

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Link for women in the public sector in Kenya: Conscientiousness and neuroticism in their quest for growth to the top

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This study investigates the link for women in the public sector in Kenya and conscientiousness as well as neuroticism in their quest for growth to the top. Current management trends that would achieve utmost organizational success call for inclusiveness of all sectors of society, and gender is a pertinent aspect of this sector. Women need some personality traits that they would hinge on to achieve leadership levels and be able to participate in decision making; therefore making the needed changes for the women themselves. Exploratory research design which will provide deep understanding of the variables under investigation was applied to study the non-elected women leaders in the public sector in Kenya. The interviewees were obtained through stratified random sampling. This is dividing the population into homogenous subgroup and then taking a simple random sample from each subgroup. Data were obtained from this sample by use of self administered questionnaires while interview schedules were used to obtain in-depth information pertaining to the strategies hinged on to get to the top. Various analyses were carried out to assess the link between acceding of women to leadership with conscientiousness and neuroticism, such as descriptive, correlation, regression and content analysis. This study concluded that women need to possess these personality characteristics, among others. It concluded that the traits are a link to acceding leadership positions.

**Key words:** Kenya, women leadership, conscientiousness, neuroticism, public sector.

## INTRODUCTION

The Kenyan public sector leadership to a large extent is dominated by the male gender despite the fact that the larger population is made up of women, at about 52%. Women have a right and obligation to participate in leadership and management where they bring a different leadership perspective (Clinton-Rodham, 2003; Neuman, 1998; Maathai, 2006; Thomas and Wilcox, 2005).

### Challenges associated with growth to leadership

Women face tremendous challenges in growing into leadership owing to problems associated with poverty, lack of empowerment to be obtained through education and training, violence 'aids', as well as the lack of credit facilities (Goering, 2006). Women have had to deal with numerous social and psychological issues to accede into leadership, due to attitudes towards them. This is such as the common and gender stereotypical opinion that

women have a personality that is too emotional to lead (Gouws and Kotze, 2007). This is then used to inform perceptions and operationalization of women as leaders and their leadership, consequently, continues to be mistrusted. Is it not possible that women are conscientious and emotionally stable enough (non-neurotic) to lead?

Societies are not prepared to have women leaders in high offices and men insist on holding the women back as well as discriminating them in many spheres (Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends survey, 2008). This is despite the fact that women make effective leaders; capturing the attention of business

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gurus that the future of business depended on women. Prejudicial attitudes still perpetuate that womanhood is a disadvantage for leadership (Heffernan, 2002).

Despite having participated in paid workforce for many years in other countries such as Australia as in Kenya, women are still poorly represented in leadership positions across industry due to gendered organizational structures (Sinclair, 2005; Powel, 2003; Kamau, 2010). Women play varied roles yet their contributions remain invisible in formal leadership and in governance boards due to structures that have no place for women. Where women find entry to management boards, it is allegedly due to their high visibility, not knowledge and ability; as it is alleged (Sheridan and Fiona, 2009). Part of the reason for the persistent inequity, too, is the slow process of mainstreaming gender into the public sector together with poverty eradication policies, programs and strategies in a coordinated, multi-sectoral and crosscutting way. This should not be seen as inconsiderate of the responsibilities that women have outside their leadership roles that contribute to attitudes of male managers, who brand women as lazy or uncommitted to professional growth (Kamau, 2007). It is still possible that women possess qualities that would see them to top management if well harnessed.

The slow growth of women in the sector under study too relates to dynamics around unequal power relations, gender roles and socio-cultural stereotypes as well as institutionalized biases against women in Kenya. Literature also reveals that opportunities exist in both theory and practice on strategies aimed at overcoming these challenges. This is particularly the empowerment school of thought that seeks to diminish dependency of women by increasing their various capabilities. A link in the women capacities that enable them get there needed to be identified and further recommended.

### **Consequences of women absence in leadership**

The stay at the bottom of the leadership triangle translates, in Kenya, as in the rest of the world, to women issues remaining unaddressed since the gender that best understands them is absent from where policy and subsequent decisions are made (Mangatu, 2010; Biseswar, 2008; Rhode and Kellerman, 2007). The trend further leads to increased women under-employment, poverty and powerlessness among women and the larger population since women leadership not only aids in building nations, but also balance up decision making processes (Epstein et al., 2005).

