

Female Attorneys in South Africa: A Quantitative Analysis

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Abstract

Law is an established profession, traditionally white, male and middle-class. Since 1994, there has been a strong focus on transformation in the South African legal profession, largely focusing on racial transformation, with meaningful gender transformation lagging behind. This article illustrates at a quantitative level the gendered landscape of the South African attorney's profession. The findings show that in the past decade there has been a steady increase in the number of female law graduates and the number of females admitted as attorneys. The occupational structure shows that the junior levels of the profession are dominated by females, and that there is a lack of diversity and transformation as regards the senior and most sought-after positions in the profession. Not only are female partners outnumbered, they are also significantly under-represented, with only half of them being represented at the partnership level, whereas males are over-represented at that level. South Africa has no shortage of laws and policies promoting gender equality and transformation. Unfortunately, these laws and policies have done very little to liberate female attorneys as they move through the ranks of the profession. The article concludes by raising questions that should be qualitatively explored in future research.

Keywords: law; attorneys; profession; female; gender transformation

Introduction

Law is an established profession, traditionally white, male and middle-class (Muzio & Tomlinson, 2012). Over the past three decades, the profession has grown exponentially in terms of size, shape, geographic location and scope of practice, due to the increasing



demand for legal services (Bruck & Canter, 2008; Campbell & Charlesworth, 2012; Galanter & Henderson, 2008; Wald, 2010). During the 1960s and 1970s the profession became increasingly feminised (Kay & Gorman, 2008; Menkel-Meadow, 1986, 1995; Michelson, 2013; Seron, 2013) with gender equality and the similarity between the two genders being the focus of legal arguments and scholarship (Menkel-Meadow, 1986). During this period, growing political pressures demanding equality, and the increased momentum of the international women's movement meant that females could access higher education and enter the law profession. Societal trends of shifting the traditional roles of husbands being the breadwinners and wives staying at home to both following careers meant that females could also enter the labour market (Billing, 2011). Females were thus provided with greater access and opportunity to employment in law firms, facilitating their increased entry into the profession (Hull & Nelson, 2000; Pinnington & Sandberg, 2013). Today, females have far greater access to legal education and employment than before.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, females across the world have fought for access to law school and the right to practise in the profession. For many years their progress was slow and it was only since the 1970s and 1980s that a rise in the number of female law students occurred—a development referred to as the feminisation of the profession (Menkel-Meadow, 1986, 1995). With the growing number of female lawyers,¹ one would expect a similar trend at the partnership level, which is the highest and most prestigious level in the profession. Research, however, indicates that feminisation is largely experienced at the junior levels and is not reflected at the most senior positions in law firms (Galligan et al., 2017). For example, in the United States of America, females constitute 60 per cent of lawyers, yet only 15 to 17 per cent of partners. In Australia, more females graduate from university yet constitute only 13 to 15 per cent of partners (Pinnington & Sandberg, 2013).

In South Africa, females were first allowed to join the legal profession in 1923 with the passing of the Women's Legal Practitioners Act (Act 7 of 1923) (South Africa, 1923). The first female who was admitted as an attorney in South Africa was in 1926, and 89 years later, in 2015, the first female, Sally Hutton, was appointed as a managing partner (albeit alongside a male, Chris Els) to head one of South Africa's largest corporate law firms (Lamond, 2017). Her appointment holds significant symbolic value to females in the profession (Lamond, 2017). Over the past few years, transformation in the profession has been a key issue; however, this has largely focused on race. This is undoubtedly South Africa's biggest challenge, but has resulted in gender transformation taking a backseat (Mathodlana, 2017).

In the light of the background presented, this article sketches the legal and policy landscapes that give rise to gender equality and transformation in the attorneys'

¹ In this article, the terms lawyer and attorney will be used interchangeably.

profession. The researcher uses current statistics to present gendered trends in the profession. The article concludes by highlighting the need to pursue qualitative research to explore the challenges confronting women.

A Transformation Agenda for Gender Equality and Empowerment

The international community has increasingly recognised that the empowerment of females is important to improve the socio-economic and socio-political lives of women. To this end, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Platform for Action, which were adopted at the Fourth World Conference for Women in 1995, are two of the most well-known international conventions aimed at ending gender discrimination and promoting gender equality in all spheres of social, economic and political life. South Africa has ratified both these conventions. All signatory states to CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action are required to implement measures such as policies, programmes, projects, laws, institutional and other measures that will effectively condemn discrimination and promote gender equality at all levels (United Nations, 1979, 1995). In addition, Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals, which was succeeded by Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all females, including young girls (United Nations, 2015).

At a regional level, the African Union adopted the Maputo Protocol in 2003, which comprehensively guarantees the rights of females, including but not limited to social, economic, political, civil, health and reproductive rights (African Union, 2003). In addition, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is committed to mainstreaming gender by eradicating gender inequality and the marginalisation of females. The SADC adopted the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in 2008. The objectives of the protocol are to foster female empowerment, eliminate discrimination and achieve gender equality (SADC, 2008).

