PRESENCE OF GLASS CEILING IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: A ROADBLOCK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The glass ceiling in higher educational institutions is a significant roadblock to sustainable development. Despite the increasing number of women in faculty positions, their career progression appears to be slow, with many remaining concentrated toward entry-level positions. This invisible barrier hinders women's advancement to top positions, such as heads, deans, and directors. A study of 98 faculty members working in higher education sector in NCR region revealed that gender and psychological constraints were the strongest glass ceiling barriers. Other factors like perceived discrimination and a male-dominating culture significantly determine the glass ceiling effect. The conceptual model of the glass ceiling and career development in the study highlights the complexities that hinder women's career advancement. It offers a framework for thoroughly analyzing and addressing these issues, considering the interplay of societal, organizational, human, and external factors, as well as the importance of intersectionality and continuous adaptability. The study points out that this vertical segregation not only impedes individual career development but also undermines the broader goal of gender equality, a key aspect of sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: Gender inequity; Women's leadership; Glass ceiling; Underrepresentation.

INTRODUCTION

The higher education system in India is undergoing rapid changes. We have one of the world's largest university networks, with a total of 43,796 universities (IBEF Report, 2023 retrieved online on 11 May 2023). There has been rapid expansion in the markets and occupational opportunities due to globalization, which has created an exciting range of educational and career options. Women have also benefited from this expansion in the educational sector. Despite significant strides in workplace diversity, it is an unfortunate reality that women still face significant obstacles in their efforts to reach senior management positions.

Conventionally, women have faced various difficulties and obstacles in accessing positions of leadership in higher educational institutions in India. There is an assorted set of underlying reasons for this discrimination. Most commonly, men are assumed to be the best fit for leadership positions within the academe. The unfriendly policies at the workplace that directly impact women during their childbearing years, as well as other hidden and overt beliefs, norms, and stereotypes, create gender prejudice, also known as the glass ceiling phenomenon. The glass ceiling is a metaphorical barrier used to describe stigmatized behavior that creates invisible barriers and limits opportunities for the advancement of women and minorities, despite possessing the requisite skills and qualifications.

It is worth noting that women's participation in the higher education sector in India shows an upward trend. However, it is disappointing to see that in reality, this trend does not continue upwards when it comes to leadership roles. This dissonance in statistics is just an indication of a broader underlying imbalance that favors males as more morally upright and deserving than women. According to the All-India Survey on Higher Education Report (2018-19), out of the total 14,16,299 teachers, 57.8 percent are male and 42.2 percent are female. At the national level, the ratio is 73 females per 100 males. There are approximately 190,000 teachers at the university level, with 36.65 percent of them being female. For every 100 men, only 49 women are employed as non-teaching staff members. This gender inequality in higher education leadership not only hinders individual growth but also obstructs the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Dismantling the glass ceiling is crucial for sustainable development. Providing equal opportunities for all will help us harness the full potential of human resources accelerating progress towards the SDGs. By ensuring equal opportunities for all, we can harness the full potential of human resources, thereby accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Hence, it becomes very important to bring the issue of the glass ceiling in higher educational institutions in research discussion and identify the factors deterring it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of available literature points to various factors that help or obstruct the opportunities for career progression of women in higher educational institutions. The most common constraints identified by studies are the glass ceiling, gender discrimination, organizational culture, work-life imbalances, male domination, stereotypes, poor support, and personal characteristics (April & Sikatali, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018). A major finding from different studies conducted on barriers and constraints that affect women in educational leadership pointed to family responsibilities as a major roadblock in the career progression of working women. Many authors have supported this conclusion, including Maheshwari & Lenka (2022) and Business Consultants FZE (2018). They found that women are more likely to take on a larger share of family responsibilities, which can limit their availability for the long hours and travel often required for career advancement in academia.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Over the years, women have been actively participating in the workforce, but it is an undeniable fact that their career growth is hindered by the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is a discriminatory obstacle that impedes women's progress in their careers and prevents them from reaching higher positions. This study has two crucial objectives:

