

# The Thickening Glass: Women's Career Development at The Glass Ceiling

C.L. Edirisinghe<sup>1</sup>, K.A.A.N. Thilakarathna<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, Institute of Human Resource Advancement, University of Colombo

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo

## ABSTRACT

The study was designed by addressing the problem how the glass ceiling effect on career development of women in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. This study was structured based on the conceptual framework built up using the exiting literature related to glass ceiling and women career development. This study was conducted with the aim of obtaining the objectives of; to investigate factors affecting on glass ceiling, to investigate the current statues of women career development in apparel industry Sri Lanka, and to investigate the effect of glass ceiling on women career development in apparel industry Sri Lanka. This study was completed with a survey using a self-administered questionnaire. And the sample consisted of 100 female executives in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. For presenting and analysing the data both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The findings reveal that the glass veiling factors, and women career development have a positive relationship, and show that family, individual, organizational, and cultural factors have a significant effect on women career development. Following the results of the study, a conclusion was made that there are significant effects of the glass ceiling factors on women career development of executive female employees working in apparel industry Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Women career development, Individual factors, Organizational factors, Family factors, Cultural factors

## INTRODUCTION

Women have played an integral role in the workforce throughout history. The past several decades have been marked by notable changes because of the women in labour force participation (Clevenger and Singh, 2013). In an organizational context, women are considered as a minority group and women's roles in the organization are categorized under the ethnic minorities and disabled workers (Jayawardena and Senevirathne, 2003). In today's world, women tend to enter the labour market (Jackson and O'Callaghan, 2009). Economists introduce several possible reasons for the rapid rise in women's labour force participation. Some of them are, rising real wage rates for women, changing preferences and attitudes, rising productivity in the household, declining birth rates, rising divorce rates, expanding job accessibility, and an attempt to maintain living standards (Campbell, Stanely, and David, 2010).

However, most top management positions in almost all countries are generally held by men and female managers generally tend to hold lower management positions by having less authority than men (Jackson and O'Callaghan, 2009). The concept of the glass ceiling has been used to explain why women fail to rise to the upper range of the corporate ladder regardless of their qualifications or achievement (Appelbaum et al., 2013). The glass ceiling is one of the useful terms when comes to the women's career moves into higher management because it indicates that women can see through it, but women can't break it without inflicting considerable damage (Holly, 2008).

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). As stated by Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) barriers which related to individual factors described as, the barriers which coming from themselves, barriers related to the organization factors known as the barriers that coming from organizational structure and practices which influence employee development, barriers which relate to the family factors known as barriers which come from their family relations and cultural barriers which comes from cultural factors described as the extent to which beliefs, traditions, influence the employee development.

According to the Department of census and statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Sri Lanka (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. Also, they found out that, the estimated economically active population is around eight million and about five million of them are males. The female participation rate is around three million. The majority among the economically inactive population is females (Sri Lanka. Department of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance, and planning 2014). This problem is also visible in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. The apparel industry employs several million people worldwide and it generates billions of dollars each year. Indeed, in several small developing countries, the production of apparel is the major support of the entire economy. According to the Sri Lanka, Export Development Board (2012), In Sri Lanka, approximately 273,070 people work in the apparel industry and in percentage, it is 37. And it is the highest number of people participating in the labour market. As stated by the Sri Lanka Department of Census and statistics women's contribution is around 75% and male contribution is around 25%. It seems that the apparel industry is feminized with 75%. However, all most all the top management positions are held by males and female employees are stagnated in certain levels even apparels industry is feminized with 75% of female employees. Therefore, the researcher addresses the research problem as to how the Glass Ceiling effect on career development of women in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The concept of the glass ceiling has emerged in social science research in general and higher education over the past 20 years (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). Ceiling implies that there is a limit to how far someone can climb before he or she jumps up against a barrier (Boyd, 2012). In this concept ceiling is glass. It implies that what is on the other side is both visible yet inaccessible to those who are facing it (Boyd, 2012). Akpinar (2012) argues that the glass ceiling is a visible and invisible obstacle that separates the professional and organizational hierarchical level for women. The concept of the glass ceiling is generally viewed as the set of factors to career advancement for women in the workplace (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

There are several kinds of factors that block women from rising to the most senior positions in the corporate world (Madichine, 2009). U.S. Federal glass ceiling Commission (1995) stated 3 major types of factors that create the glass ceiling, namely internal business structural factors, societal factors, and government factors. Jackson (2001) stated that perception and stereotyping, corporate climate, and corporate practices as the factors which lead to creating the glass ceiling.

