

Effect of Glass Ceiling on Women Career Plateau: A Study on Service Organizations

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***Abstract:** This research investigated the effect of workplace barriers particularly for women on their career plateau in different service organizations of Bangladesh. Samples were collected from five different service organizations in Dhaka city. To accomplish the study objectives total 231 respondents were chosen by convenience sampling techniques. Data were analyzed by adopting the statistical techniques: factor analysis, correlation and regression analysis. The study found significant correlation among most of the barriers of women glass ceiling in the work place. Five hypotheses were tested and four of those were accepted as glass ceiling factors creating women career plateau. The study findings suggested that private organizations should develop HR policy considering individual career ambitions as well as developing harmonious workplace environment to accelerate women career development for sustainable competitive advantage.*

***Keywords:** Glass ceiling, women career plateau, service organization, and sustainable competitive advantage.*

1. Introduction

Women are performing excellent in many sector of business and becoming more competent compared to their male counterparts. Still women are facing more challenges to survive in the competitive workplace with added disadvantage of family responsibilities but primary obligations for the women in the society. Workplace barriers are behavioral discrimination, salary and benefit discrimination, internal politics, unfair promotion and development opportunities and some unwritten social norms restricting female participation in activities traditionally considered as the exclusive domain of men. Female participation in the workplace are increasing in Bangladesh which will grow from 34 to 82 percent over the next decade, adding 1.8 percentage points to the GDP of Bangladesh (World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, 2015). Women participation in key decision making positions of Bangladeshi organizations is very insignificant. Many

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women who started their job with all the ambition of becoming a top level manager in her organization could not continue their career but to quit the job only because of their work and family life imbalance. Career plateau is “full-time stagnation”, and it is the loss in human capital. Researcher also referred that promotion opportunities to the working mothers could not be translated into career progression as the higher position required full-time work (Mutter, Joanne; Thorn, and Kaye, 2017).

Corporate culture and customs also demand more from the women than men regarding their appearance and dress up based on nature of their job. Organization often impose dress code on women employee in the form of advertisements and celebrity looks which pressures on them to be focused on physical outlook rather than work friendly get up in the workplace. Women employees are valuable contributor to the production and performance, so companies need to ensure gender equality and women friendly job environment. Marlow et al., (1995) explored in a study that top-level women managers perceived significant differences in the importance of 18 criteria that are crucial to career advancement, particularly, they felt that everything is more important to women than men. The research found that women have to be “better” than men to achieve similar advancement in the workplace although naturally women are more concerned for the home and family simultaneously.

2. Literature Review

A good number of researches already conducted on women career and several barriers to their career development. The glass ceiling most frequently refers to barriers faced by women who attempt, or aspire to attain senior positions and higher salary levels in organizations. Here in this study, the glass ceiling is discussed regarding few important barriers to women career advancement in Bangladeshi service organizations. Women are more likely to occupy top management ranks in an organization where most of the lower level management positions filled by women (Goodman, Fields and Blum, 2003). A recent research revealed that men always earn more and get promotion easily to the next position of the career ladder than women do (Ansari, Jabeen and Baig, 2016). They also found glass ceiling in the career path of females composed of multidimensional responsibilities at individual, social and institutional levels of the stratification system.

Workplace discrimination refers to unequal treatment in the workplace regarding age, sex, religion, race, salary or behavior etc. Research revealed that women employees should have particular positions in top level management because it ensures equal distribution of power and fair treatment of men and women regarding salary and other job related issues in organizations (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Another research (Hoobler, Wayne and Grace Lemmon, 2009) examines potential reasons for the persistence of the glass ceiling i.e. whether bosses (both male and female) perceive women as having greater family-work conflict and therefore view them as mismatched to their

organizations and jobs. The results support that bosses' perceptions of family-work conflict mediated the relationships between subordinate sex and perceptions of person-organization fit, person-job fit, and performance. Both types of fit were related to promotability (nomination for promotion and manager assessed promotability). It is found that women have made great strides in gaining entrance to various organizations in many countries and they also successfully overcame the entire glass ceiling but despite these advances, women still largely remain stuck in middle management (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005).

