Can Women Keep Managerial Positions in Saudi Arabia? The Impact of Glass Ceiling and Leadership Empowerment on Work-Life Balance

Hammad Alshammari[1]

[1] Associate Professor, Department of Management & Information Systems, University of Hail, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Email: ham.alshammari@uoh.edu.sa

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors that impact female workers maintaining leading positions. The primary purpose of the search is to study the effect of the glass ceiling and leadership empowerment on women's work-life balance in the private sector in Saudi Arabia. A survey research design was employed, and a cross-sectional approach to data collection was used to achieve the primary objectives. Thus, data were collected from 54 selected female executives working in private enterprises in Saudi Arabia. Closed-ended questions-based Likert scales were employed to gather data from the research participants. The study uses Multiple regression to analyze the data collected using SPSS. Consequently, it was found that the empowerment of female leadership has a significant influence on the work-life balance of female leaders in the private sector of Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, the glass ceiling was not found to significantly impact the participants' work-life balance. Finally, it was concluded that attempts should be made to support female leaders as this will positively affect their work-life balance and consequently leads to better performance.

Corresponding Author's Email: ham.alshammari@uoh.edu.sa

1.   Introduction

Saudi Arabia is a country that has undergone significant transformations in recent years. Female fairness and their participation in workforce have been at the forefront of these changes. Although women make up nearly half of the Saudi Arabian population, they have faced numerous obstacles in pursuing leadership positions, including the so-called "glass ceiling" phenomenon (Al Zahrani & Al Shaikh, 2019).

The term "glass ceiling" refers to the invisible barriers that prevent qualified women from rising to the top of their professions, regardless of their talent or hard work. This issue has been a major concern for many women in Saudi Arabia, where cultural and social norms have historically restricted their opportunities for advancement in the workplace (Al Zahrani & Al Shaikh, 2019; Marinakou, 2014).

However, in recent years, there has been a significant push to empower women and increase their representation in leadership positions (Glass & Cook, 2016; Singh, 2008). This has been reflected in various initiatives, such as the 2030 Vision, which aims to diversify the economy and increase women's participation in the workforce. Recently, there has been a shift in Saudi Arabia regard the participation of female in the labor market. This is majorly as a result of radical economic and social transformation through the popular

vision 2030. Additionally, there have been policy changes, such as lifting the ban on women driving and granting women the right to vote and run for office (Al Zahrani & Al Shaikh, 2019).

Despite these changes, there are still challenges to be addressed. Women in Saudi Arabia continue to face discrimination, biases, and a lack of support from their families and communities. These obstacles can impact their ability to maintain a work-life balance, which is crucial for their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

Therefore, it is essential to examine the impact of the glass ceiling and leadership empowerment on women's work-life balance in Saudi Arabia. This research could shed light on the challenges that women face and the measures that can be taken to overcome them. It can also highlight the benefits of women's leadership and how it can contribute to a more diverse and inclusive workplace (Al Zahrani & Al Shaikh, 2019; Alsahan & George, 2022).

## 2.	Literature Review
## 2.1.	Women Leadership Empowerment

Labor market accessibility and attractiveness constitute a major focal point in the National Transformation Program. The focus was to overcome difficulties which improvement of the labor force may encounter on the economic sectors of the Kingdom. Hence, this involves enhancing women's presence culture in the workforce along with creating suitable work environment for them (F. T. Alotaibi, 2020).

In their study Salas-Lopez, Deitrick, Mahady, Gertner, and Sabino (2011) investigated several attributes that women leadership experience using semi-structured interviews including family responsibilities effect on job decisions. They have found that family support was vital in the women leadership success. Similarly, Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan, and Rajasekar (2017) studied workplace obstacles and job barriers against female workers in Saudi Arabian, and found that women workers take care of domestics work after working outside their homes which consequently militates against their leadership performance.

Thus, according to F. T. Alotaibi (2020), empowering Saudi women, who make up more than 50% of the population, to join and contribute their necessary skills and abilities to the Saudi labor market is one of the key stages toward reaching this aim. Although, customarily women in Saudi are staying at to engage with domestic responsibilities, which is not the case where religion or local culture ban females from engaging in formal decent work (F. Alotaibi, 2019). Similarly, Islam traditions allow women to accept formal job as long as it does not violet morality and chastity as provided by the teachings of Islam (Al-Sheha, Boulter, & Murad, 2011).

