

ABSTRACT

Women in the “House”: An Assessment of the Impact of Female Legislators on Pro-Women Policies in the Houses of Parliament in Jamaica

Jacqueline Angela Coore-Hall

This thesis, the first comprehensive study of its kind in the Caribbean, examines whether the descriptive representation of females in the Houses of Parliament in Jamaica resulted in the substantive representation of women in the society. The objective was to assess whether gender identification and/or feminist consciousness exist among female legislators, and if they use their presence in the legislature to advance women’s rights and gender equality during deliberations on pro-women Bills. *A priori* definitions were used to select 17 pieces of legislation relating to childcare, domestic violence, sexual offenses, reproductive rights, sex discrimination and family issues enacted between 1962 and 2009. The “language in use” discourse analysis and content analysis methods were used to code and analyse the verbal contributions of the female legislators during the floor debates on these Bills, to identify instances of gender-framing and claims of ownership and responsibility to represent women. There is evidence of gender identification and feminist consciousness among the female legislators. Their presence has an impact on the legislative process but has not resulted in a gendered legislative outcome as they have not introduced any pro-women Bills. Collective identity has been noted as an important enabler in the process of representation during the policy deliberations. To be more effective in getting women’s issues and concerns on to the legislative agenda, it is recommended that female legislators should strengthen ties with women’s organizations and other civil society groups and form a cross-party women’s caucus in parliament. Additionally, the electoral system should be changed to mixed member proportional representation with closed list and mandated gender quotas for candidate selection by political parties, supported by equality strategies and programmes for political transformation. Future research should include multiple frames to analyse and measure substantive representation of women by female legislators and to investigate their activities and contributions inside and outside the legislature.

Keywords: Jacqueline Angela Coore-Hall; substantive representation, women’s interests, feminism, gender identification.