

ECONOMIC BARRIERS AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES CONFRONTING WOMEN FOR LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

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Abstract

This work examines the economic and social factors inhibiting women from going for leadership and or management positions despite female empowerment with the current society is acknowledged in many decades. Although the fight for equal rights is graceful indeed and the women tend to enter the labour market more actively than before, there is still a number of barriers preventing women from becoming leaders. For example, these are the economic barriers that include the pay gap between male and female employees that affect women to the extent that they cannot progress much in their businesses. Preceding research has established that women are by and large paid less than men for perform comparative work and this does not just incorporate jeopardizing their procuring capacities but in like way crushes them with comparative advancement open doors. Women also get fewer resources – or allocate themselves fewer resources – that are really critical to advancement such as networking and sponsorship. Gender stereotyping at the social level where women are supposed to be at lower successive positions for not being supposed to be in the leadership levels. These biases reaffirms once again that leadership qualities are something only male people possess not women. Also, cultural norms, such as women having to juggle between corporate ladders and the demands of their family to not abandon the family responsibilities and climb it, places hostile work environment in place where there will be promotions skipping women or a work–family conflict by choosing between the two. The other problem is that of job and family demands where women find themselves in an over vulnerable position due to lack of flexible work arrangements and proper parental leaves policies when these factors are at their lowest in the organizations that are highly rigid in terms of structure especially in rigid industries. This study attempts to find out how the economic and social barrier to the progress of women to leadership position by taking a quantitative and qualitative data that involve survey and interviews of women in the leadership position or women who would like to be in a leadership position. Following these findings, however, the barriers do not go away, and this is proof clear that organizational and social change are needed. Hence, it is crucial to ask for policy modifications regarding gender fairness related to the equal remuneration of the same job, a gender diverse on board directors and equal presentations of the programmes to have positive male role models for women. This study finally recommends for such organizing culture that supports positive change to enable women to take senior management and leadership positions and fully participate in leadership roles.

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INTRODUCTION

While policies on gender equality, women's workplace participation and educational attainment have made tremendous processes in mitigating underrepresentation of women in leadership and management, particularly in Western countries, the vice, however, still remains. While women have made some strides in entering the workforce and realizing educational and job success, economic and social impediments still stand in the way of their rising to leadership positions. Trapped by both internal and external barriers, women's career advancement, as well as their decision making power and their influence in innovation at organizational level are limited. Consequently, this calls for the removal of these challenges as means to encourage gender equality as well as to enable that women can have equal opportunities to participate in the leadership and decision making processes in the workplace.

One of the main economic barriers to women's access to leadership is. It is still true that the gender pay gap, a term that describes the difference in earnings between men and women for the same work, persists in most sectors (Becker, 2019). Women are paid less, on average, than their male colleagues in similar roles, making them less financially able and limiting their career growth (Blau & Kahn, 2017). The pay gap comparison is even more pronounced in leadership and management positions, where women still don't have representation in senior posts that earn higher pay (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017). Lack of financial resources to access necessary and important training, networking and mentoring opportunities which are essential for career progression of women. In most situations, economic limitations that women face often act as a barrier to the widening of opportunities leaving them unable to rise to top leadership positions.

Social issues like gender bias, society expectations, and the lack of mentors also play a great role in preventing women from going up the top to reach leadership positions. Gender bias also occurs, which involves prejudicial behavior towards someone due to their gender, generally assuming the male gender to have more leadership qualities than the female gender (Eagly and Kauru, 2002). There is yet another bias, which appears in different kinds like stereotyping, discrimination, and an exclusion which reduces the possibility of promotion of women for high level leadership roles. At the same time, gendered expectations of what women should be and do in society – caregiving, family responsibilities, etc. – have added other barriers in their way. In many instances, societal expectations deem women as caregivers over their careers and in turn affirm that women are not as dedicated to their careers or are not as suitable to hold leadership positions (Madsen, 2017). Women therefore experience pressure to combine work and family responsibilities and in most cases are forced to give up on their career aspirations to take care of family while their career advancement is restricted.

