

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN: CHALLENGES FACED IN CAREER PROGRESSION

Thasika Yogeswaran *

University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

* thasiyoges@gmail.com

(Published 15 October 2021)

Abstract

This research aims to explore the factors that hamper the career advancement of middle level female employees in banking organizations in Sri Lanka. While reviewing the literature of women's career advancement, it has been noted that a majority of the research has considered the individual, organizational and social factors as the barriers to advancement. However, since there is a difference between the nature and type of barriers with regard to different stages of a woman's career, it would be interesting to investigate this for understanding any differences in women's struggles in advancing in their careers at the different stages of their careers. Using the qualitative research approach, the researcher has carried out in-depth, in-person interviews with 15 middle level female managers, representing banking organizations. The findings of the study were derived from the thematic analysis and indicated that the most of the participants were adequately aware of what barrier existed at each stage of their career with regard to career advancement. The participants also commonly identified organizational factors to be the most hindering factor of career advancement in banking organizations. This study identified a number of insightful remarks to be further researched in women career advancement.

Keywords: Banking organizations, interviews, qualitative research, women career advancement, career stages

1. Introduction

The role of women in the world of work and the issue of whether women are making sufficient progress in advancing through the organizational rank has been debated several times and fought over for several centuries. Some studies have been conducted by Bombuwela, Alwis and Chamaru in 2013 illustrate that during the past years there has been an increase in the percentage of women at entry and middle-level management positions. There are valid evidences of the women under-representation in leadership positions in many countries all over the world. Such as Australia (Davidson, 2009), China (Tan, 2008), United Kingdom (Davidson, 2009) and United States (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, it has gained greater recognition throughout the world not only for electing the world's first prime minister 1960 but also electing the country's first executive woman president in 1994. This was widely interpreted and overwhelmed, in Sri Lanka and all over the world. But some researchers argued the hidden reality of women representation in higher positions in Sri Lanka (Wickramasinghe & Jayatilaka, 2006; Hewamanne, 2008; Jayawardena, 2018).

Despite these plenty of attention on women representation and advancement, Recently, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are ranked countries in the region, having just over 72% and nearly 68% of their overall gender gap, respectively (Gender Gap Report, 2018).

Burke and Nelson (2002) claimed that, although the number of women entering the professional and managerial workforce has risen significantly over the past three decades, the number of women in senior executive jobs remains very low and not in considerable manner.

Along with notion, Ruth (2008), has reported that Even though the labor participation of women are increasing, especially women are being providing a large portion of Sri Lanka's factory work by committing themselves as sewing girls in apparel sector. As of 2010, 350,000 women are employed in the country's 850 apparel factories or 85% of the industry's workforce.

In addition to this, with increased numbers of women in the workforce in recent decades in 2015 there was a 40:60 male-female ratio amongst undergraduate students. In 2016, 68 percent of university graduates were female (university grants commission, 2016). There are some valid arguments made on lack of participation of women in positions of power, while women are more educated than men at the undergraduate level, and almost equally educated at the postgraduate level.

As per their report of Employed population Women are heavily concentrated on certain occupations. This clearly shows that 62.25 percentage of professional are women. However, noted women's rate on Senior Officials & Managers is 30.43 shows low rates of women representation than men. Even the various forms of laws and legislations protecting the women's rights, from negative social attitudes towards widows, divorcees, single parents, single women and any vulnerable groups of women. But there is still very few representations of women in business today who hold senior executive positions and sit on corporate boards Thus it obviously indicates that still there is no significant expansion in women career advancement and women leadership roles in most of the decision making positions in workplaces.

An increasing awareness of this issues has led the plenty of researches in this field and found number causes which have led to under representation of women at the senior level Wood (2008) Powell, Graves (2003) Cordano, Scherer (2002), Catalyst (2004). Especially in Sri Lanka, researchers came with numerous proposals on this issue and led some steps to foster the representation of women in Senior Management level (Herath (2015), Bombuwela et.al, (2013). Most of the researchers pointed out the challenges and barriers of women representation based on different perspectives which can be categorized under Individual factors, Family factors, Organizational factors and Cultural factors (Afza and Newaz, 2008).

