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Career Barriers for Women Executives in India and the Glass Ceiling Syndrome

Dr. Jojo K Joseph¹ Jikky P Shaji²

¹Principal, DevaMatha College Kuruvilangad, Kerala, India

²Research Scholar, Research and Post Graduate Department of Commerce
Marian College Kuttikkanam [Autonomous], Kerala, India

Abstract

In India, women have a disproportionately low presence in top levels of management when compared to men. There is presence of certain barriers often referred as glass ceiling barriers which makes it difficult for women to develop their careers, especially in reaching managerial positions. The main purpose of this paper is to recognize the factors that contribute for glass ceiling of women employees in India and to summarize how these factors affect the career advancement of women. This paper undertakes an extensive review of literature on glass ceiling and career advancement of women and has identified various factors that hinder women's career advancement. The main glass ceiling barriers identified was family responsibilities, corporate practices, mentoring, networking, gender stereotypes, corporate culture and individual barriers. This paper attempts to provide a better understanding of how these factors act as a barrier to career advancement of women employees in India.

Keywords : 1.Barriers, 2.Career Advancement, 3.Glass Ceiling, 4.Women.

Introduction:

In contradiction to the popular belief, the percentage of women participating in the labor force is declining over the past few years. Women's labor force participation rate was 48.5 percent in 2018, a decrease from 51.4 percent in 1990 (Catalyst, 2018). In India, women's labor force participation rate has fallen from 35.1 percent in 1990 to 27.2 percent in 2017 (Catalyst, 2018). Also, women have a disproportionately low presence in top levels of management when compared to men. This implies that certain barriers are in place which makes it difficult for women to develop their careers, especially in reaching managerial positions. Usually these barriers follow them right from the beginning till the end of their career. These barriers are often referred to as Glass Ceiling barriers.

Glass Ceiling

The term 'glass ceiling' was coined in a 1986 issue of The Wall Street Journal on corporate women by Hymowitz and Schellhardt to describe the 'invisible but impenetrable barrier between women and the executive (Smith et al. 2012; Akpinar-Sposito, 2013; Townsend, 1997). It is used to describe the conflict that arises when qualified women were denied higher job position in the corporate ladder and did not get

equally paid for similar work (Ottu&Inwang, 2013). This situation is referred to as a 'ceiling' as there is a limitation blocking upward advancement, and 'glass' (transparent) because the limitation is not immediately apparent and is normally an unwritten and unofficial policy (Afza & Newaz, 2008). The glass ceiling refers to the difficulty of women trying to be promoted into the top management levels. Elaqua, Beehr, Hansen, & Webster (2009) found that women are less likely to be hired into a company at top levels, and although women managers might be promoted, their likelihood of obtaining promotions to the very top levels is less than men's. According to Jackson et al. (2014) the glass ceiling effects demonstrate that females are more likely than males to experience significant challenges advancing in their careers and were less likely to achieve the highest levels of recognition in their field.

Career Advancement of Women

Career advancement refers to getting promoted or being assigned more responsibilities by an employer. It is commonly believed that women have less career advancement opportunities than do men. There are different reasons to believe that women have weaker career opportunities. According to Bihagen & Ohls (2006), first, men in managerial positions prefer people with cultural preferences similar to their own. Second, prevalence of sexist attitudes i.e., the feeling that men are better suited for leadership positions better than women. And third, assumption that women have larger responsibilities to take care of family and child care. McCrady (2012) identified the main challenges that women face all through their career which includes - choices about work and family, balancing the career needs of both partners in case of committed relationships and choices about how to present themselves as professionals. Chen (2005) found that, there is a significant and positive relationship between career tracking strategies like advanced education and training, internal networking, career tracking, formal mentoring, and exceeding performance expectations and women's career advancement to senior executive positions. Women employees face various obstacles when compared to their male counterparts while attempting for upward career advancement.

Glass Ceiling Effect on Career Advancement of Women

The effect of glass ceiling on career advancement of women was made under study by various researchers. It was found that the effect of glass ceiling on career progression of women may vary depending upon the nature of profession and also differ by countries. Studies made by (Dimovski, Skerlavaj, & Man, 2010), (Morgan, 1993), (Manasra, 2013) identified the existence of strong presence of glass ceiling on women's career advancement. In addition, previous empirical studies (Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Cook & Glass, 2014) found that women were more likely than men to be placed in positions already associated with poor company performance. That is, their positions of leadership were more risky and precarious (i.e., at greater risk of being associated with failure) than those in which men found themselves. Furthermore, from the study conducted by Sharma et al. (2011) among 234 faculty members from 42 Colleges of Haryana, it was found that women respondents affirmed that they are stuck at their positions, they are over-represented at lower positions and there is biasness against them. It was observed that respondents differ significantly on the basis of their gender, despite the fact that there are government rules and regulations for gender equality.