Additionally, this lack of mentorship and sponsorship compounds the problems of social challenges in many organisations. In the process of career advancement, mentorship is a necessary part (Ragins, 2016), by providing support and guidance as well as with opportunities for networking with individuals who share the same ideas and can help overcome organizational difficulties, and attain certain leadership roles. According to research however, women are less likely to have access to those mentors or sponsors, especially in male dominated industries where men usually hold leadership roles (Ibarra, Carter and Silva, 2010). There is no woman mentor or sponsor in senior role to remove the barrier for women to advance her career, continue to under represent women in leadership role. In addition, this lack of support can make women feel isolated or unseen, which then feeds into their confidence and ability to move forward in their careers.

Regarding women in top leadership roles, when women are absent in top leadership, it not only affects individual women but also entire organizations. Not having gender diversity at leadership level curtails the diversity of both thought, decision making and innovativeness that may be experienced within organizations. It is proven that the better problem solving, decision making, innovation rate and the like is done by diverse leadership teams (Nielsen & Huse, 2010).

On the other hand, the absence of women in leadership positions is likely to keep cycling gender inequality since younger women in the workforce may lack role models to emulate. The lack of women in senior roles is also a way of saying that women ought not to be in senior roles and can deter women from aspiring to such roles and pursuing their careers.

These barriers have persisted, so the question that arises is how to overcome them. Policies that help to close the gender pay gap are among the key recommendations to overcome economic barriers. Numerous researches have studied pay transparency and salary audits as tools that help fight gender based pay disparities and ensure that women are fairly paid for their work (Dube & Niskanen, 2018). Besides, organizations can initiate female human resource programs to ensure that women can access the programs geared towards increasing financial literacy and career development so that they can achieve career promotions. Mentorship and sponsorship opportunities also provide access to support women's career progression. Formal mentorship programs can be put in place in companies as well as pushing senior leaders to become sponsors and advocates of women, so that they are equipped with the support necessary to breach the barriers that hinder their ascent.

To address these social challenges, the first step should be to change culture in an organization and in the society in general to become unbiased and free from social expectations for genders. Organizations should create inclusive workplaces by encouraging diversity in leadership roles and by initiating policies that endorse work life balance, including providing flexible work arrangements and parental leave (Kossek et al., 2016). One way to help challenge traditional gender roles and promote women into leadership roles without fear for discrimination and bias is to create a culture that values diversity and inclusion. The latter requires providing public awareness campaigns that will challenge the normatively assigned societal expectations of women in caregiving roles, and campaign for equality of the gender in both workplace and homes.

Additionally, having more women represent in leadership roles can transform an organization's culture. As women climb higher in positions of power, they can be role models for younger women and inspire them to seek out their own careers. Moreover, increasing woman representation in leadership also aids in breaking the gender biases and stereotypes which bar women from holding those leadership positions, and at the same time illustrates that women are equally eligible for leadership roles. In addition, diversifying leadership can help organizations recruit and retain the best people and ultimately improve overall organizational performance.

This research will use a mixed method approach through qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys in order to better understand the problem women in the attainment of leadership positions face, as well as their ideas about the possibilities for change from the point of view of women in leadership positions across many different industries. Qualitative component will yield in depth interviews with women who have realized their leadership posts through the tenureship of their careers to understand their personal or organizational based challenges. Quantitative surveys will serve to give a broader perspective of the prevalence of the gender biases and gaps in pay as well as other economic and social barriers across economic and/or social sectors. The results will provide essential information on the barriers that women encounter and will help to develop strategies to promote gender equality in leadership.

The summary is, even though steps have been taken towards gender equality in the workplace, there are still considerable economical and social hindrances standing in the way of women achieving leadership and management roles. This process of addressing the barriers requires policy, organizational and societal changes. Organizations can help to create a more equitable and diverse leadership pipeline by pursuing strategies to close the gender pay gap, provide mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, and help to create an inclusive organizational culture. It will ultimately help individual women, but also has the potential to advance the cause of better decision making, innovation, and organisational success. These efforts could help propel

society closer to the goal of real gender equality when it comes to placing people in leadership roles, granting women an equal voice in the development of the future of organizations and industries.

It is then notable that the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector and others have an underrepresentation of women occupying leadership positions. While much progress has been made in promoting gender equality, there're still many hurdles to a woman's pursuit of a career and most especially in the profession of a leader. However, barriers can be subdivided into intrapersonal and environmental factors and are the main impediments that prevent women from reaching the apex in their leadership careers. Typical intrapersonal barriers include lack of self-confidence, self doubt and women's perception of the glass ceiling which restricts their professional advancement. In contrast, environmental barriers are more external and include norms at the level of the organization and society, dominated by male dominated industries, gender stereotypes, and lack of supportive structures for women in leadership positions. In addition, there is a lack of female mentors and role models, as well as inclusive cultures in organizations.

