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Glass Ceiling: A Study of Women in Senior Management Roles within the Mauritian Banking Sector

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Abstract

Are females viewed as key assets in leadership today or are they merely 'indoctrinated slaves' serving the company in lower positions, to the commands of men? Years have elapsed since the term 'Glass Ceiling' surfaced to describe the inferiority of women as compared to males and this gender disadvantage, peculiarly with regards to rising above a certain level, is still very much perceptible within organisations. On a global plane, this conundrum is verily present and for the sake of this paper, the focus is on the Mauritian Banking Sector wherein this effect shall be studied with respect to female employees. This study shall have as focal point the level to which glass ceiling factors result into the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions within Mauritian Banks. Being a highly flourishing domain, Banking has been chosen given that we still have not seen the emergence of a female chief executive in a Mauritian Bank. The study, targeted to survey 250 female bankers, emerged with glaring results which ultimately culminated into recommendations to Banks in the form of Flexible Work Arrangements, Equitable Workplace Environment and early promotions inter-alia to better the representation of women in senior positions.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Women, Mauritian Banking Sector, Senior Positions.

Introduction

Going back millennia in the history, women's roles within the society proved to be mainly limited to their households. This retrogressive pattern knew a metamorphosis only when women were able to break the shackles of the taboo revolving around their responsibilities being restricted to households. In the wake of the astronomical steps taken by women worldwide, there has been the spark of global topics such as Gender Equality which marked its prominence, peculiarly within the realm of employment and career advancement. However, despite the leaps of advancements taken by women within their careers, we are still faced with the question – "Has the summum bonum of gender equality been attained? Are women now at par with men?"

It is still not unwonted to seeing women executing the same amount of work as male colleagues whilst holding the same credentials but yet being faced to a very meagre possibility for them to be promoted to a senior position. Often, we witness that a qualified person wishing to climb the stairs of the organisational hierarchy is impeded due to discrimination, most likely based on race or gender (Rath&Mishra, 2022). This is actually termed as Glass Ceiling which reflects vertical discrimination, most frequently against females, encumbering them from striding beyond a certain level within the company due to the gender biases or in the words of Dhote et al. (2023), it is "an invisible barrier preventing them from further ascending within their careers."

It is surmised that this is mainly a concern for the less developed economies however, the advanced economies are not any immune to same and even though Glass Ceiling (hereinafter GC) is perceived just as a fallacy by many, it remains a verity effectively encapsulated within "many organisational cultures, policies and strategies besides women's own inadequacies" (Misra et al., 2012).

"Glass ceiling, sticky floor, pink collars refer to some disparaging colloquial terms" connoting the unbalanced ratio of men at the driving seat of large organisations whilst women still have to attain workplace equality regardless of the array of promises made with respect to equality, asseverating ostensibly that all people are equal, deserving "equal rights, equal opportunities and equal pay for equal effort" (Earl, 2019). Women are often burdened with the responsibility to continuously prove themselves by being lean and mean but, the stigma of not being strong leaders in a quasi-chauvinistic society still inhibits them.

Notwithstanding the significant strides being made towards gender equity in various sectors, women continue to encounter pervasive barriers that hinder their access to and progression within leadership and senior management roles. One such barrier, often termed as glass ceiling "is a metaphor used to represent an invisible barrier that describes unfairly discriminatory practices…preventing women from achieving higher positions in a job, specific field of work, or organisation, etc." (Dhote et al., 2023).

The gender disparities evident in management and leadership roles stand as a global concern. Despite significant progress in education and workforce participation, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions across diverse industries worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2020). This underrepresentation extends to senior management roles, which has a cascading effect on the overall gender balance in organisations.

In the context of banking and finance, the issue is especially glaring. In fact, "in many countries, women represent nearly half of the financial services industry" (Catalyst, cited in Shaji et al., 2021) however, the financial sector has historically been characterized by a pronounced gender gap, with women facing considerable challenges in accessing executive and managerial positions. This gender imbalance has been perpetuated by various factors, including entrenched gender biases, workplace cultures that favor traditional male leadership styles, and limited opportunities for mentoring and sponsorship (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990).

