

# A Conceptual study about Socio – Psychological Barriers among Women in Leadership

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## Abstract

This paper is a study of leadership research, focusing primarily on socio- psychological barriers among women in leadership. Economic empowerment of women is very important for the development of a nation. Now a day socio-psychological barriers play a major role in the women leadership. Some of the barriers of women leaders are facing managerial sex role stereotyping, work life balance, glass ceiling, cross cultural barriers. Coping strategies such as participatory leadership, determination to succeed, mentoring subordinates and delegation of power, continuous learning and planning served as support that strengthened these women against much of the difficulties they encountered in their professional roles. This paper mainly focuses on various socio-psychological barriers among women leaders and recommends strategies for removal of these obstructions to women leaders.

**Keywords:** women in leadership, socio- psychological barriers, Economic empowerment.

## Introduction

In the history of human development, women have been as a vital role in the history making as men have been. In fact higher status for women vis-a-vis employment and work performed by them in a society is a significant indicator of a nation's overall progress. Undoubtedly, without the active participation of women in national activities, the social, economic or political progress of a country will deteriorate and become stagnant. But ironically and tragically, women employees in general, are not taken very seriously by their superiors, colleagues, or society at large. Having a career poses challenges for women due to their family responsibilities. Traditionally Indian women had been homemakers but in the recent decades, proper education and better awareness, in addition to the ever increasing cost of living has made them to go out and choose careers. In a patriarchal society like India, it is still believed that a man is the primary bread winner of his family. Although

Indian women have started working outside their homes still they have a long way to go both culturally, socially and economically, to bring in positive attitudinal changes in the mind-set of people. While a majority of the women still face discrimination and gender bias, in the last few decades, the number of women successful in politics, technology and business etc. is definitely on the rise. Society has started seeing women in a different perspective.

Leadership development for women plays an essential role in economic development of India. Women are generally assessed as home makers with little to do with economy or commerce. But this scenario is changing, as the new generation women across the world have overcome all negative opinions and have proved themselves beyond doubt in all spheres of life including the most complex and massive world of entrepreneurship. The increase in the number of self-employed women has changed demographic characteristics of the business environment. Women's entrepreneurship provides a formidable contribution to the economic development, innovation and wealth creation of many countries. On the global scale, women make up a substantial proportion of the entrepreneurial population. This changing scenario has given ample opportunities for women to be successful leaders.

Women leaders in India face numerous problems which start from the family or the society which she belongs and other general problems including gender inequality, problem of finance, risk taking attitude and competition, lack of family support, lack of role model etc. This study reveals the barriers/problems/issues/challenges faced by women leaders and how to overcome these barriers.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To gain knowledge about the problems and challenges faced by women leaders in the workplace
- To find out possible solutions that could help them to overcome the problems that they face in the workplace.

### **Research Methodology**

The analysis of this paper is based on secondary data collected from the related websites, books and articles from different journals.

### **Review of Literature**

Okolo (1989) studied that one obstacle is the lack of role models of executive women due to their scarce presence in top managerial positions. Likewise, this study found out that there is no gender difference in organizational hierarchies when a woman has already gained access to them. The lack of impact in women can occur because executive and managerial women have developed survival features becoming immune to the effects of men's hierarchies. A hierarchy composed by men solely may have an effect upon the election of a managerial board, and then its further influence is not very strong.

Wentling (2003) showed that the twin roles of women cause tension and conflict due to her social structure which is still more dominant. In her study on working women in Delhi, she has shown that traditional authoritarian set up of Hindu social structure continues to be the same basically and hence women face problem of role conflict change in attitudes of men and women according to the situation can help to overcome their problem.

Cotter and colleagues (2001), they examine three remaining criteria for discerning the effects of a glass ceiling. First, a glass ceiling exists when artificial barriers impede the advancement of women and minorities. In measuring discrimination, analysts often control for education, work experience, tenure with the current employer, and familial factors affecting productivity (e.g., marital /parental status). A second criterion for investigating the concept of a glass ceiling is that one must use longitudinal data to examine job transitions over time. A third criterion for the existence of a glass ceiling is that inequality grows over the life course; this implies that the barriers to mobility existing early in a career become more severe later in the career.

