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Existence of Glass Ceiling for Women: A Barrier in Effective Leadership

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Abstract

The extant literature on leadership imitates the traditional bias of leadership being a male domain. Arising out of a social structure, men assume leadership in organisations while women are often confined to work at home. Women are underrepresented in the leadership ranks across society. Research and the development of strategies to assist corporate women in breaking the glass ceiling are frequent and ongoing. The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical explanation for the persistence of the glass ceiling keeping women away from assuming leadership positions. The paper also provides implications of the literature for effective leadership and breaking of glass ceiling. A review of the existing literature was conducted to collect data through professional and academic journals of business and education as well as pertinent web sites. The secondary data available on the paycheck India were analysed. The present study showed that there was an existence of glass ceiling with a significant difference in average salary, designation and industry, which hindered women to be employed at managerial positions. Furthermore, the study revealed that the salary disparity between men and women is constricting over time. Research also showed that women handle emotions and relationships differently than men. Women were often more effective than men as managers since they frequently utilize intuitive and empathetic skills.

Keyword: Glass Ceiling, Salary Disparity, Designation Disparity, Industry Segregation, Leadership

Introduction

Gender biasness in economic activities is a matter of concern for any welfare, democratic, and developing state (Chaudhuri & Panigrahi, 2013). For decades, women have been playing multiple roles in their life. In India, women were expected to manage household responsibilities and virtually devote all their time, energy and dedication towards their families. Ironically, since ancient times women are ill-treated and low-graded (Chowdary *et al*., 2009). According to Sabatier (2010), glass ceiling is a result of gender discrimination, which like other forms of discrimination, is socially unacceptable. Several explanations for this phenomenon have been offered (Schruijer, 2006). The glass ceiling phenomenon may also generate negative incentives for women (because they are less likely to be promotedand therefore might invest less in their work), depriving the economy of human competencies that could be used more efficiently (Sabatier, 2010).

The term "glass ceiling" was coined in 1986 by the Wall Street Journal article to describe the condition of women who are moving up in managerial positions but due to "transparent but real barriers" based on discriminatory attitudes or organisational bias, are unable to reach to the top (Eagly & Carly, 2007; Gibelman, 2000). Kiaye & Singh (2013) described glass ceiling as an invisible barrier similar to a concrete ceiling that is impenetrable and prevents the attainment of women to senior levels of management.

The Indian Constitution states that women are legal citizens of the country and share equal rights with men

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(Chowdary *et al*., 2009). Yet equality for women in the workplace is presented in the literature as a distant reality (Sampson & Moore, 2008). Due to their access to education, women are finding employment at lower and middle management, but the tendency is not the same at the senior management level (Kiaye & Singh, 2013). Hoobler *et al*. (2009) emphasized that the "glass" allegory refers to the invisibility of the barriers women face that hinder their upward mobility in organisations, while the "ceiling" refers to barriers faced by them. Kiaye & Singh (2013) identified personal factors (lack of confidence, emotionally unsuited to progress, passive), situational/organisational factors (gender discrimination, lack of respect from male colleagues and insensitive handling of the multiple roles) and social role factors (family commitment and relocation) as clear barriers in the progress of women.

Colletti *et al*. (2000) found that men reported a slightly higher tendency to miss family activities because of job demands, while women were significantly more likely to miss work activities because of family responsibilities. Sabatier (2010) urged that while focusing on promotion, females seem to be under represented in senior positions and suggested that women face a glass ceiling that limits their promotion. According to Dreher (2003), at the level of firm performance, the glass-ceiling phenomenon presents problems for at least three reasons i.e. gender discrimination, lack of diversity and tight labour market conditions. Sampson & Moore (2008) found in their study that women held more of the lower-level administrative jobs as well as more of the director-level positions, while men held more of the senior management positions. These differences between salary and job title certainly pointed toward a glass ceiling for women.

