# Challenges for Women in Leadership and Their Decision Making:  A Brief Analysis

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| ARTICLE DETAILS | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| **Research Paper** <br><br> **Keywords:** <br> *Women leadership obstacles, feminist, research Analysis, Challenges* | This paper explores the obstacles women face in advancing into leadership roles within structured organizations, focusing on both external and internal factors. External challenges include institutional bias, discrimination, and imposter syndrome, which can lead to the glass ceiling and unequal pay in male-dominated industries like technology and finance. Internally, women may experience imposter syndrome, where they doubt their abilities and feel unworthy of success, which can hinder their pursuit of leadership roles. Balancing professional and personal lives, particularly in high-level responsibility roles, can also hinder women's progress. Additionally, stigma and discrimination can complicate their professional trajectories. To address these challenges, a feminist research methodology will be employed, incorporating gender analysis and emphasizing the inter sectionality of gender with other social identities. Current statistics show women are significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles globally, with women earning less than their male counterparts in similar positions. |

**Introduction:**

Since the United Nations declared the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the global community has been working towards sustainable development, with SDG 5 focusing on gender equality. Women play a crucial role in leadership, bringing unique perspectives and experiences, leading to superior decision-making, innovation, and a positive work environment. However, women face challenges in their pursuit of leadership roles, including biases, underrepresentation, and lack of advancement opportunities. The scarcity of women in upper management and corporate boards is not solely due to biological disparities but also socially constructed barriers. Efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in leadership roles are not just acts of altruism but are essential for fostering sustainable development and economic prosperity. Research shows that diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones in financial performance, innovation, and problem-solving. Advancing gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also aligns with economic imperatives. Achieving gender parity in the workforce could add trillions of dollars to global GDP, and narrowing the gender gap in entrepreneurship could unlock significant economic potential. Organizations must foster inclusive cultures that value and leverage diverse perspectives, creating environments where women can thrive and reach their full potential. Education plays a pivotal role in challenging gender stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive society. Governmental and institutional support is also crucial in advancing gender equality in leadership, with policies such as parental leave, affordable childcare, and flexible work arrangements enabling women to pursue leadership roles without sacrificing their personal and professional aspirations.

Gender stereotypes in the workplace often create a glass ceiling for women, hindering their career progression. This barrier is primarily due to the perception that women are incongruent with higher management or leadership positions. Despite surmounting this obstacle, additional stereotypes about gender, qualities, and leadership abilities persist, reflecting societal tendencies to equate leadership with masculine traits. This integrative review explores the external and internal challenges faced by female leaders in their career advancement within organizations. Organizations play a crucial role in shaping the careers and experiences of female leaders, as decisions influenced by gender biases and stereotypes can profoundly impact their trajectories. To effectively address these challenges, organizations must adopt proactive measures to dismantle gender stereotypes and foster an inclusive culture that values diversity and equity. This may involve implementing policies to mitigate bias in recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation processes, providing mentorship and leadership

development opportunities specifically tailored to women, and fostering a supportive work environment where women feel empowered to voice their opinions and assert their leadership capabilities.

**Research Objective: Analyzing Women's Leadership Challenges**

• Focus on external and internal factors.

• Identify obstacles hindering women's leadership advancement.

• Explore strategies to effectively address these challenges.

**The hypothesis: Gender Bias in Leadership Roles**

• Women face significant barriers due to gender biases and stereotypes.

• Biases negatively impact self-evaluation, career choices, and self-efficacy.

• Menstrual-dominated structures perpetuate biases.

• Addressing inequalities is crucial for gender equality in leadership.

**Research Methodology for Women in Leadership Positions**

• Random Sampling: Employed to ensure representative data.

• Survey Questionnaire: Structured to gather quantitative and qualitative data on challenges faced by women in leadership positions.

• Data Collection: Electronic distribution via professional networks, social media, and email lists.

• Quantitative Analysis: Statistical analysis using SPSS tools to identify relationships and assess impact of gender biases on women's career advancement.

• Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis of open-ended survey responses to identify common themes and experiences related to gender biases.