2. Statement of the problem

Since past researches have concerned about exploring the barriers and challenges on women career advancement, factors affecting the women career advancement in Sri Lankan context, is needful. It can be concluded with the identification of factors affecting women career advancement under the different career stages. Therefore, present research intends to identify the factors affecting the women career advancement in Sri Lankan and clarify why these factors are critical in Sri Lankan organizations through the exploratory research methods.

3. Methodology

The information for the present study is derived from semi-structured, in-depth interviews carried out with 15 female middle level managers in banking organization in Sri Lanka. The interviews were conducted in both Tamil and English languages and the interviews conducted in Tamil were translated to English. With the permission of the participants, interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed for the analysis. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique through personal contacts and snowballing as it is purposeful method of data collection in qualitative researches (Naderifar, Ghaljaie, 2017).

4. Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis was carried out for the findings of the Research. In qualitative researches, thematizing meanings as one of the diverse analytic traditions, it helps to build the reporting patterns in exploratory studies (Braun and Clarke 2006). As Braun Clarke (2006) explained the steps of doing the analysis, themes and patterns have been derived from the transcribed interviews as findings of the research.

The understanding from the Middle level female Managers in banking organizations, this study revealed that there are barriers women face while climbing up the corporate career. Career development is linked with individuals based on their goals and objectives personally and their organization career possibility professionally. As one of the Female managers in banking sector, who said

“We perceive female employees are mostly centered at the middle and the lower-level management roles not the top level. At banking institutions few of them are representing in managerial positions.”

As it has been stated by the female manager in banking sector, they notice that there are some glass ceiling barriers to the female employees in their sector. Similarly, this has been stated by another executive officer, there are some internal strategies are used by the people those whom are autocratical hierarchy against to women.

“I am working in the banking sector for ten years. I observe the strategies they create by perceiving or creating the stereotypes contrary to women in terms of their ability and skills to represent the higher-level positions. What actually they generate is female employees are mostly sympathetic, not suitable for leadership positions.”

With this understanding from the above respondents, this is being as a common understanding of women representation of higher position as it is demonstrated by Chamaru and Bambuvela (2013). Glass ceiling is not one ceiling or wall, they are varied and pervasive forms of gender bias that occur frequently in both overt and covert ways.

As it is stated by other participant in banking organization it is clear that they understand, *“As we are the female employees’ difficulties, we experience in claiming on professional roles that have been strongly linked to masculine attitudes are very far for female. Specially most of the team-based projects are led by males in our bank.”*

Few participants agreed that even the barriers are existed for female managers in minor level arrangements of work task. Participants those who are being as Risk analysis in loan section detailed that *“We believe the role of a woman is much important for the society and nation. We grandly celebrate Women’s day in our branch. Procedures and formalities what keep specially for female staff and customers are obvious but not in the power of influence or decision making. My question is, why top ladders are not open for female not only here but also for all positions when they work very hard in the foundations”*.

For example, participant from regional head office presented his view as:

“Employers avoid promoting women because women as a group are absent from work more often than men, due to childcare responsibilities where women are assumed to have larger responsibilities than men”.

It is found that societal factors are the one which hinder the women from climbing their career ladder. Other factors like personal and organizational factors contribute almost in equal amount to the hindrance in climbing up the career ladder. It was interesting to note some respondents,

“Decision making power of females in career advancement is affected by personal responsibilities and family interferences. But now a days these invisible and visible barriers are pushing women to choose their interested things what they can do as their own as a secondary job”.

As it is stated by Officer Grade female respondent,

“Where you let the wise platform for the scope of the development for female will create strong platform of equivalence behavior in organization. It is clear to state here that this refers although women are now capable of moving to upper levels, at some point they are halted by an invisible barrier which kept from advancing higher because we are women”.