Boon (2003) pointed out that it is a myth in Asia that European women are not capable of assuming managerial positions, because of the ongoing exclusion of women from these positions, however, in reality European women are found to be more effective than men as managers because they frequently utilise intuitive and empathetic skills that are highly valued in that region. Appelbaum *et al*. (2003) opted that woman's leadership style was different from men's. In other words, effective leadership was not the exclusive domain of either gender and both could learn from the other. The study also found that leadership styles of women were not at all less effective, in fact they were more effective within the context of team-based, consensually driven organisational structures that are more prevalent in today's world.

Review of Literature

Glass Ceiling as a Barrier in Overall Growth of Women

According to Kiaye & Singh (2013), the glass ceiling seems to be breaking, in that career opportunities exist for women and they are being fairly evaluated, but it is still very much a reality in organisations which need a multi-branched, multi-stakeholder approach to bring about true gender equity in senior management. Oti (2013) opted that women academicians were prepared for the odds the occupation offered, being a male-dominated occupation, though their career was generally slower compared with their male counterparts due to the pressure from marriage, childbearing and rearing, despite of the fact that they were intellectually not inferior to their male colleagues in any way. The study also concluded that academic women need to seek the support of their spouses, while parents need to encourage their female children to aspire against all social odds and academic men need to change their stereotype behaviour toward their female colleagues. Another study by Kiaye & Singh (2013) found that lack of recognition, support and respect highly contributed in the existence of glass ceiling in the Durban organisations. The study further identified that social role and situational barriers existed in the organisations and most of the female respondents believed that they were not respected by male colleagues which, is a form of gender discrimination.

Bhatt (2013) examined the incidence and nature of gender-based discrimination in American medicine. A majority of the women physicians' experienced gender-based discrimination at all levels in the medical workplace as residents, as faculty and in promotions to positions of power. Both women and men physicians in the sample reported fairly substantial gender discrimination from supervisors and coworkers in the workplace. Tai & Sims (2005) did a research to study employee gender and the positions held in high technology companies. The study concluded that women had same levels of education and experience, both of which were related to promotion, yet, women in the study sample were less likely to hold upper management positions. Also, men and women were both being promoted, but the levels of promotion achieved were different as women only achieved lower level management positions, whereas men achieved upper level positions. Elacqua *et al*. (2009) examined managers' potential implicit or explicit explanations for why women rarely reach the top hierarchical levels in their own organisation. The study found a strong relationship between perceptions of differential treatment and a glass ceiling for women than for men. Evers & Sieverding (2014) surveyed German male and female students and found that men had a substantially higher income than women. The results indicated that couples still divide their family responsibilities according to traditional gender roles that expect women to reduce or interrupt their career for family reasons. The findings further indicated that women seem to face higher career obstacles than men, because human capital variables were better rewarded for men than they were for women.

The pertinent literature on glass ceiling also highlights its positive relationship with job dissatisfaction, turnover intention, job stress, and ill health. Okpara *et al*. (2005) investigated the impact of gender differences on job satisfaction of university teachers in the United States and observed the employment of more female than male university teachers in the lower academic ranks. The study also suggested a difference in satisfaction levels of male and female university teachers as female university teachers were less satisfied than male teachers with their pay and promotion as well as with their supervisors since they were being deprived of adequate supervision and supportive feedback. Burke & Mckeen (1996) examined the impact of employment gaps on satisfaction and careers of managerial and professional women. University-educated women in managerial and professional jobs who had one or more gaps or interruptions in their work and career histories were less satisfied with their career and future career prospects, less involved in their jobs and were earning less income than managerial and professional women who had no career or work interruptions. Managerial women reported that employment gaps were more likely due to partners and children which resulted in greater household and family responsibilities.

Stroh (1996) investigated differential turnover rates between male and female managers employed by 20 Fortune 500 corporations. The study did not predict female managers' intentions to leave by their family structure (dual-earner status or number of children), but instead by perceptions of lack of career opportunity in their current company, job dissatisfaction and disloyalty to the current company. The study also concluded that females were leaving their organisations in higher proportions than males, and they were doing so for career-related concerns. Blomme *et al*. (2010) found the differences in the psychological contract and its relation to the intention to leave between highly-educated male and female employees. In the study, it appeared that for women in particular, promotion opportunities and work-family balance were related to turnover intentions while for men the clarity of the job description was an important predictor for leaving.