The legal discourse on the issue of the glass ceiling effect can also be discussed under the non-discrimination laws based on sex or gender. While many countries do provide both Constitutional and Statutory guarantees concerning non-discrimination, the glass ceiling effect to speak has slipped out of the radar due to the non-legal basis of the concept as it is something perceived from an internal perspective which is at times devoid of law.

As stated by Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) individual factors are the most influential factors for women's advancement.

Cross (2010) in his research findings stated that thirteen of the thirty interviewees indicate that they want to achieve senior management in the short term, but individual barriers block their career advancement.

Therefore, the first hypothesis is advanced as,

*Hypothesis 1: Individual factors have a positive impact on Women Career Development*

According to the research findings total of 72 percent of the female employees noted organizational barriers such as the organization being very male-oriented, not concerned about women's needs (Ismail & Ibrahim 2008). In terms of supervisor support in organizational setup, 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, most of the respondents' performances are not fairly evaluated by their superiors (Kiaye & Singh 2013). When comes to the organizational culture almost 50 percent of women are agreed culture is a barrier for them when they are trying to reach the top of their corporate ladder (Clevenger & Singh 2013). Therefore, the second hypothesis is advanced as,

*Hypothesis 2: Organizational factors have a positive impact on Women Career Development*

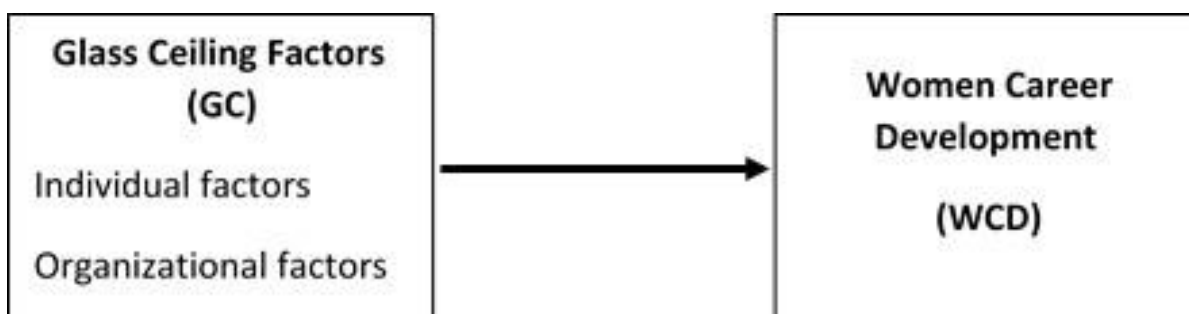
Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) stated that women's involvement in the family reduces their career commitment. So, this was revealed from the research findings and 62.7 percent of women agreed with the statement that women had less time for a career due to their duty in the family. Taking care of children is the most significant reason which affected their career movement (Cross 2010). Therefore, the third hypothesis is advanced as,

*Hypothesis 3: Family factors have a positive impact on Women Career Development*

According to Clevenger and Singh (2013), almost 45 percent strongly agreed or agreed that differences in gender-status beliefs negatively affect performance, with only 24 percent strongly disagreeing or disagreed. The remaining percent were neutral. So, these beliefs are led to create the glass ceiling effect (Clevenger & Singh 2013). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is advanced as,

*Hypothesis 4: Cultural factors have a positive impact on Women Career Development*

The conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure I.



## METHODOLOGY

### Sample and data collection

The researcher collected data through self-administered questionnaires compiled in English. Using stratified and simple random sampling, 100 questionnaires were distributed among executive-level female employees in three different companies in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka.

