

This Far and No Further: Barriers in the Managerial Woman's Journey to the Top

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ABSTRACT

Though various studies are available on the education, competence, professional prowess and dexterity exhibited by women in management and ample research has clearly indicated enhanced profitability and employee productivity in organisations with more women in managerial positions, their presence, especially at the highest hierarchical levels, remains grossly discouraging. Much water has flowed under the bridge since the gender equality trumpets reverberated the business corridors. Yet, a study in the December 2014 issue of Harvard Business Review stated that the disparity between the two sexes with respect to movement to top positions remained nearly intact and according to the recent International Business Report by Grant Thornton, 14% of women represented senior management in India, 24% globally and only 12% businesses had a female CEO. Surprisingly no noteworthy change has been observed and the figure remained almost the same in 2015, 2014, 2013, 2009 and 2007. Against this backdrop, the present paper aims at probing further into the reasons which stall the progress of women using a mixed method design. Without pointing fingers only at the male bastion, it also attempts a two pronged focus - the role of women themselves and the veracity of lack of support from other women in the workplace in thwarting their progress.

Keywords: Women, management, progress, barriers, mixed method design

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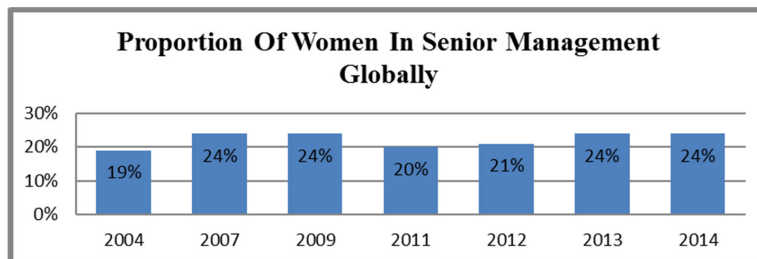
INTRODUCTION

With similar beginnings, education, credentials, men and women step out with similar goals, aspirations and hopes for their careers. Both look forward to and talk about “job titles, job levels and professional achievements at roughly the same rates”. A survey of more than 25000

HBS graduates across age groups ranging from 26 to 67 revealed that the goals aspired for are realised differently across genders even by the top tier B school graduates who step out equally equipped and adept with ample openings and opportunities. “Among HBS graduates working full-time, men were significantly more likely than women to have direct reports, profit-and-loss responsibility, and positions in senior management.” Men across three generations were much more satisfied on the four prime dimensions: “meaningful work, professional accomplishments, opportunities for career growth and compatibility of work and personal life” (Ely et al., 2014). The discrepancy between the ascent of men and women to top positions remains almost unharmed despite sharp progression in number of women equally accomplished for top notch roles across organisations and increased impetus on developing women employees. In fact, barely 5% of Fortune 1000 CEOs are women. Only 20% of Fortune 500 board seats are held by women and even “fewer women of colour (below 5%) occupy Fortune 500 board seats”. Again,

the Grant Thornton International Business Report 2014 states that the proportion of women in senior positions in India is only 14%. Surprisingly, this seems to be almost a global phenomenon and recent statistics show disappointing results with Denmark and Germany also at 14%, US and Spain at 22%, UK at 20%, Switzerland 13%, Netherlands 10% and Japan a miniscule 9%. The Southeast Asian countries exhibit more promising results with Indonesia at 41%, Philippines at 40% and Thailand at 38%. China has made some headway and is now at 38% but globally the figures show no progress in 2014 and remain the same as in 2007 and 2009. Moreover, only 12% of businesses have a female CEO.

In 2015 too, “the proportion of the top jobs in business held by women has barely changed” In fact the women in senior management globally has reduced from 24% in 2014 to 22% in 2015. They “remain concentrated in management support functions rather than in leadership roles [indicating] a bottleneck for women upon reaching the management level” (Grant Thornton International Business



*did not include China or Brazil

Figure 1. Proportion of Women in Senior Management Globally (2014)
Source: Grant Thornton IBR 2014