Lyness & Judiesch (2001) examined the relationships of gender, promotions, and leaves of absence to voluntary turnover for 26,359 managers in a financial services organisation and noticed female managers' voluntary turnover rates slightly lower than those of their male counterparts. Further, the managers who had been promoted were less likely to resign than non-promoted managers and promoted women were less likely to resign than promoted men. The study also found that managers who had taken family leaves had higher voluntary turnover rates than managers who had not taken leaves, and among family leave takers, managers with graduate degrees were less likely to resign than managers with less education. Ozer & Gunluk (2010) investigated the links between perceived discrimination, job satisfaction, and turnover intention among public accounting firms in Turkey. The study concluded that when perceived discrimination increases, job satisfaction decreases; when job satisfaction increases, turnover intention decreases; and when perceived discrimination increases turnover intention increases too. While studying the sample of members of a US-based national women executive association, Jawahar & Hemmasi (2006) emphasized that perceived organisational support for women's advancement negatively related to turnover intentions of professional women; employer satisfaction more strongly related to turnover intentions than job satisfaction; employer satisfaction mediated the support-turnover relationship more strongly than job satisfaction; organisational support for women's advancement related to turnover intentions; and employer satisfaction had a strong negative effect on turnover intentions.

Glass Ceiling as a Barrier in Effective Leadership

According to Still (2006), despite 30 years of considerable legislative, policy and social change in the equity area, women had not attained leadership positions in any significant numbers in Australia. Rohmann & Rowold

(2009) showed that female leaders were perceived as exhibiting more transformational leadership behaviour than male leaders. Moreover, female leaders were evaluated as more effective and as producing more satisfaction than their male counterparts. Cormier (2007) explained why top women leaders still feel like outsiders in their organisations and identified strategies for retaining and supporting women in leadership today. The interviews conducted with 40 successful women chief operating officers, vice presidents, directors and senior managers represented industries including pharmaceuticals, healthcare, manufacturing, high tech, and higher education in the USA and Europe who had broken through the glass ceiling. The chief force for women leaders' dissatisfaction was that they did not feel fully integrated as leaders, due to not fitting in as equals in the leadership ranks, a lack of networks, and low social capital experienced by these women leaders.

Sikdar & Mitra (2012) explained women leadership in organisations in the UAE, a part of the Arab world of the Middle East, from the perspective of gender-role stereotypes as opposed to traditional sex-role biases, to bring women leaders into the mainstream gender literature. The findings indicated that within organisations in the UAE, employee feedback highlighted gender-role stereotypes as defining leadership roles, rather than individual biological sex and their traditional family and social role. The findings revealed that in the UAE, gender stereotypes influenced leadership intention and behaviour rather than individual biological sex and related traditions. Accordingly, women leaders having higher proportions of "agentic" characteristics of male gender stereotype together with lower proportions of "people orientation" of female gender stereotype, make successful leaders in the UAE breaking the well-known "glass ceiling". It explains the emergence of an increasing number of women leaders in the UAE. Chao (2011) contributed to the knowledge of organisational communication and cross-cultural leadership by examining the relationship between cultural values and expected female leadership styles in non-profit organisations in Taiwan and the US with a sample of 307 Rotarians. The research results identified that female leaders often need to behave much more progressively and actively and sometimes make necessary compromises of their female qualities to overcome the barriers in their career path.