Suntoo (2019) opines that "the percentage of women in senior levels is growing slowly. At this little pace, the parity with men would not be reached for decades." The Investment and Financial Services sector encompasses 52% of female population, showing a remarkable headway (Marketlinks, 2023) but it remains incandescent of a trend to see that the limits of the strides being mainly to junior positions within the Banking sector whilst they have diminishing imprints in ascending corporate levels.

This gender disparity within the Mauritian banking sector is not just a local phenomenon but reflects broader global patterns. It raises salient questions about the equitable distribution of power and opportunities within organisations and the potential impact on organisational culture, performance, and effectiveness. As a vibrant and vital component of the nation's economy, the Mauritian banking sector is a driving engine of the country's financial landscape and economic growth. However, beneath this outward success story lies a gender imbalance in the sector's leadership, representing a microcosm of the broader gender inequality issue in Mauritius.

Gender inequality in leadership and management positions is a persistent issue globally, being deep-seated to societal and organisational biases. The underrepresentation of women in senior roles remains a significant challenge in various industries, including the banking sector. In the context of Mauritius, a nation with a rapidly growing economy, the banking sector stands as a critical contributor. However, there still appears to be lesser women in management ranks as compared to males.

This underrepresentation of females in management roles comes up with critical reflections on the distribution of power and opportunities within the sector, as well as the potential consequences for organisational performance and effectiveness. To date, there is a scarcity of empirical researches that comprehensively examine the experiences and challenges of women in management roles within the Mauritian banking sector.

The research aims to bridge this knowledge gap by investigating the representation of females in senior management roles, identifying the barriers they face in career advancement and proposing strategies for promoting gender equality within the Mauritian banking sector. By so doing, it aims to providing valuable viewpoints that can inform policies and practices triggered towards reducing the impact of the glass ceiling, fostering more gender equality and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the sector.

By addressing these issues within the Mauritian banking sector, this study contributes not only to the advancement of gender equity in this specific context but also adds to the broader discourse on gender diversity in leadership, which is crucial for creating more inclusive and effective organisations worldwide. This study assesses the extent to which women are underrepresented at the highest levels in the banking sector in Mauritius, ceteris paribus. Hence, assessing what are the possible causes?

In line with the aims of this paper, its research objectives are firstly to acknowledge and understand the concept of glass ceiling in the workplace, mainly with respect to the Banking sector, to assess the distribution of females across the different levels of the hierarchy within the Sector and investigate factors which are impeding their movement, to gather the opinions of employees regarding the representation of women at the highest levels within this sector and lastly to make recommendations to the management of the banks to enhance the promotion of women in the banking field.

The examination of gender disparities in management within the Mauritian banking sector is imperative for several reasons, adhering with international commitments and initiatives. Secondly, promoting gender diversity in leadership positions can lead to improved decision-making, enhanced corporate governance, and ultimately, better organisational performance (Catalyst, 2011 cited in McKinsey & Company, 2020). By addressing the gender imbalance in management roles, the Mauritian banking sector can potentially unlock significant economic and social benefits.

Moreover, the Mauritian government has continuously endeavoured to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through various policies and initiatives. However, there are insufficient empirical materials which examine the status of women in management roles within the Mauritian banking sector. This research purports to bridge this gap by establishing a comprehensive understanding of the see-saws encountered by women within the sector.

The study will be one of a limited number of studies carried on the topic and as such, it will shed extra light on glass ceiling factors restricting the access of women to management roles in the banking sector; the extent to which glass ceilings are present in financial organisations; on whether the limited presence of women in management positions is due to women's inadequacies or the glass ceiling or if it is a combination of both. Through this study, there lies the aim to spotlight the growth barriers to which banking institutions are exposed and which, entails the possible glass ceiling towards women.

Review of Literature

The recent years have evidenced the emergence of an increasing tendency towards gender diversity within the workplace with organisations progressively acknowledging the importance of having a varied talent pool. Notwithstanding the advancements made, there continues to be a conspicuous lack of female representation in leadership positions, notably within the banking industry. In fact, when we consider the Mauritian banking sector, it remains indubitable that women have made significant leaps but underneath this stride lies the question as to why Mauritian banks have not yet witnessed the day where a woman has undertaken the position of a Chief Executive. This chapter shall provide a detailed anatomy of glass ceiling within the said sector and the many underlying concepts associated with it whilst establishing the different correlations with regards to factors piquing this effect.