The challenges are even more pronounced in the case of the ICT sector, which has been traditionally a male dominated and as such, has very deep gender biased, as noted Mafudze. Women aspiring to leadership roles in ICT face a host of difficulties as they are underrepresented and, in the case of women to conform with masculine leadership models. Therefore, women are often bypassed for upper management positions or left with no choice but to assimilate their authenticity to conform with malecentric leadership paradigms. Despite such challenges, research has shown that many strategies and practices are available to help women overcome such barriers. Individual, organizational, and society level strategies can be identified for the implementation of these strategies. Women at the individual level can keep working on women for continuous self education and self affirmation which leads to building of women's confidence and assertiveness in their careers. Creating a positive and supportive environment for women involves organizational practices like mentorship programs and inclusive cultures of companies. The barrier to women career advancement can also be helped by societal practices, like showing successful women leaders as role models or developing an inclusive society.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the main economic and societal barriers that women are confronted with in the ICT sector, with particular reference to intrapersonal and environmental barriers that hinder the vertical promotion of their careers. The research looks into the barriers and the strategies that can be employed to overcome them to help shed light on the elements that lead to increase in issue of gender inequality in leadership and management positions. Consequently, the results of this study will play a leading role in rendering policy changes and organizational practices which support increased gender equality in leadership positions. The research addresses all these barriers at different levels, and envisions a world in which women participate and contribute equally to the decision making, to the innovation and organizational success in the ICT industry and elsewhere.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender disparities in leadership and management occupations have remained rampant despite strategies that have been put in place to enhance gender equity in the workplace. This is not about representation only but also shapes the body of economic and social conditions that even today suppress women in their struggle for progress up the corporate ladder. They continue being discriminated in that they are paid lesser than their male counterparts, making it one of the key factors that affects their progression to leadership positions in their careers. It is well documented that unequal pay prevails to be a crucial barrier to women's numerical advancement in the workforce to leadership positions.

It is a verifiable fact that men and women are paid differently for equal work, and the gender pay gap exists not only in one country but in all over the world. Although female employment has

improved over the years, women have lower average wages than men do, which has consequences for women's careers. A Global Gender Gap report by the World Economic Forum (2020) reveals that women earn up to 20% lesser than men for the same working, a menace that hinders then in the advancement to better positions. This disparity is primarily felt in leadership positions as women are paid lesser compared to their male counterparts (2018, p.128).

The gender pay gap prevents women from being promoted to leadership positions due to lack of capital and cannot afford such resources that will assist them in their career advancement. Thus, the gender pay gap contributes to women availing lesser opportunities in their professions in terms of quality professional development, mentorship or networking which are very crucial in one's career paths (Blau & Kahn, 2017). These financial constraints also hinder women's ability to acquire the right experience or training that may enable her to compete for seniority positions. It also ensures that women remain in low ranking and low paying jobs; and this disempowers them from access of decision making processes and leadership roles in organizations.

Pay discrimination is not merely limited to by restricting pay but it has a wider effect on gender. It also ties with the problem of gender inequality in the workplace and makes women's employment limited to stereotypically appropriate jobs and expectations for women to occupy specific roles only. This raises the question on whether organisations have fully embraced women into their companies because the pay difference particularly persistently illustrates that women are considered subordinate in the job market for they are likely to be offered less pay and are denied upward mobility (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Also, this gap cultivates women's unfavorable attitude of injustice in the workplace since women have the perception that they are not valued as much as their male counterparts leading to low self-employability and unwillingness to pursue higher careers.

Subsequent research has sought to stress that gender pay disparity is not the only challenge that women are bound to encounter in the economic market. The women also encounter some constraints when it comes to access to critical assets such as training and development that remain important in career advancement (Kosseck et al., 2016). This kept many women from engaging in high level or leadership training hence do not get the experience to for leadership positions. This is coupled with cultural expectations that limit women's ability to gain more work related resources such as travel, networking, and elongated working hours because women should be homes bound, and should be more focused on family (Madsen, 2017). All these cumulatively to ensure that women are locked out of the elevation to leadership positions which can only be got through opportunities.