At a national level, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (South Africa, 1996) (hereafter the Constitution) is the supreme law of the country and all other legislation is required to uphold the tenets of the Constitution. Chapter 2, section 9 of the Constitution calls for the enactment of national legislation preventing inequality and unfair discrimination (South Africa, 1996). Subsequently, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA) (Act 4 of 2000) was adopted. The PEPUDA Act acknowledges the inequalities and discrimination that are deeply embedded in the social fabric, attitudes and practices of South Africa. This Act aims to prevent and prohibit unfair discrimination and promote equality (South Africa, 2000). In addition, the Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill of 2013 (hereafter the Gender Bill) focuses on the empowerment of females and on gender equality. The Gender Bill aims to establish a legislative framework for the empowerment of females and align all laws and policies relating to female empowerment and the implementation thereof (South Africa, 2013b). The National Policy Framework for Women's

Empowerment and Gender Equality of 2002 (South Africa. Office of the Presidency, 2002) draws on the Beijing Platform for Action. It is a generic policy framework outlining South Africa's vision for gender equality. It addresses a number of challenges confronting females, including HIV and Aids, globalisation, poverty, economic empowerment, access to resources, land, empowerment, and basic needs (South Africa. Office of the Presidency, 2002). It envisages that the process of gender equality should be at the centre of the transformation process across all sectors in South Africa. Recognising the importance of work and the plethora of discriminatory practices experienced by workers, the South African government adopted the Employment Equity Act (Act of 55 of 1998). The Act recognises the effects of apartheid laws and practices that have created disparities in employment, occupations, income and the broader labour market. It acknowledges that these disparities have created disadvantages for certain groups of people, especially females, blacks and the disabled (South Africa, 1998). The Act aims to achieve equity in the workplace by promoting equal opportunity and eliminating unfair discrimination through affirmative strategies to correct unequal employment practices experienced by designated groups (such as females, blacks and the disabled) (South Africa, 1998). In addition, the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (Act 53 of 2013) promotes the economic empowerment of all black people, including females, the youth, the disabled and all workers. The objective of the Act is to achieve "equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce" (South Africa, 2013a, p. 4).

South Africa has a robust legal and policy framework addressing gender equality and empowerment. Understanding this framework and the policy documents that emerge from it is paramount in understanding the transformation vision in the legal profession. Following the political reforms in the early 1990s, transformation of the profession became a prominent topic of debates. The inequalities plaguing the profession were recognised and acknowledged by the Department of Justice (Godfrey & Midgley, 2008). The department's Planning Unit published a strategic plan (titled *Justice Vision 2000*) for transformation in the justice sector. The vision as set out in the document is to "transform the justice system so that it reflects the basic constitutional ideals as well as goals of the government policies on reconstruction and development" (Department of Justice, 1995, p. 7). One of the key aims of the plan is "to make the profession representative of all the people who live in South Africa" (Department of Justice, 1995, p. 108). The document states that "the legal profession does not reflect the diverse nature of the South African society. Disadvantaged groups, especially black people, are not well represented in the legal profession. Few black graduates are able to enter the profession. To a lesser extent, the same is true of white female graduates" (Department of Justice, 1995, p. 108).

Following *Justice Vision 2000*, the transformation process was slow and not much occurred on the issues of diversity and transformation. A follow-up discussion document, highlighting the same issues raised in *Justice Vision 2000* was developed by the Planning Unit in 1999. On the issue of representation, the document re-emphasised

that the legal profession was not representative of the South African populace: while law graduates were becoming diverse, disadvantaged graduates continued to struggle to establish themselves in the profession. This was a critical challenge to the transformation process and needed to be addressed if the profession wanted to represent the diversity of South African society in all spheres (Department of Justice, 1999). Many of the transformation efforts discussed in the two documents mentioned above centred on the development of the Legal Services Charter (hereafter the Charter). Two previous drafts of the Charter had been published (Department of Justice, 2006, 2007a), with the most recent one being the Third Draft Legal Services Charter of 2007. Section 2.5 of the Charter (Access to the legal profession) acknowledges “the shortage of legal practitioners in South Africa as a result of historical barriers to entry into the profession” and declares that transformation of the profession must reflect and represent “the racial and gender composition of South African society so as to ensure a body of well-trained and competent professional providers of legal services, and to enable appointments to be made to the judiciary which reflect the demographics of South Africa” (Department of Justice, 2007b, p. 11). The Charter adopts an optimistic tone with regard to overall transformation, but indicates that many of the envisaged goals are dependent on the Legal Practice Act (Act 28 of 2014). The purpose of this Act is to provide a legislative framework for the transformation of the profession underpinned by the Constitution. It also seeks to broaden access to justice and to put in place measures that provide equal opportunities for all aspirant legal practitioners in order to have a legal profession that broadly reflects the demographics of the country (South Africa, 2014).