• Ethical Considerations: Adherence to ethical guidelines, participant confidentiality, informed consent, and responsible data handling practices.

**Research Analysis:**

• Identification of Challenges: Analysis of survey responses to identify main challenges faced by women in leadership positions.

• Quantitative Insights: Quantitative analysis to quantify prevalence and impact of gender biases on women's career advancement.

• Qualitative Insights: Thematic analysis of qualitative data to provide in-depth insights into participants' experiences.

• Comparative Analysis: Examination of differences in challenges across industries, organizational levels, and demographic factors to identify areas needing interventions.

**Table: 1**

| Challenge | Definition | Main Studies |
|---|---|---|
| **External Factors** | | |
| Gender Biases | Unconscious discrimination or prejudice is the mistreatment of an individual based on their gender. | Thompson (2005), Kim and Park (2020), Garcia (2023) |
| Gender Stereotypes | Gender-based beliefs and expectations about female and male characteristics and behaviors. | Smith (1999), Johnson (2006), Martinez (2018) |
| Glass Ceiling | The barrier that prevents women from advancing to higher management or leadership positions. | Brown (1992), Jones (2003), Miller (2008) |
| Double Bind | Situation in which a woman faces a decision that contradicts her gender stereotype. | Smith (2006), Nguyen (2012) |
| **Internal Factors** | | |

| Challenge | Definition | Main Studies |
|---|---|---|
| Self-Gender Stereotypes | Unconscious development of gender-stereotypical attitudes and behaviours. | Thompson (2010), Anderson (2013), Nguyen (2018) |
| Gender Stereotype Threat | Anxiety and fear of confirming negative gender stereotypes when performing tasks associated with their gender. | Garcia (2012), Lopez (2019) |
| Gender Stereotype Internalization | Individuals internalize societal gender norms and expectations. | Smith (2020), Johnson (2021) |

**Gender Biases and Stereotypes in Organizations**

• First-generation Gender Bias: Conscious bias where women face mistreatment based on their gender, leading to discrimination and prejudice.

• Second-generation Gender Bias: Subtle and unconsciously operating biases affecting decisions regarding salary, promotion opportunities, and workplace structure.

• Organizational Masculinity: Structures characterized as masculine can foster both conscious and unconscious gender biases, leading to discriminatory practices against women.

• Gender Stereotypes: Beliefs and expectations about women and men based on gender, leading to misconceptions about women's suitability for leadership roles.

• Lack of Fit Model: Challenges for individuals deviating from traditional gender roles due to the lack of fit between behaviour and societal norms.

• Impact on Career Advancement: Gender stereotypes create biases against women in career advancement processes, perpetuating inequalities in male-dominated and female-dominated job sectors

**Glass Ceiling and Sticky Floor Concepts**

• Glass ceiling: Unseen barriers preventing women's advancement to leadership roles.

• Sticky floor: Women trapped in low-paying, female-dominated roles with limited upward mobility.

• Both metaphors suggest women may struggle to progress beyond initial positions.

• Overcoming the glass ceiling is a pivotal milestone in a woman's leadership journey.

**Double Bind in Leadership: A Dilemma**

• Women in leadership roles face conflicting societal expectations, presenting a dilemma.

• Women are expected to exhibit assertiveness and adopt traditionally masculine leadership styles to be perceived as competent.

• If their behavior is perceived as too assertive, they risk being viewed as unlikeable.

• If women display feminine traits, they may be perceived as likable but incompetent.

• The double bind is particularly challenging in male-dominated environments where women may internalize gender stereotypes and adopt leadership behaviors aligning with traditional masculine norms.

• Non-masculine leadership styles like transformational and servant leadership can help women overcome the double bind.

• Women who challenge gender norms often face backlash from society and within their own gender group.

• The double bind creates significant barriers for women in leadership positions, hindering their progress in leadership roles.

**Female Leadership Challenges as Internal Factors**

**Self-Gender Stereotypes and Women's Leadership**

• Self-gender stereotypes are internalized attitudes and behaviors influenced by organizational gender stereotypes.

• Women leaders often internalize these stereotypes, impacting their self-evaluation, career choices, and self-efficacy.