The comprehensive analysis of gender and gender differences may be possible with the aid of the numerous theories and studies which have been effectuated within this realm. Cotter et al. (2001) have expounded that a significant correlation exists between glass ceiling and gender. This section shall have as nucleus certain theories relating to glass ceiling.

Social Role Theory

Ridgeway (2001) explains that "Eagly's (1987) social role theory argues that widely shared gender stereotypes develop from the gender division of labor that characterizes a society." Extrapolating from this explanation, the social role theory outlines that gender differences and similarities are mainly deep-rooted to the social roles assumed by both genders.

As a matter of fact, the surfacing of glass ceiling is linked "to gendered social systems where work was 'designed by men and for men' and where patriarchy described work roles in terms of gender, has resulted in stereotyping" (Ertan & Cavlan, 2020). The authors further explain how the stereotyping of women as kind and caring whilst males are viewed as strong and achievement-oriented has triggered the "think leader, think male" mentality. Ertan & Cavlan, 2020). Morgenroth and Ryan (2018) share the viewpoint that "these gender stereotypes stem from the fact that women and men are over- and underrepresented in different roles in society" – with women overrepresented in domestic roles and underrepresented in leadership ones as compared to men. Eagly and Wood (2012) further stipulate that understanding the sources of role asymmetries mirrors a futuristic challenge for the champions of gender equality given that studies have revealed "that gender stereotyping has a negative impact on the career prospects of women" (Erthan & Cavlan, 2020).

Role Congruity Theory

TheRole Congruity Theory (RCT) was conceived in 2002 by Early and Karau to establish how and why prejudices are developed against women leaders (Carmen et al., 2023). The authors have davantage glossed how this Theory has gained increasing attention amidst Management scholars who try to apply it for considering the consequences resulting from these gender-based prejudices. Eagly and Karau (2002) explicate that "to the extent that leader roles are less masculine, they would be more congruent with the female gender role, and therefore the tendency to view women as less qualified than men should weaken or even disappear." Ertan and Cavlan (2020) also add that "the role of incongruity for women in leadership positions arising from glass ceiling creates prejudices that produce barriers for promotion and their effectiveness at top management positions."

Gender Conflict Theory

Having emerged from a myriad of empirical theories developed, the GRC Theory "is defined as a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others." Boundless (2020) further explains that under this theory, men are deemed to be in dominance over women who are subordinates and according to "this theory, social problems are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups. Therefore, their approach is normative in that it prescribes changes to the power structure, advocating a balance of power between genders."

Workplace Discrimination

In Babic and Hansez (2021)'s viewpoint, males and females are often exposed to differential treatments within the workplace. Workplace discrimination encompasses a range of manifestations, including explicit kinds like harassment as well as more nuanced instances such as being overlooked for advancement opportunities or being allocated less desired responsibilities. It is suggested that "perceiving differences in a company's treatment of women would lead workers to believe that there is a glass ceiling in the company" (Babic&Hansez, 2021).

This barrier suggests the first criterion as put forth by Cotter et al. (2001). According to a 2023 report from the McKinsey & Company, "for every 100 men hired and promoted to manager, only 87 women advance" (Pazzanese, 2023). Within the Pakistan Banking sector as well, Khalid and Ijaz (2019) suggest that "jobs requiring similar skills, qualifications or experience tend to be poorly paid and undervalued when they are dominated by women rather than by men."

When we talk of workplace discrimination, there is this idea where "women are performing the same as men, but their performance is discounted or even evaluated more poorly even though it's exactly the same" on grounds of their gender (Lockert, 2022). Additionally, when it comes to promotional aspects, workplace discrimination renders women as being least favored. As explained by Larsen (2012), "the glass ceiling asserts that there is a limit to how high women and minorities can be promoted." McKinsey & Company (2023) explains that the outnumbering of women by men leads to fewer women in management roles and hence, there is a decreasing trend of women at every subsequent stage. Shaji and Joseph (2021) further add that GC at the workplace is triggered by differential treatment of women and that "another barrier is the paucity of qualified women in the pipeline to be considered for promotion."The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H1: Workplace discrimination will have a positive effect on the underrepresentation of woman in senior management roles.