Report (IBR), 2015). This glaring gender gap has been comprehensively discussed. Extensive research and academic studies record a host of barriers from societal and organisational prejudices to gender pigeonholes, the iniquitous glass ceiling, pay variation, childcare, inadequate career development, promotion pathways and mentoring provision. It could be argued that if Harvard graduates with the best of opportunities could be plagued with stereotypes, maybe to a lesser degree, as compared to their less fortunate counterparts from the not so elite B schools, then this demands further attention. Having said that, this study probes further into the reasons which impede the progress of women to top positions and without blaming only the male stronghold, it also attempts a focus on women themselves. It could be a male pulling the rug from under her feet but the emphasis here would be more on the hindrances due to stereotypical baggage etched in the women’s psyche or their own gender blocking their upward clamber.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The implicit presumption behind the study is the glass ceiling phenomenon which has become a metaphor that has been discussed and dissected but is supposedly still prevalent despite rebuttals. The popular phrase was defined by the US Glass Ceiling Commission as “the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements” (Recommendations of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission Washington, D.C. November, 1995). After more than three decades of its maiden appearance in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1986, the glass ceiling still seems to be current, relevant and in the thick of discussion. Research reveals that though the number of girls going to school has multiplied and in many parts of the world girls have received better tertiary education than the boys, majority of women have not found it easy to reach the top management jobs. Therefore, despite efforts towards gender equality, minimal number of women

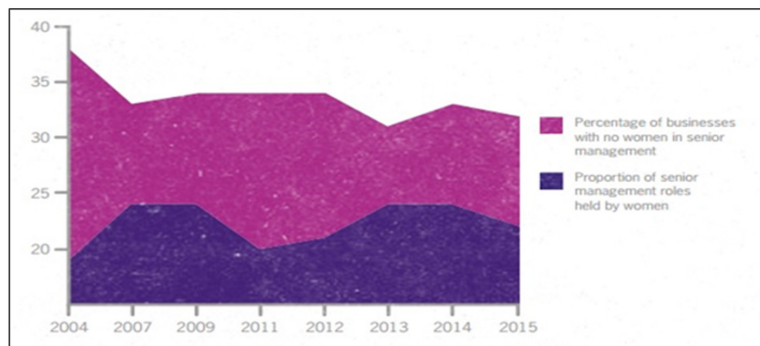


Figure 2. Proportion of Women in Senior Management (2015)
Source: Grant Thornton IBR 2015

have been able to make it to the senior management levels in the corporate world (Wallace & Smith, 2011). Equipped with the reality of higher educational levels and the promise of gender equality, more and more women are entering the corporate world. But it has been found that the strength of women at lower management levels is more than that in the higher level managerial jobs. Statistics and studies have shown that the cardinal tenet is still the same – higher the position, fewer the women. The Centre for Social Research (CSR) 2009 report titled *Women Managers in India: Challenges and Opportunities* states that women hold only 1 to 3 per cent of top executive jobs and the organisations without women in senior management positions have stood at 38% since 2004. Further, if 70% of the women in developed countries and 60% in developing countries are working and 40% of women contribute to global labour force, the representation of women in senior positions worldwide seems dispiriting. Women in management in India represent a nominal 2 per cent of the entire executive strength despite a phenomenal increase in the number of women in the corporate world. It has been observed that women are a key part of a company's success and companies having women in top positions have a positive financial impact. Even at the time of economic downturn, women who owned hedge funds lost less than those owned by men (Wallace, 2013). Studies have discussed how “women in senior management positions” can “offer different perspectives” resulting in “corporate

financial success” (Fitzpatrick & Maggie, 2013). Research on women leadership too has revealed positive results. Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman's article based on a survey conducted on 7280 leaders in 2011 concludes that women are undoubtedly better leaders at each level and women at the top management levels are found to be more impressive than their male counterparts. The study also showed that companies with a higher representation of women at the management levels are more profitable and exhibit enhanced employee productivity. If this is a reality then why are women so sadly under-represented at the senior most levels? Findings indicate that women don't self-promote. They take the back seat in management and remain complacent at their level of achievement and rank (Zenger & Folkman, 2011). Many other core issues affecting women's progress to senior management positions have been repeatedly cited. Though family responsibilities and child care remain as major barriers, long working hours, less flexibility at workplace, low levels of self-confidence, society's negative attitude towards women as leaders also add up to the list. The gender centred theorists have attributed the differences between the sexes to common heritage, beliefs and assumptions. It is assumed that women give greater weightage to family lives than to their careers. Women's own expectations of their performances and their relatively depleted levels of self-confidence are also a setback. Factors such as societal and institutional practices, expectation, corporation's culture, history as well as

its structure affect the women's limited ability to attain high level position (Sposito, 2013). The barriers notwithstanding, we do witness a sea change in the present scenario with women outshining men in academia, in certain areas and with companies implementing programmes to counter "structural biases against women". So, do we believe that women "are finally poised to make it to the top" or is this a "delusion of progress" (Carter & Silva, 2010) where we happily judge that there is no gender disparity? The women are making it but the flip side is that the last decade has showed slower growth than what was expected. Even after years of experience, women lag behind because of their slow start up and the gap becomes difficult to breach. Those who taste success probably start post-MBA at middle level management or above. The first boss, low salary, lower satisfaction in job than men have also come up as reasons behind women not breaking the glass ceiling. "Reports of progress in advancement, compensation, and career satisfaction are at best overstated, at worst just plain wrong" (Carter & Silva, 2010). An investigation conducted by Ann Howard and Richard S. Wellins revealed that the presence of women at executive levels "was half" as compared to "that in first level management" and in "all major global regions, women were more likely than men to fall off the management ladder before reaching the top". It was also found that the probability of having men in high, international leadership positions is twice as compared to that of women.