## Measures

*Glass ceiling factors:* Here, the researcher adapted a scale from Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013). Respondents were required to select responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). A sample item is “I am confident in my abilities”. Study reported a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.65 for individual factors, 0.80 organizational factors, 0.72 for family factors, and 0.65 for cultural factors.

*Women career development:* The researcher adapted a scale from Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013). Respondents were required to select responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). A sample item is “Gender-based barriers exist in my career success”. Study reported a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.63.

## Sample description

Of the 100 respondents, 47% belonged to the 40-49 age category. Regarding education, 32.5% have obtained a bachelor’s degree and 26.5% have obtained master’s degree. Regarding average monthly income 32.5% belonged to the 100,00-125,000 income category. More than 33% had more than 10 years of total work experience and more than 28% have at least five years of work experience in the current organization.

## ANALYSES

Using the Pearson’s product moment correlation with two tailed tests of significance, the correlation analysis was made to investigate relationship between the glass ceiling factors and women career development.

### Correlation analysis

		Women Career Development	Individual Factors
Women Career Development	Pearson Correlation	1	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	83	83
Individual Factors	Pearson Correlation	.501**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	83	83
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Survey data

According to the table 1, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.501 which is positive. This indicates there is a moderately strong positive correlation between individual factors and women career development. The found relationship is statistically significant as correlation as significant at 0.01 level (2- tailed). Probability of the relationship between individual factors and women career development is 0.000.

Result is highly significant. Therefore, there is statistical evidence to claim that there is a moderately strong positive relationship between individual factors and women career development. Therefore, the hypotheses 01 is accepted; individual factors have a positive impact on women career development

		Women Career Development	Organizational Factors
Women Career Development	Pearson Correlation	1	.423**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	83	83
Organizational Factors	Pearson Correlation	.423**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	83	83
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Survey data

According to the table 2, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.423 which is positive. This indicates there is a moderately weak positive correlation between organizational factors and women career development. The found relationship is statistically significant as correlation as significant at 0.01 level (2- tailed). Probability of the relationship between organizational factors and women career development is 0.000. Result is highly significant. Therefore, there is statistical evidence to claim that there is a moderately weak positive relationship between organizational factors and women career development. Therefore, the hypotheses 02 is accepted; organizational factors have a positive impact on women career development

		Women Career Development	Family Factors
Women Career Development	Pearson Correlation	1	.725**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	83	83
Family Factors	Pearson Correlation	.725**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	83	83
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Survey data

According to the table 3, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.725 which is positive. This indicates there is a moderately strong positive correlation between family factors and women career development. The found relationship is statistically significant as correlation as significant at 0.01 level (2- tailed). Probability of the relationship between family factors and women career development is 0.000. Result is highly significant. Therefore, there is statistical evidence to claim that there is a moderately strong positive relationship between family factors and women career development. Therefore, the hypotheses 03 is accepted; family factors have a positive impact on women career development.

		Women Career Development	Cultural Factors
Women Career Development	Pearson Correlation	1	.223*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.042
	N	83	83
Cultural Factors	Pearson Correlation	.223*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	
	N	83	83

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey data

According to the table 4, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.223 which is positive. This indicates there is a moderately weak positive correlation between cultural factors and women career development. The found relationship is statistically significant as correlation as significant at 0.05 level (2- tailed). Probability of the relationship between cultural factors and women career development is 0.042. Result is significant. Therefore, there is statistical evidence to claim that there is a moderately weak positive relationship between cultural factors and women career development. Therefore, the hypotheses 04 is accepted; cultural factors have a positive impact on women career development.

