

# Investigation of Barriers on Glass Ceiling Effect among Female Executive Employees in a Selected Large Apparel Industry in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract**—This study is mainly focuses on examine how barriers impact on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in the Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry.

There is an empirical and theoretical knowledge gap in the Sri Lankan context of how barriers impact on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in the Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry. Therefore researchers address the research problem as, what are the barriers on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in the Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry?

The data were collected from a selected sample of 320 executive level female employees who employed in top three companies in selected large apparel industry Sri Lanka. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling method used as a sampling technique. Data were collected by using a questionnaire, which consist of 50 questions/statements with 5 point scale. The data analyses include the univariate and bivariate analyses.

The findings of the study was that there is a moderately strong positive correlation between barriers of glass ceiling effect and glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in the Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry. And also five barriers which comes under barriers of glass ceiling effect i. e. individual barrier, organizational barrier, family barrier, cultural barrier and governmental barrier are moderate strongly correlated with glass ceiling effect. As per the results of regression analysis 52.4% of the variance of glass ceiling effect is explained by barriers of glass ceiling effect.

It is concluded that glass ceiling effect face by female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry were reduce or avoid by overcoming of barriers of glass ceiling effect i. e. individual barrier, organizational barrier, family barrier, cultural barrier and governmental barrier.

**Keywords:** Barriers, Female executive employees, Glass ceiling effect.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For the past several decades have been marked by notable changes because of the women labour force participation activities (Clevenger & Singh 2013). In organizational context women are considered as a minority group and women's roles in organization is categorized under the ethnic minorities

(Jayawardena&Senevirathne 2003). In today's world women tend to entering for the labour market (Jackson & O'Callaghan 2009). But the majority of top management positions in almost all countries are generally held by men and compared with men; female managers generally tend to hold lower management positions by having the less authority than men (Jackson & O'Callaghan 2009). Not only that but also we can see this situation in Sri Lankan apparel industry as well, it has been feminized with 90 percent of young women workers but in all most all organizational top positions are hold by men (Jayawardena&Senevirathne 2003).

So the concept of the "glass ceiling" has been used to explain why women fail to rising to the upper range of the corporate ladder regardless of their qualifications or achievement (Steven et al 2013). It is also true that there are numerous barriers that lead to develop the glass ceiling effect (Yokongdi& Benson 2011).

Simply the term glass ceiling can be explain as, set of barriers to career advancement for women (Jackson & O'Callaghan 2009). According to the Smith, Caputi and Crittenden (2012) glass ceiling describe as the obstacles that lead to the underrepresentation of women in leadership and upper level management positions in an organization. As stated by the Chernesky (2003) glass ceiling is a set of barriers and it is transparent, even it is transparent it is very strong because of that women should do a considerable damage to break it. And also Holly (2008) describe the term glass ceiling with women's career and researcher explain that they can see through it but they can't break it without inflicting considerable damage.

It seems that identifying the barriers that leads to the glass ceiling effect is very important in order to address for the workplace issues which relates to the inequity between men and women in the work place and develops strategies to address and improve the policies for preventing such things.

## 2. PROBLEM BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

The glass ceiling is used to describe the inevitable barriers that women face as they attempt to climb the corporate ladder (Pai & Vaidya 2009). There are several kinds of barriers that block women from rising to the most senior positions in the corporate world (Madichine 2009). Barriers can be defined as 'a factor, events or phenomenon that prevent or controls access to individuals from making progress and barriers may be tangible or intangible, actual or perceived by the recipient' (Ismail & Ibrahim 2008, p. 54).

According to the previous research findings, Cross (2010) stated that thirteen of the thirty interviewees indicate that they want to achieve the senior management in the short term but individual barriers block their career advancement. Clevenger and Singh (2013) stated that 45.8 percent respondents reporting that their organization is a barrier for them which create the glass ceiling. Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) stated that women's involvement in the family reduces their career commitment. Furthermore Clevenger and Singh (2013) stated that 40 percent strongly agreed and agreed that cultural beliefs, traditions in society become the barrier that leads to create the glass ceiling effect. Overall 38 percent respondents reported that they were strongly agreed and agreed that government is a barrier for them (Clevenger & Singh 2013).

When comes to the Sri Lankan situation, Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning (2014) stated that, women represent more than half of the population in Sri Lanka but the labour force participation rate is less than the men, furthermore they stated that women are heavily concentrated in certain occupations and 24.9 percent of them are employed in "elementary occupations" compared with 21.6 percent of males. Also, 11.3 percent of females work in "professional" occupation compared with 3.7 percent of males. However, it was noted that women's participation rate for "managers, senior officials and legislators" was less (Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics 2013).