The glass ceiling barriers prevent large numbers of women and ethnic minorities from obtaining and securing the most powerful, prestigious and highest paid jobs in the workplace. Moreover, this effect prevents women from filling high-ranking positions and puts them at a disadvantage as potential candidates for advancement. In addition, the glass ceiling barriers are present in all spheres of employment, irrespective of the sectors, levels and nature of employment.

It is vital to study why women in India, irrespective of the sector they work lack equal opportunity for advancement at the workplace. Hence, an attempt is made in order to understand the factors that contribute to the glass ceiling barriers which in turn affect the career advancement of women in India.

Objectives of the study

Despite educational gains, there is a declining trend in the female labor force participation in India. The labor force participation rate for women in India is one of the lowest in the world. The labor force participation rate for women in India for 2017 was 28.5 percent when compared to 82 percent for men. Reaching gender parity would have a bigger impact in India than in any other region in the world (Catalyst, 2018). Women comprised 3.2 percent of the board chairs and 12.4 percent of the board seats in India in 2016 (Deloitte, 2017). India's complex culture which includes diverse religions and languages, gender inequality with respect to recruitment and promotion and gender inequality with respect to compensation (World Economic Forum, 2016) may be some of the issues. The objective of this paper was

1. To identify the factors that contribute for glass ceiling of women in India
2. To summarize how these glass ceiling factors affects the career advancement of women.

The present study reviews different works done by researchers in the field of glass ceiling and career advancement of women and to spot out the important issues faced by them.

Materials and methods

This study utilized qualitative research to identify the factors that contribute to the glass ceiling barriers of women in an organization. To achieve the objectives of the study and answer the key research questions, a critical analysis of relevant literature was conducted. The literature search included the following: a computerised search of accessible and available material on glass ceiling and a search of reports from international organisations. The computer searches accessed ProQuest, EBSCO, Jstor, and Elsevier. Recent reports from Catalyst, Deloitte and World Economic Forum were also accessed for obtaining the solution for the research question. Quality research articles were reviewed in order to identify the main obstacles which women employee faces.

Antecedents of glass ceiling

There exists several glass ceiling barriers for women to reach the top positions in an organization. By conducting a detailed review of existing literature, different factors with respect to glass ceiling that influences career advancement of women across world were identified. A meticulous discussion of these factors is mentioned below.

Family responsibilities

Family responsibility refers to instrumental activities relating to child upbringing, providing goods and support services for the family (Kolade&Kehinde, 2013). Women are typically the primary family caregivers for children and/or the elderly (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013). One of the most commonly used metaphors is the 'second shift', a term used to describe working women having far greater involvement than their husbands/partners in home and family responsibilities, i.e. doing unpaid labor. In India, the nation with the world's highest number of working women, women are responsible for most household work and childcare (Smith et al. 2012). According to Catalyst (2018) in India, average time spent per day in unpaid work by women is five hours and 52 minutes. Whereas, it is only 52 minutes for men which is much lower than other developed countries.

Responsibility to take care of children is a barrier for career advancement. According to Bihagen and Ohls (2006) the gender penalty in career is relatively larger for women with small children. Various impediments that a women face with respect to family responsibilities include career interruptions for household and family responsibility, reluctance to relocate, conflict between work role and family role or other personal commitments, non-supportive spouse, and lack of support from family (Aeran, 2014; Cutler & Jackson, 2002; Daley, 1996; Rath et al. 2016).

In most of the cases, spouse of the woman employee may also be employed. Hence, women's careers are not important as they are not the primary family provider. As promotion policy is linked to transfer, fear of dislocation due to transfer weakens women managers' aspiration to move up the ladder (Rath et al. 2016). Hence, due to fear of relocations women are unwilling to make sacrifices to retain top positions.

Women often, voluntarily move to less challenging jobs in the middle of their careers to keep up with their commitments as homemakers.

Corporate practices

Organizations may promote career of women managers in response to legislation. At many cases, the practices followed by organization determine the pace at which each woman gets promoted to the top. Women are less likely to be hired into a company at top levels, and even if women managers might be promoted, their likelihood of obtaining promotions to the very top levels is less than men's (Elaqua et al. 2009).

The key challenges a women face in relation with corporate practices include lack of equality in respect for male and female in terms of employment, equality in career development opportunity / career encouragement, gender-equity policy in respect to recruitment, promotion, remuneration, equal access to training opportunities, and equality in performance appraisal and incentive system. According to Catalyst (2018), in India, women earn 62 percent of what their male colleagues earn for performing the same work.

