

**IS GENDER PLAYS A ROLE IN WORKPLACE?
REVIEW OF GLASS-CEILING EFFECT ON WOMEN EMPLOYEES**

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ABSTRACT

Women participation in the workplace has increased dramatically in recent years, yet the women in the the highest positions of the organizations are still rare. Women face greater barriers that are different from those of their male counterparts when moving up the career ladder. Glass-ceiling refers to situations where the advancement of a qualified person within the hierarchy of an organization is halted at a particular level. The paper discusses the glass ceiling of women employees and the nature of the glass ceiling among the women in society. Further it provides a critical analysis on the glass ceiling by giving empirical evidence from different authors. Evidence shows that glass ceiling is still prevalent around the world. However, cooperates do not believe the existence of glass ceiling, which makes the situation worse by hiding reality. They argued that glass-ceiling effect is a myth created by society. Moreover, it is argued that the lack of women employees in the top positions of the organizations is not because of the glass-ceiling was there but because the factors within the women employees hinder their movements to the top positions in the organizations. Hence glass ceiling remains still debatable.

Keywords: career development, glass-ceiling, women

1. Introduction

Shaping the critical decisions of an organization is one of the superior position that an employee can be reached in his or her career ladder. Mostly it can be obtained through effective career development. Therefore an effective career development of an individual is important not only for the person but also for the organization (Panorama, 2008). Career development can be recognized as a process that employees progress from a series of stages. Each stage is characterized by different sets of development tasks, activities, and relationships (Noe as cited in Amir & Mahmud, 2014). Therefore, career development can be considered a proper approach taken by an organization to ensure that people with the appropriate qualifications and experience are available in the organization when needed; hence, if proper career development exists within the organization, the most appropriate labour force will retain in the organization. Career development can be perceived inside the same organization as a hierarchical promotion from the simpler and less demanding positions to more demanding and challenging assignments and those involving certain level of responsibility. Moreover career can be developed horizontally, which means that person changes jobs and positions in order to achieve their demands and expectations.

The employee performance is considered the backbone of the organization, leading to the organisation's growth and development. Thus organizations should focus on its human resource rather than focusing on man or woman as separate resources (Adewale & Anthonia, 2013, Patrick and Kumar, 2011, Nandy, Bhaskar & Ghosh 2014). However traditionally, pink is for girls and blue is for boys hence when they grew up as men and women, they are expected to be either masculine or feminine in their behavior. Further, men were viewed as breadwinners whereas women were viewed as caretakers (Silva & Priyasantha, 2014, Kiaye and Singh 2013).

Anyhow at present the involvement of women in the workplace has been increased across the world and the traditional roles have evolved with more women accepting the role of earner in their lives and men beginning to take house hold and parenting duties. According to the ILO (2006), out of the world's 2.9 billion workers, 40% were women and Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) reported that the proportion of women at middle level management positions have been increased as a result of the activities of the women's efforts, policies of the political system, and corporate equal opportunity initiatives. Labour force participation of women in the world has significantly increased during the last few decades but the proportion of women reaching senior and top management positions has remained relatively low (Victor & Shamila, 2018). However there was a contradiction with existing literature since Akpinar (2012) argued that females generally tend to be concentrated in lower management positions and have less authority than men. Further, stated that in the same time women are still centralized in traditionally female functional areas such as human resources, corporate communications, community and governmental relations, marketing and finance. Hence companies unable to obtain maximum outcome from female employees. Once moving up the career ladder of an organization, it is hard to find females because the majority of top management positions in almost all countries are primarily held by men (Victor & Shamila, 2018, Akpinar, 2012) even though, the most educated females in the world expect fulfillment of power, affiliation, utilization of knowledge, and the prestige of being employed.

The advancement of a qualified person within the hierarchy of an organization is halted at a particular level because the discrimination, most commonly sexism or racism is referred to the Glass-ceiling (Afza & Newaz, 2008). Therefore it is evidenced that women have less career development opportunities than do men and they faced the harsh effect of glass-

ceiling. Hence it is important to pay attention on women's career development and advancement without any gender distinct treatments.

The buzzword 'glass-ceiling' refers to situations, where the advancement of a qualified person, within the hierarchy of an organization, is stopped at a lower level because of some form of discrimination, most commonly, sexism or racism. Glass-ceiling is a concept that usually more relevant on women than male employees. The U.S. Department of Labor has defined 'Glass Ceiling' as "an artificial barrier based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevents qualified women and other minorities from advancing upward in their organization and senior management level positions".