### Regression Analysis

According to the table 5 the R value is 0.816, which shows the correlation coefficient between glass ceiling factors; individual, organizational, family, and cultural factors and women career development. R-Square is the proportion of variance in the women career development, which can be explained by the glass ceiling factors. This is an overall measure of the strength of association. And it is 0.666 in the study analysis. This indicates that the glass ceiling factors; individual, organizational, family, and cultural factors are responsible for 66.6% of the women career development. The adjusted R gives .281

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.816 <sup>a</sup>	.666	.649	.261

a. Predictors: (Constant), Family Factors, Cultural Factors, Organizational Factors, Individual Factors

Source: Survey data

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.575	4	2.644	38.950	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	5.294	78	.068		
	Total	15.869	82			



a. Dependent Variable: Women Career Development
b. Predictors: (Constant), Family Factors, Cultural Factors, Organizational Factors, Individual Factors

Source: Survey data

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-4.616	1.041		-4.435	.000
	Individual Factors	.351	.105	.239	3.340	.001
	Organizational Factors	.793	.219	.247	3.616	.001
	Cultural Factors	.296	.139	.144	2.135	.036
	Family Factors	.694	.088	.566	7.891	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Women Career Development						

Source: Survey data

## DISCUSSION

The problem of the study is to investigate how the Glass Ceiling effect on career development of women in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. Based on the theoretical information, conceptual framework was developed to test relationship between glass ceiling factors effect on women career development. According to the analysis it was possible to arrive at the following finding.

It was indicated that majority of the executive-level female employees in three different companies in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka belonging to the age group of 40-49. Hence, we can conclude that most of the female executives were young. There were 32.5%-degree holders. So, it indicates us majority of the respondents where the female executives were well educated. And 32.5% female executive stated their income category as 100,000-125,000. Furthermore 33% female executive employees fall into the experience category of more than 10 years.

Mean value of the women career development is 4.30 and standard deviation is 0.440. Hence, it was seeming that female executive employees have good career development. According to the analysis data mean value of the individual, organizational, family, and cultural factors are 4.26, 3.80, 4.44, and 4.46 respectively and standard deviation stand as 0.299, 0.137, 0.359, and 0.214 respectively. So, it indicates that the female executive employees are agreed with the statement which related to the factors of glass ceiling effect and they think that these factors lead to create women career development.

According to the analysis data all four (4) null hypothesis were rejected and alternative hypothesis were accepted.

Among the glass ceiling factors family factor is the most influential factor because, correlation coefficient of family factor (0.725) was higher than correlation coefficient of other glass ceiling factors, organizational barrier (0.423), individual barrier (0.501), and cultural barrier (0.223) in respectively.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the above findings of the study the following recommendations were made which could be extremely useful for the apparel industry for improving women career development by addressing glass ceiling factors (Individual, Organizational, Family, Cultural and Governmental barriers). Through the analysis it seems that women continue to be underrepresented in the most senior management positions. So, company policies should be focused about increasing of promotion opportunities for women. For increasing promotion opportunities included more networking for women, coordinating career and family planning, etc. Furthermore, promotion criteria should be objective, measurable and should have no gender bias. Promotion committee should be gender balanced to ensure that women are considered fairly.

Based on the analysis data it was revealed that family factor is the most influential barrier which leads to the creation of the women career development. To minimize that, societal awareness should be enhanced. So, for that conduct societal awareness programs by explain importance of women career advancement, give the example of women who reach the top of their career ladder.

Organizational culture, policies and strategies are highly presided by masculine values and styles. Due to that female employee frustrated and disillusioned before it reaches the top. To avoid that, organizations should promote and practice equal employment opportunities at the workplace. Create the work environment that the women can balance their multiple roles. As an examples organization can introduce flexible work hours and a flexible workplace, women who return from maternity leave should be re-orientated through re-skilling programs, training, and development, allowed flexi time to take care of family responsibilities. Organizations that have the financial means and physical space should provide childcare facilities at the workplace etc. So, from these female employees will be able to overcome their family barrier as well as organizational barrier. 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. It will help women to overcome their individual barrier. And also, organization can conduct different training and programs to upgrade of female employees' knowledge, skills and competencies. Sri Lankan government can also offer the different scholarships to upgrade of female employees' knowledge.

And also, government plays an important role in order to improve women career development. Such as government should implement proper government monitoring system against gender discrimination, proper governmental 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.