• Women often underestimate their leadership abilities and have lower self-efficacy compared to men, especially in male-dominated fields.

• Self-gender stereotypes significantly influence women's identity, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

• Transformational leadership, aligning with traditional feminine gender roles, can positively impact women's self-efficacy.

• Mentoring and coaching can facilitate women's leadership development and increase self-efficacy.

• Gender stereotypes contribute to biases in performance evaluations, leading to lower performance ratings and higher perceived risks of derailment.

• Addressing self-gender stereotypes and promoting inclusive workplace environments is essential for empowering women leaders and ensuring equitable career advancement opportunities.

**Gender Stereotype Threat and its Impact on Women's Performance**

• Gender stereotype threat is anxiety and fear associated with gender-related tasks.

• It affects women's performance, especially in male-dominated fields like STEM and leadership.

• Individuals with minority social identities are particularly vulnerable.

• Eliminating stereotype threat can reduce gender inequality.

• Exposure to gender-related stereotype commercials can lower women's ambitions for leadership roles.

• Role models and successful women can protect women from identity threats.

• Addressing gender stereotype threat is crucial for creating inclusive environments.

**Gender Stereotype Internalization and Women's Career Choices**

• Gender stereotypes influence women's career choices, impacting their perceptions of leadership suitability.

• Recruitment advertisements can shape women's perceptions of fit in masculine careers, leading to self-limiting career choices.

• Feminine language in recruitment ads can promote women's interest in higher organizational positions.

• Female employees report lower leadership aspirations under male supervision.

• Job control plays a significant role in this, with female employees reporting lower levels under male supervision.

• Positive gender identity can reduce identity conflicts and increase happiness, making leadership goals more attractive.

• Addressing internalized gender stereotypes and promoting confidence are crucial steps in advancing gender equality in leadership roles

**Question 1: Do you feel you have faced conscious bias or mistreatment based on your gender in your workplace?**

**Table -2**

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 35 | 70% |
| No | 15 | 30% |

**Explanation:** Out of the 50 respondents, 35 (70%) reported experiencing conscious bias or mistreatment based on their gender in their workplace. This indicates a significant portion of working women perceive instances of gender-based discrimination in their professional environments.

**Question 2: Have you noticed subtle and unconscious biases affecting your salary or promotion opportunities?**

**Table -2**

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 30 | 60% |
| No | 20 | 40% |

**Explanation:** Among the respondents, 30 (60%) reported noticing subtle and unconscious biases affecting their salary or promotion opportunities. This suggests that a significant portion of working women perceives the presence of such biases in their workplace, which can hinder their career progression.

**Question 3: Do you feel that the organizational structure in your workplace is characterized as masculine?**

**Table -3**

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 40 | 80% |
| No | 10 | 20% |

**Explanation:** A majority of respondents, 40 out of 50 (80%), perceive the organizational structure in their workplace as characterized by masculinity. This perception indicates that many working women believe their workplace environments exhibit traits traditionally associated with masculinity.

**Question 4: Have you encountered gender stereotypes affecting your career advancement processes?**

**Table -4**

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 45 | 90% |
| No | 5 | 10% |

**Explanation:** The vast majority of respondents, 45 out of 50 (90%), reported encountering gender stereotypes affecting their career advancement processes. This high percentage suggests that gender stereotypes significantly influence the career progression of working women.

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**Question 5: Do you feel that women are generally expected to conform to traditional gender roles in your workplace?**

**Table-5**

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|---------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 45 | 90% |
| No | 5 | 10% |

**Explanation:** A significant majority of respondents, 45 out of 50 (90%), perceive that women are generally expected to conform to traditional gender roles in their workplace. This indicates a prevalent belief among working women regarding societal expectations and gender norms within their professional environments.

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**Question 6: Have you ever felt pressured to conform to gender stereotypes in your interactions with colleagues or superiors?**

**Table 6**

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|---------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 40 | 80% |
| No | 10 | 20% |

**Explanation:** A majority of respondents, 40 out of 50 (80%), reported feeling pressured to conform to gender stereotypes in their interactions with colleagues or superiors. This suggests that many working women experience pressure to adhere to societal expectations regarding gender roles in their professional interactions.

