

# Glass Ceiling Effect: A Focus on Pakistani Women

Farhat Shafiq

Assistant Director, Pakistan Manpower Institute, Ministry of Education, Trainings and standards in Higher Education, Pakistan

**Abstract:** Glass ceiling and gender discrimination are the biggest barriers holding back Pakistani women from occupying high positions of prestige in the corporate world. Working women in Pakistan face obstacles moving up the corporate ladder and are often excluded from the decision-making. The present research paper looks into the prevailing situation of glass ceiling effect from Pakistani working women's perspective along with barriers and while concluding the discussion makes recommendations to the relevant stake holders.

**Keywords:** Glass ceiling effect, glass ceiling in Pakistan, women employment, gender discrimination, top level employment.

## 1. Introduction

Pakistan is a developing country with a total population of 184.35 million out of which 51.35% are males and 48.65% females [7]. It has a labor force of 57.24 million, 0.91 million more than what was in previous year [6]. The labor force participation rate of Pakistan is 32.88%, 49.27% males and 15.57% females which mean male participation is 33.7% more than female participation rate [7]. The female labor participation rate in Pakistan is lowest among the South Asian region. Pakistani women do not enjoy equal right for work and employment opportunities despite of the fact that poverty is one of the major challenges in the socio economic development of the country. According to the estimates of the World Bank 1.29 billion people around the globe live in poverty out of which 70% are women and Pakistan is no exception to this [2]. In Pakistan, just like most of the developing countries of the world, the women lag behind men in almost every social and economic indicator resulting into larger portion of the poor. Pakistani women are often denied opportunities for growth like education, trainings, employment etc. and those lucky ones who managed to sail through and get the employment have to face many barriers including the invisible barrier of glass ceiling. The issue needs to be addressed seriously as today the gender equality in all aspects is the economic necessity and no country can prosper while ignoring this fact.

## 2. Defining Glass Ceiling

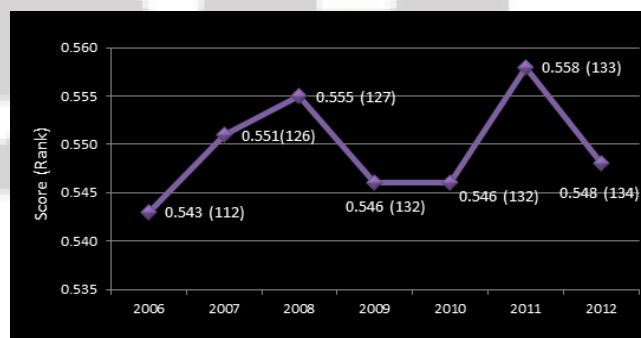
A glass ceiling is a political term used to describe "the unseen, yet unbreakable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate Ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievement [9]. David Cotter and colleagues defined four distinctive characteristics that must be met to conclude that a glass ceiling exists. A glass ceiling inequality represents:

- "A gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee."
- "A gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome."
- "A gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels."
- "A gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career." [1]

The term glass ceiling is often described as a metaphor to the invisible barriers like glass through which women can see higher position opportunities but they cannot reach them and for that reason they are just like ceiling to them. These barriers stop women and minorities from occupying these powerful higher management positions having high prestige and high remuneration in the workforce. The consequence of this phenomenon can be that women feel that they do not possess skills and capabilities worthy to hold the high ranking positions or their bosses do not consider them as a potential candidate for any such advancement and hence they are not able to fully contribute towards the development of the country.

## 3. Gender Gap in Pakistan

The global gender gap index examines four critical areas of inequality between men and women in 136 economies around the globe. Two of these critical areas are "Economic participation and opportunity – outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment" and "Educational attainment – outcomes on access to basic and higher level education". The ranking of Pakistan has gradually dropped from 132 in the year 2006 to 135 this year (2013) [10], [11]. The ranking is the lowest in Asia and the Pacific region. In the year 2013 the ranking moved down from 134th to 135th which has made it the second worst country in terms of gender gap. The ranking of the country from 2006 to 2012 can be seen in the graph presented below.