## 2.2.	Glass Ceiling

The 'glass ceiling' concept is commonly used to describe employment confronts women encounter when trying to accelerate job position where male workers are dominating. These bottlenecks are mostly unwritten and thus, constitute informally established norms in organizations policies (Al Zahrani & Al Shaikh, 2019; Kagan, 2021).

Glass ceiling is a concept that is used to explain the socio-cultural bottlenecks that prevent against injustice advancement of women to the organization echelon (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). According to the report of World Economic Forum (2015) regarding gender parity index shows that Saudi Arabia is ranked about 134th out of the total 145 countries. Thus, it is argued that the possible reason for these statistics is the fact that female facing more tackles at work.

However, the glass ceiling is not a problem restricted to the MENA countries but affects other countries, including the so-called developed nations. Yagüe-Perales, Pérez-Ledo, and March-Chordà (2021) examine the 'glass ceiling' concept in relating to gender differences in leadership positions and found that less progress concern overcoming the gap between genders. Gender and role stereotypes are common factors in the Middle Eastern organizations which militate against women's leadership advancement and thus, suggest

the evidence of a glass ceiling in leadership (Alsahan & George, 2022). Based on the forgoing, it is proposed that:

2.3. Work-Life Balance

Salas-Lopez et al. (2011) found that family prospects and support from home were crucial to women's leadership success in the area of medicine. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia Al-Asfour et al. (2017) investigated the difficulties and barriers working Saudi women faced and discovered that they were majorly have housework responsibilities.

2.4. Statement of the Problem

Todays, Saudi female workers comprise over one third of workforce in non-government jobs (Saudi Vision, 2030). Moreover, introducing more jobs non-government industry along with preventing obstacles that tackle women to enter the labor-force are seen among important task for the government. Hence, through several government policies, the Kingdom attempted and succeeded in enhancing the number of women in the workforce and specifically in the private sector (Clyde & Co., 2020). For instance, through the Nitaqat Saudization program, the government was able to increase female employment (Clyde & Co., 2020).

According to Regional Report (2016), studies conclude that female presence in managerial positions is at challenge. Practically, there are several difficulties that block women to access top management positions in workplace: the so-called "glass ceiling". In comparison with male, female workers are more likely to counter difficulties at low managerial levels such as corporations' structure along with social and cultural constraints.

Empowering women was one of the main focus of 2030 Vision 2030. Thus, the launching of "Vision 2030" came after some reforms favoring Saudi women's social life. This includes the lifting of the driving ban and changes to women's legal status in general. These reforms resulted in Saudi women working in more fields than ever before, earning the same wages as men, and holding senior positions in various government sectors (Almoaibed, 2021).

2.5. Need of the Study

The Saudi government policies and programs aimed at enhancing the number female workers in non-government sector (Saudi Vision, 2030). However, women preference in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia every so often to be hired in the government jobs (Abdalla, 2015). This is a result of the fact that employment in the government sector more likely offers flexible employment conditions along with family and life concerns. In Bahrain, women employment in the private sector scored less than thirty per cent, while in the public sector women are nearly half of the employees (Regional Report, 2016). In Qatar, factors such as culture related issues and work situations tackle women from working in private sectors. In similar country like Egypt, more than seventy percent of workforce in the government jobs are female (Abdalla, 2015). More to add, in Egypt and Jordan, the majority of female workers in the private sector leave jobs after getting married while those working in the public sector do not (Regional Report, 2016).

2.6. Objective of the Study

Based on the foregoing, this paper investigates the factors influencing the effective leadership of female managers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

2.7. Hypothesis of the Study

NH-1: Empowerment of female leadership not significantly affects their work-life balance in Saudi Arabian Organizations.
NH-2: Glass Ceiling not significantly affects women's work-life balance in Saudi Arabian Organizations.