Lack of women at the top leadership positions has meant locking out important, measurable, competitive and excellent skills brought in by women leadership. Having them stay out of policy making involvement is detrimental to the society because it translates to their persistent poverty, powerlessness and underrepresentation in decision making (Onsongo, 2006).

This is despite the fact that studies have found a strong positive correlation between a critical mass of women leaders with strong personalities and outstanding business performance (Nugent, 2002; McKay, 2007).

### **Trends in women leadership then.....**

Though milestones have been achieved (Eagly et al., 2003), women still encounter prejudicial impediments to leadership which could only be removed or weakened by women themselves accessing or possessing qualities that would aid them in acceding to leadership (Rapoport, 2002). Progress in women leadership made in Kenya and other countries therefore is still scanty. What do few of those who manage to get to the top hinge on?

Theoretically, there is a relation between certain strategies by women leaders and actual accession to leadership positions. Unless women learn to operationalise certain strategies, they will be seen as deficient. These are strategies such as being more assertive and having enough confidence in their leadership abilities to enable them 'crack the glass ceiling' into top leadership.

### **Statement of the problem**

Kenyan women constitute over 50% of the entire population (UNDP, 2010). This forms a critical portion of the human resource base yet they remain greatly challenged with regard to strategies linking them to ascendancy to leadership positions where pertinent policies affecting them and the entire country are made (Kamau, 2001; Gachukia, 2002). Their absence at this level locks out important, measurable, competitive and excellent skills brought in by women leadership translating to their persistent poverty, powerlessness and underrepresentation in decision making arenas (Onsongo, 2006). Ministry of Gender report (2011) reveals that Kenya never had a woman minister in the ministry of education and only 25% of the ministerial leadership (Job group P-U) are women (ROK, 2011).

Although there has been gender advocacy in Kenya, including the hosting of the 3rd World Conference of Women in Nairobi in 1985, the pioneer spirit has failed to form a link to leadership strategies for women in Kenya itself (AMWK, 2006; AWCF, 2004; Kiragu, 2006). Some milestones have however been achieved after more than two decades of gender activism and sensitization as well as capacity building in Kenya (Kamau, 2010) but the strategies linked to this departure have hardly been sought.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This study aims to investigate the link between conscientiousness and neuroticism and women acceding to leadership positions in the public sector in Kenya.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Personality is the sum total of the ways in which individuals may relate and co-exist with one another. It refers to the stable patterns of individual behaviors and tendencies, both at internal convictions and external behavior (Mc Shane and Glinow, 2008). Traits of personality form the endurance or otherwise of an individual and will influence the possibility of one climbing to leadership, according to this study. Personality traits have been categorized into five components of conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism (emotional stability), openness to experience and extroversion. According to UNIFEM (2010), it is necessary to identify the typical personality and character traits that help women into top positions. It is also pertinent to evaluate how women see themselves and their career building relative to the environments they are often-times subjected to.

This study chooses to investigate two of the personality traits, conscientiousness and neuroticism, and their possible link with women acceding to leadership in the public sector in Kenya. The two traits are important components of personality in the sum total of the link to individuals relating and co-existing with one another and growing to leadership levels. They are pertinent in the stable patterns of individual behaviors and tendencies, both at internal convictions and external behavior (Mc Shane and Glinow, 2008). Traits of personality form the endurance or otherwise of an individual which will form the link with the possibility of one climbing to leadership. Certain personality traits link the individual with leadership and management and this may dictate how well the organization will perform. Personality traits indicate how hard and prepared a person is, how organized they are, how well they will interact with others and how creative they are for the achievement of the organization (Benjamin and Smith, 2004).

### Neuroticism

Certain relatively stable traits of personality have greater value in linking individuals to advancement to top leadership (Tharenou, 2007). These qualities that include locus of control (emotional stability/neuroticism) as concluded too, in a meta-analysis by Judge et al. (2002), found that neuroticism was a significant predictor of leadership. The studies, conducted in a government and military setting further argued that there was a negative correlation between neuroticism and leader effectiveness, showing a leader's lower self efficacy or the perceived capability to perform his/her roles. This will be due to their general tendency to be anxious and less confident of themselves; consistent with self-efficacy theory (Judge and Ilies, 2002).

The trait, too, is associated being anxious, depressed, angry, insecure, depressed or the extent to which an

individual perceives that outcomes are controlled by their own actions or by external forces over which they have no control. This necessitates that the individuals cultivate their own ability to be in control of emotions and situations to be successful. Emotional stability or the extent, to which the individual evaluates him/herself favorably across situations, ends up in self-esteem on the high end. Individuals with internal loci of control and high self-monitoring/esteem as well as emotional stability are more likely to seek and find mentoring relationships and the link to leadership (Turban and Dougherty, 2002).