Nima Ghorbani et al. (2000), examined work-related stress is significantly correlated with negative coping efforts. When faced with stressful situations, people often look for ways to self-medicate and turn to drugs, alcohol, and nicotine abuse. Psychopathology including depression, anxiety, and suicide are results of negative coping. Many people choose negative coping strategies to relieve the stress and strain. To combat these negative coping efforts, women must learn how to effectively deal with stress.

### **Introduction to the Conceptual Framework**

✚ **Barriers of the women in leadership:** Some of the barriers in women leadership are;

- **Glass Ceiling:** To understand the limited movement of women into prominent positions of leadership, concepts such as the “glass ceiling” have come into wide use. The term is commonly used to describe the invisible barrier that blocks women's chances of further promotion or advancement up the corporate ladder. The glass ceiling is not simply a barrier for individual women, but it also applies to women as a group, who are kept from advancing simply because they are women. Subtle, indirect obstacles as a result of labelling or stereotyping place stumbling blocks in the career paths of many women. The glass ceiling is a term which symbolizes a variety of barriers faced by women as they seek to improve their employment status. Many studies confirmed the glass ceiling hypothesis and indicated that women in their early lives experienced a number of barriers during their decision of their career path (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997); and also invisible barriers, which continued to prevent women from moving up to a higher position in organizations ( Baxter & Wright, 2000; Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

- **Sex Role Stereotyping:** Sex role stereotyping is a serious obstacle facing women in leadership. Unique barriers that affect women's ability to shatter the glass ceiling involve career assumptions by management about women as a group and contradictory expectations for women. Discriminatory attitudes are often veiled in inaccurate “facts” about women's capacity for leadership. Women are presented as not aggressive enough, lacking the self-confidence required for the job, and not being serious enough about their careers to climb the corporate ladder. But prejudices and gender stereotypes persist because they allow males to protect their privileged status and keep women in their place. Despite overwhelming evidence that these stereotypes are wrong, they persist. Many female executives are convinced that they are not taken seriously by their male colleagues; many have reported being mistaken for secretaries at business meetings. While few women in executive positions report serious anti-women attitudes at work, the forces of discrimination are far more subtle: Women are simply ignored more than men. Furthermore, female executives are generally paid less than their male counterparts with similar responsibilities.
- **Work Life Balance:** Work and life balance challenges can impact women's advancement and, if not dealt with, may contribute to the glass-ceiling phenomenon. Women are typically the primary family caregivers for children and/or the elderly. Assumptions are often made regarding women's availability to do a job without interference from family responsibilities. Further, some organizations may not offer work/life programs that support outside commitments, particularly for senior-level positions. As a possible solution, perhaps, women could choose to work fewer hours than men in order to spend more time with their families. Women also measure success in the workplace differently than men. Men tend to measure success by high salaries and important job titles whereas women place a higher value on their relationships with colleagues and community service. Therefore, many women are at a disadvantage to take steps that would increase the likelihood of advancing up the corporate ladder.
- **Job Stress:** The most commonly accepted definition of stress (mainly attributed to Richard S Lazarus) is that stress is a condition or feeling experienced, when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources, the individual is able to mobilize. In short, it's what we feel when we think of losing control over the events. Job stress can be defined as an employee's awareness or feeling of personal dysfunction as a result of perceived conditions or happenings in the workplace, and the employee's psychological and physiological reactions caused by these uncomfortable, undesirable, or threats in the employee's immediate workplace environment (Montgomery et al., 1996)