However, there are some other respondents explained, organization consider progressive culture

and behavior towards women. As participant indicated, “We perceive cultural barriers against to career development, even though the opportunities are open and vital for women in this era. This cultural wall mostly downward the women career life. Moreover, still I am in that position where I started”.

It is also noteworthy that there are some Individual, organizational, social factors that affect women career and destroying their competencies.

It has been notified by the respondents who gave their support this research,

“I experienced greater scrutiny and Criticism as female leader regarding my new initiation and leadership roles in my organization which actually superior than men in the same position. I depressed when female colloquies make Criticism”.

5. Directions for future research

As women career advancement is a global issue and responsibility of Human resource, and general management, future research could be conducted to get the views form the male counter parts by changing the view of looking the female leaders. Moreover, the study could be prolonged to other industry sectors globally. However, also multinational companies were left out from our study that ought to be included in future studies.

6. Conclusion

Evidences which are derived from the study indicates that there are valuable factors hindering the women career advancement in banking organization in Sri Lanka. The study was done in particular to the banking industry. Prominent factors of hindering factors identified through literature review are personal, organization and societal factors. From the interview it is found that organizational factors are the one which hinder the women from climbing their career ladder in banking organizations.

References

- Afza, S. R., & Newaz, M. K. (2008). Factors determining the presence of glass ceiling and influencing women career advancement in Bangladesh.
- Burke, R. J., & Nelson, D. L. (2002). *Advancing women's careers: Research and practice*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Carli, L. L., & Eagly, A. H. (2007). Overcoming resistance to women leaders: The importance of leadership style. In *Women and leadership: The state of play and strategies for change* Jossey-Bass.
- Catalyst: 2004, *The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity*. New York: Catalyst
- Cordano, M., Scherer, R. F., & Owen, C. L. (2002). Attitudes toward women as managers: sex versus culture. *Women in Management Review*.
- Davidson, M. J., & Burke, R. J. (2009). Women in management worldwide: Progress and prospects—An overview. *Women in Management Worldwide* 19–36.
- De Alwis, A. C., & Bombuwela, P. M. (2013). Effects of glass ceiling on women career development in private sector organizations—Case of Sri Lanka.
- Ghaljaie, F., Naderifar, M., Goli, H. (2017). Snowball sampling: A purposeful method of sampling in qualitative research. *Strides in Development of Medical Education* 14(3).
- Herath, H. M. A. (2015). Place of women in Sri Lankan society: Measures for their empowerment for development and good governance. *Vidyodaya Journal of Management* 1(1).
- Herath, S. M. (2015). Displacing Women, Resettling Families: Impact of Landslides on Women's Land Tenure Rights in Sri Lanka. In *Gender and Land Tenure in the Context of Disaster in Asia* 33–47 Springer, Cham.

- Hewamanne, S. (2008). *Stitching identities in a free trade zone: Gender and politics in Sri Lanka*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jayawardena, D. (2018). Patriarchy and (Un) Doing Factory of Women's Collective Identity in Sri Lanka's Localised Global Apparel Industry: The Glass Ceiling Revisited. In *Handbook of Research on Women's Issues and Rights in the Developing World* 19-36. IGI Global.
- Powell, G. N., & Butterfield, D. A. (2003). Gender, gender identity, and aspirations to top management. *Women in Management Review*.
- Tan, J. (2008). Breaking the "bamboo curtain" and the "glass ceiling": the experience of women entrepreneurs in high-tech industries in an emerging market. *Journal of Business Ethics* 80(3): 547-564.
- Ud Din, N., Cheng, X., & Nazneen, S. (2018). Women's skills and career advancement: A review of gender (in) equality in an accounting workplace. *Economic research-Ekonomska istraživanja* 31(1): 1512-1525.
- Wickramasinghe, M. (2006). An epistemology of gender—An aspect of being as a way of knowing. In *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 606-611.
- Wood, G. (2008). Gender stereotypical attitudes: past, present and future influences on women's career advancement. *Equal Opportunities International*.