1. To analyze and identify the key factors responsible for the existence of the glass ceiling.

2. To determine how the glass ceiling affects women's career advancement.

RESEARCH METHODS

The main objective of this research was to explore the barriers that restrain women from reaching senior leadership positions in Higher Educational Institutions in India. Both primary and secondary data were used to investigate the existence of the glass ceiling phenomenon and the potential factors that contribute to its presence. The primary data was collected from faculty members and senior leaders working in different universities and affiliated colleges in the NCR region. The participants were recruited using convenience sampling and snowball sampling because the snowball sampling technique, as recommended by Esterberg (2002), is appropriate to find populations of people who engage in stigmatized behavior. A total of 98 respondents participated in the study. Respondents with varying demographic profiles who worked at various universities were included in the sample. For this reason, the sample may be said to be representative of the population.

Table 1: Reliability estimates of factors of glass ceiling

Factors	Alpha Values
Family	.80
Gender	.72
Age	.60
Ethnic background	.62
Religion	.60
Work life balance	.78
Psychological constraints	.89
Persons of opposite gender	.79
Persons of same gender in senior administration	.69
Non-competitive Salary	.83
Lack of family friendly workplace policies	.77
Attitudinal and organizational prejudices	.87
Expression of sexism in the workplace	.67
Absence of sponsors, mentors and role-models	.70
Lack of administrative experience	.76
Lack of leadership training programs	.80
Capabilities to network	.71

The main instruments used for the study were open-ended and close-ended questionnaires. The closed-ended items were in the form of a Likert scale with a range of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Various glass ceiling factors (organizational, cultural, societal, psychological, family, and stereotypes, etc.) were included in the questionnaire in the form of statements. The questionnaires were sent via mail as Google Form attachments and, in a few cases, were personally administered by the researchers. The reliability and validity of the glass ceiling factors were confirmed through alpha values (Table 1). The collected data were tabulated, and the final analysis was performed with SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis of responses from faculty working in higher educational institutes was done in order to explore the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. However, it was not aimed at drawing conclusions on causality. As noted by Leedy, Ormron, Welman, and several other authors in their research, descriptive statistics aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of a particular situation at a specific moment in time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Welman et al., 2005). Table 2 below highlights the demographic profile of the respondents. Out of a total of 98 sampled respondents, 51 percent were male and 49 percent were female faculty members. Nearly 68 percent of the respondents were in the age group of 30-60 years, and 37 percent had completed doctoral and post-doctoral degrees, respectively. It was observed that 53 percent of the respondents were holding leadership positions with more than 5 years of experience in administration.

On the domestic front, it was noticed that 38.7 percent of the sampled faculty members were married, and the average family size was more than 3. Almost 47 percent of the respondents had two or more children. The statistics reveal that 44.9 percent had elderly people in the family and more than 58 percent of the respondents have domestic servants to help them with routine chores.

BARRIERS OF GLASS CEILING

The research study aims to investigate the obstacles that hinder the promotion of women to leadership positions in their respective organizations. The primary objective is to determine whether the glass ceiling is created by organizational, socio-cultural, or individual characteristics. The main instrument used for the study was a close-ended questionnaire consisting of 17 major items in the form of a Likert-type scale. The results were categorized into disagree, agree, and neutral to make it convenient for analysis.

The psychological boundaries that women frame against themselves in their minds emerged as the major hindrance in career advancement and reaching leadership positions as shown in Table 3 below. Almost 43 percent of respondents expressed agreement over this variable in the study. The other factors, in order of majority responses, were lack of administrative experience (40.8 percent); capabilities to network (40.8 percent); sexism in the workplace (38.8 percent); family responsibilities (38.7 percent); attitudinal and organizational prejudices (37.7 percent); persons of the same gender in senior administration (37.7 percent);