Gender Stereotype and Unconscious Bias

Gender stereotypes refer to commonly accepted views on the suitable duties and behaviours that are expected of individuals based on their gender (Eagly & Carli, 2011). Khadri et al. (2023) allude to recent evidences to bolster their cause that the wide perspective of women not being suitable for the position of manager is one of the main issues faced by the females. Parallelly, studies have evinced that the disclosure of a woman being a mother leads to biased screening and selection criteria (Heilman et al., 2015).

Another instance illustrating this phenomenon is a study conducted by the Harvard Business School, which revealed that women are subject to lower rates of promotion endorsement compared to males, even when their credentials and experience are same (Moss-Kanter, 2007). The observed phenomenon may be attributed to unconscious prejudice, as shown by the study's findings indicating that managers had a greater tendency to connect leadership attributes with male individuals as opposed to their female counterparts. Balabantaray (2023) explains that "the perception of women as being less competent or suitable for leadership roles can have a significant impact on their ability to advance in their careers."

Furthermore, the presence of stereotypes may give rise to unconscious biases, which in turn have the potential to impact decision-making processes pertaining to recruitment, advancement, and compensation (Catalyst, 2023). In fact, the concept of unconscious bias pertains to the innate and sometimes inadvertent preconceptions and biases that are universally present among individuals (Catalyst, 2023). The impact of decision-making might manifest in several manners, including our perception and engagement with others. ILM (2023) has rightly put it as "I wonder sometimes, quite honestly, when a role comes up and you get a woman going for it… whether they would just err more to the male application. It's that kind of unconscious bias."

Murray (2011) posits that "Unconscious bias is hard to avoid" and it may assume an example as evident as women exhibiting a higher probability of experiencing interruptions and being spoken over during meetings in comparison to males. Venkatesen (2020) shares the idea that the functioning at workplaces may be hobbled by

these biases and organisations have tried to action to uproot this issue from the source, normally by way of unconscious bias training. Nonetheless, Kulik and Rae

(2019) lament that "there is little evidence that this kind of training has a direct effect on women's representation in senior management roles and it may even inadvertently normalize decision-makers' stereotype use." Pazzanese (2023) adds that "backlash for counter-stereotypical actions, unfortunately, still is real." The following is therefore proposed:

H2: Gender Stereotypes and Gender Bias will have a positive effect on the underrepresentation of woman in senior management roles.

Self-Imposed Barriers

Rajesh and Emmanuel (2019) assert that "the self-confidence of an individual in his/her capabilities needs recognition and reassurance from others as well" and this aspect seems to be a lacuna with regards to women within the Banking Sector. Pazzanese (2023) explicates that given leadership is still mainly associated with men, some females prefer evading the "sandwich position" where bias is present both at below and upper levels. Ganiyu et al. (2018) add that women are reportedly less ambitious than men, impeding their movement across the career ladder. In the same wavelength, Kulik and Rae (2019) elucidate that over time, women tend to succumb to the GC and their ambitions to advancing downs. The authors state further that "if enough women opt out, or opt down, before reaching senior management levels, their organisations will not display the accelerating gender gap in promotions that defines a glass ceiling." In fact, it is believed that "women often opt out of careers in banking due to a perceived lack of work/life balance and incompatibility with family life" (ILM, n.d.).

Moreover, women find it easier to change organisations when they notice the prevalence of glass ceiling within their organisations and "unfortunately, women who do secure senior-level roles by changing organisations are likely to do so in less desirable organisations—organisations with higher turnover and lower average management salaries or organisations in precarious financial situations" (Kulik and Rae, 2019). One such vivid instance would be Mrs. Flournoy opting out of Pentagon and when "asked what plans she has made for her life after the Pentagon, Flournoy said, 'Absolutely none,' other than catching up on sleep and spending more time with her children" (Politico, 2011).

H3: Self-imposed barriers will have a positive effect on the underrepresentation of woman in senior management roles.