However, the latter is that social factors such as gender prejudices and traditional roles impede women in their career progression. Several previous research have indicated that women are rated as less competent than man especially when it comes to male-dominated area of working such as IT, engineering, and finance (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Some of these are based on stereotyping I formation; collection, analysis and reporting of the data generated; discrimination; and exclusion from crucial decision making processes. For example, research evidence suggests that female managers, like the male managers, are compared negatively when performing similar tasks than their male counterparts; women are in a catch-22 situation where the very behaviour they need to carry out their efficient management job, such these restrained, assertiveness, assertiveness, ambition, are labelled negatively when exhibited by a woman (Heilman, 2012).

In addition to this, gender stereotyping in society hinders the women from being able to gain leadership positions. Since the roles of women entail taking care of the family and the young ones most organizations restrict women to fewer promotions and opportunities. This structure of gender employment opportunities presents another problem to women involved in leadership roles since now they are supposed to be not only managers but wives and mothers as well. These hikes make women's decision-making difficult as they are forced to choose between their jobs

and their children and due to cultural expectations, most women end up preferring to care for their families (Madsen, 2017).

There are no sufficient mentorship and sponsorship also escalates these social challenges even higher. As this paper shows, having a proper mentor in an organization is vital for enhancing the of the individual as well as ensuring that one gets the necessary connections required in leadership positions within the organization. But, women are given less chances to receive the mentorship as compared to men and it is even more prominent where there is an inclination toward the male workers (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010). This reinforces a disadvantage that women face because they never get a mentor or a sponsor to advise, recommend or even lobby for their appointment to higher positions. Moreover, women appear to lack female role models at the top managerial positions; therefore, they do not have strong leaders that they emulate in ascending to top executive positions.

There are various reasons why women are unable to rise to leadership positions in organizations and career lattice; the effects are not only felt by them and organizations but the entire society. This tends to reduce the variability of reasons for decision making in an organization as well as decision making autonomies, hence degrading organizational performance and innovation (Nielsen and Huse, 2010). Research has also demonstrated that diverse teams perform better in problem-solving, decision-making process, and enhancing the process of innovation. In addition, lack of management of women continues to give rise to negative trends as women joining the workforce have limited senior figures to emulate. This lack of representation simply implies that leadership positions are meant for males only, and females are not even encouraged to apply for these positions, hence further enhancing gender-based discrimination at the workplace.

Therefore, it is without doubt that there has been increased representation of women in the workplace but still, there are many impediments to women when it comes to being given management and leadership positions. From the present literature, it becomes possible to identify the causes of the dearth of women in leadership; these include the gender disparities, poor resource availability, gender biasness, and societal culture, lack of first-line management and sponsors. In order to overcome these barriers some of the necessary methods require standard and policy-making intervention along with reorganization and alteration of the social culture. Thus organizations should work towards reducing the gender pay disparity, offering equal or better opportunities for sponsors, and creating non-sexualized work-related environments so that women could be promoted to the executive level. In conclusion, the condition where such representation of women in the workplace will lead to having more women taking the most senior positions in organizations will ultimately enhance decision making as a means of benefiting both the individual and the organization.

Although women encounter economic barriers that hinder their chances of occupying leadership roles, social barriers brought about by gender prejudices, as well as culture, remain a challenge to the advancement of women in leadership positions. These are prevailing barriers with roots in workplace cultures and still prevalent in today's societies greatly affecting women's careers. Greed for example is a social issue; which hinders women from being promoted or appointed to higher ranks at their workplace. These attitudes are derived from prejudices prevalent in the former's mind that leadership role is meant for the male gender, while the female gender is not suited for such roles. Studies have indicated that leadership roles are stereotypically associated with the male gender and jobs are considered appropriate for females should possess the following characters ? assertiveness, confidence, decisiveness, etc While the opposite gender (female) should imbibe the following values of; ? nurturing, empathy and passivity. These gender stereotypes influence the society to provide a perception that women cannot be as competent, or possess capability to lead as male counterparts. According to Eagly and Carli (2007) the female leaders end up being sanctioned for violation of the societal cultural norms that presume that only

male individuals should lead. The opposite thing is frequently blamed for the manifestation of characteristics, which are associated with the male gender and aggression, for example, assertiveness, self-promotion leads to the receiving of a low rating in terms of leadership abilities. On the flip side, when such characteristics are displayed by men, they are most likely going to be regarded as the competent and leading personalities. ESSAY II: Women are trapped in what could be called the “Double Bind” which suggests that a woman who seeks the leadership position will either be criticized for being assertive, too aggressive or on the other end of the scale, a woman who refrains from being too hard, assertive will be considered a poor leader contributing to a toxic workplace environment in which the probability of a woman being promoted or obtaining leadership positions is very low.