Dunn (2007) examined the role of the female British Army officers to determine whether they led in different ways compared to male Army officers. Semi-structured interviews with 24 Army officers (split equally between men and women) disclosed that women and men Army officers interviewed lead in different ways with women demonstrating a gender management aspect to their leadership. The research also identified that women officers experienced an "armoured glass ceiling" in terms of their career progression. Burke & Collins (2001) suggested that self-reported leadership styles of female accountants differ somewhat from the leadership styles reported by the male accountants as females were more likely than males to indicate that they use an interactive style of management called transformational leadership which was found to be correlated with several management skills associated with success. Female accountants reported somewhat higher perceived effectiveness on two of these management skills: 'coaching and developing' and 'communicating', but received more developmental opportunities than the male colleagues. Jogulu & Wood (2008) focused on evaluating the leadership styles of managerial women while exploring female and male peer evaluations of leadership effectiveness through a survey of 324 middle managers from Malaysia and Australia. The findings highlighted that evaluations of female managers' leadership styles in Malaysia were strongly culture specific in general as well as within the respondent's own organisations, reflecting the strongly held values, attitudes and beliefs of each country. In addition, Malaysian female managers were not seen as effective in the leadership styles they adopted in their roles when compared to the Australian female managers', however, such an evaluation had little to do with an objective appraisal of the female managers' capability, but rather with a strongly held cultural belief about the appropriate role of women in society and particularly in organisations.

Appelbaum *et al.* (2013) discovered why gender plays a significant role in attaining leadership positions and whether one gender was more effective than the other on certain dimensions. The study suggested that the most effective leadership style was transformational leadership that was most often associated with women, and certain behavioural traits of female managers like empathy, supportiveness and relationship building were more effective when dealing with employees as compared to other traits such as vision where male managers ranked better than female managers.

Research Methodology

The present paper analysed data collected from the Paycheck India web survey (www.paycheck.in). Paycheck India is Wage Indicator's Indian website, which collects data through an online survey questionnaire on continuous and voluntary basis. The data were confined to the organised sector in India, wherein responses were taken from 21,552 employed individuals including both male and female respondents from different age groups, varied industries, and various hierarchical positions in their respective occupations, collected over a period of 7.5 years (2006 to 2013). Out of the 21,552 responses, 18,043 were males and 3,509 were females. The year-wise gender distribution of the overall respondents during the period of survey showed that the ratio of male to female respondents has been 5:1 on an average.

Results

The primary objective of the study is to identify the presence of glass ceiling for women in India. The study analysed wage differentials between genders, difference in ratio of gender with regard to hierarchy, and difference in ratio of gender in various industries. Average salaries (median) for males and females have been used to analyse the data in order to find out the percentage difference in earnings. The survey examined 3,509 women (16 percent) and 18,043 men (84 percent).

Salary Disparity Among Gender

To analyse the disparity between male and female salaries and to know the parity between salaries of both the genders, year-wise data was analysed.

Graph 1: Salary Distribution for Male and Female

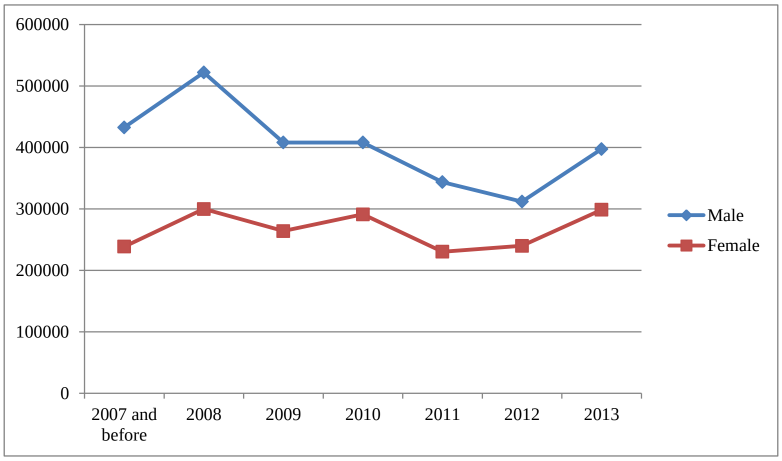


Table 1: Year-Wise Salary Analysis

S. No.	Year	Median salary per annum in Rs.		% Difference in salary of females from male
		Male	Female	
1.	2007 and before	4,32,600	2,38,800	-44.80
2.	2008	5,22,000	3,00,000	-42.53
3.	2009	4,08,000	2,64,000	-35.29
4.	2010	4,08,000	2,91,264	-28.61
5.	2011	3,43,728	2,30,400	-32.97
6.	2012	3,12,000	2,40,000	-23.08
7.	2013	3,97,368	2,98,800	-24.81

