A BRIEF HISTORY OF 'GLASS CEILING': THE PAST, PRESENT & THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

Diversity leads to better decisions in all aspects of life, including business. Knowing the fact that companies with a greater number of women in their senior management teams outperformed those companies with no women placed at their top management level, women at workplace face major hurdles which are invisible like 'Glass ceiling' and 'Glass cliffs'. The present study aims at pointing out the 'Glass Ceiling Effect' which is used to describe the limits and obstacles experienced by women preventing them to reach the highest levels of the organization regardless of their talent and achievements. The methodology used in the study is based on review of extant literature including research articles, reports and published data relevant to Glass Ceiling phenomenon.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Glass Cliff, Women, Career Advancement, Career Barriers, Gender, Diversity.

INTRODUCTION

An organization's growth derives from diversity of thoughts, opinions and decisions. Gender diversity has always been the talk of prime importance but globally, women still encounter challenges when it comes to their career progression at workplace. Despite the enormous benefits of gender diversity in leadership roles and senior positions, organizations have made only little progress in this direction. Women employees at workplace tend to face many real and invisible barriers when it comes to their career progression.

Barriers which are tough but invisible has been termed as 'Glass Ceiling' effect in several studies Afza & Newaz (2008); Bazazo et al. (2017); Jain & Mukherji (2010). With more than three decades, the existence of glass ceiling barriers has been proved by many researchers Afza & Newaz (2008); Fisher et al. (1993); Jain & Mukherji (2010). Although women as well as a part of society is struggling hard to shatter this glass ceiling, but it doesn't seem to be the end of 'think manager – think male' trend Schulz & Enslin (2014). Those who tried to break the glass ceiling seems to have been trapped in the 'Glass Cliff' phenomenon, which is far more precarious situation for the career of women at middle and senior level management Vetter (2021); Xiang et al. (2017). The present study is an attempt to rationalize the phenomenon of 'Glass Cliff' as the next level of hurdle at workplace after breaking the 'Glass Ceiling' by women in their career progression towards leadership roles. The methodology used in the study is based on review of extant literature including research articles, reports and published data relevant to glass ceiling and glass cliff.

Glass Ceiling: The Familiar Term

A metaphor which means 'an invisible barrier which act as a roadblock to women and

minorities from rising upward towards senior positions or leadership roles in their career' (Boyd Karen S., 2008; Federal glass ceiling commission (1995). This term was officially coined in the mid-eighties by Wall Street Journal but couple of years before in 1984, Gay Bryant quoted this term 'glass ceiling' as a hurdle to rise up in the senior level management positions for women professionals (Boyd Karen S., 2008; Pai & Vaidya (2009). Years later in 1991, this issue was considered as vital by Department of Labour followed by the establishment of a bipartisan Glass Ceiling Commission involving twenty-one members under the Civil Rights Act, headed by President George H.W. Bush (Boyd Karen S., 2008; Elacqua et al. (2009); Hoobler et al. (2011).

A report on Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) stated that 'Glass Ceiling' is an artificial barrier to women and minorities which stops them to move higher towards management and decision making positions in organizations. This report also throws light on the types of 'Glass Ceiling' barriers namely, societal barriers which are not in the direct control of the organizations, internal structural barriers which are in control of the organizations and the third level of barrier is governmental. Later, many researches around the globe has presented several forms of glass ceiling barriers and their influence on women career advancement. A compiled structure of 'Glass Ceiling factors' which has been reported by several authors in their studies has been presented below in Figure 1.
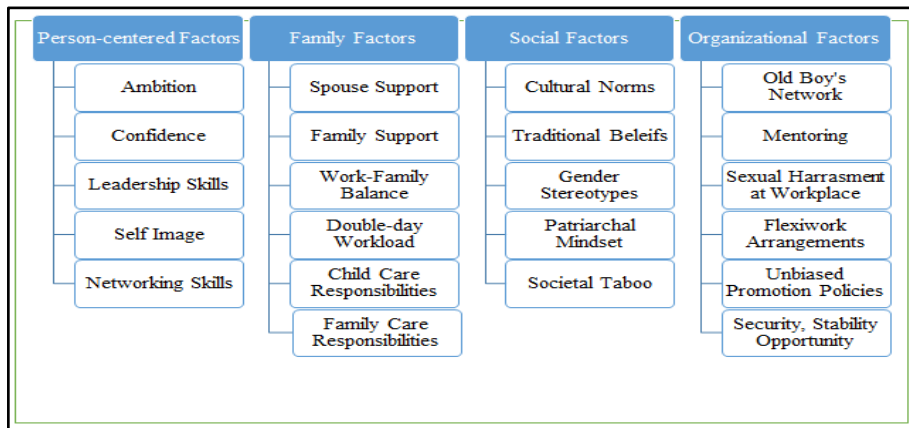
Source: Compiled by authors from literatures

FIGURE 1
FACTORS INFLUENCING GLASS CEILING EFFECT

The 'Glass Ceiling Barriers'

Past three decades has been much evident in context to the theory of 'glass ceiling'. Women at workplace is still suffering from barriers which mainly persist at personal, societal or at organizational level De Alwis & Bombuwela (2013); Chanana (2003); Chinchilla et al. (2006); Jackson (2001); Jain & Mukherji (2010); Mayya et al. (2021); Özkanli et al., 2009; Subramaniam et al. (2016) Schaefer (2008).