Neuroticism is especially aroused when social relationships are threatened such as in being criticized and rejected as opposed to physical threats (Dennissen and Penke, 2008). The trait has been found to be especially negatively correlated to threats and may therefore be a strong indicator of the extent to which one would rise to leadership considering the potential threats common in the public sector. Viewed negatively, it is expected that neurotic characteristics which may include worrying, being nervous, temperamental and having self pity form poor links for women acceding to leadership. These are traits that would inhibit rather than facilitate accomplishment of tasks (Tharenou, 2007). This study seeks to evaluate the extent to which shunning neurotic traits is linked to acceding to leadership, which was found by Judge et al. (2002) to negatively correlate to acceding to leadership at a p-value of negative 22.

### Conscientiousness

The term refers to dependability, responsibility, perseverance, achievement, prudence and task focus. The more conscientious a leader is, the more effective the leadership, with few exceptions (business-leadership-qualities.com, 2012). Studies have found that women join organizations at the same level with men but do not advance as fast as the men to the upper echelons of management (Benhett, 2001). The glass ceiling often times traps them at the entry-level or, at best, lowers management positions. Is it therefore possible that a conscientious woman will accede to leadership in spite of the challenges occasioned by the glass ceiling? The trait is considered by scholars such as Schmidt and Hunter (1992) and Barrick et al. (2001) as reflecting motivation and best overall organizational performance. It may be the factor that best defines the best overall performing worker, therefore linking them to leadership; other moderating factors held constant.

Judge et al. (2002) too found that conscientiousness positively correlates (is linked) to leadership at a positive p-value of 16. It is therefore expected that this positive correlation will be associated with a high leadership self efficacy (LSE). This is because individuals found to be organized, responsible and hard working are also more confident in their performances and are focused on completing their tasks (Judge et al., 2002). They are

**Table 1.** Women in public leadership in Kenya.

S/N	Sector	No.
1	Civil Service (Job Groups P to U)	369
2	Judiciary (High Court Judges, Court of Appeal Judges, Deputy Chief Justice and Chief Justice)	33
3	Ambassadors and High Commissioners	11
4	Local Authorities Top Managers	5
5	Government Parastatals (CEOs and Board Chairs)	10
6	Public Administration (Job Groups P to U)	9
7	Universities (Chancellors and Vice Chancellors)	5
	Total	442

more tenacious and persistent in completing tasks and will therefore be rated effective (Barrick et al., 2001). This study therefore captures the role of positive conscientiousness in linking the women to leadership by advancing and showing their relationship, at various levels, and how this contributes to performance and an ultimate link to leadership.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

Exploratory research was used in this study to principally gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Belli (2008) and Rose and Gallup (2007), the design was used to collect data in order to get a comprehensive picture of a phenomenon in preliminary studies. Etievent (2011) too used the design to study 'the determinants of green consumption: a study of socio-demographics factors as determinants' in investigating the variables that influence the green purchaser behavior. The researcher concluded that pro-environmental behavior or gender had an effect upon the consumption of green products.

Jimmy-Gama (2009) too studied 'An assessment of the capacity of faculty-based youth friendly reproductive health services to promote among unmarried adolescents: evidence from rural Malawi'. He used exploratory design method and found that the way facility-based youth friendly reproductive health services is implemented has limited impact on sexual and reproductive health promotion among unmarried adolescents of rural Malawi.

### Population

The population of this study consisted of the non-elected women in the public sector in Kenya. These are the persons who have to get to the top by getting tested through time. These are therefore women in the civil service, parastatals, judiciary, foreign missions, public administration and local governments as shown in Table 1.

### The sample

This was drawn from the population above as a proportion of the population selected for observation and analysis, and to make inferences to the population from which it was obtained (KIM, 2009). Since it is not possible to interview the entire population due to time, cost among other constraints, a sample was calculated in accordance with the guidelines of Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where:

n is desired sample size when target population is large, preferably greater than 10,000;

Z is standard normal deviate at the required confidence level (=1.96) for a confidence level of 95%;

p is the proportion in the target population estimated to have the characteristics being measured when one is not sure, so one takes the middle ground (= 0.5);

q = 1 - p (= 0.5), statistically speaking;

d is the level of statistical significance (= 0.05).