Apparel industry occupies a prominent position in Sri Lanka's industrial structure (Kelegama 2009). He further stated that after the introduction of open economic policies in 1977 the outlook of the industry was totally changed within an export-oriented strategy. Today it is considered as Sri Lanka's number one foreign exchange earner (Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics 2014). And also it's the Sri Lankan's single largest employer in manufacturing sector (Ranaweera 2014). According to the Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics (2013) 475,000 people are working in apparel division. Even the industry is feminized with 75 percent of female employees all most all the top management positions are hold by the men compared with the women, but lower level employees are female operatives it is around 67 percent (Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics 2014).

It is a problematic situation why this was occurred and what are the barriers that affect for female employees who are stagnated in certain position. Above mention empirical and practical evidence supported for the barriers that leads to glass ceiling effect. But it seems that there is a gap in the empirical knowledge available in Sri Lankan selected apparel industry with regards to the barriers leads to create the glass ceiling effect. *Therefore researchers address the research problem as, what are the barriers on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in the Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry?*

## 3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Barriers of glass ceiling effect: Clevenger and Singh (2013) stated that with almost an equal percentage of respondents reporting they face for the glass ceiling effect and it is 45.8 percent and they stated that barriers are impact for their advancement. Simultaneously 45.7 percent stated did not have a glass ceiling effect. So the study indicates that positive relationship between barriers and glass ceiling effect while a significant negative relationship between barriers and glass ceiling effect. So it is important to investigate the simultaneous effect of independent variable of barriers of glass ceiling effect. Hence, the first hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is an impact of barrier of glass ceiling effect on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry.

Individual barrier: As stated by the Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) individual barrier is the most influential factor for women advancement. Cross (2010) in his research findings stated that thirteen of the thirty interviewees indicate that they want to achieve the senior management in the short term but individual barrier block their career advancement. Therefore, the second hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 2 (H1): There is an impact of individual barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry.

Organizational barrier: According to the research findings total of 72 percent of the female employees noted organizational barrier such as the organization being very male-oriented, not concern about women's needs (Ismail & Ibrahim 2008). In terms of supervisor support in organizational set up, 56 percent of the women responded that they are treated fairly, that they have learned skills from their supervisors and their supervisors would help in their advancement (Ismail & Ibrahim 2008). But according to another research finding, majority of the respondents performances are not fairly evaluated by their superiors (Kiaye & Singh 2013). When comes to the organization culture almost 50 percent women are agreed culture is a barrier for

them when they are try to reach the top of their corporate ladder (Clevenger & Singh 2013). Because of that, the third hypothesis as follows:

**Hypothesis 3 (H1):** There is an impact of organizational barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry.

**Family barrier:** Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) stated that women's involvement in the family reduces their career commitment. So this was reviled from the research findings and 62.7 percent women agreed with the statement that women had less time for career due to their duty in the family. Take caring of children is a most significant reason which affected for their career movement (Cross 2010). The studies reviled that the family barriers might or might not be impact on career advancement of women. Hence, the next hypothesis of the study developed as follows:

**Hypothesis 4 (H1):** There is an impact of family barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry.

**Cultural barrier:** According to the Clevenger and Singh (2013) almost 45 percent strongly agreed or agreed that difference in gender-status beliefs negatively affect performance, with only 24 percent that strongly disagreed or disagreed. The remaining percent were neutral. So these beliefs are leads to create the glass ceiling effect (Clevenger & Singh 2013). So the existing research findings indicate us cultural barrier positively or negatively impact on glass ceiling effect. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis as follows:

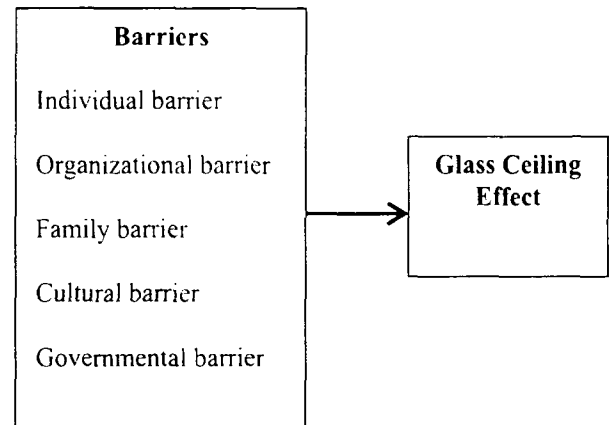
**Hypothesis 5 (H1):** There is an impact of cultural barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry.