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents

Socio- demographic Parameters	Rate of recurrence	Percentage
Age (in years)		
20-30	32	32.6
31-40	24	24.5
41-50	19	19.4
51-60	23	23.5
Gender		
Male	50	51
Female	48	49
Education		
Post Graduate	27	27.5
Doctorate	36	36.7
Post Doctoral	35	35.7
Years of Experience in Higher Education Administration (in years)		
Less than 1	14	14.2
2-5	27	27.5
More than 5	57	58.1
Holding Leadership Position		
Yes	46	46.9
No	52	53.1
Marital Status		
Unmarried	32	32.6
Married	38	38.7
Separated/Divorced	28	28.6
Family Size (No. of members)		
1-2	10	10.2
3-5	58	59.2
More than 5	30	30.6
Number of Children		
No children	10	10.2
1	31	31.6
2-4	46	46.9
More than 4	11	11.2
Elderly People		
Yes	44	44.9
No	54	55.1
Domestic help/servant		
Yes	57	58.2
No	41	41.8

and non-competitive salary (36.7 percent). Furthermore, these factors were followed by absence of sponsors, mentors, and role models; lack of family-friendly workplace policies and leadership training programs advocated by 34.7 percent of respondents respectively.

Overall, the trend demonstrates a combination of hurdles that women encounter to attain educational leadership positions. The finding supports research by various authors such as Bain & Cumming (2000), Linehan & Scullion (2001), Bell, McLaughlin & Sequeira (2002), Adamson (2012), and Afza & Newaz (2008) who have shown that family responsibilities, lack of administrative experience, and limited networking access are significant barriers for females seeking administrative positions.

Conceptual model: glass ceiling and career advancement of women

In the higher education sector of India, women's experiences vary based on their intersectionality of factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability. These intersecting identities can either exacerbate or alleviate the impact of glass ceiling barriers. Conceptually, career advancement of women is dependent on these glass ceiling barriers (organizational culture, family responsibilities, psychological constraints, gender stereotypes, and mentoring).

Women career advancement (WCA) = Function (organizational culture (OC), family (FR), psychological constraints (PC), gender stereotypes (GS), and mentoring (M)).

Table 3: Barriers of Glass Ceiling

		Disagree	%	Agree	%	Neutral	%
1.	Family	28	28.6	38	38.7	32	32.6
2.	Gender	28	28.6	38	38.8	38	32.6
3.	Age	29	29.6	25	25.5	44	44.8
4.	Ethnic background	35	35.7	25	25.5	38	38.8
5.	Religion	33	33.6	27	27.5	38	38.8
6.	Work life balance	35	35.7	33	33.7	30	30.6
7.	Psychological constraints	29	29.6	42	42.8	27	27.5
8.	Persons of opposite gender	31	31.6	33	33.7	34	34.7
9.	Persons of same gender in senior admn	35	35.7	37	37.7	26	26.5
10.	Noncompetitive Salary	30	30.6	36	36.7	32	32.6
11.	Lack of family friendly workplace policies	33	33.7	34	34.7	31	31.6
12.	Attitudinal and organizational prejudices	27	27.5	37	37.7	34	34.7
13.	Expression of sexism in the workplace	32	32.6	38	38.8	28	28.6
14.	Absence of sponsors, mentors and role-models	31	31.6	34	34.7	33	33.7
15.	Lack of administrative experience	25	25.5	40	40.8	33	33.7
16.	Lack of leadership training programs	34	34.7	34	34.7	30	30.6
17.	Capabilities to network	26	26.5	40	40.8	32	32.6

WCA = f (OC, FR, PC, GS, M)

Where WCA is the dependent variable (Y) and OC, FR, PC, GS, and M are independent variables (X).

This conceptual model highlights the multifaceted nature of glass ceiling barriers and career advancement for females. It serves as a framework for analyzing and addressing these issues comprehensively, considering the interplay of individual, organizational, societal, and external factors, as well as the importance of intersectionality and ongoing adaptation.

Hypothesis Testing

Based on the literature analysis, this study took into account the following different hypotheses regarding the three elements that influence women's career development: psychological factors, organizational factors, and social factors.