Source: Paycheck India Report

Table 2: Gender Disparity with Respect to Designation in Occupational Hierarchy

S. No.	*Designation/Position/Level in occupational hierarchy*	*Number of males*	*Number of females*	*% Difference in number of females from males*
1.	Head	1,580	208	-86.83
2.	Supervisor	885	104	-88.25
3.	Team leader	2,121	243	-88.54
4.	Senior	3,354	540	-83.89
5.	Trainer	242	58	-76.03
6.	Junior	707	203	-71.28
7.	Assistant	1193	404	-66.13
8.	Trainee	3322	771	-76.79

Source: Paycheck India Report

The gender pay gap is computed according to the formula:

$$\text{Pay Gap} = \frac{\text{Median Wage}_{female} - \text{Median Wage}_{male}}{\text{Median Wage}_{male}} * 100\%$$

Table 1 depicts that females earned 44.80% less than males during and before 2007. However, since 2008, the gap has been constantly decreasing. But the gap still continues to be at an alarming rate of 24.81% in 2013. This study indicates that a salary disparity exists between male and female in the organised sector of India. The difference between these average salaries is significant. Graph 1 shows the distribution of female's and male's salaries in India over 7.5 years. It is evident from Graph 1 that women hold a larger number of low-paying jobs in the field and men hold more of the high paying jobs in the field.

Designation Disparity in Occupational Hierarchy Among Gender

Over the last 30 years the proportion of women in lower and mid-level management positions has increased dramatically, although the proportion of women reaching top management positions has remained relatively small (Powell, 1999). Hymowitz & Schellhardt (1986) first used the glass-ceiling metaphor to describe an