**Governmental barrier:** Clevenger and Singh (2013) stated that almost 53 percent of the participants strongly agreed or agreed, while 22.8 percent strongly disagreed or disagreed, the remaining 24.6 percent were neutral in relation to the importance of having reporting system. Overall, 26 percent reported they strongly disagreed or disagreed, and 37 percent strongly agreed or agreed regarding their perception of governmental barrier. The remaining 38 percent reported neutral (Clevenger & Singh 2013). So the next hypothesis as follows:

**Hypothesis 6 (H1):** There is an impact of governmental barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry.

Relevant schematic diagram is shown in Figure 1. Barriers of glass ceiling effect stand as independent variable and glass ceiling effect stand as dependent variable. Barriers of glass ceiling effect consist with individual barrier, organizational

barrier (Cross 2010) family barrier, cultural barrier (Bombuwela & De Alwis 2013) and governmental barrier (Clevenger & Singh 2013).



#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The objective of the study was to examine how barriers impact on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in the Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry. Five barriers which have identified as possible affected factors on glass ceiling effect. So the objective is to establish the relationship between these independent variables and the dependent variable. Therefore, the type of the study was analytical (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). And the type of the investigation is correlational study which attempts to outline the significant relationship between two variables (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). This is the field study because it examines how barriers impact on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in the Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry. Therefore this study can be done in the natural environment where work proceeds normally, that is non-contrived setting (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). No any artificial or contrived setting was created for the study. This study took over one month for the collection of data. The data for the study was collected within the particular time period and there were no subsequent extension of the research contemplated. Hence the study was cross sectional in nature. For this study, the data were collected from each individual. Thus, the unity of the study is individual: female executive employees who employed in top three companies in the Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry.

The population of the study is executive level female employees who employed in top three companies in selected large apparel industry Sri Lanka. The total population size is 1896. Sample size was 320 (Krejcie and Morgan Table 1970). In this study both primary and secondary data collection methods were used. A questionnaire was used as a primary data collection method and the secondary data were collected from the various sources such as organization report, books, journals, government reports, internet and other publications.

Data collected from primary sources were analyzed using the Microsoft excel and computer based statistical data analysis package, SPSS (version 16. 0. ). The data analysis includes univariate and bivariate analyses.

## 5. RESULTS

To investigate the responses for independent and dependent variables of the female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry univariate analysis was conducted. The results of the univariate analysis were given in Table 1.

Table 1: Univariate analysis

	Barriers of glass ceiling effect	Individual barrier	Organizational barrier	Family barrier	Cultural barrier	Governmental barrier	Glass ceiling effect
Mean	3.77	3.84	3.66	3.90	3.77	3.82	3.61
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Std. Deviation	0.522	0.573	0.612	0.628	0.579	0.621	0.633
Variance	0.272	0.329	0.375	0.395	0.335	0.385	0.401
Skewness	-1.016	-0.495	-0.806	-0.459	-0.616	-0.654	-0.505
Std. error of Skewness	0.136	0.136	0.136	0.136	0.136	0.136	0.136
Kurtosis	1.487	1.049	0.587	0.901	0.891	1.150	0.119
Std. error of Kurtosis	0.272	0.272	0.272	0.272	0.272	0.272	0.272
Range	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Minimum	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

According to the Table 1 barriers of glass ceiling effect, individual barrier, organizational barrier, family barrier, cultural barrier, governmental barrier, glass ceiling effect were normally distributed. As per mean values of barriers of glass ceiling effect is at high level. So it indicate that female executive employees are agreed with the statement which related to the barriers of glass ceiling effect and they think that these barriers lead to create glass ceiling effect. Mean value of glass ceiling effect is also at high level. Hence, it was seems that female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry face for the glass ceiling effect. Mean value

of the family barrier is higher than the other four barriers. So it indicates that the majority of the female executive employees are think it will lead to create glass ceiling effect.

Bivariate analysis, Pearson's correlation between barriers of glass ceiling effect and dimensions of barrier of glass ceiling effect with glass ceiling effect of female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry were illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson's correlation between independent variable and dependent variable

	Barriers of glass ceiling effect	Individual barrier	Organizational barrier	Family barrier	Cultural barrier	Governmental barrier
Correlation	0.724	0.658	0.688	0.630	0.695	0.621
Sig. (2tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2tailed)

According to the Pearson's correlation coefficient there is a moderately strong positive correlation between barriers of glass ceiling effect on glass ceiling effect. And also there is moderately strong positive correlation between dimensions of barriers of glass ceiling effect i. e. individual, organizational, family, cultural and governmental barrier and glass ceiling effect. However cultural barrier obtain the highest correlation coefficient value when compare other four barriers.