Catalyst (2007) found that number of women professional school graduates, obtaining careers in fields such as accounting, business, and law profession are about to equal to male in those professions, which indicate women are equally skilled and competent to attain top leadership positions in various professions. But the career path for women always contains lots of obstacles than male employees toward top positions of the organization which is evident by several researches (Catalyst, 2004; Davidson & Burke, 2000). Working women are accumulating all the required skills, experience and education, but they still got to pass through several barriers like family problem, organizational politics, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination as glass ceiling in today's workplaces. Research on this phenomenon focuses on identifying the organizational practices and interpersonal biases that inhibit women's advancement. Different research findings in this area include lack of mentoring and career counselling of women, and views that associate masculine traits with leader (cf. Fletcher, 1992; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Morrison, 1987; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). Some recruitment advertisements do not clearly mention that women need not to apply or are not eligible for high-level positions but evidence suggests that women continue to have difficulty in career advancement into the senior management positions (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2000).

Baxter and Wright (2000) revealed that gender-based discrimination in promotions is not simply present across levels of hierarchy but is more intense at higher levels. Empirically, this implies that the relative rates of women being promoted to higher levels compared to men should decline with the level of the hierarchy. They explored that there is strong evidence for a general gender gap in authority. The women are having less authority than those of men in many organizations. Women and people of color encounter barriers in their quest for senior-level positions (e.g., CEOs) in society as glass ceiling effects (Jackson, O'Callaghan and Educ, 2009). Women are increasingly employed in various organizations but only for the lower and middle positions. In particular, the obstacles women face to promotion relative to men systematically increase and the idea of a glass ceiling intensify more for women than for men. Top managers are willing to let women occupy the lower reaches of the managerial structure, but the argument goes they obstruct the access of women to positions of real power, as a result, women are largely denied

promotions to the higher levels of management. Many glass ceiling mechanisms may be responsible for this obstruction: old-fashioned sexism, women managers' isolation from important informal networks, or more subtle sexist attitudes that place women at a disadvantage (Baxter and Wright, 2000).

Women career plateau is the result of lack of access for women to board of directors of service organizations in Bangladesh. A research showed that diversity in board members is important to make effective decisions. The findings of the study shows that women are a critical but over looked resource to enhance strategic decisions. Thus board membership for women needs to increase to reflect the corporation's consumer population (Arfken, Bellar and Helms, 2004). Mattis (2004) found that women in the workplace experiences lack of flexibility and challenge, lack of role models and mentors, lack of access to line positions with concomitant entrepreneurial opportunities, and that results in failure of organizations to credit and reward women's contributions.

Workplace discrimination is a common phenomenon for women. Social role theory and expectation theory state diverse reasons for the emergence of the differences. However, both theories propose that gender differences will result in performance evaluation bias against women which ultimately create glass ceiling phenomenon and keep women away from top leadership positions (Weyer, 2007). Vianen and Fischer (2002) investigated gender differences in organizational culture preferences, both in a managerial sample and a sample of non-managerial professionals in private sector organizations. Result showed that gender differences only existed in the non-managerial groups with women showing less masculine culture preferences than men. Organizational culture preferences were predictive for ambition of non-managerial employees, but not for that of middle management employees. Overall, women were less ambitious than men, and even ambitious women perceived work-home conflict as an important barrier to career advancement.

Family responsibilities are crucial part of women career development in many developing countries. Career ambitions, aspirations or priorities of women largely depend on family and future family planning. Research shows that family responsibilities of women create work and family conflict more to women than men. Results indicate that the relationship between job-life satisfaction and work-life conflict may be stronger for women than men (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998).

