

Glass Ceiling in Banking: A Comparative Study of Women's Career Advancement in Public and Private Sector Banks in Palakad District.

¹R. Devi Nair, ²Dr. P. Anbuoli

Research Scholar, Department of Management Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamilnadu.

Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College, Madurai, Tamilnadu.

Abstract: The glass ceiling remains a significant barrier to women's career advancement into senior and top-management positions in the banking sector. Although women constitute a substantial proportion of the banking workforce, their representation at higher managerial levels remains comparatively limited. The present study examines the perceived glass ceiling barriers affecting women's career advancement and compares these barriers between public and private sector banks. The study was conducted during December 2024 with a sample of 300 women employees, comprising 150 from public sector banks and 150 from private sector banks. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. The study considers gender stereotypes, organisational culture, work-life balance, mentoring and networking, promotion practices and organisational support as major factors influencing career advancement. The data were analysed using percentage analysis, mean and standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, independent sample *t*-test, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The study indicates that gender stereotypes, organisational culture and work-life balance are important perceived barriers, while mentoring, transparent promotion practices and organisational support positively influence women's career advancement.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Women's Career Advancement, Banking Sector, Gender Stereotypes, Public and Private Banks

1. Introduction

The banking sector plays an important role in economic development and provides considerable employment opportunities for women. Despite the increasing participation of women in banking, their representation in senior management and top leadership positions continues to be comparatively low. The concept of the glass ceiling refers to invisible organisational and social barriers that restrict women from reaching higher levels of management despite having the required qualifications and capabilities. These barriers may arise from gender stereotypes, organisational culture, unequal promotion practices, limited mentoring opportunities, work-life balance challenges and insufficient organisational support. Public and private sector banks may differ in their organisational structures, policies and work environments, resulting in different experiences of career advancement among women employees. Therefore, a comparative assessment of these sectors is important for understanding the factors that influence women's progression to leadership positions. The present study examines the glass ceiling barriers affecting women's career advancement and compares the perceptions of women employees in public and private sector banks during December 2024.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the major glass ceiling barriers influencing women's career advancement in the banking sector.
2. To compare the perceived glass ceiling barriers and their influence on career advancement among women employees in public and private sector banks.

3. Review of Literature

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) developed the SERVQUAL framework, while subsequent organisational studies have applied related measurement approaches to understand workplace perceptions. Oakley (2000) highlighted gender stereotypes, organisational practices and structural barriers as important factors restricting women's advancement to senior management. Wirth (2001) reported that women continue to face barriers in reaching leadership positions despite increasing labour-force participation. Ragins and Cotton (1991) emphasised the importance of mentoring in career development and advancement. Linehan and Scullion (2008) identified organisational and networking barriers affecting women's progression into senior managerial positions. Eagly and Carli (2007) explained that women's leadership advancement is influenced by organisational expectations and gender-related challenges. Hoobler et al. (2009) examined the role of organisational perceptions and gender stereotypes in women's career outcomes. Powell (2012) discussed gender and leadership, highlighting persistent challenges faced by women aspiring to managerial positions. Catalyst studies have consistently emphasised the importance of organisational support, mentoring and equitable promotion practices in improving women's leadership representation. These studies indicate that the glass ceiling is influenced by a combination of individual, organisational and structural factors, supporting the need for a comparative study of women's career advancement in public and private sector banks. Jose and Navdeep (2024)

4. Conceptual Framework

The study considers Gender Stereotypes, Organisational Culture, Work-Life Balance, Mentoring and Networking, Promotion Practices and Organisational Support as major explanatory variables.

Independent Variables → Women's Career Advancement

- Gender Stereotypes → Career Advancement
- Organisational Culture → Career Advancement
- Work-Life Balance → Career Advancement
- Mentoring & Networking → Career Advancement
- Promotion Practices → Career Advancement
- Organisational Support → Career Advancement

The framework also examines whether perceptions of these factors differ between public sector and private sector banks.

5. Hypotheses of the Study

H1: Gender stereotypes have a significant negative influence on women's career advancement.

H2: Organisational culture has a significant negative influence on women's career advancement.