They were unable to reach the executive status in the industries where leaders were mostly men whereas in "industries where the gender ratio was balanced at first level management", one third of the women slipped off the ladder before attaining the managerial rank. So regardless of the ratio of women in the leadership stratum, "men are significantly more likely to be in high potential programs" (Howard & Wellins, 2008, 2009). The article *The Corporate Boardroom: Still a Male Club* underscores the "lack of women on company boards and distinguishes the wasted resource of female talents". It reveals that women are "often demoted to lessen their pay and responsibility" (Broome, 2007). Reasons from boardrooms being perceived as a "man's world" and old executives not being comfortable with the idea of having women at the apex to women themselves being responsible due to their lack of confidence, insecurity, fear of disapproval on appearing too ambitious are spread all over the research firmament. Are women less self-assured than men? Is it all this or is it "prioritising family over work"? Is it the continuous career graph of men which does not exhibit any break due to family and child-rearing constraints that make them more likely than women to have direct reports, profit and loss accountability and top management positions (Ely et al., 2014). Finally, is women's exclusion from their organisations "old boy's network" or the unofficial power citadel composed of men who operate and take decisions at the golf course or during the more than occasional

drink or lunch together? Does this prevent women from “being privy to important inside information that might have helped them to position themselves to move up” (Glaser & Smalley, 1995). The present study tries to revisit the barriers to women’s career advancement and addresses two research questions: Are women responsible for their plight and does lack of support from other women at the workplace act as an encumbrance?

The Inner Demons: Are Women themselves to Blame?

The thought that they are probably not smart enough and the fear of appearing overtly ambitious and hence not liked by their peers/superiors are a part of the stereotypical baggage that women carry with them. These have roots in the psyche which have been nurtured and watered through their childhood, adolescence and possibly adulthood. These restrictive beliefs limit their ability to succeed. Girls who were taught to be “seen and not heard” might be “interrupted more” and “viewed by men as invisible”. At meetings while men do most of the talking and table thumping some women hold themselves back waiting for the “right moment” to offer ideas “and then do so without conviction and confidence”. There are chances then that they are ignored, are “not taken seriously” and don’t get credit for their ideas (Glaser & Smalley, 1995). Does “speaking up first at meetings” involve the risk of “being disliked” or “being labelled a bitch”? The confidence wavers and according to Katty Kay and

Claire Shipman, women keep grappling with lack of confidence in strange ways. They blame themselves when things go wrong at the professional front and easily shower accolades and bestow credit on others when something goes right. What holds women back is not their actual ability to do well at the higher levels. They are indeed as able as the men. What holds them back is the choice to quit or not to try. Women are perfectionists and would normally abstain from soliciting a promotion till “they met 100% of the qualifications” while a man could strut confidently even with 50% information and surety (Kay & Shipman, 2014). The germs can be traced in their childhood when they were repeatedly expected to look better, perform better, be better daughters and sisters. They do not ask for a raise because again they have to be better wives, better mothers and better employees. We do have innumerable corporate women who are supremely confident but they might be playing safe and obeying rules which was a lesson learnt during childhood. But when this spills over to adulthood quite a few of them appear hesitant to take risks and disinclined to make their own rules. Other allegations are that women are “consensus seekers” which is fine but that can “translate into indecisiveness on the job” (Glaser & Smalley, 1995). Is this the case or do we encounter a role of the other women in the workplace who create roadblocks in the progress of their own sex?

Does the other Woman (Read Older and Peer) Support or Foil the Upward Ascent?