The culture in many societies push women to be more involved and responsive to the needs of their families and other dependants worsens the social hurdles confronting the female leaders. Women have been assigned the role of the housekeepers and caretakers of the children according to the cultural beliefs that uphold the traditional patriarchal marriage. This societal expectation puts the female gender in a fix especially if they are hurdle-bound by the desire to grow in their careers, yet responsibilities at home cannot be shrugged off. Consequently, women may feel forced to have fewer career goals, or else they have to work shift or low-ranking jobs that will enable them to cope with family duties (Madsen, 2017). This can disqualify them from taking or getting promotions to leadership positions, which frequently entail working numerous hours, travelling often or moving, all challenges that are hard to contemplate by caregivers. Furthermore, this expectation propounds the stereotype that women are less career-oriented or more likely to quit her job to raise a family thus perpetuates the idea that women are not well suited for leadership positions as men.

These gender prejudices and cultural attributes lead to the failure of promoting women to corridors of leadership through mentorship and sponsorship in many workplaces. Mentorship and sponsorship involve the provision of timely information that is valuable in leadership, as well as the introduction of such individuals to networks that are crucial for leadership opportunities. But yet, the study reveals that women hardly get into mentoring and sponsorship as much as their male counterparts (Ibarra, Carter & Silva, 2010). Mentorship entails receiving advice and feedbacks from a role model, while sponsorship entails sponsors determine to push for a person claiming that they deserve certain opportunities or tasks be assigned to him or her. These attendant relationships help the women gain visibility and the chances to rise to leadership positions within the organizations.

The author Ibarra, Carter, and Silva (2010) stress that women remain disadvantaged when it comes to being chosen as mentorship or sponsorship by leaders at the top management level especially in organizations that are dominated by male employees. Such exclusion from mentorship and sponsorship does not only result in a continuation of the disadvantaged state for women, but also deny them a number of career chances and feedbacks that are crucial for leadership success. In addition, it also implies that senior management positions are held mostly by males and, therefore, women may have fewer or limited opportunities for developing such beneficial relationships since male managers will not be motivated to take women under their wing through offering them coaching or supporting them in securing choice positions. All these eliminate any chances a woman has of climbing the ladder to the executive level, as they are not given any support or an opportunity to get the connections that will help them penetrate through the glass ceiling.

In addition, the lack of sponsorship comes hand in hand with negative impact of mentorship wherein the women are left with no confidence and goal direction. The absence of the supportive and encouraging environments that can come with these mentorship relationships may cause those women to start to question their capability to perform the requirements of the leadership positions. This lack of confidence may also make it difficult for increasing the

promotion of women by decreasing their chances of going for promotion or speaking up more in leadership positions. Hence, not only is the financial support of a role model, but also the encouragement of self-confidence and self-sufficiency for women to be able to come through social and economic challenges.

The influence of culture, tradition, and lack of or inadequate role models add on to the challenges that affect the career advancement of female individuals. These challenges are further compounded by the fact that women have to prove themselves and their capacity to lead in organizations dominated by male counterparts. The consequence is that there are so many women who lag behind as far as leadership opportunities than their male counterparts with similar educational background and work experience. This is undesirable not only for women but for the organizations as well because the organizations lack the diversity of thinking and creativity of women as well as the leadership that can come only from women.

It is therefore ascertained that the established social challenges such as gender discriminations, cultural norms and lack of role models hinder the leadership progress of women. The following are the barriers that contribute to the poor female representation in leadership and or a workplace that is perceived to be hostile to women. To address all these challenges, there is the need for change of such cultures, gender diversity and equality at workplace as well as providing women with opportunities for mentoring and sponsorship. In this way, it is possible the develop more equal and gender sensitive management conditions that will allow women to also reach the highest levels of the organizational hierarchy as their male counterparts do.