Constitution of 1978 guarantees equal rights without discrimination on the grounds of sex offers scope for affirmative action however there is a need to work towards gender equality in several sides of human development. Even though both academic and governmental, have shown that there are efforts to decrease diversity, women still face barriers when it comes to top management positions in the private sector (Pai & Vaidya, 2009). Therefore women continue to be disadvantaged in management fields further they have been excluded from foreign or international management positions too (Baker & McKenzie, as cited in Njiru, 2013). The ILO (2006) clarifies that the promotion of women's participation in economic activity, including the management and decision making levels, is not simply an answer for the question of equity, but also one of necessity for viable and sustainable national development. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 include the ambitious aim to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. Moreover, they have stated that promoting gender equality is now generally recognized as a vital requirement of poverty reduction and development and development effectiveness.

2. Critical Analysis

According to Rai & Srivastava (2010), glass-ceiling's effect highly impacts women in India unlike the other countries around the world. Authors provided examples as only 3% of the senior positions in the Indian Private Sector companies are filled by women. A leading company like Videocon does not hire women for its corporate office in Mumbai and no woman would be found on the shop floor of Bajaj Auto. Even with 75% of the world's illiterate people are women; women hold only 14% of Parliamentary seats worldwide, 80% of those displaced by violent conflicts and disasters are women". In Asian culture women have locked into their household responsibilities and male chauvinism has discouraged the women from their development of their careers.

The other good example in recent years was the case of Hilory Clinton. She was a candidate for US Presidential Elections 2008, said, "Women voters could shatter America's 'highest glass ceiling' and make her its first female president". Clinton has failed because she could not shatter the proverbial glass ceiling (Rai & Srivastava, 2010).

Glass ceiling is an invisible hurdle that determines the level to which a woman can grow in an organization. In general, it is an attitudinal or organizational bias, which prevents women from occupying leadership positions in organizations. Even though women have proven their capability to handle top positions and leadership skills, the cooperate world has created a barrier for them. Although the fact that 68 women have led their countries as presidents and prime ministers, there still exist many barriers in the career path of women leading to leadership positions. Some of the barriers are related to the women themselves, and some to

their organizations. Women employees can be successful if the interchange of organization and family support manage well along with their individual drive for success.

At present steady increases in the levels of women's participation in the workforce can be observed, however similar increases have not been found in the number of women entering the ranks of senior corporate management. Hence it can be suggested that female workers encountered glass ceiling, which an invisible but real barrier for them to reach senior management positions and in high level decision making positions (Afza & Newaz, 2008). In this scenario, there is a limitation in upward advancement, and this limitation is not directly occurred as well as it is unwritten and unofficial policy Further, this situation is wide in most third-world countries (Afza & Newaz, 2008).

Women at the highest levels of business are still rare. They comprise only 10% of senior managers in Fortune 500 companies; less than 4% of the uppermost ranks of CEO, president, executive vice president, and COO; and less than 3% of top corporate earners. Supplementary Pai and Vaidya (2009) pointed out that person who gets promoted into management or top position in any organization indicated that employment diversity records do not fair-minded less diversity in organizational upper atmosphere. Hence the higher position, in both, the private and public sectors, less likely that women or minorities will fill it. Obviously management positions represent only a small proportion of the total workforce; however this job category has grown over the last few decades due to the growth of the service sector. Whereas the expansion of this sector has often given more employment opportunities to women nevertheless women remain under representing of management positions (ILO, 2006).

According to the Sri Lanka labour force survey (2017) only 4.9% of the proportion is held by female in managers, senior officials and legislator category. Women are heavily concentrated in certain occupations like 11.8% of in "Professional" occupation compared with 3.7% of males whereas Clerks and Clerical support workers occupation indicates 5.9% for females compared with 3% of males. Hence it can be proved that the female representation in senior management level is considerably low in Sri Lanka.

Past studies have identified several factors which limiting female employees to climbing up the corporate ladder. Employers avoid promoting women because women as a group are absent from work more often than men, due to child bearing and childcare responsibilities, organizational level variables such as size, public versus private status, different geographic region are other considerable barriers, individual factors like women strategies and style of communication are significant barriers in carrier development (Edirisinghe, 2018, Keenawinna and Sajeewanie, 2015, Jayawardane & Sajeewani, 2015, Afza & Newaz, 2008, Rosenfeld as cited in Afza & Newaz, 2008). Moreover, Kattara as cited in Amir and Mahmud (2014) discrimination in career development occurred because the community often sees women with certain stereotypes and lack of opportunities for mentoring, training, and development.

However it is essential to have appropriate career development opportunities for employees regardless of their gender because career development leads to realize the employees' full potentials and facilitates businesses to structure employment opportunities. As well as making people aware of learning, work, civic, leisure opportunities and career guidance helps to build confidence and empower individuals. However, discrimination always occurs among female employees because people assume that they cannot do the job properly as male workers, especially in management positions (Amir & Mahmud, 2014; Afza & Newas, 2008).