66.6% of the variance of the women career development explained by glass ceiling factors and 33.4% of the variance was unexplained by these variables. So, the researcher believes in that important independent variables that may account for the unexplained variable in the women career development, such as Societal Barriers (Ismail & Ibrahim 2008), Situational Barriers (Kiaye & Singh 2013), Internal Business Structural Barriers (Clevenger & Singh 2013) and so on. And, there are several mediating and moderating variables (EX: Age) that impact on women career development, however they are not considered in this research due to the time limitation and to avoid unnecessary complexities. And this study limited for the female executive employees' apparel industry Sri Lanka. So, further research studies are suggested to carry out to find out the impact of other glass ceiling factors on women career development of female executive employees in Sri



Lankan apparel industry. Further studies are similarly suggested to find out the impact of glass ceiling factors on career development of women in other economic sectors in Sri Lanka.

## CONCLUSION

According to this study it identified that, there high level of career development exists among the executive level female employees in apparel industry in Sri Lanka. Further, glass ceiling factors has a high positive relationship with career development of executive level female employees in apparel industry in Sri Lanka. The family, organizational, individual, and cultural factors that have significant impact on career development of executive level female employees in apparel industry in Sri Lanka.

## REFERENCES

1. Akpınar-Sposito, C. (2013). Career barriers for women executives and the Glass Ceiling Syndrome: the case study comparison between French and Turkish women executives. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 75, 488-497.
2. De Alwis, A. C., & Bombuwela, P. M. (2013). Effects of glass ceiling on women career development in private sector organizations–Case of Sri Lanka.
3. Boyd, KS (2012), Glass ceiling, *Encyclopaedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society*, 12(2), pp.546-552.
4. Campbell, C, Stanely, B and David, M 2010, *Contemporary labour economics*, McGraw- Hill/Irwin, New York.
5. Clevenger, L., & Singh, N. (2013). Exploring barriers that lead to the glass ceiling effect for women in the US hospitality industry. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 12(4), 376-399.
6. Cross, C. (2010). Barriers to the executive suite: evidence from Ireland. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*.
7. Holly, L. (1998). The glass ceiling in local government: A case study. *Local government studies*, 24 (1), 60-73.
8. Ismail, M., & Ibrahim, M. (2008). Barriers to career progression faced by women: Evidence from a Malaysian multinational oil company. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.
9. Jackson, J. F., & O’Callaghan, E. M. (2009). What do we know about glass ceiling effects? A taxonomy and critical review to inform higher education research. *Research in Higher Education*, 50 (5), 460-482.
10. Jakson, J.C. (2001) women middle managers’ perception of the glass ceiling for women leaders. *Women in management review*. [Online] Emerald Database 16(1). p.30-41. Available from: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com> [Accessed 08 /5/ 2015]
11. Jayawardena, D., & Seneviratne, P. (2003, November). Human resource management: A postmodern reading. In *Conference proceeding of the 9th International Conference on Sri Lankan Studies, Matara, Sri Lanka* (Vol. 28, p. 30).
12. Kiaye, R. E., & Singh, A. M. (2013). The glass ceiling: a perspective of women working in Durban. *Gender in Management: An international journal*.
13. Madichie, N. O. (2009). Breaking the glass ceiling in Nigeria: A review of women’s entrepreneurship. *Journal of African Business*, 10(1), 51-66.
14. Pai, K., & Vaidya, S. (2009). Glass ceiling: role of women in the corporate world. *Competitiveness review: An international business journal*.
15. Sri Lanka, Department of Census and statistics, Ministry of finance and planning (2014), *Quarterly report of Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey*, M.D Gunasena and company printers (Private) Limited, Colombo.
16. Sri Lanka, Export Development Board (2012), *Industry Capability Report*, Author publication, Sri Lanka.
17. Appelbaum, S. H., Shapiro, B. T., Didus, K., Luongo, T., & Paz, B. (2013). Upward mobility for

women managers: Styles and perceptions: Part two. *Industrial and Commercial Training*.

18. United States. Federal glass ceiling commission. (1995) *A solid investment; Making full use of the nation's human capital*. Washington, D.C. :Glass ceiling commission.