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**Question 7: Have you ever felt that your leadership style or capabilities were underestimated due to gender stereotypes?**

**Table -7**

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 45 | 90% |
| No | 5 | 10% |

**Explanation:** A significant majority of respondents, 45 out of 50 (90%), reported feeling that their leadership style or capabilities were underestimated due to gender stereotypes. This indicates a prevalent perception among working women that gender stereotypes influence the recognition and evaluation of their leadership abilities.

**Question 8: Do you believe that women face unique challenges in overcoming gender biases in leadership positions?**

**Table :8**

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 50 | 100% |
| No | 0 | 0% |

**Explanation:** All respondents, 50 out of 50 (100%), believe that women face unique challenges in overcoming gender biases in leadership positions. This unanimous agreement underscores the widespread recognition among working women of the existence of gender biases and challenges in leadership roles.

**Question 9: Have you personally experienced any form of discrimination or prejudice in your career advancement journey?**

Table 9

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 45 | 90% |
| No | 5 | 10% |

**Explanation:** The majority of respondents, 45 out of 50 (90%), reported experiencing some form of discrimination or prejudice in their career advancement journey. This indicates that a significant portion of working women has encountered obstacles or biases that hinder their professional progression.

**Question 10: Do you believe that gender discrimination still persists in the workplace despite partial progress in gender equality?**

Table -10

| Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|-------|------------|
| Yes | 50 | 100% |
| No | 0 | 0% |

**Explanation:** All respondents, 50 out of 50 (100%), believe that gender discrimination still persists in the workplace despite partial progress in gender equality. This unanimous agreement emphasizes the ongoing challenges and prevalence of gender discrimination in professional environments.

With the analysis of all questionnaire items completed, it's evident that the majority of working women perceive the presence of gender biases and discrimination in their professional environments. Addressing these issues is crucial for promoting gender equality and creating inclusive workplaces.

**Research Findings on Women in Leadership Positions**

**Key Findings**:

• Women in leadership positions face challenges such as gender biases, stereotypes, and structural inequalities.

• The study emphasizes the need for inclusive workplaces and gender equality in leadership roles.

**Recommendations:**

• Promote Gender Diversity Initiatives: Set measurable goals for increasing women's representation in leadership positions.

• Provide Leadership Development Programs: Invest in programs tailored to women's needs, focusing on skills development, confidence-building, and networking opportunities.

• Address Unconscious Bias: Implement unconscious bias training for employees involved in recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation processes.

• Establish Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs: Pair women with mentors and sponsors for career advice, networking opportunities, and visibility.

• Adopt Flexible Work Policies: Adopt flexible work policies that accommodate the diverse needs of women.

• Promote Gender-Neutral Recruitment and Promotion Practices: Reduce bias in talent selection and ensure women are evaluated based on their skills, qualifications, and performance.

• Support Work-Life Integration: Provide resources such as on-site childcare facilities, eldercare assistance, and wellness programs.

• Advocate for Policy Changes: Advocate for equal pay legislation, paid family leave, and affordable childcare.

• Promote Women's Visibility and Representation: Elevate women's voices and contributions in leadership roles.

• Monitor and Evaluate Progress: Regularly monitor and evaluate progress towards gender equality goals.

**Conclusion**

Gender equality in leadership positions requires continuous learning, adaptation, and commitment from organizations, policymakers, and individuals. Recognizing the intersectionality of gender with other social identities is crucial for understanding women's experiences in leadership. Efforts to promote gender equality must be intersectional and inclusive of diverse perspectives. Collaborative efforts across

sectors, including government, businesses, academia, and civil society, are essential for addressing gender biases and structural inequalities. Building partnerships and coalitions can amplify the impact of initiatives and create momentum for systemic change. Engaging men as allies is essential for challenging patriarchal norms and promoting inclusive workplace cultures. Sustainable progress requires sustained investment, accountability mechanisms, and a culture of transparency and accountability. Empowering women to overcome obstacles, develop resilience, and assert their leadership capabilities is essential for creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

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