As has already been said, South Africa has no shortage of legislation and policies on the promotion of female empowerment and gender equality. Its commitment to international and regional conventions gives females, lawyers and policy-makers the power to expect the government to comply with its commitments. The transformation vision provides an important basis for assessing and measuring progress towards gender equality. In this regard, this article explores the changing gender profile of the attorney’s profession.

Methodology

This research adopted a quantitative methodology, which focuses on objective measurement and a statistical, mathematical or numeric analysis. The aims are usually to measure, compare, forecast, test hypotheses, construct theories and concepts, explore, control or explain variables (Walliman, 2017). These can include straightforward counts, percentages or more complex statistical and mathematical tests and modelling. Obvious and straightforward data, such as population statistics, is usually presented in numbers and percentages (Walliman, 2011). Quantitative studies can include exploratory, explanatory or descriptive designs. For the purposes of this research a descriptive design was adopted. Descriptive studies describe the phenomena of interest and in so doing address questions of “what is happening,” “how it is happening” and “what has happened” (Chui, 2017). It allows for an objective analysis of a particular

phenomenon (Babbie, 2011). Descriptive studies can be either cross-sectional or longitudinal. In this research, a longitudinal approach was adopted as it allows for measuring changes in variables over a period of time (Chui, 2017).

Data Collection

The research used two sets of data. The first assessed gendered trends during legal education and training, admissions and practice. This data was obtained from the Legal Education and Development (LEAD) database of the Law Society of South Africa (LSSA). LEAD is an associate member of the LSSA and provides legal and professional training to legal scholars and professionals in South Africa. The data presents a trend analysis between 2010 and 2017 but, unfortunately, does not reflect the intersection of race and gender. In order to give a true sense of the numbers, the data is presented using real numbers. Where necessary, percentages are used to reflect growth trends.

The second set of data was obtained from the four individual law societies that represent attorneys in South Africa, namely, the Law Society of the Northern Provinces, Cape Law Society, Free State Law Society and KwaZulu-Natal Law Society. This data is presented at a national level and reflects gender representation by occupational structure and more specifically at partnership level. It does not, however, reflect a trend analysis and it presents the most recent statistics for 2017. Interestingly, this data is able to reflect the intersection of race and gender at partnership level.

Data Analysis

In this article, the career trajectory of attorneys (Figure 1) is used to analyse and present gendered trends in the profession.

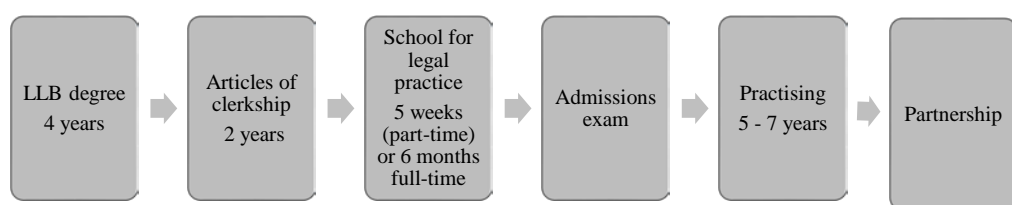


Figure 1: Career trajectory of attorneys

In accordance with the Legal Practice Act (Act 28 of 2014) (South Africa, 2014), four requirements have to be fulfilled to practise as an attorney: a four-year Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree; vocational training through articles of clerkship, which consists of at least two years of articles at a private law firm or state attorney or community service; compulsory practical training of either five weeks during or after articles or a six-months, full-time course at the School for Legal Practice; and passing the attorneys admission examination set by the Law Society of South Africa, an examination that is

practice oriented and can only be written after completion of at least six months of the two-year articles or at least a six-months course at the School for Legal Practice. Once admitted, attorneys usually practise at mid-level in the profession (as associates or senior associates) for five to seven years before being considered for promotion to the partnership level, which is the ultimate goal in the career of an attorney.

The data on the career trajectory of attorneys was analysed and presented using counts, percentages and forecasts where necessary.

In South Africa it is especially important to assess whether gender or racial statistics reflect the demographic makeup of the country. This article assesses the extent to which practising attorneys at the partnership level reflect the gender demographics of the country. This type of analysis allows for assessing the level of skewness or establishing whether a particular gender or race is over- or under-represented in proportion to the general population. In the current analysis, the 2017 partnership statistics for gender and race are divided by the South African gender and racial population statistics obtained from Statistics South Africa where 1.0 is a perfect-equal representation and anything above 1 is over-represented and below 1 is under-represented. The current gender population statistics for South Africa are: males (49%) and females (51%). The racial population statistics are: African (80.8%), coloured (8.7%), Indian/Asian (2.6%) and white (7.9%) (Statistics South Africa, 2017).

Research Findings

The findings in this section are presented according to the career trajectory of an attorney as illustrated in Figure 1. The four-year LLB degree is the minimum requirement to enter the law profession. Table 1 shows that between 2010 and 2017 the number of both females and males enrolling into the LLB programme increased, with the number of females being higher than their male peers each year. Although the numbers are much lower, the same trend is observed for LLB graduation (as shown in Table 2), with more females obtaining their LLB degrees.