- **Lack of Mentors:** Another barrier of women in leadership is the lack of a critical mass of senior or visibly successful female role models and mentors. Mentoring is an arrangement whereby an individual who has experience and knowledge in a particular field can actively guide and offer support to facilitate the learning or development of another person. The arrangement generally involves a person in a leadership position providing guidance and assistance to an individual in a more junior position. While corporations or institutions of higher learning have recognized the importance and value of mentoring for their employees and have put formal structures in place to support this process, mentoring generally occurs on an informal basis. Given the old-boy network that has been central to men's mentoring and advancement, women traditionally have had fewer mentoring opportunities open to them than their male colleagues. Women in executive positions stress that the lack of mentoring among women has been detrimental to their climb up the corporate ladder. Because men generally occupy the highest positions of leadership, men are more likely to be in powerful positions to open doors for those with inferior status. This is a serious barrier to women's advancement. Since the basis of patriarchy has been organized through men's relationships with other men, a similar unity among women is an effective means by which to combat institutional forms and norms that largely exclude women.
- **Cultural Barriers:** It has often been assumed that traditional attitudes towards gender inequality influence women's advancement in the office. Theories of socialization have long illuminated the bearing division of sex roles within a society, especially the existence of egalitarian or traditional attitudes towards women in private and public spheres.
- ✚ **Strategy and Solutions:** Some of the strategies are mentioned below;
  - **Coping Strategies of Women Leaders:** More women gain work experience and the education necessary for them to be qualified as leaders, organisations have been subsequently called upon to re-establish and expand their notions of what constitutes effective leadership as it relates to gender, stereotyping, and role expectations. Rosener (1990) revealed his study that those reconsiderations and added that they should include “a valuing of diversity of leadership styles”, if an organisation hopes to be successful in its mission. McGuire (2002) viewed that leaders must support, develop and nurture staff. Effective leaders set a standard for ethical behaviour and seek diverse perspectives and alternative points-of-view. Not only do leaders encourage innovations, initiatives, collaborations and strong work ethics but they also expect and provide multiple opportunities for staff to engage in continuous personal and professional growth. Furthermore, leaders must collaborate and cooperate with others on a daily basis. Leaders communicate high expectations and provide acquired

information to foster understanding and to maintain trust and confidence. Every organisation depends on capable leadership to guide it through its activities.

- **Mentoring Programmes:** The organizations should have mentoring programmes which will help the male employees to accept the female employees equally and there will not exist any glass ceiling in the organization.
- **Career Rotation:** This is another option, where men and women get equal opportunities to be the leader in the organization without discriminations.

There also can be an increase in board room diversity. Instead of only having men controlling the boardroom, even women can be given an opportunity to show their talents. The organization can have goals for diversity. This will help the women to achieve their goal to the full extent. Legislation reform constitutes an important component of any strategy to achieve equality in employment. Although legislation alone cannot provide a quick remedy and it can lead to numerous informal methods to avoid the direction of such legislation, legislation can set a community standard and serves to illustrate what is acceptable behaviour.

Female workers must work to avoid the individual barriers such, lack of self-confidence, being too emotional when working matters of workers by developing the self-confidence and positive thinking as such building can do perception. They must change the perception regarding women workers as posy, emotional, manipulative. Female workers who identified having difficulties balancing work and family indicated that they had too many work and family responsibilities and sometimes they did not have time to accomplish everything effectively. To them, time management was the biggest challenge. To avoid the Family Barriers organization can help with the female workers by offering day care centres, leave them in the weekends, giving flexible office hours etc. The organizations should have mentoring programmes which will help the male employees to accept the female employees equally and there will not exist any glass ceiling in the organization.

## Conclusion

Coping strategies such as participatory leadership, determination to succeed, mentoring subordinates and delegation of power, continuous learning and planning served as support that strengthened these women against much of the difficulties they encountered in their professional roles. Career rotation is another option, where men and women get equal opportunities to be the leader in the organization without discriminations. There also can be an increase in board room diversity. Instead of only having men controlling the boardroom, even women can be given an opportunity to show their talents. The organization can have goals for diversity. This will help the women to achieve their goal to the full extent.

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