**Figure 1:** The Global Gender Gap Report 2012 indicating Scores and Rank of Pakistan in last seven years  
Source: Published by the World Economic Forum

#### 4. Women Employment in Pakistan

Majority of women in Pakistan are employed in agriculture sector where they work in fields all the year round while assuming their household responsibilities and yet are not given any income in return. Those who do not work in agricultural sector they mostly seek for house based informal

jobs of low level and with minimum remuneration mostly due to socio cultural pressure. A very low percentage of Pakistan women are engaged in jobs in other sectors in corporate organization and the number descend as we move up the organizational chart. Women employment in different sectors in percentage can be seen in table presented as under.

**Table 1:** Employment Shares by Industry (%)

Major Industry Division	2008-09			2009-10			2010-11		
	*T	**M	***F	T	M	F	T	M	F
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture /forestry /hunting and Fishing	45.1	37.3	74.0	45.0	36.6	74.9	45.1	36.2	75.4
Manufacturing	13.0	13.3	11.9	13.2	13.9	11.0	13.7	14.5	10.9
Construction	6.6	8.3	0.4	6.7	8.5	0.3	7.0	8.9	0.2
Wholesale and retail trade	16.5	20.5	1.6	16.3	20.2	2.1	16.2	20.4	1.6
Transport/ storage & communication	5.2	6.6	0.2	5.2	6.6	0.3	5.1	6.6	0.1
Community/ social & personal service	11.2	11.1	11.6	11.2	11.2	11.2	10.8	10.8	11.5
Others	2.4	2.9	0.3	2.4	3.0	0.2	2.1	2.6	0.3

\*T=Total, \*\*M=Males, \*\*\*F=Females

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics Labor Force Survey 2010-2011

Presently Pakistani women hold only 5% [5] of the positions of corporate leadership which is very low indeed. Pakistan's ranking in world ranking of classification of women in National Parliament is 66 where 20.7% women are present in lower house and 16.3% in upper house as presented in the table below [4]:

**Table 2:** Ranking of Pakistan in World Classification of women in National Parliament

Rank	Country	Lower or single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats*	Women	% W	Elections	Seats*	Women	% W
66	Pakistan	5 2013	323	67	20.70%	3 2012	104	17	16.30%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2013, women in national parliaments.

Pakistani women in boardrooms are only 4.6%. Though efforts are being made for improving the situation but still serious high end steps should be taken for helping able Pakistani women securing their due positions in corporate [3].

#### 5. Barriers preventing Pakistani Women from Rising up on the Corporate Ladder

Here question arises that despite of being 48.65% [7] of the total population why the participation on higher level is low. The answer to the question can easily be finding by studying the socio cultural setup of the country. In a Pakistani male dominant society women are conventionally supposed to stay at home while doing daily chores like cooking, washing etc. Due to this socio cultural pressure of having prime responsibility of looking after their home and children, the Pakistani women at first place avoid doing jobs and those who enter into jobs they prefer to find one which matches with their personal needs like flexible time, day care facility and jobs with relatively less responsibility.

Another perspective is that males have a mindset which tends to accept only the conventional role of the women and therefore have a difficulty in accepting the capabilities and

abilities of the women resulting into an impression that the women would not be able to perform on the higher posts and hence are hesitant to let women raise above certain level in the organizational hierarchy. Cases have also been found where Pakistani working women have fallen victim to the professional jealousy of the male counterparts for losing any higher position to a women candidate. Pakistani women have to face a lot of barriers in the way of breaking the glass ceiling phenomenon. Following are major barriers which are preventing Pakistani women from occupying the top level management positions in the corporate world :

- Socio cultural setup of Pakistan where women are not given participation in important decisions.
- Hiring women and clustering them on staff jobs with relatively less or no career path at all towards higher positions.
- Obsolete or non suitable recruitment, selection and promotion methods which fail to seek women as potential candidate for higher posts

- No or limited access to mentoring and management trainings
- No or limited access to opportunities for career development training focused towards top level position skills
- Limited or no access to development assignments and little participation and representation in highly visible forums like committees.
- Different standards while evaluating performance
- Harassment and discrimination at work place
- Lack of strong and consistent law enforcement and monitoring
- Non availability of data about the distribution of population on higher positions and lack of reporting mechanizing in this respect.