Organizational politics severely affect women career development. Male coworker's non-cooperative attitude and lack of managerial support creates low intention and less motivation among potential women to get promotion to managerial positions. Ryan and Haslam (2005) argued that in the time of achieving more high profile positions women

are more likely than men to find themselves on a 'glass cliff', condition such as their positions become more risky or precarious. Linge (2015) revealed that to a large extent organizational political skill were significant barriers to the career progression of women employees in Kenya. The study recommended that women employees should develop political skills and network with one another to sharpen these skills so that they can use them to enhance their career progression. Women employee need to build informal relationships with influential people in the workplace which is a significant barrier to career progression. A politically skilled employee knows how to build working relationships with influential people to create a positive image which ultimately enhance career progression (Robbins, 2001). A recent study explored the importance of understanding female employees' perception toward job and categorizes themselves as a valuable element of the workplace (Fauzia et al. 2018).

3. Objectives

The main objective of this study is to know the effect of glass ceiling on corporate women career in selected service organizations of Bangladesh. Other objectives are as follows:

- i. To determine the barriers creating glass ceiling for women in private sector service organizations.
- ii. To analyze the impact of each barrier on women career plateau.
- iii. To recommend some remedies to the policy makers.

4. Methodology

To accomplish the main objective and other objectives of this study data were collected from different service organization through convenience sampling technique. These service organizations are private banks, advertising agencies, private hospitals, telecommunication organizations and private universities in Dhaka city. For conducting this empirical study, a structured questionnaire were developed under the six independent variables and distributed for total number of 270 respondents. Those are workplace discrimination, family responsibility, sexual harassment, promotion and development, organizational politics and the dependent variable is women career plateau. Five point Likert scale were used to develop structured questionnaire. Respondents were asked to give tick marks on different statements. The response scales for each statement in the survey questionnaire were as: 1= completely disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor disagree, 4= Agree, 5 = completely agree.

Survey questionnaires were distributed only to the female employees who were serving mostly in the non-managerial positions of their respective organizations and total 231

questionnaires were found correctly filled up with all the required information, thus those were used for data analysis. Besides questionnaire survey, personal interviews were taken with 9 respondents from selected service organizations. These interviews were conducted by the researcher herself before the survey. For conducting the entire survey three different groups of MBA students of Bangladesh University of Professionals sent to various service organizations. Secondary sources of data collection were individual service organizations website, annual reports, performance reports and other published materials.

5. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

The conceptual model and hypotheses of this study were developed after reviewing relevant literatures and interviewing few respondents from service organizations. The model is shown below:

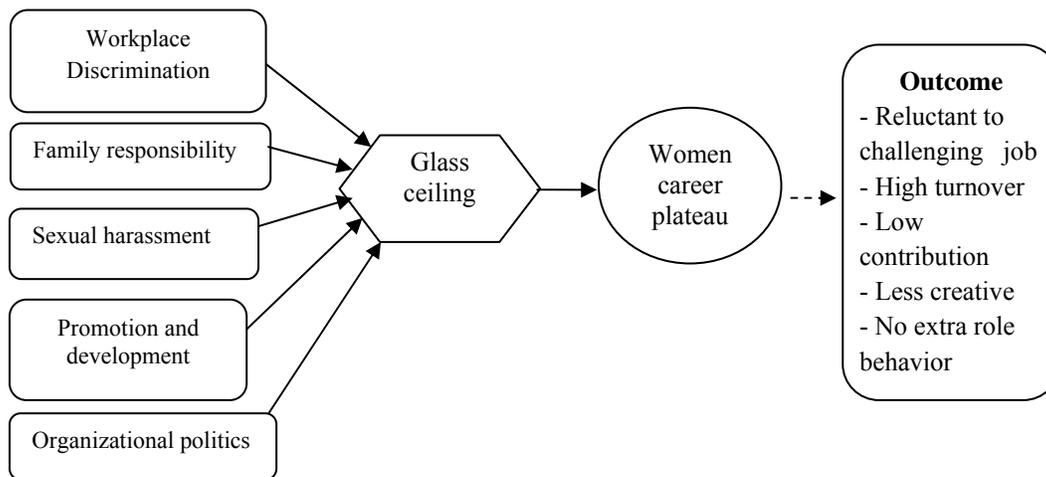


Fig: A proposed model

6. Hypotheses

H0: There is no workplace discrimination that causes women career plateau.