Table 3: Simple regression analysis

Variables	Barriers of glass ceiling effect	Individual barrier	Organizational barrier	Family barrier	Cultural barrier	Governmental barrier
Method	Linear	Linear	Linear	Linear	Linear	Linear
R - Square	0.524	0.433	0.474	0.397	0.484	0.386
Adjusted R Square	0.523	0.431	0.472	0.395	0.482	0.384
F	350.075	242.995	286.564	209.246	297.795	200.082
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
B - Constant	0.302	0.821	1.004	1.135	0.745	1.189
b - Value	0.878	0.727	0.712	0.635	0.761	0.634

The results of the simple regression analysis of independent and dependent variable presented in above Table 3. According to the values in Table 3, regression equation of barriers of

glass ceiling effect and glass ceiling effect of female executive employees is:

$$\text{Glass Ceiling Effect} = 0.302 + 0.878(\text{Barriers})$$

As indicated by R Squared, 52.4% of the variance of glass ceiling effect is explained by barriers of glass ceiling effect. And also, all the dimensions in barriers of glass ceiling effect positively related with the glass ceiling effect.

And summary of the hypothesis testing were given in Table 4.

**Table 4: Hypothesis testing**

No	value	Remarks: Alternative hypothesis	Conclusion
H1	r=0.724 b=0.878 sig=.000	Accepted	With a 99% confidence that, there is an impact of barrier of glass ceiling effect on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry
H2	r=0.658 b=0.727 sig=.000	Accepted	With a 99% confidence that, there is an impact of individual barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry
H3	r=0.688 b=0.712 sig=.000	Accepted	With a 99% confidence that, there is an impact of organizational barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry
H4	r=0.630 b=0.635 sig=.000	Accepted	With a 99% confidence that, there is an impact of family barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry
H5	r=0.695 b=0.761 sig=.000	Accepted	With a 99% confidence that, there is an impact of cultural barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry
H6	r=0.621 b=0.634 sig=.000	Accepted	With a 99% confidence that, there is an impact of governmental barrier on glass ceiling effect among female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry

## 6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

So from the analysis data it was revealed that mean value of the glass ceiling effect is 3.61 and standard deviation is 0.633. Hence, it seems that female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry face for the glass ceiling effect.

According to the analysis data, mean value of the individual barrier, organizational barrier, family barrier, cultural barrier and governmental barrier are 3.84, 3.66, 3.90, 3.77 and 3.82 respectively and standard deviation stand as 0.573, 0.612, 0.628, 0.579 and 0.621 respectively. And also from the analysis it was revealed that the mean value and the standard deviation of barriers as 3.77 and 0.522 respectively. By concerning overall result we can conclude that, barriers lead to create glass ceiling effect.

Another objective of the study is to examine about what is the impact of barriers on glass ceiling effect. So this was investigated through hypothesis testing. In order to achieve above mention objective researchers establish six hypotheses. So the summary of the hypothesis testing explains in Table 5. From the analysis it was revealed that all the null hypotheses were rejected and alternative hypotheses were accepted. It means that there is an impact independent variable on dependent variable. Correlation coefficient of cultural barrier (0.695) was higher than correlation coefficient of other dimensions in barriers of glass ceiling effect.

Based on the above findings of the study the following recommendations were made which could be extremely useful for the female executive employees in a selected large apparel industry Sri Lanka for reduce or avoid glass ceiling effect by overcoming of barriers that leads to create the glass ceiling effect. Such as, company policies should be focused about increasing of promotion opportunities for women (Clevenger & Singh 2013), conduct societal awareness programs by explain importance of women career advancement, give the example of women who reach the top of their career ladder in order to minimize or avoid cultural barrier, organization should promote and practice equal employment opportunities at work place (Bombuwela & De Alwis 2013). Create the work environment that the women can balance their multiple roles (Cross 2010). In organizations where a woman's qualifications are found to be inadequate or inappropriate, organizations that are having financial ability they can sponsor women employees' studies (Cross 2010) and also government plays an important role in order to overcome of governmental barrier. Such as government should implement proper government monitoring system against gender discrimination, proper policy and legislation against gender discrimination, vigorous and consistent law enforcement, government reporting and publication system and a system for collection of employment related data such as gender and gender related issues.

Researchers believes that the important independent variables that may account for the unexplained variable in the barriers of glass ceiling effect, such as societal barriers (Ismail & Ibrahim 2008), Situational barriers (Kiaye & Singh 2013) and Internal business structural barriers (Clevenger & Singh 2013) and so on. And also There are several mediating and moderating variables (EX: Age) that impact on glass ceiling effect, however they are not consider in this research study due to the time limitation and to avoid unnecessary

complexities. And this study limited for the female executive employees who employed in top three companies in selected large apparel industry Sri Lanka.

So, further research studies are suggested to carry out to find out the impact of other dimensions of barriers of glass ceiling effect on glass ceiling effect of female executive employees in Sri Lankan selected large apparel industry. Moreover, further studies can be conducted to find out the impact of barriers of glass ceiling effect on glass ceiling effect of female executive employees in apparel industry Sri Lanka rather than merely the selected large apparel industry Sri Lanka. Further studies are similarly suggested to find out the impact of barrier of glass ceiling effect on glass ceiling effect of women in other economic sectors in Sri Lanka.

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