A number of studies have shown that women who succeed in a male dominated environment tend to resist the rise of other women and sometimes become obsessive about retaining or safeguarding their position. According to a survey in 2011, 95% of working women alleged that they were destabilised and demoralised by another woman in certain phases of their career. The women superiors “exploit female vulnerabilities that men may not see” through strategies that would escape the attention of their male counterparts and this makes these queen bees very effective and damaging. (Drexler, 2013). Though successful women link their achievement to one or more mentors at some stage of their careers, they mostly give credit for guidance, support, perspective and ideas to men rather than women. They have often voiced their preference for a male boss rather than a female one. Research by Workplace Bullying Institute indicates that when women bully, 71% of their targets are women but when men do the same, women constitute only 57% of their victims. This is the reason why women are more comfortable working with men (Rossbacher, 2013). Do these queen bees want to make it tough for others as they themselves climbed the corporate ladder the hard way? Does the queen bee syndrome or the tendency of senior successful women in male-dominated environments to impede the progress of junior female colleagues

and of being intolerant of competition from members of their own sex constitute a major barrier? Or is this issue overhyped? The article *Sisters in Arms* contradicts the perception of female same sex conflict at the workplace. The article talks about attribution theory to propose that female same-sex conflict is more “problematized” by third parties. The issue of women being unsupportive and spiteful towards other female employees has been exaggerated. It has to be noted that there is a lack of research similar to the queen bee syndrome among men although men use indirect aggression more than women. The same-sex conflict among women is highlighted because of the prescriptive stereotypes and the evaluations that occur when women violate them. Further, only few women relative to men attain the top position and when they do, they often hold token status, thereby creating the perception that there is limited room for women at the top (Sheppard & Aquino, 2014).

OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In the fast changing scenario of women making their presence felt in all fields and their increasing numbers in the corporate world, the figures of progress to the senior most levels too should be quite encouraging. But the disparity between the two genders with respect to movement to top positions remains almost stationary. “In fact, there has been a decline, and now only 15 per cent of women believe that they have equal opportunity (compared with 20 per cent last

year) for promotion to senior management positions”. Despite all talk and emphasis on gender equivalence, the “slow pace of change is confounding” and “some upward momentum on the perceptions of equal opportunity for women” is expected (Sanders et al., 2011). This generates a genuine need to return to the issue and verify the facts. Hence, the objective of this paper was to revisit the barriers obstructing the managerial woman’s movement to the top and to identify the prime barriers in present times. It also aims to explore whether women themselves are responsible for their plight or do other women in the workplace play a role in preventing their progress. The target group was middle and senior level women managers in the age groups ranging from 35 to 55 across the IT, Telecommunication, Finance and Retail Intelligence sectors. These sectors were chosen owing to the sizable presence of women at the managerial level there. Three companies from IT, three from Finance, two from Telecommunications and two from Retail Intelligence sectors were identified in the Indian cities of Bhubaneswar, Bangalore, Pune, Mumbai and Delhi. The responses received manually and electronically were almost equally distributed across the sectors. All companies identified were large except two which were medium sized.

METHODOLOGY

To delve deeper into the present paradox of a sharp influx of qualified women in management and the discouraging figures of their progress to the senior most positions, a

mixed method design with both a qualitative and quantitative component was selected. The goal of a qualitative approach is to “understand how individuals make meaning of their social world” which is “created through social interactions of individuals with the world around them”. This makes the respondent “the expert” as “it is his or her view of reality that the researcher seeks to interpret” (Hesse-Biber, 2010). From the multiple theoretical variations of the qualitative domain, this study deals with the feminist theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007) which “seeks to understand the lived experiences of women”. Moreover, the postulation central to feminist theories is “that knowledge does not exist outside of the social world. There is no view from ‘nowhere’; instead, all knowledge contains a perspective” (Hesse-Biber, 2010) and in the present case, the perspective has to be of the women in management and their take on the glass ceiling. Differently put, the participants have much more experience with issues being studied by the researcher and hence, may have valuable insights to share. Therefore, a study must give importance to the perspectives of the respondents, “rather than relying entirely on established theoretical views or the researcher’s perspective”. This does not imply that “participants’ perspectives are necessarily beyond criticism or that other perspectives are illegitimate” (Menzel, 1978).

Hence, keeping in mind both the “perspectives” of the participants and the “established theoretical views”, the

research instrument (questionnaire) was developed in two parts. The first part was an in-depth interview with the women in question (senior and middle level women managers across organisations) for their views regarding women falling off the corporate ladder with very few reaching the pinnacle and the barriers thereof. The second part was an exhaustive review of relevant literature to probe into existing research about the veracity of the same. As mixed method research drifts towards “a more positivist methodological orientation” and “employs qualitative data as ‘handmaiden’” to help in developing “more robust quantitative measures, such as survey research questions” (Hesse-Biber, 2010), this study adopts the same methodology to build the research instrument