Personal and Family Barriers

Studies reported quite a few times that barriers which women face at their personal front specially related to their personality traits and family responsibilities holds them back from their career progression. These are such invisible barriers which women could not detect and get entrapped in the 'double day' workload of family and professional commitments Luke (2001).

Women tend to choose their career priorities Hakim (2006) and thus psychologically depends on their family members specifically male members for their decisions. This has been termed as 'Cindrella syndrome by Colette Dowling Meral & Otlu (2016). An interesting study on women and their work-life and career choices has been carried out by Hakim (2006). The study is based on preference theory which categorized women's career and personal life choices into three types – Home-centered, adaptive and work-centered. The study explains the conscious choices made by women related to their career and work life balance as the society and its cultural norms influence the thought process and perception of the people. Several studies have reported women's role at home and burdened with family care and child care responsibilities as the pertinent barriers to 'glass ceiling' Jain & Mukherji (2010); Meral & Otlu (2016). Women are generally seen to avoid professional competition due to lack of ambition and less self-confidence Jain & Mukherji (2010). In contrary to men, women are also low in professional networking Ismail & Rasdi (2007). This may be due to the gender roles specified by the patriarchal and the unsupportive family environment which restricts female employees to take up new opportunities at workplace and they do tend to feel shy to make any professional associations with their male counterpart Özkanlı et al. (2009).

Social and Organizational Barriers

Since ages, women and their profession has been momentously been influenced by the society. Till date, the traditional mindset and the stereotyped thinking has been a crucial barrier to women at work Patwardhan et al. (2016); Raja (2016); Rishani et al. (2015). Although, the discussion on developing a more gender diverse human resource management system has been reported by several researchers in the past. Bierema (1998); McDonald & Hite (1998) has reported in their literature regarding the issues faced by women employees when it comes to their career progression. Literature intended towards the role of HRD at organizational level for unlocking potential of women employees and giving them job opportunities, which are challenging and visible as well. Apparently, organizational culture and management perception about leadership positions regardless of gender plays a vital role in boosting morale of women employees who are enough talented for making decisions of the companies they worked for Afza & Newaz (2008). From pay gap to promotion, women have been significantly underrepresented at leadership positions Fisher et al. (1993). Even mentoring to women employee's works as a strategic step towards a gender diversified workplace Gibson (2002). Although studies show that challenges of low representation of women at senior positions could be due to personal factors such as family responsibilities or demographic factors like age, education and marital status. Simultaneously, indications of work challenges does exist in the form of organizational culture and career advancement opportunities namely; promotional opportunities, training, selection and recruitment techniques Subramaniam et al. (2016) Ward (2020).

Beyond Glass Ceiling: Glass Cliff

Globally, there is still no goodbye to 'Glass Ceiling' yet those who challenge to shatter this obstacle tend to face another twist in their career which is said to be 'Glass Cliff'. It seems to be the next level-up to 'glass ceiling' where women employees are given chance to elevate their career at senior and decision making positions only when the organization is on the verge of fall Peregrine (2021). The term 'glass cliff' has been introduced in the corporate world by the psychologists of University of Exeter – Michelle Ryan and her colleague Alex Haslam Ward (2020). This initial study was done on FTSE 100 companies of United Kingdom by investigating the relation between the share price performance of these companies before and after appointing

men and women executives on board Ryan (2006); Ryan (2007). The study concludes that due to lack of promotional opportunities, women end up accepting managerial task which are risky and crucial to success. Despite of the fact that females are considered as risk reluctant, yet they are willing to avail risky leadership roles and end up finding themselves on a 'glass cliff' Ryan (2007). 'Glass cliff' phenomenon has been stated as more dangerous than 'glass ceiling', while it is evident that later has been broken by many women leaders and executives at corporate level but women who reach the top level of management are eventually offered those tasks which are otherwise sure to be a failure Morgenroth et al. (2020); Nutley & Mudd (2005).

CONCLUSION

The 'glass ceiling' and 'glass cliff' phenomenon are the result of deep-rooted patriarchal history which is still imbedded in the mind of modern societies Vetter (2021). The 'think manager-think male' perception is still influencing the hiring and promotional decisions at organizational level resulting to 'glass ceiling' which is difficult to break, and those who are successful in making up to the managerial level are then assigned with the situations of crisis which invariably making the women manager held responsible in case of organizational failure Groeneveld et al. (2020); Vetter (2021). Although researchers have proven the positive performance of company's financial status with more number of women on board Coverline (2019) but the fact of 'glass cliff' cannot be overlooked and require more focused discussions and future research with diversified demographics.

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