Lack of Role Models

The dearth of female role models in executive leadership positions might provide challenges for women in seeing themselves in such roles. This phenomenon may be attributed to the need for women to have visual representation of themselves in positions of leadership, as it fosters a sense of possibility and belief in their own potential to attain such positions. Rajesh and Emmanuel (2021) expound that "in banks, there are very few women who are senior enough to serve as role models and mentors to a large number of aspiring women who enter banks every year."

Alternatively, "women having attained visibility in top positions of the corporate hierarchy could weaken traditional stereotypes claiming female managers are less capable than male managers, thereby weakening a formidable barrier to the advancement of women in the workplace" (Kurtulus and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). From a research effectuated by the University of California, Berkeley, it was observed that women have a higher inclination towards aspiring for leadership roles when they have female figures serving as their role models (Eagly & Carli, 2011). The research furthermore revealed that women who possess female role models have a higher propensity to attain positions of leadership.

H4: Lack of role models will have a positive effect on the underrepresentation of woman in senior management roles.

Work-Life Balance

It is believed that females are faced with higher difficulties than males with respect to work-life balance. It is still common to see the triple burden being carried by women, with women outnumbering men in opting for parental leaves. Khalid and Ijaz (2019) add that "consequently, women have more career interruptions or work shorter hours than men," having a brunt "on their career development and promotion prospects." The prevalence of extended working hours and a pervasive culture of excessive effort in several industries might

provide challenges for women in effectively managing their professional and personal responsibilities. This might provide a specific problem for women who fulfil the role of mothers.

A study by the Pew Research Centre in 2015 unveiled that a majority of women (58%) reported facing challenges in achieving a work-life balance, but a smaller proportion of males (37%) expressed similar difficulties (Pew Research Centre, 2015). The research further revealed that moms have a higher propensity compared to dads in expressing the challenges associated with achieving a work-life balance. Khadri et al. (2023) expound that "women's commitment to family has been considered as one of the factors that restricted women from climbing the top ladder position."

H5: Work-life balance will have a positive effect on the underrepresentation of woman in senior management roles.

Organisational Culture

The influence of organisational culture on the existence of the glass barrier for women should also be acknowledged. The absence of inclusivity and support within a culture might pose challenges for women in their pursuit of professional progression. In Shaji et al.'s view (2020) "the organisational culture in which an employee works can act as a barrier to women employees." It is mainly within cultures cultivating diverging perceptions and treatment of male and female that are found glass ceiling and its perceptions. A research by ILM showed that 61% of women viewed their current organisational culture as a deterrent to move to senior management levels (ILM, n.d.).

Maheshwari and Lenka (2022) are of the opinion that "the sexist organisational culture may also encourage senior women managers to indulge in queen bee behavior." In fact, female managers do place hurdles in the path of other women seeking to climb the ladder "including the fallacy of oneself as a reference i.e. female managers' inner voices telling them 'If I made it so high up in my career, then others can follow suit and do the same. There is no need to treat them differently." Shaji et al. (2020) outline that a key barrier leading to GC is the "lack of senior management commitment to career advancement of women along with complex organisational structure."

H6: Organisational Culture will have a positive effect on the underrepresentation of woman in senior management roles.