From the above population, the sample arrived at for this study is shown in Table 2.

### Research instruments

In accordance with requirements of scientific enquiry, the study developed tools that would yield accurate and meaningful data to enable the making of a decision (Mugenda, 2008). Self administered questionnaires, which, according to Coopers and Schindler (2006) are recommended in descriptive studies, were used to collect the qualitative data. They befit large enquiries that are free of bias since they are respondent-only based and the respondents will be sought conveniently, according to stratified samples as in this study. They increase the rate of response (Kothari, 2009) and help the researcher accumulate and summarise responses easily (William,

**Table 2.** Calculated sample.

S/N	Sector	Population	Sample
1	Civil Service (Job Groups P-U)	369	171
2	Judiciary (High Court Judges, Court of Appeal Judges, Deputy Chief Justice and Chief Justice)	33	16
3	Ambassadors and High Commissioners	11	5
4	Local Authorities Top Managers	5	2
6	Government parastatals (CEO/Director General)	10	5
7	Public Administration (Job Groups P-U)	9	4
8	Universities (Vice Chancellors and Deputies)	5	2
	Total	442	205

**Table 3.** Response on conscientiousness factors.

S/N	Factor of conscientiousness	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Total
1	I am rule conscious, dutiful and moralistic	1.7	4.6	8.2	43.9	41.6	100
2	I am self reliant, resourceful and self sufficient	2.9	13.9	18.5	39.3	25.4	100
3	I am organized, compulsive, controlled and self disciplined	0.6	2.3	14.5	43.9	38.7	100
	Average	1.73	6.93	13.73	42.37	35.23	

2006).

Interview schedules were used to obtain in-depth information pertaining to the issue under investigation (Saunders et al., 2009). It helped give reasons why the numbers (quantitative approach) tell what they do. This is triangulation that helps get the 'bigger picture' of what is under investigation (Finlay, 2011).

### Data analysis

This is a way of transforming data into knowledge through interpretation and ascribing meaning to it. This study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative research and therefore the data generated consisted of both research. Data analysis was guided by the objective of the study.

The data were then presented descriptively using percentages and tables for initial organization and interpretation of the large body of data. Simultaneously, the qualitative data were transcribed and various themes formed and presented in figures bearing the actual responses/testimonies of the respondents. Coefficients were used to test the link between the dependent variable (acceding to leadership), conscientiousness and then neuroticism.

Regression analysis was also carried out to further determine the link between the variables under investigation. The  $R^2$  analysis was used to measure the goodness of fit of the model being assessed. The following simple linear regression model was used to model the data:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2$$

Where,

Y is acceding to leadership;  $X_1$  is conscientiousness;  $X_2$  is neuroticism;  $\beta_0$  is the y-intercept (constant); and  $\beta_1$  is the model coefficients.