Table 1: LLB registration by gender

<i>Year</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2017</i>
Female	2926	2839	3310	2658	2765	2766	3455	3395
Male	2451	2397	3012	2091	2111	2258	2439	3094
Total	5377	5236	6322	4749	4876	5024	5894	6489

Source: LSSA, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017

Table 2: LLB graduation by gender

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Female	1763	2218	1954	1954	2129	2382	2601	2777
Male	1534	1533	1622	1622	1649	1768	1865	2145
Total	3297	3751	3576	3576	3778	4150	4466	4922

Source: LSSA, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017

To practise as an attorney, graduates are required to complete comprehensive vocational training. This training for attorneys is done through compulsory articles of clerkship and a course at the School for Legal Practice.

The numbers of both females and males registered for articles are increasing, with a 42 per cent growth over the period for females or an average of five per cent per annum. Males, however, have a slightly higher rate of increase at 47 per cent with an annual average of 5.7 per cent. The percentage growth or gap between the two is not significant, and the overall trend is one of positive change (as illustrated in Figure 2).

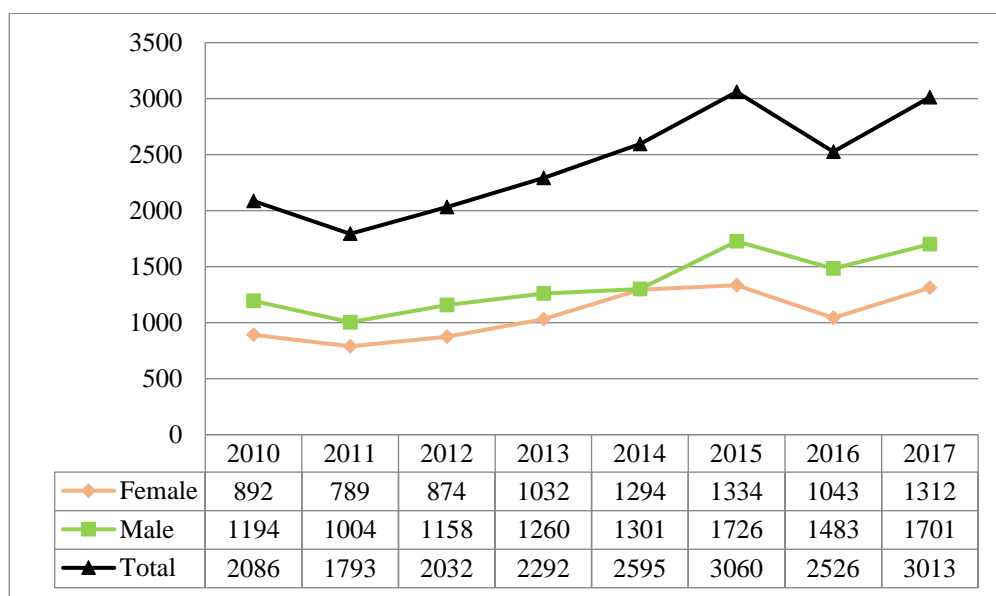


Figure 2: Articles of clerkship by gender

Source: LSSA, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017

The number of females attending the School for Legal Practice has consistently been higher than the number of males (see Figure 3). In addition, the number of females increased by 38 per cent from 620 in 2010 to 857 in 2017, whereas the number of males declined by 0.09 per cent. The increase in the attendance of females at the school is

purportedly due to an increase in the number of LLB graduates and the fact that the number of graduates exceeds the number of articles available. Graduates who are not able to get articles immediately after graduation enrol at the School for Legal Practice to get practical experience to increase their chances of being appointed by firms and to reduce the duration of their articles of clerkship (Godfrey & Midgley, 2008). Upon completion of a course at the school they may apply to do articles the following year.