Graph 2: Job Level Category by Gender

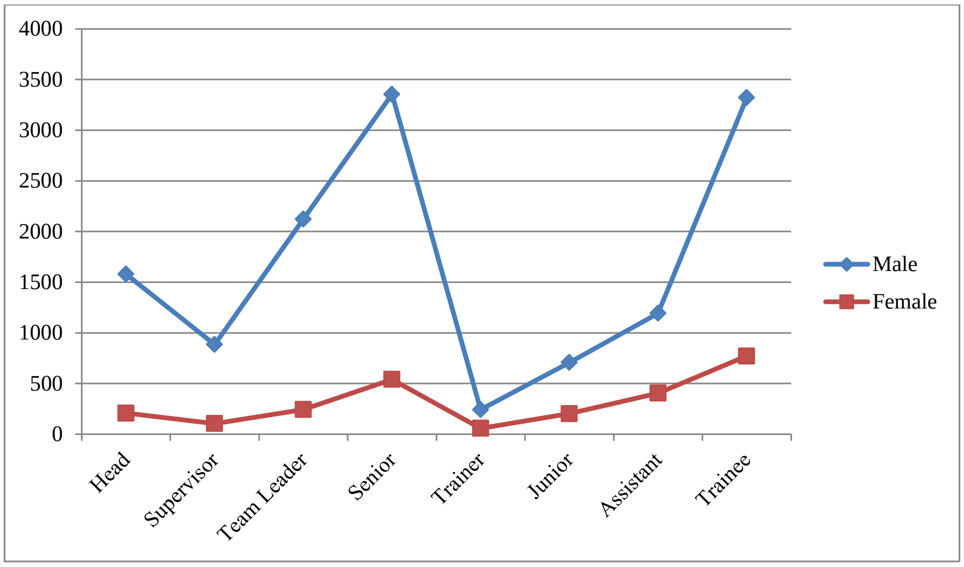


Table 3: Gender Disparity with Respect to Industry

S. No.	Industry	Number of males	Number of females	% Difference in number of females from males
1.	Mining & Quarrying	91	16	-82.41
2.	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	117	24	-79.48
3.	Accommodation & Food Service Activities	245	75	-69.38
4.	Administrative & Support Service Activities	523	104	-80.11
5.	Public Administration and Defense	89	27	-69.66
6.	Education	525	229	-56.38
7.	Wholesale & Retail Trade	690	136	-80.28
8.	Financial & Insurance Activities	1978	332	-83.21
9.	Other Service Activities	155	58	-62.58
10.	Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities	1747	429	-75.44
11.	Real Estate Activities	175	42	-76
12.	Human Health & Social Work Activities	401	146	-63.59
13.	Construction	839	122	-85.45
14.	Information & Communication	3992	626	-84.31
15.	Manufacturing	3372	484	-85.64
16.	Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	112	35	-68.75

Source: Paycheck India Report

impediment in organisational hierarchies, just below the top management level, that prevents or constrains women from rising into the ranks of senior management. Table 2 analyses the gender disparity with respect to position in the occupational hierarchy.

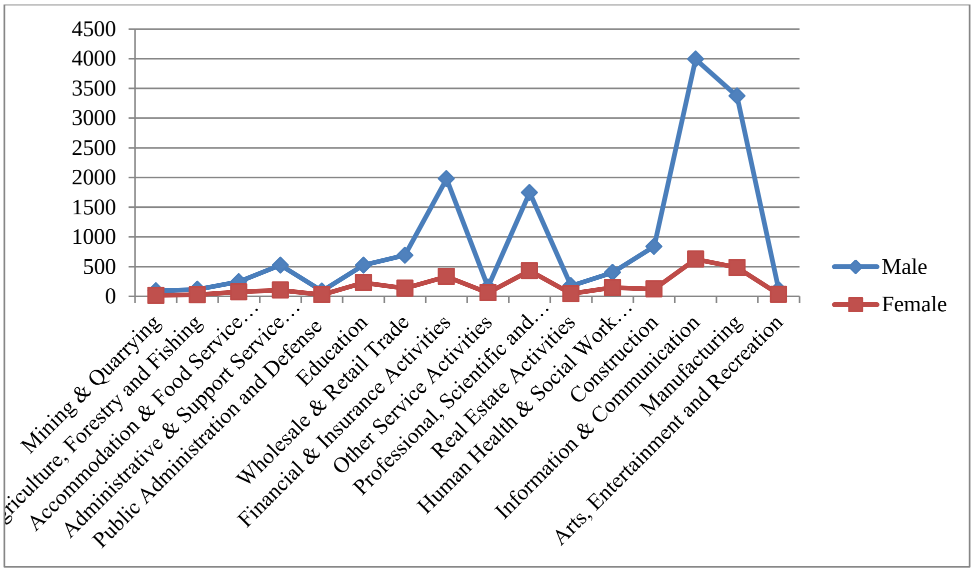
Table 2 shows that there is significant difference in the number of male and female employees in the organised sector of India. The results highlight a huge difference at the designation level of 'team leader'(88.54%),'supe rvisor'(88.25%),'head'(86.83%) and 'senior' (83.89%). On the whole, it is evident that glass ceiling exists at the managerial level. A graphical representation of gender disparity based on designation is shown in Graph 2.

Gender Disparity with Respect to Industry

Gender discrimination in economic activities is a matter of concern for any welfare, democratic, and developing state. Equal opportunity and compensation to female workforce should be promoted in the governmental policies of such states. The female workforce participation varies across socio-economic, demographic, and cultural backgrounds, with respect to geographical region. It has been observed that despite of higher level of literacy and educational level, the share of women in the labour force is poor. Indian society is believed to be male-dominated. Lower value for women in the society or family may be a cause for their invisibility in economic activities of the country (Chaudhuri & Panigrahi, 2013). The jobs of men and women differ to a great extent across sectors, industries, occupations, types of jobs and types of firms. Table 3 shows the gender disparity in India with respect to industry.