Though women's participation in the labour market is increasing, some and the majority occupied the lower range of the white collar positions. Moreover females need to work harder and longer to show their credibility in order to have opportunity (Ismail & Ibrahim as cited in Amir & Mahmud, 2014). And also most of the organizations have staff development schemes but nothing aimed specifically at women. Further it has a written equal opportunities statement but in actual situation do not have an affirmative action program.

Even though many studies have shown there was a glass-ceiling from the historic time many cooperates believed and argued that this concept is a myth and a self created one backed by two major arguments. First, is that women can hold higher positions based on their talents, through hard work and aspirations and the second one is work challenges and family responsibilities that get into the way of women's career development. Women tend to quit the senior management roles in organizations since they feel the family is more important though there were very few females in higher positions backed by the support of their families by sharing the household responsibilities by their partners.

Despite the above arguments, some authors have argued that there is no such thing as glass-ceiling: a self-created concept and a myth. Studies have found that it is not the management who stop the women employees from moving up in their career ladder, it is them who holding or locking themselves. Njiru (2013) pointed out that if female employees have their own willingness to confront and fight strong barriers and hurdles that stand their path mostly they would be able reach and survive in high flying jobs in corporations and organizations. Further it is facilitated by the arguments of Shakir & Siddiqui (2014) stating that the selection of Carleton Fiorina as first female CEO of (Hewlett-Packard) in the year 1999 was seen as a proof that a glass ceiling do not exist anymore. Fiorina declared that women encounter "No limits whatsoever. There is no glass ceiling". Moreover, in the last few years, Irene Rosenfeld of Kraft food and Patricia Woertz of Archer Daniels-Midland also shake the glass ceiling concept by becoming CEOs of fortune500 and Forbes 400 companies respectively. Further they have mentioned that women can get on top ladder of hierarchal levels by proving their selves as ambitious, diligent and value addition to bottom line if they have the will but many women do not opt for striving career goals. It is family responsibility which hinders women career development not the organization or management. Also it is not gender discrimination against women but lack of male (and female) sponsorship which keeps them away from top position because despite being qualified for leadership they do not have that support which is required to become prominent and motivated to pass the hazardous passage of top management safely.

(Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010) refer queen bee syndrome as one of causes which impedes females advancement and development as professional incorporate environment where women on top positions avoid helping women striving to raze the glass ceiling. Queen bees feel that women should struggle and put efforts to be on top ladder of hierarchy as they did for the same. This syndrome does not let Queen Bees ease women aspiring to be on higher levels in organizations. Moreover majority of queen bees do not encourage training and development for ambitious women.

Moreover women's individual strategies also affect her career as stated by (Hafen as cited in Shakir & Siddiqui, 2014) women involvement in manipulation, gossips, exclusion and social isolation disturb functionality of office settings and eliminate the possibility of their promotions and development as professionals in organization.

Breaking that barrier is a more challenging task that women employees should do and Rai & Srivastava have proposed two ways of dealing with it. Employers' side is one aspect which can support to break the glass-ceiling for women employees and there are actions that can be taken includes create a supportive culture for women employees, develop and monitor promotions so that talented women employees will be promoted despite of their gender and promote good practices among both men and women. On the other hand women employees can address the issue from their side as well. Understand their inner strengths, weaknesses and motivations, develop their own self to be prepared for the upper positions of the organizations, branding their leadership qualities, understand the organizational politics in different levels and deal effectively with them, and finally understand their value to the organization and build a good network with others will be a ladder for their future positions of the organization.

3. Conclusion

The concept of Glass-ceiling was an area which was more confusing in the past and is at present. In recent years, women as well as gender issues have turn into a major area of concern. Worldwide discussions have pointed women issues and women progression in all areas of life. The reason behind that was the increasing participation of women in labor market. Some studies illustrate that during the last two decades there has been an increase in the proportion of women at entry and middle-level management positions, resulting largely from the activities of the women's movement, policies of the political system, and corporate equal opportunity initiatives. However women at the highest levels of business are still rare. Ample of evidence demonstrates that women employees face the glass-ceiling effect despite their qualifications, ambitions, and dedication for moving up in the ladders in the cooperate world. It was mainly backed by the traditional facts and myths about the women which are developed by the society. However, the corporate world does not believe that the women employees face the glass-ceiling effect or discrimination in promoting women employees to the upper positions of the organizations, which makes the situation worse by hiding reality. Consequently this effect was occurred in organizations due to the hidden and unofficial policies of the senior management about not promoting female employees. However some authors have pointed out the fact that the glass-ceiling effect is a myth created by the society by providing empirical evidences from different scenarios argued that there were lack of women employees in the top positions of the organizations not because of the glass-ceiling was there but because of the factors within the women employees hinder their movements to the top positions in the organizations hence it remains still debatable.

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