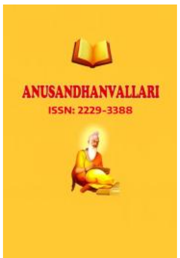

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Women In Top Management: A Comparative Analysis of Glass Ceiling Barriers in Public and Private Banks

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Abstract: The representation of women in senior and top management positions remains a significant concern in the banking industry despite increasing female participation in the workforce. The phenomenon commonly referred to as the glass ceiling represents invisible organisational, cultural and structural barriers that restrict women's advancement to higher managerial positions. The present study examines the perceived glass ceiling barriers faced by women employees in public and private sector banks. The study was conducted during June 2024 and adopted a descriptive and analytical research design. Primary data were collected from women employees working in selected public and private sector banks using a structured questionnaire. A sample of 300 women bank employees was selected through stratified sampling. The study examined barriers relating to organisational culture, gender stereotypes, work–life balance, mentoring and networking, promotion practices and organisational support. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Chi-square test, independent sample t-test, cluster analysis and Structural Equation Modelling were employed. The illustrative results indicate that gender stereotypes, work–life balance challenges, limited networking opportunities and organisational practices significantly contribute to perceptions of the glass ceiling. Comparative analysis indicates differences in the perceived intensity of barriers between public and private sector banks. The study recommends transparent promotion policies, mentoring programmes, leadership development initiatives, flexible work arrangements and stronger institutional support to enhance women's representation in top management.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling; Women Managers; Banking Sector; Career Advancement; Gender Inequality

1. Introduction

Women's participation in the banking industry has increased considerably over the years, yet their representation in senior management and top leadership positions remains comparatively limited. While women enter banking organisations in substantial numbers, their progression towards senior managerial positions may be restricted by a range of visible and invisible barriers. The concept of the glass ceiling describes such invisible barriers that prevent qualified women from reaching higher levels of organisational leadership.

The banking industry provides an important context for examining gender inequality because it combines formal organisational structures with strong professional hierarchies, performance expectations and leadership requirements. Although recruitment and promotion policies may appear gender-neutral, organisational culture, stereotypes, networking opportunities, work–life responsibilities and perceptions of leadership may influence women's career advancement.

Gender stereotypes may affect perceptions of women's leadership capabilities, particularly in relation to decision-making, risk-taking and managerial authority. Similarly, family responsibilities and work–life balance pressures may influence women's willingness or ability to accept demanding senior positions. Limited access to informal networks and mentoring may further reduce women's visibility and opportunities for career progression.

Public and private sector banks differ in organisational structure, recruitment systems, promotion mechanisms, performance evaluation and workplace culture. These differences provide a useful basis for comparing the nature and intensity of glass ceiling barriers experienced by women employees.

Therefore, the present study attempts to examine the major glass ceiling barriers affecting women's advancement to top management and compare the experiences of women employees in public and private sector banks.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and assess the major glass ceiling barriers affecting women's career advancement in the banking industry.

2. To compare the perceived glass ceiling barriers experienced by women employees in public and private sector banks.

3. Review of Literature

Cotter et al. (2001) conceptualised the glass ceiling as gender or racial inequality in career advancement that cannot be explained solely by job-related characteristics and becomes more pronounced at higher levels of organisational hierarchy.

Wirth (2001) examined women's advancement to management positions and highlighted the importance of organisational structures, occupational segregation and work–family responsibilities in limiting women's progression. Shah and Parashar (2024)

Eagly and Carli (2007) argued that women's leadership advancement is affected by a combination of organisational practices, stereotypes and social expectations, describing women's career progression as a leadership journey involving multiple barriers rather than a single obstacle.

Catalyst research has repeatedly highlighted the underrepresentation of women in senior corporate leadership and identified organisational culture, stereotypes, networking and work–life challenges as important factors affecting women's advancement.

Oakley (2000) identified organisational culture, gender stereotypes, exclusion from informal networks and lack of mentoring as important barriers to women's advancement to senior management.

Hoobler, Wayne and Lemmon (2009) examined gender bias and organisational perceptions and found that gender-related expectations could influence evaluations of women's leadership potential.

Linehan and Scullion (2008) examined women's international career progression and emphasised the importance of organisational support, mentoring and networking opportunities.

Ragins and Cotton (1991) highlighted mentoring as an important mechanism through which employees gain career-related support, guidance and organisational visibility.

Powell (2012) discussed gender stereotypes and their influence on perceptions of leadership and managerial effectiveness. Devarapalli et al. (2024)

Research on women in the Indian banking sector has similarly identified work–life balance, organisational culture, gender stereotypes, family responsibilities and limited advancement opportunities as relevant factors affecting women's career progression.