H1: Psychological factors do not considerably affect the career development of women.

H2: Organizational factors do not considerably affect the career growth of women.

H3: Social factors do not considerably affect women's job advancement.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

One of the objectives of the study is to determine which glass ceiling barriers create more hindrance in career advancement. To achieve this goal, portions of regression are conducted. Linear regression analysis of the factors using the above hypothesis led to the following results (Table 4).

The study found that all the factors (psychological, organizational, and social) are significant, with a correlation coefficient of over 75%. Psychological constraints were found to have a significant impact on women's career advancement in the higher education sector. As a result, all hypotheses were rejected, as there is a significant correlation among all the factors that affect women's career advancement.

The study found that psychological factors had the highest correlation coefficient of 77.77% with career advancement, followed by social factors with a correlation coefficient of 76.14%, and then organizational factors with a correlation coefficient of 75.36%.

The study identified psychological factors like willingness, self-perception, gender, and family-work balance as significant for aspiring female leaders' career advancement. Lack of training in leadership programs was identified

Table 4: Result Summary

Independent Variable (X)	Dependent Variable (Y)	Correlation Coefficient
Psychological Factors	**Career Advancement**	**77.77 %**
Organisational Factors	**Career Advancement**	**75.36 %**
Social Factors	**Career Advancement**	**76.14 %**
Glass Ceiling Factors	**Career Advancement**	**88.34 %**

as the significant organizational factor, while societal beliefs and stereotypes were found to have a significant impact on career advancement as social factors.

The study found that glass ceiling barriers had a correlation coefficient of 88.34%. The significant factors contributing to these barriers were identified as self-belief, family responsibilities, lack of administrative experience, attitudinal and organizational prejudices, lack of mentors and role models, perception of management, and beliefs and stereotypes.

Managerial implications

The study on the glass ceiling in the higher education sector of India has several managerial implications, such as:

Advancing Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives: Higher education institutions (HEIs) can leverage research findings on the glass ceiling effect to drive their diversity and inclusion initiatives. This involves implementing proactive policies and programs that actively attract and support faculty from diverse backgrounds..

Confronting Institutional Biases and Structural Barriers: Findings of the study offer crucial insights into institutional biases and structural barriers that perpetuate inequality within HEIs. Armed with this knowledge, managers and administrators can strategically assess and challenge their organizational practices, policies, and decision-making processes.

Elevating Leadership Development Opportunities: Recognizing the impact of the glass ceiling effect demands a substantial investment in tailored leadership development opportunities for underrepresented groups. This includes delivering comprehensive training in negotiation skills, academic leadership, grant writing, and networking strategies. Such initiatives equip individuals to navigate the challenges of academic careers and compete assertively for leadership roles.

Enhancing Recruitment and Retention Strategies: HEIs can elevate their recruitment and retention strategies through insights gained from studies on the glass ceiling. This involves implementing forward-thinking measures to attract diverse talent pools, ensuring transparent and unbiased hiring practices, and fostering supportive work environments that promote career growth and job satisfaction for all faculty and staff.

Championing Policy Reforms: Research on the glass ceiling effect can serve as a powerful catalyst for championing policy reforms at institutional and governmental levels. This includes advocating for gender-sensitive policies, fair resource distribution, and affirmative action programs that advance inclusivity and level the playing field for marginalized groups within HEIs.

CONCLUSION

Women are capable; however, they are still underrepresented in senior executive positions in organizations. The study aimed to identify the barriers that prevent women from advancing to managerial positions and found evidence of glass ceiling barriers in higher education institutions. Women face obstacles due to

societal attitudes, family concerns, and their own choices. However, these barriers can be overcome by implementing tailored strategies that are specific to the situation and women's abilities. By promoting inclusive policies, providing equal opportunities for leadership, and creating a diverse work environment, institutions can break the glass ceiling. This will not only promote gender equity in academia but also contribute significantly to the broader sustainable development agenda in India.

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