H1: There is workplace discrimination that causes women career plateau.

H0: Family responsibilities are not causing women career plateau in the workplace.

H2: Family responsibilities are causing women career plateau in the workplace.

H0: Sexual harassment in the work place and women career plateau are not related to each other.

H3: Sexual harassment in the work place and women career plateau are related to each other.

H0: There are no unfair practices of job promotion and development that affect women career plateau.

H4: There are unfair practices of job promotion and development that affect women career plateau.

H0: There is no organizational politics that can create women career plateau.

H5: There is organizational politics that can create women career plateau.

7. Findings and Analysis

This section contains the result of analysis. Statistical techniques were applied to analyze the data such as factor analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis.

Factor Analysis

The statistical software program SPSS was used for all analysis. After reviewing the literature on available measures of glass ceiling conditions the researchers designed and developed an initial pool of 25 items questionnaire. In this research, factor analyses were conducted for the items related with glass ceiling factors. Factorability can be examined via Kaiser-Myer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity. KMO suggested that the scores for the test be > 0.50 , and for the Bartlett's test of sphericity, the recommended significance level is < 0.05 which express the appropriateness of factor analysis. In this study, The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is 0.619, which is goodness of fit. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is 585.970; the significance of the correlation matrix (p-value) is 0.000. The statistical probability and the test indicated that there was a significant correlation between the variables, and the use of factor analysis was appropriate. The principal components analysis was used to factor extracted using extraction method and varimax with Kaiser Normalization. The factors with eigen values greater than or equal to 1.0 and items with factor loadings greater than 0.45 were reported. From the varimax-rotated factor matrix, six (6) factors with 21 items/statements were defined by the original 25 items that loaded most heavily on them (loading ≥ 0.45). Four items were dropped due to the failure of loading on the factors at the level of 0.45 or higher. In total 21 items under the main six factors creating glass ceiling condition for women career in the workplace had been selected for further analysis and those factors explained 89.93% of cumulative variance of the data.

Internal reliability and consistency of each factor was tested by using Cronbach's alpha. Guieford believed that a Cronbach's α value greater than 0.70 indicates a high level of reliability, and when the value is lower than 0.35; the data is seen as lacking reliability and should be excluded. In this study, the alpha coefficients ranged from 0.701 to 0.837

for the six factors. So, it is clear that the questionnaire used in this study had strong internal reliability for further statistical analysis and interpretation.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

	Mean	Std. Deviation	WD	FR	SH	PD	OP	WCD
WD	3.56	.506	1					
FR	3.57	.296	.709**	1				
SH	3.80	.586	.238**	.447**	1			
PD	3.74	.563	.269**	.481**	.524**	1		
OP	3.69	.551	.467**	.504**	.101	.373**	1	
WCP	3.86	.400	.507**	.382**	.335**	-.079	-.109	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Calculated

Table 2: Regression Analysis

Predictors	Model Summary				ANOVA		Coefficients		
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
WD	.507	.257	.254	.34614	79.383	.000	.401	8.910	.000
FR	.382	.146	.143	.37114	39.244	.000	.517	6.264	.000
SH	.335	.112	.108	.37848	28.932	.000	.229	5.379	.000
PD	.079	.006	.002	.40042	1.442	.231	-.056	-1.201	.231
OP	.109	.012	.008	.39929	2.745	.099	-.079	-1.657	.099

Source: Calculated

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 1 depicts descriptive statistics of different variables. The mean value of independent variables of this study indicates that sexual harassment in the workplace got highest mean value (m=3.80, sd=.586). Rests of the means are promotion and development (m= 3.74, sd= .563), organizational politics (m= 3.69, sd= .551), family responsibilities (m= 3.57, sd=.296) and workplace discrimination (m= 3.56, sd=.506). The mean score for women career plateau (m=3.86, sd=.400) indicates the respondent's support to the existence of women career plateau in the workplace.