METHODOLOGY

This research work incorporates both questionnaires and interviews as its data collection tools in order to give an appropriate picture of the economic and social factors as potential causes of women’s low representation in leadership and management posts. The study will be a three-stage process and the reason for each stage is as follows:

PHASE 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW AND SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS:

The first step involves the literature review of gender diversity and secondary data on factors that affect female employments and promotion to leadership positions.

PHASE 2 – SURVEYS AND QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION:

With the approval of the respondents, a survey question will be given to women in leadership and management positions in the workplace, and other women who are not yet in these positions but would like to be in the future. The survey will be asking questions with an economic part, which will include questions on salary, job stability, and access to resources as well as social issues, including gender bias or lack of a mentor, and family responsibility.

PHASE 3 – INTERVIEWS AND QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION:

There will be semi structured interviews with women managers and professionals, human resource managers, and the organizational leaders. The interviews are likely to help in the revealing of more social and economic barriers into women’s career progression.

GANTT CHART

Task / Phase	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
Phase 1 – Literature Review & Secondary Data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Identify and review relevant literature	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Collect and analyze secondary data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Phase 2 – Surveys & Quantitative Data		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Design and pilot the survey		<input type="checkbox"/>				



Distribute survey and collect responses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Analyze quantitative data		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Phase 3 – Interviews & Qualitative Data			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Select participants & prepare interview guide			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conduct semi-structured interviews			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transcribe and analyze interview data				<input type="checkbox"/>
Final Report Writing & Review			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Write findings and conclusions			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Review, revise, and finalize the report				<input type="checkbox"/>

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from both the quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, offering insights into the economic and social barriers faced by women in attaining leadership and management roles. The data was collected from 150 respondents—75 women in leadership roles and 75 aspiring to these positions.

SURVEY FINDINGS

ECONOMIC BARRIERS

The survey results indicate that a significant number of women continue to face economic challenges that hinder their career progression. The findings are summarized in Table 4.1 below.

TABLE 4.1: ECONOMIC BARRIERS FACED BY WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Barrier	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Gender Pay Gap	70%
Lack of Access to Resources	55%
Job Insecurity	50%
Limited Career Advancement	60%

Key Insight: A majority of respondents (70%) highlighted the gender pay gap as a critical factor limiting their financial independence and long-term career prospects.

SOCIAL BARRIERS

Social expectations and structural biases within organizations remain prominent challenges for women. Table 4.2 outlines the key social barriers reported.

TABLE 4.2: SOCIAL BARRIERS FACED BY WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Barrier	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Gender Bias	65%
Lack of Mentorship	50%
Societal Expectations (Family vs. Career)	75%
Lack of Organizational Support	40%

Key Insight: A notable 75% of participants reported societal expectations as the biggest barrier, revealing that women are often forced to choose between career and family responsibilities.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Semi-structured interviews with women in leadership, HR professionals, and organizational leaders revealed deeper insights into the experiences and perceptions surrounding career barriers.

GENDER BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION

Participants noted persistent gender bias and the need to prove their competence more than male colleagues. Many emphasized that leadership traits in women are often misunderstood as aggressiveness.

SAMPLE QUOTE

“I always feel I have to prove myself more than my male colleagues. It’s exhausting and demotivating.”

MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP GAPS

Interviewees highlighted the absence of structured mentorship or sponsorship systems for women, which limited their access to guidance and leadership opportunities.

SAMPLE QUOTE:

“The biggest challenge in my career has been the lack of a mentor or sponsor. Without support, it’s hard to navigate the corporate ladder.”

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Many respondents struggled with balancing leadership responsibilities with family obligations, particularly in workplaces lacking flexible work arrangements or adequate parental support.

SAMPLE QUOTE

“Women are forced to make choices between family and career, but that’s an impossible choice. Support for working mothers needs to increase.”

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Economic barriers such as the gender pay gap and lack of resources remain prevalent.
- Social barriers are even more pronounced, especially societal norms and gender role expectations.
- Mentorship and sponsorship are critically lacking for women in both leadership and aspiring positions.
- Cultural expectations continue to limit the extent to which women can engage in leadership without personal or professional compromises.