H3: Work-life balance challenges have a significant negative influence on women's career advancement.

H4: Mentoring and networking opportunities have a significant positive influence on women's career advancement.

H5: Fair and transparent promotion practices have a significant positive influence on women's career advancement.

H6: Organisational support has a significant positive influence on women's career advancement.

H7: There is a significant difference in perceived glass ceiling barriers between women employees in public and private sector banks.

6. Research Methodology

Research Design : The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the glass ceiling phenomenon and its influence on women's career advancement.

Period of the Study: The study was conducted during December 2024.

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

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

Sample Size: A sample of 300 women employees was considered for the study

Sector	Number of Respondents
Public Sector Banks	150
Private Sector Banks	150
Total	300

Sampling Technique: A stratified sampling technique was adopted to ensure representation from both public and private sector banks.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 – Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree.

Variables

The questionnaire included measures relating to:

1. Gender Stereotypes
2. Organisational Culture
3. Work–Life Balance
4. Mentoring and Networking
5. Promotion Practices
6. Organisational Support
7. Women's Career Advancement

7. Statistical Tools Used

The following statistical techniques were used:

- Percentage Analysis
- Mean and Standard Deviation
- Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis

- Independent Sample *t*-Test
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)
- Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

8. Descriptive Analysis

The following results may be presented as model for the proposed study:

Glass Ceiling Dimension	Mean	S.D.	Rank
Gender Stereotypes	3.84	0.72	I
Work–Life Balance	3.78	0.74	II
Organisational Culture	3.69	0.76	III
Promotion Practices	3.62	0.78	IV
Mentoring & Networking	3.56	0.82	V
Organisational Support	3.48	0.83	VI

The results indicate that gender stereotypes received the highest mean score, suggesting that respondents perceived gender-based expectations as a major barrier to career advancement. Work–life balance and organisational culture were also identified as important concerns.

9. Comparative Analysis of Public and Private Sector Banks

An independent sample *t*-test can be used to compare the perceptions of women employees in public and private sector banks.

Variable	Public Banks Mean	Private Banks Mean	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Gender Stereotypes	3.74	3.94	2.41	.017
Organisational Culture	3.58	3.80	2.52	.012
Work–Life Balance	3.85	3.71	1.68	.094
Mentoring & Networking	3.43	3.69	2.88	.004
Promotion Practices	3.70	3.54	1.91	.057
Organisational Support	3.57	3.39	2.06	.040

The comparison suggests significant differences between public and private sector employees with respect to gender stereotypes, organisational culture, mentoring and networking, and organisational support. However, the difference in work–life balance and promotion practices is not statistically significant at the 5% level.

10. Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales.

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

The reliability coefficients are above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

11. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was used to establish the measurement validity of the constructs. The results indicate acceptable levels of Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Construct	CR	AVE
Gender Stereotypes	0.89	0.61
Organisational Culture	0.88	0.59
Work–Life Balance	0.87	0.58
Mentoring & Networking	0.90	0.64
Promotion Practices	0.92	0.69
Organisational Support	0.93	0.71
Career Advancement	0.91	0.65

The results indicate adequate convergent validity and reliability of the measurement model.

12. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

SEM was used to examine the influence of the selected glass ceiling factors on women's career advancement.

Relationship	Standardised β	C.R.	p-value	Result
Gender Stereotypes → Career Advancement	-0.28	5.04	<0.001	Significant
Organisational Culture → Career Advancement	-0.22	4.01	<0.001	Significant

Work–Life Balance → Career Advancement	-0.18	3.39	<0.001	Significant
Mentoring & Networking → Career Advancement	0.21	3.92	<0.001	Significant
Promotion Practices → Career Advancement	0.25	4.48	<0.001	Significant
Organisational Support → Career Advancement	0.29	5.21	<0.001	Significant

The model indicates that gender stereotypes, organisational culture and work–life balance negatively influence career advancement, whereas mentoring, fair promotion practices and organisational support have positive effects. **Organisational support shows the strongest positive relationship**, while gender stereotypes represent an important negative barrier.

13. Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Suggested Level
χ^2/df	2.24	< 3.00
GFI	0.92	> 0.90
AGFI	0.90	> 0.90
CFI	0.95	> 0.90
TLI	0.94	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.056	< 0.08
SRMR	0.048	< 0.08

The model demonstrates an acceptable overall fit with the observed data.

14. Major Findings

- Gender stereotypes emerged as the most prominent perceived glass ceiling barrier.
- Work–life balance challenges were identified as another major factor affecting women’s career progression.
- Organisational culture significantly influences women’s opportunities for advancement.
- Mentoring and networking opportunities have a positive influence on career advancement.
- Fair and transparent promotion practices contribute positively to women’s progression into higher positions.
- Organisational support emerged as the strongest positive predictor of career advancement.
- The comparative analysis indicates differences in perceptions between public and private sector bank employees.
- SEM results suggest that organisational and structural factors play an important role in explaining women’s career advancement.

15. Suggestions

- Banks should establish **transparent and merit-based promotion policies** to minimise gender-based barriers.
- Formal **mentoring and leadership-development programmes** should be introduced for women employees.
- Flexible working arrangements should be strengthened to help women manage work and family responsibilities.
- Banks should conduct regular **gender-sensitisation and leadership programmes** to reduce gender stereotypes.
- Equal access to networking, training and challenging assignments should be provided to women employees.
- Senior management should actively support women's career progression through clear career-development pathways.
- Banks should periodically monitor women's representation at middle and senior management levels.

16. Conclusion

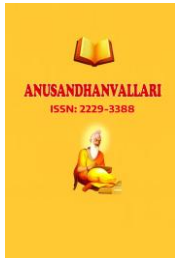
The study concludes that the glass ceiling continues to influence women's career advancement in the banking sector. Gender stereotypes, organisational culture and work-life balance challenges act as significant barriers, while mentoring, fair promotion practices and organisational support facilitate advancement. The comparative findings indicate that women employees in public and private sector banks experience these barriers differently. Creating transparent promotion systems, supportive organisational cultures and leadership opportunities for women can contribute significantly to increasing their representation in senior and top-management positions.

17. Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to selected women employees in public and private sector banks and reflects perceptions during December 2024. Since the study is cross-sectional, changes in perceptions over time are not captured. The findings are also based on self-reported responses and may therefore be influenced by individual perceptions. Datta et al. (2024)

18. Bibliography:

- [1] Catalyst. (Various years). *Women in Leadership: Research and Statistics*. Catalyst, New York.
- [2] Cotter, D. A., Hermsen, J. M., Ovadia, S., & Vanneman, R. (2001). The glass ceiling effect. *Social Forces*, 80(2), 655–681.
- [3] Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders*. Harvard Business School Press.
- [4] Hoobler, J. M., Wayne, S. J., & Lemmon, G. (2009). Bosses' perceptions of family-work conflict and women's promotability. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5), 939–957.
- [5] Linehan, M., & Scullion, H. (2008). The development of female global managers: The role of mentoring and networking. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 83, 29–40.
- [6] Oakley, J. G. (2000). Gender-based barriers to senior management positions: Understanding the scarcity of female CEOs. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 27, 321–334.



-
- [7] Powell, G. N. (2012). *Gender and Managerial Stereotypes: Have the Times Changed?* In *Handbook of Gender Research in Psychology*.
- [8] Ragins, B. R., & Cotton, J. L. (1991). Easier said than done: Gender differences in perceived barriers to gaining a mentor. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(4), 939–951.
- [9] Wirth, L. (2001). *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management*. International Labour Office, Geneva.
- [10] International Labour Organization. (2004). *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management*. ILO, Geneva.
- [11] Jose, J., and Navdeep, N. (2024). Industry-Wise Variations in Cultural Intelligence and its Impact on Business Performance, *ShodhPrabandhan: Journal of Management Studies*, 1(1), 85–92, <https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhPrabandhan.v1.i1.2024>
- [12] Datta, S., Suganthiya, M. S., and Sharma, B. (2024). A Study on the Effectiveness of Rewards and Recognition System in reducing attrition, *ShodhPrabandhan: Journal of Management Studies*, 1(1), 76–84, <https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhPrabandhan.v1.i1.2024>