(questionnaire) for the quantitative survey. This mixed method design was inspired by Catherine M. Fuentes’ (2008) sequential exploratory mixed methods model (Figure 3) which she used in her study ‘Pathways from Interpersonal Violence to Sexually Transmitted Infections: A Mixed Method Study of Diverse Women’. In the first phase, a convenience sampling of 28 women from diverse ethnicities was conducted and in the second phase a quantitative survey of 215 women was done “to generalise the results of her qualitative study” (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Similarly, in the present study, an in depth interview (IDI) with 26 senior and middle level women managers from IT, Telecommunications, Finance and Retail Intelligence sectors was conducted to

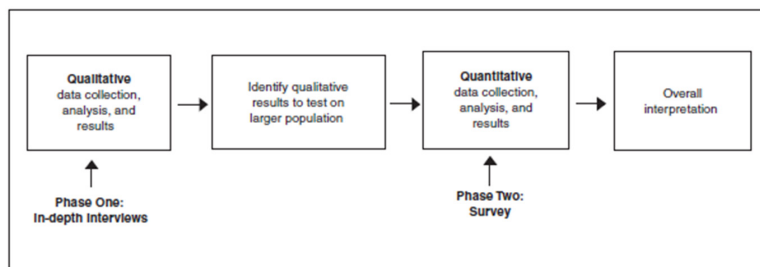


Figure 3. Fuentes’ (2008) sequential exploratory mixed methods design

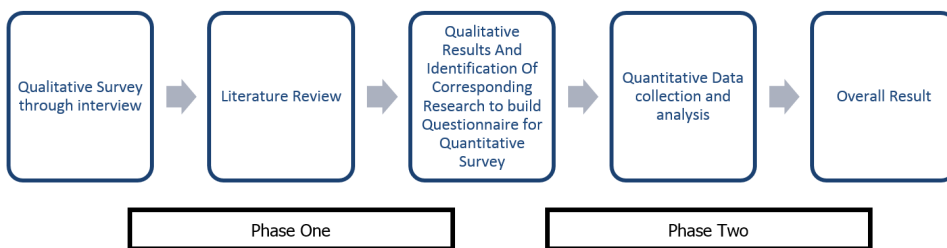


Figure 4. Research framework of the study

discern their views about the existence and nature of barriers. An extra component of relevant literature review in phase one was added to the original design as illustrated in Figure 4.

The research review was included to support the result obtained from the qualitative IDI. For instance, the basic premise of this study that a miniscule number of women reach topmost positions and quite a few women fall off the management ladder before reaching the top found almost complete agreement from the target group during the IDI. Additionally, it was corroborated by multiple existing research sources such as *Women in Management: Delusions of Progress* (Carter & Silva, 2010), *Rethink What You “Know” about High-Achieving Women* (Ely et al., 2014), *What Stops Women from Reaching the Top? Confronting the Tough Issues* (Sanders et al., 2011), *Holding Women Back Troubling Discoveries and Best Practices for Helping Female Leaders Succeed* (Howard & Wellins, 2008, 2009) and reports like Grant Thornton IBR 2014 and The Centre for Social Research (CSR) 2009 report on *Women Managers in India: Challenges and Opportunities*. A total of 25 variables were identified from the IDI which were also supported by the literature review. The variables encompassed the basic premise (a. Very few women have reached the senior most positions b. Quite a few women fall off the management ladder before reaching the top positions), the possible barriers to the movement of women to topmost positions (including the two research questions: a. the role of women themselves and b. the

role of the other women in the workplace in preventing the climb) and the prime barrier. However, after a pilot study, only 19 variables were retained. Therefore, the IDI served a dual purpose. First, it helped to identify the barriers that the participants experienced which, in turn, assisted in the development of the questionnaire and second, it gave the views of the managerial women on the identified barriers and the prime barrier to their progression to senior-most positions. Each barrier which emerged during the IDI was noted along with the broad category suggested by the interviewee under which it fell. The transcript of the interview therefore, helped in grouping of similar barriers under the category umbrella. The four categories so finalised were also substantiated by scholarly articles and books whose authors and years of publication are mentioned below:

1. Importance to family and family constraints (Sanders et al., 2011), (Wallace & Smith, 2011),
2. Unsupportive work environment, organisational culture and societal pressures (Sposito, 2013),
3. Women themselves and their inner demons (Glazer & Smalley, 1995; Zenger & Folkman, 2011), and
4. Other women in the workplace prevent the climb (Drexler, 2013; Rossbacher, 2013).