3.   Research Methodology

Sample was selected from larger population to be included in a study. The goal of sample selection is to ensure that the sample is the representative of the population comprising individual female workers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Data were collected from selected 54 female executives working in private enterprises in Saudi Arabia. This research was conducted from July 2022 to September 2022. SPSS was used in this study for data analysis.
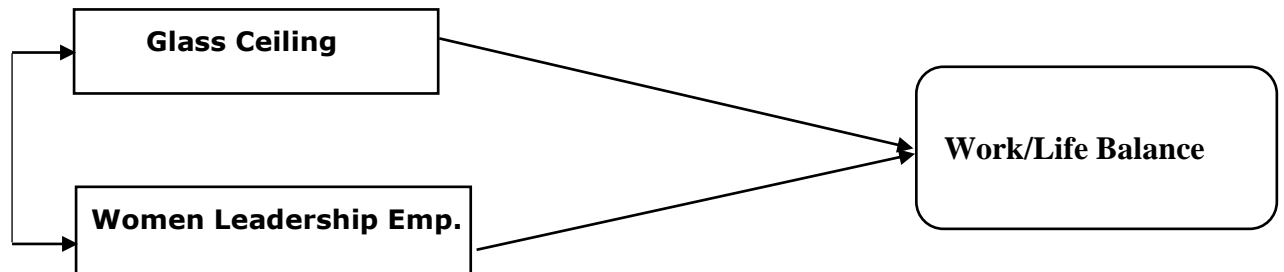

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Proposed research framework (2022) from exiting literature

4.   Analysis of the Data

Out of the total number of questionnaires administered, a sum of fifty-four (54) copies of questionnaire were retrieved and correctly filled by the respondents as shown in Table 1. Consequently, out of the 54 respondents, 12 (22.2 percent) were married and 38 (70.4 percent) were unmarried while the remaining 4 (7.4) constitute others.

Table 1
Respondents Demographic Information

Item	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
	Married	12	22.2
	Not Married	38	70.4
Marital Status	Others	4	7.4
	Total	54	100
	High School	2	3.7
Educational	Bachelor	26	48.1
Qualification	Postgraduate	26	48.1
	Total	54	100
	1-5yrs	38	70.4
	6-10yrs	10	18.5
Experience	11-15yrs	6	11.1
	Total	54	100
	Health Services Public	32	59.3
	Services	10	18.5
Industry	Retail Services	2	3.7
	Others	10	18.5
	Total	54	100

Source: Primary Survey data 2022

Similarly, with respect to the educational qualification of the respondents, majority are holding Bachelor or Postgraduate degrees together representing 52 (96%) of the total sample. On the other hand, the remaining of about 4% represents the respondents with a high school certificate. This shows the most of the respondents are reasonably educated.

On the work experience, the majority amounting to 38 (70.4%) have between 1 to 5 years of job experience, this is followed by 10 (18.5) with 6 to 10 years and 6 (11.1%) respondents have between 11- and 15-years' experience. Finally, with regards to the industry of the respondents most of them are in the health service industry representing about 60% then followed by those in the public service with 18.5% while retail services constitute 3.7%.

4.1. Reliability Analysis

In order to check the reliability and internal consistency of the construct under investigation, Cronbach's Alpha test was carried and all the constructs have values of more than 60% which means that they are all reliable and internally consistent. It should be noted however, that item GC5 under the construct of "glass ceiling" had to be removed to improve the Alpha value as shown in Table 2. Similarly, the data screened for normality through Skewness and Kurtosis. Consequently, all the items are within the acceptable range of < 2 and < 7 respectively, see appendix. Similarly, Multicollinearity was checked through correlation matrix, Tolerance and VIF, and it was discovered that there is no evidence of multicollinearity, see appendix.

Table 2
Assessing Constructs Reliability

Construct	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Workplace Women Empowerment	7	.806
Glass Ceiling	6	.697
Work-life Balance	3	.911

Source: survey data 2022

4.2. Regression Results and Hypotheses Testing

For the analysis of data collected, Multiple Regression was run, and the model found to be statistically significant at P = 0.000 significant, explaining 49% of the change in the dependent variable.

Research Hypothesis 1 The independent variable was regressed against the dependent variable, and the results show in Table 3 that (β=.705, t= 6.021, P = .000), which supports the hypothesis. It shows that empowerment of female leadership significantly does not affect their work-life balance in Saudi Arabian Organizations.