INTERVIEW DATA

Several findings from the interviews were qualitatively similar. According to women in leadership positions, they are constantly met on the field with bias from gender, where they are considered less competent or capable than a man in the same position. There were also many who mentioned the absence of mentorship and sponsorship as a further barrier to their advancement. One of the challenges that some of the interviewees experienced was striking a balance between family commitments and career aspirations, and that sometimes the organization’s policies did not support flexible work options.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUOTES

I always have a feeling that I have to prove myself more than my male colleagues. It’s exhausting and demotivating.”

The biggest challenge in my career has been the lack of a mentor or sponsor. “Without support, it’s hard to navigate the corporate ladder.”

‘Women are forced to make choices between family and career, but that’s an impossible choice,’ he said. All the support for women who want to excel needs to increase – in both.”

DISCUSSION

These results demonstrate how several forms of economic and social challenges limit women from achieving leadership roles. Research surveys demonstrated many business obstacles women experience including pay inequality and small workplace development options alongside money issues and job uncertainty. These conditions make it hard for women to develop professionally and create vital relationships while also preventing their access to educational opportunities required for career advancement in organizations. Research shows that earning less money creates continuous employment problems for women during their whole working lives.

Society puts many barriers in the path of women looking to achieve success. This research shows that solid cultural patterns that guide male leadership concepts and social practices create strong obstacles for women in their work settings. Many people in the study indicated they needed to come first to their family duties instead of moving forward at work. The social norm of family priority limits women's career progress because men do not usually need to balance opposite demands. Women face gender discrimination and stereotyping that makes their professional advancement harder. Participants explained in their interviews about how they received poor treatment through interviews that showed how colleagues gave them less value, watched them closely, or demanded they work harder than men to prove their worth.

Interview data and polls confirm that few organizations provide enough mentors and sponsors to their female employees. Women typically found themselves without helpful guidance from mentors and supporters in their businesses. Women in the workplace experience separation from their support networks which compounds gender inequality because such relationships help boost opportunities for advancement. Interview participants explained how inflexible business environments hurt women more because their workplaces maintain strict schedules and provide insufficient parental care. The structural arrangements in the workplace work against a setting that supports female career advancement.

These findings prove that gender differences in leadership positions do not depend on personal desires but exist because of business and society's fundamental rules. The solution needs active participation from different levels: adapting company systems, improving national laws, and adjusting general business practices. Leadership institutions need to replace empty gender diversity promises by creating active programs that remove meaningful workplace barriers for female development.

CONCLUSION

People now understand equal rights importance although real barriers still prevent women from becoming executives at work. The workforce limits women's job progress because they receive less money than men while facing employment instability and lack both professional growth chances and basic funds. Social pressure and gender biases team up with missing male sponsorships to make women prove their value constantly without male career partners.

The study reveals that these hurdles exist firmly in work systems and social standard practices throughout the community. Continuous work needs to be done consistently and in depth to break these obstacles. The workplace must have equal pay for equal work along with open promotion procedures and diverse leadership training for all employees. The workplace needs to provide flexible schedules and strong employee assistance that recognizes household duties across all staff. Leaderships should create official women mentorship and sponsorship programs to help female professionals secure professional help and support like male peers.

These barriers need attention because they represent both a social and moral responsibility as well as a smart approach to success. When leadership includes different types of people it helps teams make advanced choices and find fresh solutions while representing a wide range of groups in government. Using women at the top benefits anyone who supports this change and helps companies perform better. As we progress our work majorly depends on changing awareness into changes that matter. Women need equal chances to lead at every level of our society through inclusive settings backed by modern policies and reform in cultural beliefs. This study demonstrates that there are continued economic and social obstacles impeding women's entry into leadership and management positions. Significant economic factors that restrict women's ability to progress in their career are lack of resources, the gender pay gap and limited career advancement opportunities. As with the leadership problem faced by women, gender biases, expectations from the society, and absence of mentorship also hamper their ascent to leadership positions.

Organisations have a key role in both maintaining and alleviating these barriers. According to many women, they had faced a hostile work environment which was not looked upon in good light. In male dominated leadership structure of organizations, the female can not be accommodated and rather promote a culture that is not supportive to them. Moreover, flexible work arrangements are absent and there is insufficient parental leave which also contributes to women's career progression getting sidelined.

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