## STUDY RESULTS

### Conscientiousness

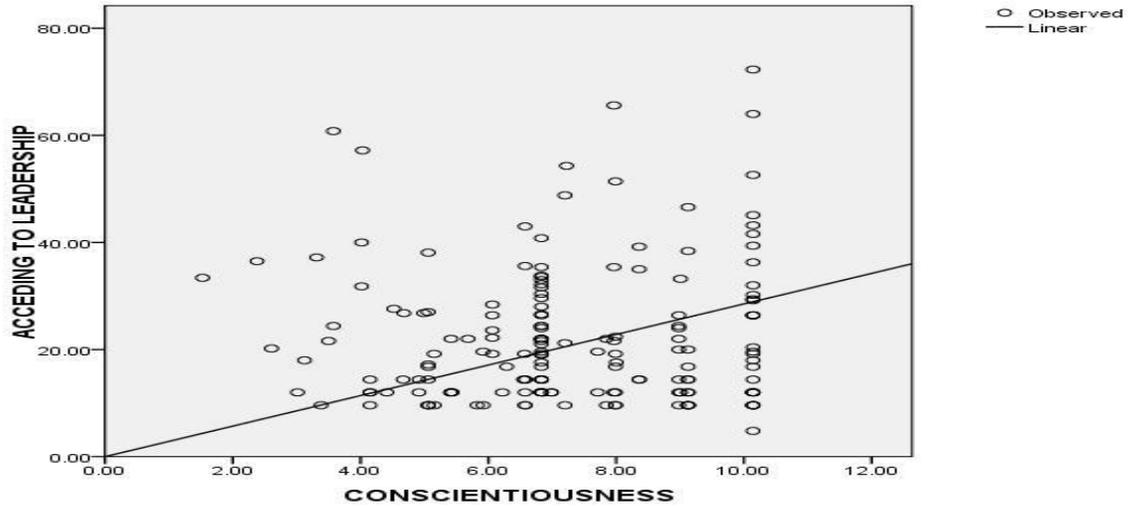
#### Descriptive results

The study used various measures of conscientiousness to assess the link to acceding to leadership. The study sought whether or not the respondents were rule conscious, dutiful and moralistic and not non-conforming, self indulgent and rule disregarding. 95.5% agreed that this is what they were while 6.3% disagreed and 8.2% were neutral. Another measure of this dimension enquired whether the respondents were self reliant, resourceful and self sufficient and not group oriented and a follower dependent. 64.7% agreed, 16.8% disagreed while 18.5% did not take a stand. This may have prevented them from acquiring values and attitudes appropriate for leadership roles.

As regards whether they were organized, compulsive, controlled and self disciplined, and not tolerant of disorder, careless of social rules and uncontrolled, 82.6% averred that they were; only 2.9% thought that they were not and 14.5% had no stand. The findings thus indicate high levels of conscientiousness averaging 80.9% (Table 3). This could point to the fact that self discipline is quite an asset in ascending to leadership. One has to be

**Table 4.** Conscientiousness and acceding to leadership.

Model	R
1	0.8402



**Figure 1.** Scatter lot on conscientiousness and acceding to leadership.

**Table 5.** Conscientiousness and acceding to leadership.

R Square
0.706

**Table 6.** ANOVA.

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	79554.492	1	79554.492	413.224	0.000
	Residual	33113.688	172	192.521		
	Total	112668.180	173			

Predictors: Conscientiousness.

patient, work very hard. One has to be focussed and look up to God for help and guidance; the interviewees said.

**Correlation results**

The correlation analysis as shown in Table 4 reveal that conscientiousness is positively related to acceding to leadership at  $r = 0.840$ . This positive correlation is further demonstrated in the scattered diagram (Figure 1).

**Regression analysis**

A further investigation of the link between the two variables reveal an  $R^2$  value of 0.706 (Table 5), showing 70.6% of variations in acceding to leadership in the model  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$ . This is further supported by the goodness of fit of the P-value of 0.000, suggesting the high significance of the overall model as shown in Table 6.

**Table 7.** Regression coefficients.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. error		
Conscientiousness	2.852	0.140	20.328	0.000

**Table 8.** Neuroticism (emotional stability).

S/N	Factor of neuroticism (emotional stability)	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
1	I am emotionally stable adaptive and face reality calmly	0.6	2.9	9.2	50.9	36.4

**Table 9.** Neuroticism and acceding to leadership.

Model	R
1	0.845

In Table 7, the B coefficient which is a measure of the units of change in the independent variable as they influence the dependent variable show that 2.852 units in conscientiousness correspond with equal change in acceding to leadership, which is quite a significant link.

According to Barret (2009), leaders need a high standard of excellence and a desire to do their best, be orderly and very self disciplined. Women found to possess these characteristics in the public sector in Kenya will therefore accede to leadership because as found in the literature, there is a strong link between conscientiousness and growing to leadership.

## Neuroticism

### Descriptive results

This was again tested using various measures as stipulated in the literature. One measure sought to find out whether the women were emotionally stable, adaptive and face reality calmly and not emotionally unstable and easily upset. 87.3% responded on the affirmative, only 3.5% differed and 9.2% were non-committal as shown in Table 8. This agrees with the opinion of Turban and Dougherty (2004) that propensity to leadership was linked to an individual loci of control, self-monitoring and emotional stability.

From the qualitative responses, the women averred that 'Men appreciate a sober discussion where they don't feel threatened' and that 'The strategy is to be persuasive, not aggression'.

### Correlation analysis

This study sought to find the extents to which one requires to be neurotic to accede to leadership. Analysis

reveals that neuroticism is linked to acceding to leadership for women in Kenya at  $r = 0.845$  as shown in Table 9. Those in leadership have had to be emotionally stable.

The above position would be supported by the positive correlation in the scatter plot (Figure 2).

### Regression analysis

A further analysis through regression showed a relation at an  $R^2$  value of 0.714 as shown in Table 10. This reveals that neuroticism explains ability to rise to leadership at a 71.45 variation in the model  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_2 X_2 + \epsilon$ . This is further supported by the P-value of 0.000 in Table 11.