Usually, women employees have to perform more than their male counterparts to get them recognised as qualified candidates for promotion. Equal performance by men and women in a male-dominated organisation may mean that women have travelled more and this must be recognized (Bruke et al. 2006). The availability of developmental opportunities is the key to transitory success (Daley, 1996). Limiting challenge is dangerous for the career advancement of women. By giving women less important jobs and not considering them for key assignments, blocks their advancement by denying them important business experiences (Bruke et al. 2006).

Mentoring

Mentors are usually higher ranking, experienced, knowledgeable senior level employees (Elaqua et al. 2009). They are committed to provide support to lower level employees in order to move up their career ladder. Having a female mentor, therefore serve as a motivational reinforcement (Daley, 1996). Lack of inadequate senior female managers to act as mentors adds to the barrier of glass ceiling. Perception of women as followers is strengthened by the absence of strong female role models (Jain & Mukherji, 2010). Mentoring has a number of benefits including - people with mentors are more satisfied with their jobs and have greater success on jobs than those without mentors (Jackson, 2001). Paucity of senior women role models hinders women career development. According to Posholi (2013) women who have not been mentored face more challenges as compared to those who have been mentored. Hence, it is seen that lack of adequate mentors, especially female mentors hold back women's career advancement.

Networking

Engaging in networking behaviors, by attempting to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to provide work or career assistance, is considered to be an important career advancement strategy. According to Rath et al. (2016) networks are sources of informal power which support career progression by building strategic relationships with powerful people within the organization. Men use to develop work relationships in the company, and these networks often tend to exclude women due to the nature of their activities or the perception that these are 'male activities', thus contributing to gender barriers in the workplace (Akpinar-Sposito 2013). Men often hold more centralized critical positions in organizations, where they have access to valuable information concerning job openings, pending projects, and managerial decisions often shared through the 'old boys network'. With a male environment, women are disadvantaged to develop such networks whereas men are privileged to have access.

Corporate culture

Cultural practices within an organization are determined by the way of life inside the organization. Men in managerial positions prefer people with cultural preferences similar to their own (Bihagen & Ohls, 2006). They determine the internal climate and environment (Rath et al. 2016). A common perception in male dominated organization is that men are viewed as the leader in the organizations, while women are viewed as the supportive followers (Jackson, 2001). Corporate culture act as an interpersonal glue that holds an organization together, and also act as an informal control mechanism which helps to coordinate employee efforts (Jain & Mukherji, 2010).

Women managers have problems presenting themselves as plausible candidates for promotion since the dominant organization model of those that will succeed is strongly sex typed male (Liff & Ward 2001). Women in male dominated environments are appraised under more strict criteria than men (Jain & Mukherji, 2010; Posholi 2013), while sometimes having to adapt to male working styles and attitudes more than necessary. If they work hard and are career oriented they are branded as unfeminine (Rath et al. 2016). The values and perceptions also see women differently. Most often, unfavorable corporate culture, male domination of senior positions, masculine culture norms, gender discrimination at workplace, and lack of positive encouragement in organization act as barriers to career advancement of women.

Gender stereotypes

The perception of management, which is predominantly male, is impacted by male view about women and their capabilities. Much of the resistance from managements to women's career progression is because of the stereotype that women are not capable enough to be successful managers. A mistake committed by one woman is generalized to the entire group of women and is used to highlight their incompetence (Rath et al. 2016). Negative perceptions and stereotype about women includes attitudes like women are challenge averse, women are not sufficiently competitive and ambitious in comparison with men, and perception that women should not head over men.

If female's behavior confirms the gender stereotype, they are not taught to be acting as a proper leader. Conversely, if their behavior is consistent with the leader stereotypes, they are not taught to be acting as proper women (Jain & Mukherji, 2010). Women leaders are usually judged more leniently by their followers as they were expected to do poorly because of negative stereotypes, but actually did better than expected. Stereotypes perceptions may still persist that women are less suited for management than men.

Individual factors

As a result of various personal factors, women may not be interested or concerned to apply for promotions within an organization. According to the findings of M. & Chamaru (2013), among the glass ceiling factors, most influenced factor was individual factor. Previous empirical studies have identified various individual barriers that impede women's career advancement. These are low confidence level, limited ambition, negative attitudes, personal traits, negative self-perception as a leader, and ineffective leadership style.

Studies found that, the attitude of success differs with men and women. According to Dimovski et al. (2010) men appear to focus on external criteria, such as status and material success, while women focus on internal criteria, such as personal recognition, accomplishment, and achieving balance in their lives. Women may value life satisfaction and happiness more than the power of high-level management positions, as compared to men (Rath et al. 2016). Women shy away from competition and men compete too much, it decreases the chance of women succeeding in competition for promotions and more lucrative jobs (Jain & Mukherji, 2010).