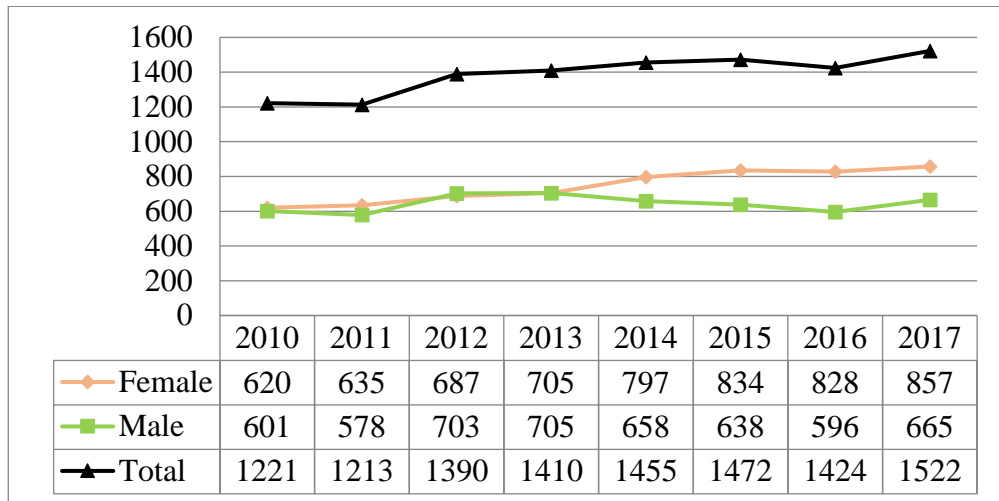


Figure 3: Attendance at School for Legal Practice by gender

Source: LSSA, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017

Upon successful completion of vocational training, graduates qualify to be admitted as attorneys by the High Court. It is important to note that admitted attorneys will not necessarily be practising as attorneys, although the majority do. The number of female attorneys who is admitted is growing and is consistently higher than the number of males (see Figure 4).

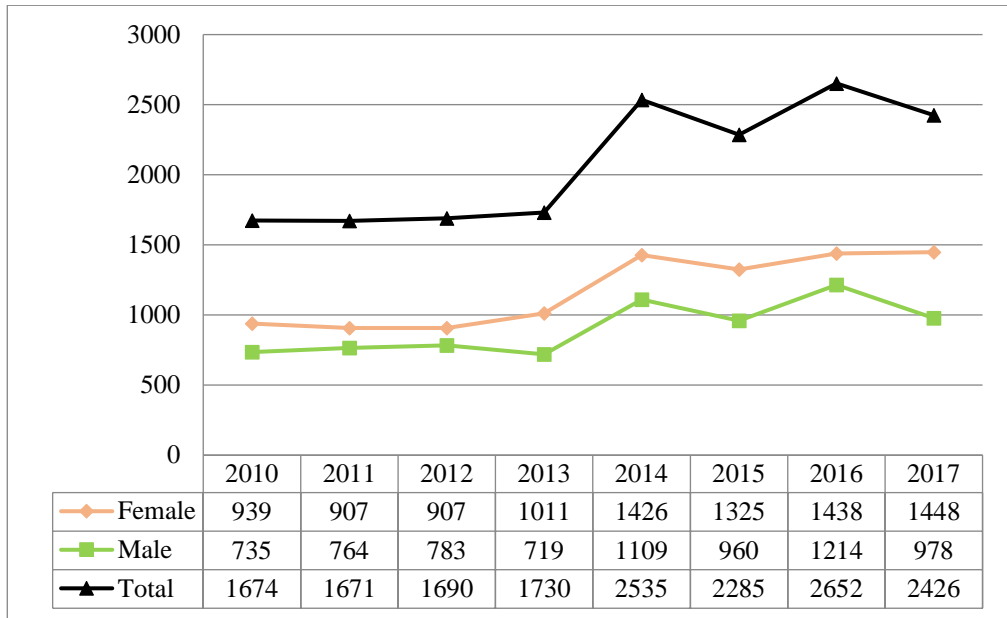


Figure 4: Admitted attorneys by gender

Source: LSSA, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016

The gender composition of the profession as illustrated in Figure 5 shows that the number of females has consistently increased over the period 2010 to 2017, with a growth rate of 52 per cent. The data also shows that the number of males has consistently increased albeit at a lower growth rate of 16 per cent over the seven years. Not only are the numbers of males increasing, but they are significantly higher compared to females. Despite the higher admission rates for females (see Figure 4), in 2017 females constituted only 9 819 (39%) of practising attorneys (see Figure 5).

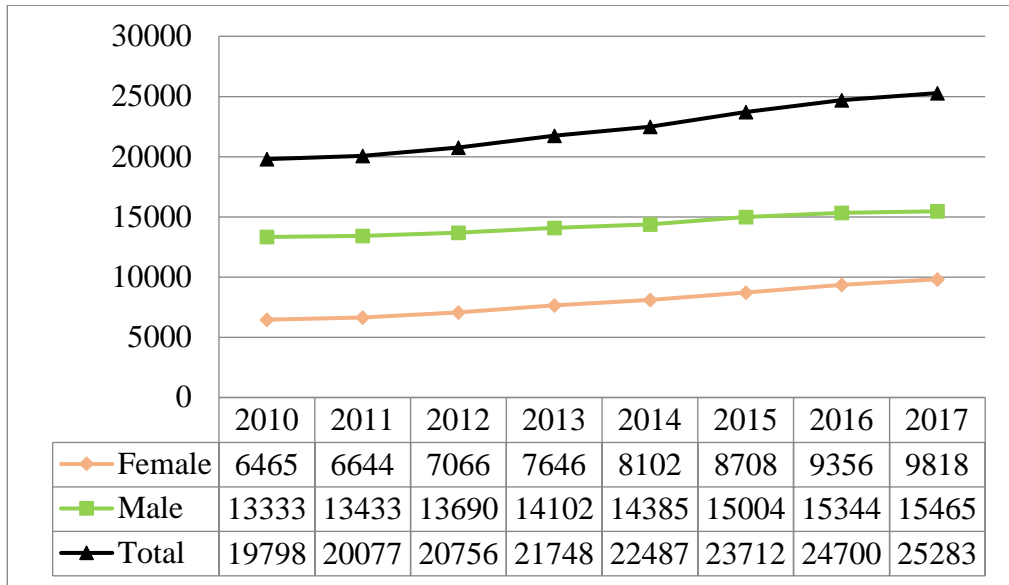


Figure 5: Practising attorneys by gender

Source: LSSA, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017

Based on current data and trends as displayed in Figure 5, a linear prediction was forecasted, which showed that it would take another 35 years (i.e. until the year 2052) before male and female practising attorneys were statistically equal (see Figure 6).