On the basis of results shown in Table 3, it can be concluded that all industries are facing a gender gap crisis, but the percentage difference is the highest in the'manufacturing industry' by 85.64%, followed by 'construction industry' and 'information and communication industry' by 85.45% and 84.31%, respectively. This employment segregation in different industries based on gender explains the presence of glass ceiling. Graph 3 is a graphical depiction of the industry-wise analysis of the gender disparity.

Graph 3: Gender Disparity with Respect to Industry



Practical Implications

It is pertinent to note that though women are entering into economic activities in significant numbers, they are still a minority. Furthermore, the culture of economy is still very much dictated by male dominion. Besides these, the lives of female workforce is also shaped and greatly influenced by the culture and their experiences at home. In fact, it has a long lasting effect on how far they go in aspiring to lead or sustaining in a leadership position. Women's desire and aspiration to lead is also shaped by the relationships shared by them as this goes a long way in building their self-confidence. Moreover, if women really desire to lead, especially in a male-dominated environment, they must learn how to gain the support of their male colleagues through their everlasting enthusiasm and commitment to work and excel.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the organisations must break the glass ceiling by paying both genders comparable salaries for comparable work responsibilities. This would be helpful in effective leadership and also increase satisfaction, retention, performance and productivity while reducing turnover and absenteeism. It is in the best interests of organisation to retain and promote the best-qualified employees regardless of their gender. Therefore, promotion decisions should be based on performance and not on gender biasness for which organisational leaders should ensure that performance evaluations are just and fair. Promotions based on performance evaluations will be perceived by employees as being fair and equitable and would enhance performance, give a greater degree of job satisfaction and, ultimately, lead to higher productivity and commitment.

Findings also suggest that there are more men in the senior ranks than women. It is therefore recommended that management must encourage women to advance at senior ranks, that is, middle and top management positions in their respective disciplines. A significant study by Cafferella *et al*. (1997) focused on female middle managers within corporations that supported the fact that women in leadership roles "focused on the importance of participation, collaborative interaction and knowing and embracing the different styles of their people", which are extremely important in allowing individual potential to develop within organisations. Many of the attributes for which women's leadership is praised are rooted in women's socialised roles. The traditional female values of caring for others, balanced with sufficient objectivity, are the basis of the management skill of supporting and encouraging people and bringing out their best (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). Corporations are slow in identifying these skills that women bring to the organisation, and women are well-advised to advertise such abilities. Thus, organisations must take a proactive role to identify whether the glass-ceiling phenomenon is operating within their organisation and lead the way to find solutions to overcome it.

The present study implicate that, in addition to legislation which mandates quotas to ensure women's representation at senior level, societal education to influence changes in perceptions of gender role stereotyping will go a long way towards facilitating women's entry into senior position. Finally, it is recommended that the management should designate the female employees in the higher ranks as mentors to others so as to make them more visible as leaders in their field.

Conclusion

The issue of gender disparity is imperative because it affects a significant portion of the working population. Though there are various reasons contributing to this disparity, the existence of such a gap is unconstitutional and therefore, this gap needs to be bridged through public policy interventions. The gender pay disparity computed in terms of national average (annual gross salary) has been narrowing over the years, but it is still very high as reflected by the results of the study showing that women before 2007 earned 45% less than men, whereas till 2013 the gap is reduced to 24.81%. Gender disparity with respect to designation showed significant difference in the ratio of male and female employees for all managerial levels, that is, 'team leader', 'supervisor', 'head' and 'senior'. Industry-wise segregation in employment further explained the presence of glass ceiling in all industries, with the maximum difference in the 'manufacturing industry', 'construction industry', and 'information and communication industry'.

Glass ceiling hinders the progression of women at leadership positions. The literature review reveals that women handle emotions and relationships differently and better than men. Women's empathy and insight is receiving boardroom attention as companies realize that these skills are indispensable in an ever-globalising world (Boon, 2003). Over time, glass ceiling has got institutionalised, but it's time now to focus on reducing its adverse impact on the society. If these issues are not contained right now, then the problem of the glass ceiling in the Indian society can aggravate further. Thus, policy-level interventions will have to be complemented with changes in socio-cultural factors as well.

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