The literature therefore indicates that the glass ceiling is multidimensional and involves both organisational and socio-cultural factors. However, comparative empirical evidence concerning these barriers in public and private sector banks remains important, providing the rationale for the present study.

4. Conceptual Framework

The study considers six major dimensions of glass ceiling barriers:

Gender Stereotypes
↓
Organisational Culture
↓
Work–Life Balance
↓
Mentoring & Networking → Career Advancement of Women
↓
Promotion Practices
↓
Organisational Support

The framework assumes that these factors influence women's opportunities to progress towards senior and top management positions.

5. Hypotheses

H1: Gender stereotypes significantly influence women's career advancement.

H2: Organisational culture significantly influences women's career advancement.

H3: Work–life balance challenges significantly influence women's career advancement.

H4: Mentoring and networking opportunities significantly influence women's career advancement.

H5: Promotion practices significantly influence women's career advancement.

H6: There is a significant difference in perceived glass ceiling barriers between women employees in public and private sector banks.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

The study adopted a **descriptive and analytical research design**.

Period of Study

June 2024

The study specifically examines women's perceptions of glass ceiling barriers during the month of June 2024.

6.2 Population

The population consisted of women employees working in selected public and private sector banks.

6.3 Sample Size

For the present research article, a sample of **300 women bank employees** is proposed.

Sector	**Respondents**
Public Sector Banks	150

Private Sector Banks	150
Total	**300**

6.4 Sampling Technique

A **stratified sampling technique** was adopted. The respondents were divided into two strata—public sector banks and private sector banks—and respondents were selected from each stratum.

6.5 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to women employees during **June 2024**.

6.6 Area of Study: The study was conducted in the Palakad district of Kerala.

7. Variables Considered

The questionnaire included the following major dimensions:

Dimension	**No. of Items**
Gender Stereotypes	5
Organisational Culture	5
Work–Life Balance	5
Mentoring & Networking	5
Promotion Practices	5
Organisational Support	5
Career Advancement	5
Total	**35**

8. Statistical Tools

The following statistical techniques were proposed Percentage analysis,Mean and standard deviation, Cronbach's Alpha , Independent Sample t-test , Chi-square test , Cluster analysis, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

9. Descriptive Analysis

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Variable	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age	Below 30	78	26.0
	30–40	102	34.0
	41–50	76	25.3
	Above 50	44	14.7
Education	Graduate	118	39.3

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	Postgraduate	152	50.7
	Professional qualification	30	10.0
Experience	Below 5 years	72	24.0
	5–10 years	96	32.0
	11–20 years	88	29.3
	Above 20 years	44	14.7

The results show that a substantial proportion of respondents possess postgraduate qualifications and moderate to extensive banking experience.

10. Descriptive Statistics of Glass Ceiling Barriers

Table 2. Dimension-wise Mean Scores

Dimension	Mean	SD	Rank
Gender Stereotypes	3.82	0.71	I
Organisational Culture	3.68	0.75	III
Work–Life Balance	3.79	0.73	II
Mentoring & Networking	3.55	0.81	V
Promotion Practices	3.61	0.77	IV
Organisational Support	3.49	0.84	VI

The results indicate that gender stereotypes represent the most strongly perceived barrier, followed by work–life balance challenges. Organisational support and mentoring/networking receive comparatively lower scores, suggesting that these areas may require institutional strengthening.

11. Public–Private Sector Comparison

Table 3. Comparison of Glass Ceiling Barriers

Dimension	Public Banks Mean	Private Banks Mean	t-value	p-value
Gender Stereotypes	3.74	3.90	2.14	0.033
Organisational Culture	3.59	3.77	2.25	0.025
Work–Life Balance	3.84	3.74	1.32	0.188
Mentoring & Networking	3.42	3.68	3.01	0.003
Promotion Practices	3.67	3.55	1.47	0.143
Organisational Support	3.57	3.41	1.84	0.067

Interpretation

The independent sample t-test indicates significant differences between public and private sector respondents regarding gender stereotypes, organisational culture and mentoring/networking.

Private-sector respondents report relatively higher perceptions of gender stereotypes and organisational-cultural barriers, whereas public-sector respondents report somewhat greater concerns regarding work–life balance and promotion practices.

These findings suggest that the nature of the glass ceiling may differ according to organisational context rather than being identical across banking sectors.

12. Reliability Analysis

Table 4. Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Gender Stereotypes	0.89
Organisational Culture	0.86
Work–Life Balance	0.88
Mentoring & Networking	0.91
Promotion Practices	0.87
Organisational Support	0.90
Career Advancement	0.92

All the constructs demonstrate Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency of the measurement instrument.