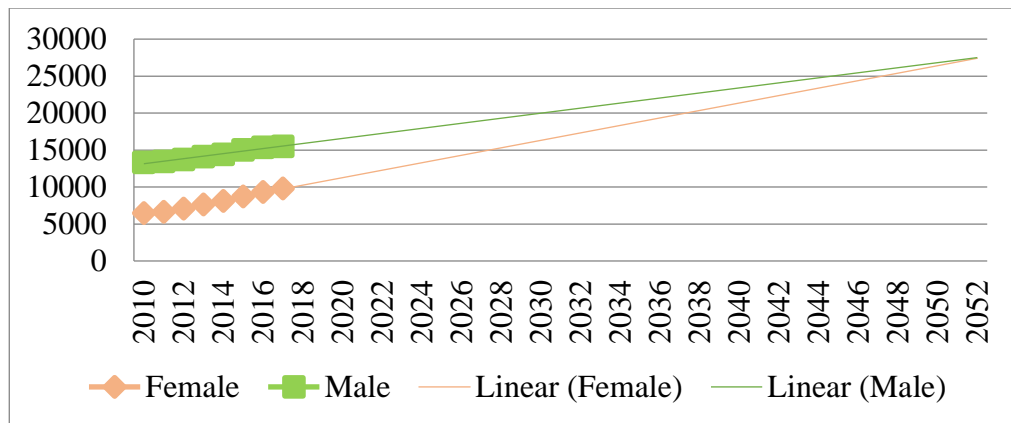


Figure 6: Linear prediction of practising attorneys by gender

Source: Author's calculations based on LSSA 2010–2017 data

Up to this point, the analysis painted a positive picture of gender transformation in the early stages of an attorney's career. Interestingly, Figure 5 shows that while the number of practising females is increasing, males are also increasing their representation and

are outnumbering females. With regard to the prediction that it will take 35 years for males' and females' presence in the profession to be statistically equal, an important question to be asked is how well we match up against our share of the South African population. Is true equality statistically possible? Figure 7 shows that it is at the practising level that females are in fact under-represented in proportion to the general population.

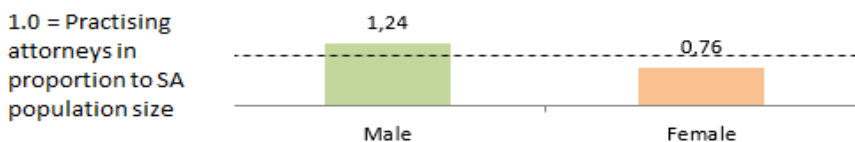


Figure 7: Practising attorneys in proportion to South African population size by gender

Source: Author's calculations based on Statistics South Africa population statistics, 2017

The highlight in an attorney's career is being promoted to partnership level, which is a symbol of success, status and prestige as it indicates that the attorney is part of the professional elite (Beckman & Phillipps, 2005; Kay & Hagan, 1998; Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008; Nelson, 1988). An associate's promotion to partnership is thus a reward indicative of hard work, commitment, loyalty and dedication. This affords him or her lifetime tenure, autonomy, and decision-making power (Kay & Gorman, 2008; Wallace & Kay, 2008; Walsh, 2012). Females account for 57 per cent of new entrants into the profession, which is reflective of the number of admitted attorneys. From 2010 to 2017 there has been a steady increase in the number of female lawyers from 6 465 to 9 818 (LSSA, 2010, 2017). Although the number of females in the profession is increasing, the profession remains skewed at the most senior level, with male partners (72%) being more than double the number of female partners (28%). Despite employment equity policies to transform the labour market, the demographics indicate that the situation remains skewed. Figure 8 paints a bleak picture for females aspiring to be partners.