The B coefficient in Table 12 reveals that 0.54 unit changes in neuroticism are the units that correspond to ascension into leadership.

## Conclusion

The study therefore concluded that all other intervening factors are held constant; it is pertinent that women in the public sector in Kenya seek to be, among others, and emotionally stable. Conscientious was found to correlate to acceding to leadership at  $r = 0.840$  and an  $R^2$  value of 0.706 or 70.6%. According to one respondent, '*the strategy is to be persuasive, not aggression*'. The link is formed by '*I believe one needs to be strong to foster on, I have a vision and I communicate it among other strategies that point at being a strong character and stable in one's undertakings. Approaches such as: 'Women like us were very aggressive during Moi's time.*

*We were feminists and were hard* did not work. The link is in having a vision, which is what leadership is; and communicating the vision '*neck up, not aggression*'.

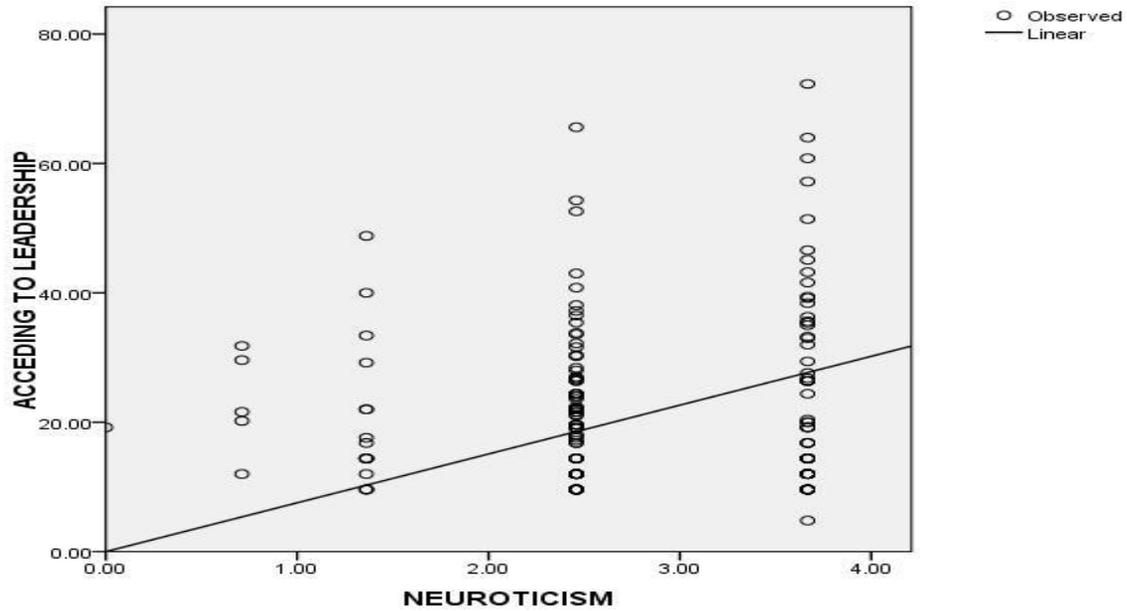


Figure 2. Scatter plot for neuroticism and acceding to leadership.

Table 10. Neuroticism and acceding to leadership.

R Square
0.714

Table 11. ANOVA.

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	80404.516	1	80404.516	428.642	0.000
	Residual	32263.664	172	187.579		
	Total	112668.180 <sup>b</sup>	173			

Predictors: Neuroticism.

Table 12. Regression coefficient.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. error		
Neuroticism	0.548	0.365	20.704	0.000

Dependent variable: Acceding to leadership.

The study hence sought a link between women acceding to leadership in the public sector in Kenya and conscientious. It is necessary for the women to be rule conscious, dutiful and moralistic. They need to be self-

reliant, resourceful and self sufficient. Being orderly and industrious is what would accord them recognition and the respect needed to rise to the top. The other link established is non-neuroticism (emotional stability) or

being emotionally stable, adaptive and calm under threats, criticism and rejection. Individuals have to perceive that their actions control outcomes, even when they have no control of the external forces. The factor correlated to a link into leadership at  $r = 0.845$  and an  $R^2$  value of 0.714; which are satisfactory findings to warrant a conclusion that this is pertinent for a leader. Possession of the personality factors in the public sector in Kenya will form the link to top leadership.

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