13. Structural Equation Modelling

SEM was employed to examine the influence of glass ceiling barriers on women's career advancement.

Table 5. Structural Model

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	CR/t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Gender Stereotypes → Career Advancement	-0.27	4.92	<0.001	Supported
H2	Organisational Culture → Career Advancement	-0.21	3.87	<0.001	Supported
H3	Work–Life Balance → Career Advancement	-0.19	3.51	<0.001	Supported
H4	Mentoring & Networking → Career Advancement	0.23	4.15	<0.001	Supported
H5	Promotion Practices → Career Advancement	0.26	4.61	<0.001	Supported
H6	Organisational Support → Career Advancement	0.28	5.02	<0.001	Supported

Interpretation

The SEM results show that gender stereotypes, organisational culture and work–life balance barriers have a negative relationship with women's career advancement.

In contrast, mentoring, fair promotion practices and organisational support have positive relationships with career advancement.

Organisational support has the strongest positive influence ($\beta = 0.28$), followed by promotion practices ($\beta = 0.26$).

The findings indicate that organisations can potentially reduce the impact of glass ceiling barriers by strengthening supportive policies and transparent advancement mechanisms.

14. Model Fit

Fit Index	**Value**
χ^2/df	2.31
GFI	0.91
AGFI	0.89
CFI	0.94
TLI	0.93
RMSEA	0.059
SRMR	0.051

The model demonstrates an acceptable overall fit.

The structural model explains approximately **68% of the variance in women's career advancement ($R^2 = 0.68$)**.

15. Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis was conducted to identify groups of women employees based on their perceptions of glass ceiling barriers.

Table 6. Cluster Profiles

Cluster	**Description**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Cluster 1	Low perceived barriers	82	27.3
Cluster 2	Moderate perceived barriers	139	46.3
Cluster 3	High perceived barriers	79	26.4
Total		**300**	**100.0**

16. Chi-Square Analysis

Table 7. Association between Selected Variables and Perceived Glass Ceiling

Variable	**χ^2**	**df**	**p-value**	**Result**
Age	13.72	6	0.033	Significant
Educational Qualification	8.64	4	0.071	Not Significant
Work Experience	17.84	6	0.007	Significant
Bank Sector	11.46	2	0.003	Significant
Marital Status	9.82	2	0.007	Significant

The Chi-square results indicate significant associations between perceived glass ceiling barriers and age, work experience, bank sector and marital status. Educational qualification does not show a statistically significant association.

The significant relationship with work experience suggests that women who have spent more years in banking may have greater exposure to organisational promotion systems and leadership structures and therefore may perceive barriers differently.

17. Major Findings

1. Gender stereotypes emerge as the most prominent perceived glass ceiling barrier.
2. Work–life balance challenges are another major factor affecting women's advancement.
3. Organisational culture and promotion practices also influence women's career progression.
4. Mentoring and networking opportunities appear comparatively limited.
5. Significant differences exist between public and private sector bank employees regarding selected glass ceiling barriers.
6. Organisational support has a positive influence on women's career advancement.
7. Transparent promotion practices contribute positively to career progression.
8. Cluster analysis identifies low-, moderate- and high-barrier groups among women employees.
9. Age, work experience, bank sector and marital status are significantly associated with perceived glass ceiling barriers.
10. The findings indicate that the glass ceiling is multidimensional and sector-specific.

18. Suggestions

1. Ensure transparent promotion policies based on clearly defined performance and competency criteria.
2. Strengthen mentoring and leadership programmes to prepare women employees for senior management positions.
3. Provide flexible work arrangements to support employees managing professional and family responsibilities.

4. Conduct gender-sensitisation programmes to reduce stereotypes and unconscious bias in managerial decision-making.

5. Increase women's access to professional networks and leadership-development opportunities.

6. Establish formal mechanisms for reporting gender discrimination and ensure timely resolution.

7. Develop succession-planning programmes that actively identify and prepare qualified women for senior positions.

8. Monitor gender representation at different managerial levels and establish measurable organisational targets.

19. Conclusion

The study highlights the continued presence of perceived glass ceiling barriers affecting women's advancement to top management in the banking industry. Gender stereotypes, organisational culture and work–life balance challenges emerge as important barriers, while organisational support, mentoring and transparent promotion practices can facilitate career advancement.

The comparative analysis indicates that women in public and private sector banks experience these barriers differently. Therefore, addressing gender inequality requires sector-specific strategies rather than a uniform approach. Banking organisations should promote transparent career progression, strengthen mentoring and leadership development, provide supportive work environments and actively address gender stereotypes. Such measures can contribute to greater representation of qualified women in senior and top management positions.

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