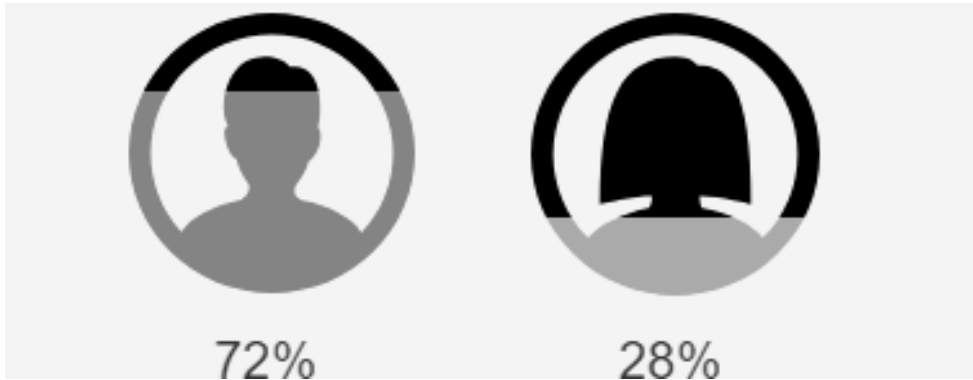


Figure 8: Partnership rank by gender

Source: Author’s calculations based on individual law societies’ figures, 2017

While females of all races have less chance of attaining partnership, Figure 9 shows that African and coloured females have an even smaller chance, whereas white females have a better chance.

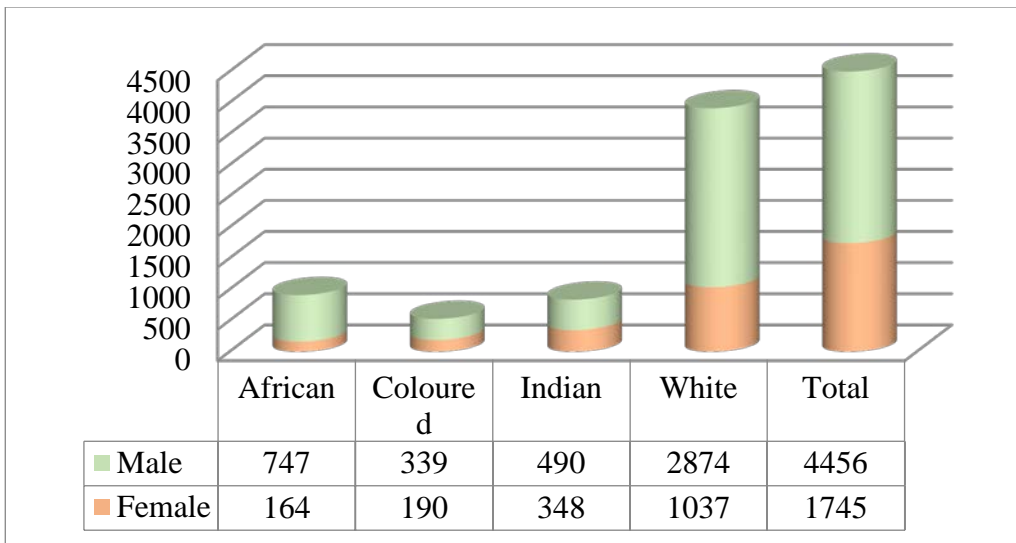


Figure 9: Partnership rank by race² and gender, 2017

Source: Author’s calculations based on individual law societies’ figures, 2017

Not only are females outnumbered, they are significantly under-represented with only half the female population being represented at the partnership level and men being

² The category Other was omitted from the analysis. This was done as the numbers were negligible and had no effect on the analysis.

over-represented (see Figure 10). It can be deduced that for every one female partner there are at least two male partners.

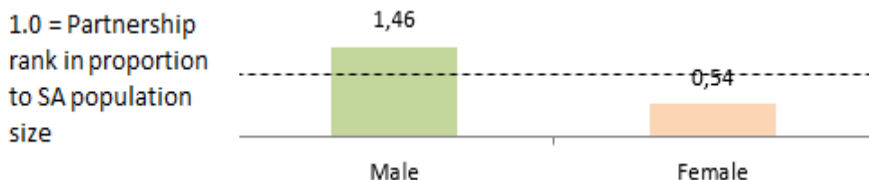


Figure 10: Partnership rank in proportion to South African population size by gender

Source: Author’s calculations based on Statistics South Africa population statistics, 2017

Interestingly, the partnership data illustrates that the profession continues to be not only male dominated but white male dominated. Not only do whites outnumber all other race groups, they are significantly over-represented by nearly eight times more than their proportion of the population (see Figure 11). This analysis is even more startling in respect of Africans who comprise 80 per cent of the population but are significantly under-represented and largely non-existent at 0.18 at partnership level (see Figure 11). What is interesting from this analysis is that one can infer an analogy that for every one African partner there are at least seven white partners. This again reaffirms that the profession continues to be a white-male-dominated profession.