Correlation analysis was conducted to know whether a relation exists among variables. In case of positive relationship between variables, certain increase in the variables will also

create an increase in the other variables. Table 1 also shows the relationship among variables of this study. Here, the relationship between organizational politics and sexual harassment, promotion development and women career plateau, organizational politics and women career plateau are weak and rests all other variables have meaningful and positive relationship.

Regression Analysis

To know the effect of each independent variable on dependent variable and to test the hypotheses of the study, regression output is presented in Table 2.

H₁: There is workplace discrimination that causes women career plateau.

Work place discrimination explained 50.7% variance in women career plateau, which is evident by the value of $R^2=.507$, $F=79.383$ at $P=.000$. The value of $t=8.910$ express the significant relationship between dependent and independent variables. So, on the basis of the results, this hypothesis is accepted.

H₂: Family responsibilities are causing women career plateau in the workplace.

Family responsibilities explained 38.2% variance in women career plateau, which is evident by the value of $R^2=.382$, $F=39.244$ at $P=.000$. The value of $t=6.264$ express the significant relationship between dependent and independent variables. So, it is concluded that the hypothesis is accepted.

H₃: Sexual harassment in the work place and women career plateau are positively related.

Sexual harassment explained 33.5% variance in women career plateau, which is evident by the value of $R^2=.335$, $F=28.932$ at $P=.000$. The value of $t=5.379$ express the significant relationship between dependent and independent variables. Thus the results show this hypothesis is accepted.

H₄: There are unfair practices of job promotion and development that affect women career plateau.

Unfair practices of job promotion and development explained 7.9% variance in women career plateau, which is evident by the value of $R^2=.079$, $F=1.442$ at $P=.231$. The value of $t=-1.201$ express the relationship between dependent and independent variables is not significant. So, the result inferred that this hypothesis is not accepted and it is concluded that organizations are following fair promotion and development practices.

H₅: There is organizational politics that affect women career plateau.

Organizational politics explained 10.9% variance in women career plateau, which is evident by the value of $R^2=.109$, $F=2.745$ at $P=.099$. The value of $t=-1.657$ express the

relationship between dependent and independent variables is not significant. It can be concluded that hypothesis five is not accepted.

8. Recommendations and Conclusion

This study explored glass ceiling factors that cause women career plateau in service organizations of Bangladesh. The research recommends to the policy makers and HRM divisions of the organizations to develop women friendly HR policy and enforce the policy in practice properly to ensure women contribution through women empowerment toward sustainable economic development. Potential women leaders should feel encouraged to work hard and achieve their career goal without experiencing any career plateau from glass ceiling barriers in the workplace. The organizational philosophy and managerial support should ensure equal opportunity and fair treatment for women which will lead to harmonious work relationship and a positive culture for the sustainable competitive advantage. The study also suggest the government to incorporate service rules and laws for all private organizations and enforce them to follow the policy to ensure positive work culture for women career development.

This research concluded that women working in the corporate service sectors are experiencing career plateau which ultimately diminishes their performance. Women serving the same position for long term due to glass ceiling effect can never bring positive outcome for the organization. The findings of the interview with the women respondents clearly indicated that glass ceiling factors are causing, higher tendency to switch job, less intention to the development of the organization, unwilling to become more creative in their job and more harmful outcome is that they would never show citizenship behavior or extra role behavior in the organization. So organizations need to be more strategically sound while dealing with employee selection, training, promotion, performance appraisal and work culture taking full care of women employees' contribution which directly affects their career progression.

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