Table 3
Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Beta	T statistic	P value	Findings
NH1	.705	6.021	.000	Supported
NH2	.012	.103	.919	Not Supported

NH1 Empowerment of female leadership not significantly affects their work-life balance in Saudi Arabian Organizations.
NH2 Glass Ceiling not significantly affects women's' work-life balance in Saudi Arabian Organizations.

Research Hypothesis 2 The independent variable was regressed against the dependent variable. Regression analysis was conducted and the results show in Table 3 that (β=.012, t= -.103, P = .919), which indicates that the null hypothesis was rejected. It means that Glass Ceiling significantly affects the work-life balance of female workers in Saudi Arabian Organizations. The R^2 (the proportion of explained variance) is .699, It means the model shows a significant variability in the outcome variable.

4.3. Findings of the Study

In this section, findings have been discussed. The first finding that empowerment of female leadership does not significantly affects their work-life balance in Saudi Arabian Organizations. This clearly shows that issues constituting empowerment of female leadership such as: involving female leaders in decision making and giving them required authority to execute their roles and responsibilities, do not play a significant role in attaining work-life balance by female leaders in Saudi organizations. This finding is in contradict with those of Al-Asfour et al. (2017); Salas-Lopez et al. (2011) both studies show that female leadership is significantly related with their work-life balance. However, this may to be connected with the fact that the recent government policies and vision 2030 have taken care of the empowerment of female leadership factors that affect the work-life balance of female leader negatively.

On the other hand, Glass Ceiling was found to significantly affect work-life balance of women in Saudi Arabian Organizations. Consequently, factors like provision of equal opportunities, organizational supports and promotions play a significant role in the women's work-life balance for the study population. Hence, this is line with findings of (Marinakou, 2014; Yagüe-Perales et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

This paper was set out to assess the extent to which women empowerment and glass ceiling relate with work-life balance of female workforce in Saudi Arabia. To this end, relevant conclusions were drawn. First, it is concluded that women empowerment does positively leads to work-life balance with respect to the women in the country. Second, that glass ceiling does not balance working life of Saudi female workers.

Based on the finding and conclusion above, it is hereby recommended that the organizations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia should focus on the supporting women in the workplace as this will positively enhance their work-life balance and consequently leads to better performance and productivity. This can be done by carrying the women leaders along and involving them in the major decisions that affect their job. Further researches suggested in different locations to overgeneralize the outcomes.

5.1. Limitations of the Study

The sample of this research was limited to women holding managerial positions in private sectors in Hail region in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This means that the outcomes of this search are limited to women in managerial positions in Saudi Arabia in private sector. Moreover, it is limited for glass ceiling and women leadership empowerment effect on work-life balance.

5.2. Scope of the Research

The scope of the research on "Can Women Keep Managerial Positions in Saudi Arabia? The Impact of Glass Ceiling and Leadership Empowerment on Work-Life Balance" would include an exploration of the challenges that women face in maintaining managerial positions in Saudi Arabia, despite the increasing number of women entering the workforce in the country.

The study would focus on the concept of the "glass ceiling" and its impact on women's advancement in the workplace. It would investigate the factors that contribute to the glass ceiling, such as cultural and societal norms, gender bias, and discrimination. The research would also examine the role of leadership empowerment programs in addressing the glass ceiling and promoting gender equality in the workplace.

Furthermore, the study would explore the impact of the glass ceiling and leadership empowerment on work-life balance for women in managerial positions in Saudi Arabia. It would investigate how women manage their personal and professional responsibilities, and the challenges they face in achieving a balance between the two. The research would also examine how work-life balance affects women's job satisfaction, motivation, and retention.

The scope of the research would involve collecting data through qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. The study would also include a review of existing literature on the topic, including academic articles, books, and reports.

Overall, the research would provide insights into the challenges faced by women in maintaining managerial positions in Saudi Arabia and the role of leadership empowerment in promoting gender equality and work-life balance. The findings of the study could be useful for policymakers, employers, and organizations seeking to promote gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Authors Contribution
Hammad Alshammari: Complete article

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures
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