The 19th and the final statement in the questionnaire was open ended seeking the respondents’ opinion regarding the prime or topmost hindrance in organisational

Table 1
Main Premise and Barriers

Main Premise

1	Fundamental Assertion	a	Despite efforts towards gender equality, very few women have reached the senior most positions
		b	Quite a few women fall off the management ladder before reaching top positions

Barriers

	Categories of Barriers		
1	Family constraints and importance to family	A	Women give more priority to family than to their careers
		B	Breaks in career due to family and child care constraints limit their experience as compared to continuous record of male counterparts
		C	A woman's commitment to family and child rearing is the main reason in turning down offers of promotion
2	Unsupportive work environment, organisational culture and societal pressures	A	Unsupportive work environment, organisational culture, societal pressures affect women's ability to attain high level position
		B	Women often do not get the critical inside information which forms a part of the informal male social networks that women frequently avoid
		C	Women managers are not utilised and developed to the same extent as male counterparts
3	Women themselves and their inner demons	A	Women managers are less self-assured and confident than their male counterparts
		B	Women lack the desire to advance to senior level
		C	Gender stereotypes and fear of appearing too ambitious and not likeable prevents progress up the ladder
		D	Women don't self-promote and themselves take a back seat.
		E	Men overestimate their abilities and performance and women underestimate both
		F	Women have to work harder to prove themselves
4	Other women in the workplace preclude the climb	A	Other women in the workplace play a role in obstructing their progress
		B	Most senior women do not mentor younger women
		C	Women who succeed in male dominated work environments oppose the rise of other women to maintain their authority
		D	One good female friend in the workplace can become a principal support.

Prime Barrier

1	Prime barrier	A	The topmost hindrance in upward progression or organisational ascent is _____
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ascent. This was also classified under the categories of ‘importance to family and family constraints’, ‘unsupportive work environment/societal pressures’ and ‘women themselves with their inner demons’. The Table 1 shows the statements of the questionnaire, including the main premise, the barriers clubbed into four categories and the prime barrier to the progress of women in management as discussed earlier.

The results of the interview showed almost complete denial of the last two categories (women themselves and their inner demons and other women at the workplace obstruct their way to the top) and suggested that unsupportive work environment/societal pressure was a bigger culprit (prime barrier) as against the normally accepted family constraints. Therefore, in the first phase, the qualitative IDI and the literature review helped in building the questionnaire. The questionnaire was finalised after being tested through a pilot study. This was followed by a quantitative

survey (which was conducted on a larger population of 200 women managers, out of whom 134 responded) to validate what had been achieved by the qualitative interview method. The 5-point likert scale containing response options of strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree was used to assess agreement and disagreement to the statements in the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The quantitative study led to the following observations: An overwhelming 79% of the women agreed to our fundamental assertion that despite efforts towards gender parity, very few women have reached the senior most positions while 9% disagreed. Further, 63% agreed that quite a few women fall off the ladder before reaching the top position while only 16% disagreed. This is clearly indicated in the Figure 5.

As mentioned in the methodology, the barriers to women’s progress to senior most positions were classified into

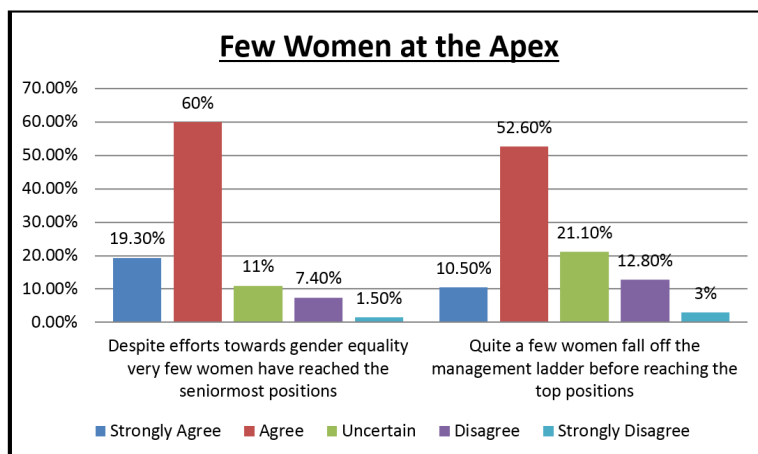


Figure 5. Percentage distribution of the result of the study’s basic premise

four categories. The leading category - Importance to family and family constraints - gave expected results. The oft cited and the most commonly declared barrier of giving more importance to family fetched 52% agreement but retardation in progress due to family constraints gave predictable results. Seventy four per cent of women managers agreed that breaks in career due to family and child care limit their experience in workplace and 62% agreed that a women's commitment to family and child rearing is the main reason in turning down offers of promotion.

The second category - Unsupportive work environment, organisational culture and societal pressures - has almost usurped the crown from the generally reigning prime barrier of family constraints. Sixty eight per cent are sure that unsupportive

work environment, organisational culture and societal pressures can be a major barrier in attaining high level position while 49% agree that women do not get the critical inside information discussed in the informal power networks or the old boys club which proves to be a deterrent to their advancement. Table 2 shows the response to the first two categories.