Discussion and conclusion

The primary aim of this paper was to identify various factors that contribute to the glass ceiling barriers of women employees that hinders their career advancement opportunities. For this purpose, an extensive literature review was conducted and a key issue faced by women executives across the world was identified. From the review, the factors which were identified as the major barriers to career advancement of women includes: family responsibilities, corporate practices, mentoring, networking, gender stereotypes, corporate culture and individual barriers. A consolidation of the factors in tabular form is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Glass ceiling barriers to career advancement of women

Glass ceiling barriers	Sources
Family Responsibilities Career interruptions for household and family responsibility Reluctant to relocate Conflict between work role and family role Non-supportive spouse Lack of support from family	Posholi, (2013); Rath et al. (2016); Townsend, (1997) Cutler & Jackson, (2002); Daley, (1996) Kilian& McCarty,(2005); Manasra,(2013) Afza&Newaz, (2008); Kolade&Kehinde, (2013) Afza&Newaz(2008); Subramaniam et al. (2016)
Corporate Practices Gender inequality in terms of employment Inequality in career development opportunity Gender-equity policy in respect to recruitment Gender-equity policy in respect to promotion Gender-equity policy in respect to remuneration Equal access to training opportunities Equality in performance appraisal and incentive system	Jackson, (2001); Kolade&Kehinde, (2013) Dimovski et al. (2010); Rath et al. (2016) Elaqua et al. (2009); Manasra, (2013); Rath et al. (2016) Jackson, (2001); M. &Chamaru, (2013) Dimovski et al. (2010); Adamson, (2012) Mathur-Helm, (2006); Posholi, (2013) Afza&Newaz, (2008); Sharma &Sehrawat, (2014)
Mentoring Lack of mentoring for female executives Lack of guidance and support of mentor Paucity of senior women role models	Adamson, (2012); Daley, (1996); Townsend, (1997) Daley, (1996); Posholi, (2013) Elaqua et al. (2009).
Networking Exclusion of female employees from important senior management communications Exclusion of potential female candidates from internal promotion related decision-making processes Exclusion from new highly visible work assignments Difficulty in getting right informal connections	Adamson, (2012); Afza&Newaz, (2008) Adamson, (2012) Azmia et al. (2012); Forret& Dougherty, (2004) Elaqua et al. (2009); Forret& Dougherty, (2004)
Corporate Culture Unfavorable corporate culture Male domination in senior positions Masculine culture norms Gender discrimination at workplace Lack of positive encouragement	Dimovski et al. (2010); Townsend, (1997) Afza&Newaz, (2008); Jain &Mukherji, (2010) Choi & Park, (2014); Rath et al. (2016) Manasra, (2013); Subramaniam et al. (2016) Bruke&McKeen, (1995); Dimovski et al. (2010).

<p>Gender Stereotypes Women are challenge averse Perception that women should not head over men Women are not sufficiently competitive and ambitious</p>	<p>Jain & Mukherji, (2010); Rath et al. (2016) Kolade & Kehinde, (2013). Jain & Mukherji, (2010); Kolade & Kehinde, (2013)</p>
<p>Individual Factors Low confidence level Limited ambition Negative attitudes Personal traits Negative self-perception as a leader Ineffective leadership style</p>	<p>Azmia et al. (2012); M. & Chamaru, (2013) Kolade & Kehinde, (2013); Rath et al. (2016) Kolade & Kehinde, (2013); M. & Chamaru (2013) Azmia et al. (2012); M. & Chamaru, (2013) Jackson, (2001) Townsend, (1997); Sharma et al. (2011)</p>

Evidence from the review highlights the slow progression of women achieving equality in leadership positions. Even though women's proportion in labor force varies from countries to countries and from sectors to sectors, there is substantial evidence that their position in the higher levels of management has not become equal to that of men. Women still endures various difficulties when compared to men while climbing the corporate ladder. Even in this twenty first century, gender equality is only a dream with respect to employment.

This analysis has directed us toward identifying a limitation of the current paper. The present work is only a comprehensive survey of literature about glass ceiling. In order to understand the actual impact of glass ceiling on career advancement of women in the financial service sector, a detailed study has to be conducted. Hence, an empirical study is essential [i] to check whether glass ceiling really exist in the financial service sector of India, [ii] which all factors are applicable in our context and which all factors are irrelevant [iii] to suggest a model to measure the relative influence of each of these factors on the career advancement of women and [iv] to suggest remedies to avoid the effects of glass ceiling etc.

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