different, because I was going alone on a scholarship, it was not common (E4).

I think my greatest life achievement was the creation of women's secretariat in the political party I was with. It resulted in a greater women presence in the party leadership, in the candidacies and especially the assimilation that every party manager has to do politics for women (E3).

There is the political system issue, which is shameful, it is defiled, you just have to follow the news, you arrived at the workplace and you heard many things that you didn't want to hear (E2).

The research findings also revealed that the interviewees believe that there are several benefits in the presence of women in city politics, but not only locally, they believe that women should occupy positions in politics as a whole. They believe that women have a different view, a more fraternal and loving look, in addition to being more qualified, corroborating Barreto's (2014) statement that women are more numerous at different educational levels, including at universities.

From this research, it is suggested that women are less involved in corruption than men and know the society problems because they are, for the most part, who experience them. The only one who disagrees is E2, she is a religious person, so she believes that women need men to make politics better, according to her the two complement each other because God made them that way.

We are the population and electorate majority and we are more qualified, we are the majority in universities, women have a look that is needed in politics, what we want is equal opportunities (E1).

Women don't get involved in corruption, the data prove it. It is time to give the opportunity to women, so that we do it differently, it is the women who deal with the health problems because they are the ones who take their children to the appointments, they deal with education problems because they are the majority who take care of their children's education, they know the problems of the neighborhoods because they are the ones who walk on the streets, in short, the ones who takes on this routine. We are the main victims of violence, we have several health problems and it is necessary that this view come into politics (E3).

There is a need to have a female presence. The woman's vision will never be the man's and I sometimes jokingly say this: God is perfect, if it were different, he would create the man without needing a woman, or the other way around, just a woman. No, but God made everything perfect, if there is an agreement between both, everything can be achieved, but there is a difficulty in this difference, this fight between men and women, but I believe that women are different in this sense (E2).

Politics in general needs women, it needs our look and our way of doing politics, maybe this way we can have a more fraternal and honest politics, with more transparency in relationships, with more efficiency (E4).

The results show that there are several projects that were done by the interviewees for the benefit of the population, especially the female population. The findings reinforce the statement by Corrêa et al. (2016), that the women's representation in politics has made them an influencing agent for projects, economic, social and political issues.

A women's reference center and a family planning center have therefore been set up, as well as projects to prevent depression and domestic violence. Projects were also developed for the rural centers,

implementation of local schools, expansion of the elementary school curriculum with the insertion of Spanish, among other projects. These results corroborate the research of Dawn Metcalfe and Afanassieva (2005), in the sense of cooperation existence among women and the construction of professional female identity.

The results presented demonstrated the prejudice experienced by the interviewees when in public positions and showed the challenges of the female presence in public management, serving as a basis to encourage women to continue fighting for representativeness, non-discrimination and gender prejudice of any other type.

## Final Considerations

This study aimed to research the experiences of women in entering and occupying positions in public management in a Brazilian city. From the interviewees' reports, it can be seen that women remain underrepresented in city management and there is a clear gender gap. The results also highlight discriminatory practices and that women face cultural barriers in their careers.

As a practical contribution to city's public managers, this research makes it possible to realize that the challenge of changing organizational and social attitudes remains. From a theoretical point of view, this study contributes by adding reflections on current and little researched subjects, public management and gender, in addition to providing a focused look at the experiences of women who hold positions of power in the public sector.

Finally, the research was limited to the public management of a Brazilian city and the interviewees' perception, that is, the experiences and interpretations of this specific example of women. In this sense, it is suggested the expansion of research on the subject addressed, expanding the universe of research to confront the ideas and to refine a deeper perception of women's performance in public management.

## Data availability statement

The dataset that supports the results of this paper is available at SciELO Data and can be accessed via <https://doi.org/10.48331/scielodata.ZSTVQ6>.

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**Editor:** Rodrigo Firmino

Received: Mar. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Approved: Aug. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021