The reactions to the third category (illustrated in Table 3), which is also the first research question, exhibit that women themselves and their insecurities (inner demons as we call them) seem to be emerging from under the shadows of their fears with 76% disagreeing that women lack the desire to advance to senior level and 75% vehemently denying that they are less self-assured and confident than their counterparts. Though 56% agree

Table 2
Results for the first and second categories of barriers

Barriers		SA	A	N	D	SD	
Family constraints and importance to family	A	Women give more priority to family than to their careers	16%	46%	22%	9%	7%
	B	Breaks in career due to family and child care constraints limit their experience as compared to continuous record of male counterparts	31%	43%	12%	13%	1%
	C	A woman's commitment to family and child rearing is the main reason in turning down offers of promotion	19%	43%	13%	25%	0%
Unsupportive work environment, organisational culture and societal pressures	A	Unsupportive work environment, organisational culture and societal pressures affects women's ability to attain high level position	24%	44%	14%	15%	3%
	B	Women often do not get the critical inside information which forms a part of the informal male social networks that women frequently avoid	7%	42%	27%	16%	9%
	C	Women managers are not utilised and developed to the same extent as male counterparts	7%	21%	20%	27%	25%

that they have to work harder to prove themselves, a meagre 20% agree that women underestimate their abilities as well as performance. Twenty eight per cent agree that women don't self-promote while 42% feel that fear of appearing too ambitious, hence not likeable, obstruct their path to reach higher positions.

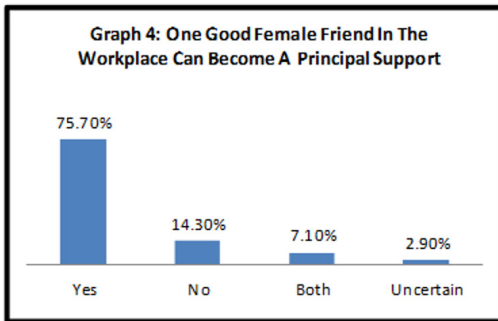


Figure 6. One Good Female Friend in the Workplace Can Become a Principal Support

The fourth category (other women in the workplace preclude the climb) answers the second research question. This is the surprise package and refutes the conjecture that other women in the work place create road blocks and are unsupportive towards their own sex. Only 20% agreed that senior women do not mentor younger women while 21% agreed that women who succeed in male dominated work environments oppose the rise of other women and 23% of the women agreed that other women in the workplace play a role in obstructing their progress. Table 3 showcases the results of category 3 and 4 mentioned above. Further, responses to the statement that ‘one good female friend in the workplace can become a principal support’ showed an interesting result. An overwhelming 75.7% agreed that women can become a prime support in their workplace (Figure 6).

Table 3
Result of the third and fourth category of barriers

Barriers			SA	A	N	D	DA
Women themselves and their inner demons	A	Women managers are less self-assured and confident than their male counterparts	5%	9%	11%	33%	42%
	B	Women lack the desire to advance to senior level	7%	7%	10%	40%	36%
	C	Gender stereotypes and fear of appearing too ambitious and not likeable prevents progress up the ladder	7%	35%	38%	16%	4%
	D	Women don't self-promote and themselves take a back seat.	6%	22%	28%	25%	18%
	E	Men overestimate their abilities and performance and women underestimate both	4%	16%	30%	32%	18%
	F	Women have to work harder to prove themselves	16%	40%	15%	17%	11%
Other women in the workplace preclude the climb	A	Other women in the workplace play a role in obstructing their progress	4%	19%	33%	33%	11%
	B	Most senior women do not mentor younger women	5%	15%	20%	44%	16%
	C	Women who succeed in male dominated work environments oppose the rise of other women to maintain their authority	5%	16%	22%	40%	18%

Finally, to the query regarding what they think was the prime hindrance to their organisational ascent, quite interestingly, 52% of the women stated that unsupportive environment at workplace and societal pressures were the topmost barriers. This statement which solicits the respondents' judgement about the jewel in the crown, that is, the topmost barrier is also analysed under the first three categories and the responses received revealed that 22% give importance to family and family constraints, 26% to women themselves and 52% to unsupportive environment at work place and societal pressures (Figure 7). Out of the 52%, a whopping 34% of the women managers considered unsupportive environment at workplace as their chief obstacle. A chi-square test was done to check if there exists a significant relationship between 'societal pressures, organisational culture and unsupportive work environment' and 'women who have to work harder to prove themselves'. The chi-square test (value was 16.89 at 5 per cent level with one degree of freedom) establishes here that both factors are very much dependant.