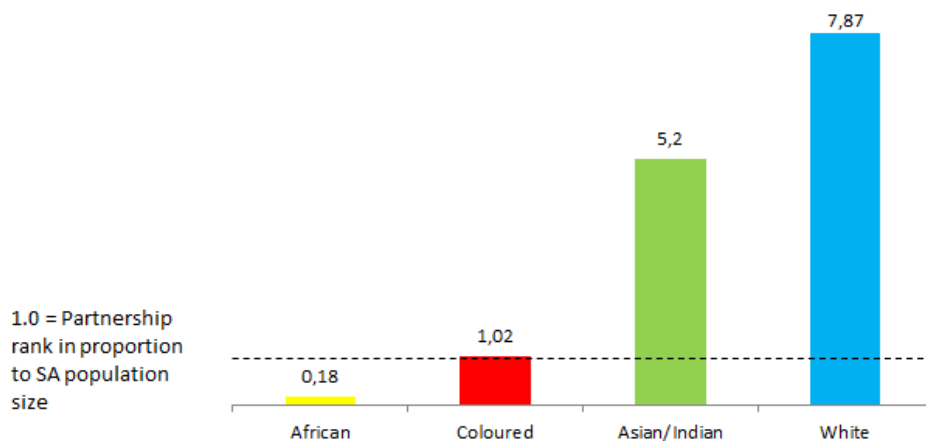


Figure 11: Partnership rank in proportion to South African population size by race³

Source: Author’s calculations based on Statistics South Africa population statistics, 2017

3 The category Other was omitted from the analysis because the numbers were negligible and had no bearing on the analysis.

The data presented in this article consistently shows that there are more females at the entry point in the profession but that their numbers diminish notably at the point where they practise and become partners. Females are not advancing to the partnership level despite the rapid increase in female attorneys, the growing market for legal services and the benefits of attaining partnership status (Hull & Nelson, 2000; Kay & Hagan, 2008; Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008; Noonan, Corcoran, & Courant, 2008; Walsh, 2012). Research shows that females find it more difficult to reach senior positions despite having the same level of education, years of experience and quality of performance (Burke & Nelson, 2002; Pratt, 2012; Siboni, Sangiorgi, Farneti, & De Villiers, 2016; Tharenou, 1999). It is estimated that females have less than a one-third chance of attaining partnership status (Hull & Nelson, 2000), with men being twice more likely to become partners (Rhode, 2001). This finding has indeed been confirmed in the case of South Africa, indicating that a “glass ceiling” is preventing females from moving up in the career hierarchy (Department of Trade and Industry, 2018; Kay & Hagan, 1998; Masengu, 2016; Ramotsho, 2018; Sandberg, 2013; Rhode, 2017; Wald, 2010). It is assumed that female law graduates will hold powerful positions in the profession since legal education and entrance into the profession are available to all, but advancing to the partnership level remains a major stumbling block for many females (Gorman, 2006; Seron, 2013). The unequal position of females in the hierarchy of legal firms can no longer be blamed on an insufficient number of females entering the profession. It is important to explore the causes that prevent successful female graduates and attorneys from reaching the pinnacle of their legal career.

Conclusion

Despite the many laws, policies and conventions promoting gender redress, and the increased number of females graduating from law schools, females are still experiencing challenges in reaching the peak of a legal career. This article illustrates at a quantitative level the gendered landscape of the South African attorney’s profession. The increase in the number of female candidate attorneys (those doing articles of clerkship) is perhaps not very surprising as it correlates with university enrolment and completion trends. International trends have shown the disparity to be only at the partnership level. This article has shown the disparity to be not only at the partnership level, but also at the practising level. This finding is an indication that South Africa is regressing because females are being excluded from progressing in their careers much earlier. The paucity of female attorneys in positions of authority is indicative that meaningful change has not occurred in the profession.

Females have bravely fought for legislative reform and are without doubt experiencing the law in ways that were previously unthinkable. Today, female lawyers are fearless, driven, resilient and committed. Not only do they want to grow and develop in their careers, but they also want to see change for future female attorneys. They see themselves acquiring skills that they can use to excel and grow in their careers and make a contribution to society. We are witnessing an era where more females are entering

(and will be entering) the profession and where the focus of research needs to shift from exploring opening doors and eradicating barriers to entering doors to buildings that have glass ceilings (Mathodlana, 2017). The legal profession in South Africa is an interesting case as it is quite attractive to the youth (especially females) and will continue to be so. The profession has come a long way, but the situation in the profession is largely one that does not allow females to make changes. While there are females at the top, the positions they occupy are relatively low and “just enough to stop anyone crying foul” (Lamond, 2017, p. 16). Legislative change has without doubt given females a voice to speak out, but has done very little to transform the work and social environment females find themselves in. However, it is important to note that while the numbers of females in senior positions are low, it is their individual stories that will continue to give hope for the next generation of lawyers.

Quantitative studies such as the present one are important in revealing the current and future situation relating to female lawyers from a statistical point of view, but they cannot indicate why trends are occurring. Therefore, quantitative studies should empirically guide future qualitative work to explore the challenges that females are experiencing. Why are they experiencing challenges and how are they experiencing these challenges? It is equally important to understand that females are not a homogenous group, and future research should consider various social constructs and intersections that confront females, for example, race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion and marital status. Female attorneys in South Africa are ready for their voices to be heard and their stories to be told. These are conversations that must happen, not only to ensure transformation in the profession, but also in the broader legal fraternity and South African society. Failure to engage with such conversations will negate any effort to further transform the profession.

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