## 6. Steps Taken for Reduction of Glass Ceiling Effect

The government of Pakistan has taken positive steps in past few years to improve the prevailing job condition of the Pakistani women. Different trainings, sensitization and awareness projects have been conducted alone and in collaboration with the National and International agencies. Laws have been made to support the Pakistani working women and many institutions have been made with the intention of contributing towards their well being. Some of the efforts made in this respect are of making of Ministry of Women Development, National Commission on Status of Women, Gender Reform Action Plans (GRAPS), Ten Year Perspective Plan 2000-11 National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women National Plan of Action, Protection against Harassment of Women at the workplace Act, 2010, Affirmative Action's through reservation of seats and quotas.

In addition to the efforts made by the government many non government organization are also working in Pakistan for the cause of more women participation in high level profile jobs in the corporate world .They are applying their part in sensitizing and making aware the women about opportunities for their professional growth and facilitate access to educational and training opportunities which are necessary and help a lot while performing on higher positions in any organization

## 7. MS. Musharaf Hai: A Role Model for Pakistani Working Women

The appointment of Ms. Musharaf Hai as chairman and CEO of Unilever Pakistan in 2001 came as a shock for the corporate world as it was the first time that some Pakistani women was appointed at such a powerful high position . Despite of her excellent credentials that suggested otherwise, a lot of people in the corporate world were doubtful whether she will be able to lead and performance on this level in a male dominated field, especially in relation to the intense pressure required to be sustained at such high profile job level. Fortunately Ms. Hai not only proved her credibility through making Unilever as Pakistan's largest consumer goods company but also by being ranked amongst the 50 most power women in business by fortune magazine (2004).

## 8. Conclusion

Pakistan is a country having a male dominated society with a lot of gender discrimination where women are not given their due right in every walk of life including employment especially to higher level jobs of big portfolio hence creating a glass ceiling for women in the corporate world. But no Nation can prosper ignoring a big part of its populations and leaving it in ignorance and discrimination. The realization of importance of women participation in the socio-economic development of any country has encouraged many employers in Pakistan to established women friendly workplaces but unfortunately these measures are not very successful in breaking the invisible gender bias barrier i.e glass ceiling preventing women from moving up the hierarchy At present unfortunate there is no set formula to tackle and deal with glass ceiling. It takes an extraordinary effort and courage for Pakistani women to voice such issue and fight for their due right. Glass ceiling is a constant struggle for the Pakistani working women who take their profession seriously and are ready to fight for their right to have access to the top level high ranked positions to fulfill their aspirations .If Pakistan is to prosper the ceiling has to fall. Following are some of the recommendation in this respect:

Pakistani women:

- Should think bigger to achieve bigger targets in short they should unleash their ambitions
- Should know their professional value and worth.
- Should avoid leading from the crowd rather they should take the lead from front.
- Should willingly take up the challenging tasks involving important decision making about the sensitive issues and matters without any unnecessary fear
- Should advocate for them as visibility is as important as the work well done.
- Should refuse to tolerate the intolerable: Pakistani women should refuse to tolerate and keep quite on the issues they feel should be voiced and settled in their best interest.
- Should Embrace risk as crucial to their success

It is also suggested that the present laws, rules and regulations about employment should be revisited to incorporate the necessary additions for increasing the capable women share in top level posts and all these laws should be fully executed, implemented and evaluated so that Pakistani women can also contribute towards the socio economic development of the country

## 9. Future Implication of the Research

The present research paper provides the basic insight into impact of glass ceiling effect on the working women of Pakistan while highlighting the barriers and making relevant recommendations and suggestions in this respect. The research paper can be helpful for any future research studies intended to be made for investigating further any question or finding solution to any problem related to of glass ceiling effect and its impact on Pakistani working women.

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## Author Profile

**Farhat Shafiq** received Bachelor’s in Business Administration (BBA) (Hons) and Masters in Business Administration (MBA) degrees from IIUI, Pakistan in 2004 and 2005, respectively. From March 2005 to May 2010 was working as an Human Resource Specialist in a Multinational company named as Ciklum (Pvt) Ltd. From March 2012 to date is working as an Assistant Director, Pakistan Manpower Institute of Ministry of Education, Trainings and Standards in Higher Education, Pakistan