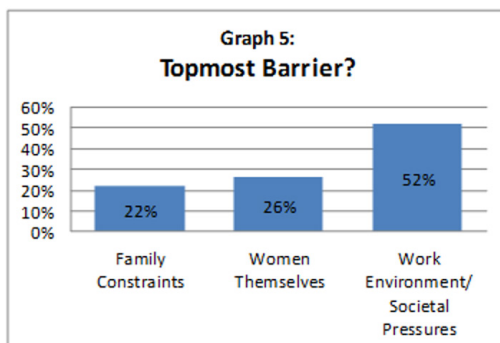


Figure 7. Topmost barrier

DISCUSSION

The important pronouncement about the prime barrier was found to be 'unsupportive work environment/societal pressures' with over 52% of the women managers across middle and senior levels supporting it. This is especially interesting as most of the research has repeatedly suggested that family constraint is the main barrier. Though that does remain an important barrier, the chief barrier in the present study was found to be 'unsupportive work environment/societal pressures' with family constraints showing a meagre 22% and women themselves 26%. This reveals a shift as it indicates that families are more supportive these days as compared to the past. Besides, women can and do make alternate arrangements to tackle family constraints but the workplace needs to take more effective measures and change their mind-sets and culture. Future research could include the men's perspectives to help strategise more inclusion at the top organisational strata despite the perception that men either present a rosier picture of acceptance of female executives especially at the higher most wrung or tend not to see the barriers (Carlson et al., 2009).

In addition to revisiting the barriers and identifying the current prime barrier, the present study addresses two research questions, namely: are women themselves responsible, and does lack of support from other women at the workplace act as a hindrance? In this context, the statement 'women are less self-assured and confident than men' received a vehement disagreement

from 84% of the respondents. Similarly, the response to the other query on whether ‘women lack the desire to advance to senior level’ also got a clear no with as high as 84% respondents not agreeing with it. On the issue of senior women not mentoring younger women, 75% of the women managers disagreed. Also the statement of successful, senior women opposing the rise of other women fetched a clean 75% disagreement from the respondents. Therefore the much publicised myth of ‘other women at the workplace obstructing their progress’ was busted. The detailed response is given in Table 4.

As mixed method research can “complement, develop, initiate, or expand a current or future study” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), the qualitative method (IDI) was used to develop the instrument to be employed for the quantitative method. The IDI gave a clear insight into how the women managers make sense of their reality by fully agreeing to the problem addressed and providing a window to the

impediments of the organisational climb that they experienced. This helped in building the questionnaire for the quantitative survey. Again, as mixed methods “can enhance the validity and reliability of findings” and test “pertinent results”, the qualitative study was “followed” by a quantitative study “on a wider population” leading to “triangulation” or “convergence in findings” (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The results of the survey conducted by the present study clearly indicate that though family constraints, including child rearing, remains a major barrier, unsupportive work environment and organisational culture are equally responsible or maybe more for the almost static figures from 2004 to 2015 representing progress. The quantitative results corroborate the initial findings of the qualitative IDI (which had also refuted that women themselves and other women at workplace were responsible for their limited growth and revealed that unsupportive work environment could be a bigger evil than family constraints) exhibiting convergence of findings.

Table 4
Women themselves or other women at the workplace

Barriers	SA	A	N	D	DA	% *
A Women are less self-assured and confident than men managers	7	12	15	44	56	0.84
B Women lack the desire to advance to senior level	10	9	13	54	48	0.84
C Women have to work harder to prove themselves	21	54	20	23	16	0.66
D Most senior women do not mentor younger women	7	20	27	59	21	0.75
E Women who succeed in male dominated work environments oppose the rise of other women to maintain their authority	7	21	29	54	24	0.73

[*Note: Percentages calculated after ignoring ‘neutral’ responses and finding the proportion of ‘yes’ to ‘no’.]

CONCLUSION

Like an encouraging family, a supportive work culture and environment can go a long way to help women finally break the glass ceiling and in more numbers. There is no denying to changing times, changing mind-sets, education, opportunities and steps forward but the change is probably not enough and definitely not adequate to see larger number of women at topmost levels. Research has repeatedly shown family limitation as the main barrier. But the present study indicates that women might be able to figure out ways to handle family demands but the workplace needs to be more open to change and diversity. The inner demons may still haunt the women occasionally but as the study showcases, lack of confidence, insecurities seem to be receding into history and as the women make giant strides towards their not-so-distant goal, other women at the workplace do not obstruct their scramble but, in contradiction to the inflated stereotypical perspective, support their sisters in their efforts.

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