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework which incorporates the concepts and variables as described with this section. The purpose of this conceptual framework is to provide a clear understanding of the fundamental elements that impact the representation of women in senior management roles.
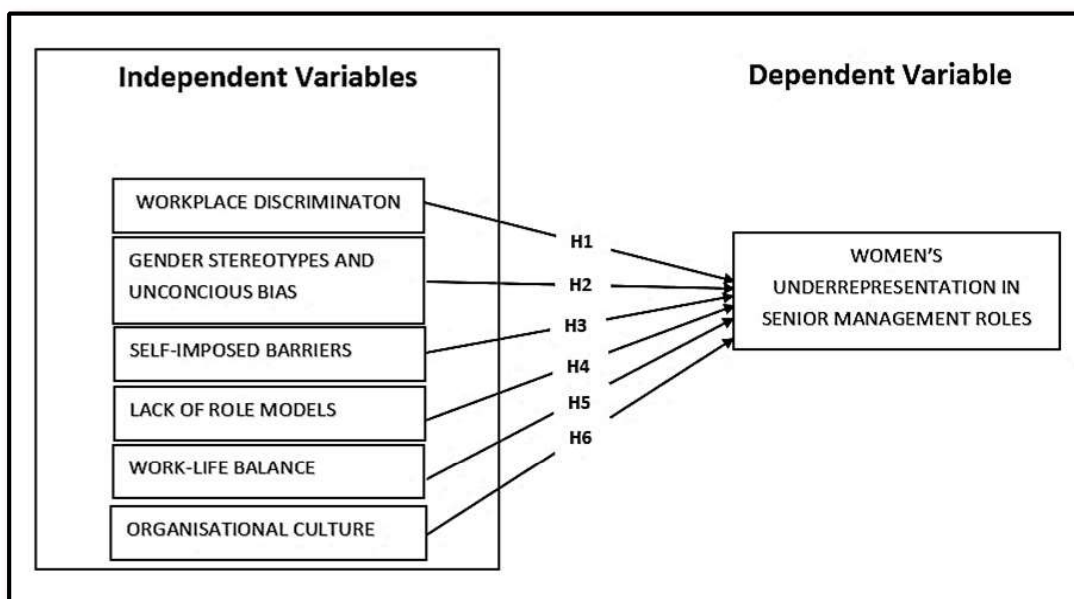
Source: Author(s)   Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study's target population shall be female employees across certain banks within Mauritius. The banking sector in Mauritius currently includes 19 banks which operate under the protective umbrella of the Bank of Mauritius, "of which 5 local banks, 12 foreign banks-predominantly subsidiaries and a few branches, 1 is a joint venture, and 1 is licensed as a private bank" (Mauritius Bankers Association Limited, n.d.).

For the purpose of this survey, only banks offering traditional banking services have been considered, excluding banks providing specialized services. This is actually alluded to as the Sampling Frame – "The list of items from which a sample is obtained is known as the sampling frame" (Zach, 2020). The banks are as follows:

- ABC Banking Corporation Ltd
- Absa Bank (Mauritius) Limited
- AfrAsia Bank Limited
- Bank of Baroda
- Bank One Limited
- Habib Bank Limited
- MauBank Ltd
- SBI (Mauritius) Limited
- SBM Bank (Mauritius) Ltd
- The Mauritius Commercial Bank Ltd

Convenience sampling technique will be availed to single out the banks whilst Quota Sampling technique is used to select the quota of participants for each bank. The study has actually swerved towards a non-probability quota sampling which "does not require numbers that match the proportions in the population" (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This technique allows to study a specific subgroup of interest; female bankers in this case.

10 banks offering traditional banking services have been selected for the survey and 25 questionnaires will be distributed to each bank. Therefore, this study will use a sample size of 250 female bankers for the survey. These sampling techniques were likewise used in a study conducted by Dastidar and Kalita (2020) on "cracking of the glass ceiling in the Indian banking sector" with the research being on a quota of 55 for each of the 2 private banks conveniently selected.

A pilot study was conducted on 20 employees of banks chosen at random so as to make sure that the questionnaire was easily comprehensible to the target respondents and ensure that any type of difficulty that was encountered while filling in the questionnaire, was resolved. In a bid to validate the reliability of the questions, the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test was conducted. As a part of the procedure, it was agreed that any identifying information from the individuals, such as their name, phone number, or email address would not be asked. It was assured that the obtained information would be kept in strict confidence and would in no way be used without the prior approval of the participants.

Results and Discussion

As afore-stated, a total of 250 female employees represented the number to whom questionnaires were distributed. 215 participants in the survey provided valid questionnaires for analysis whilst 10 incomplete questionnaires had to be discarded. As a result, the study was able to acquire a response rate of 86.00%.

The Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient bespoke a consistent measurement and the results of the test coupled with the assessment of their reliability has been tabulated below:

Table 1: Reliability Test

Sections	Items	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
B	Workplace Discrimination	10	0.865
C	Gender Stereotypes and Unconscious Bias	7	0.956
D	Self-Imposed Barriers	5	0.866
E	Lack of Female Role Models	6	0.866
F	Work life Balance	7	0.942
G	Organizational Culture	9	0.944
Overall Average		**44**	**0.9065**

Source: (Authors)

The figure is evidential of there being more single respondents than married and other in the proportion of 72.09%, 22.33% and 5.58%, respectively. The highest percentage of respondents is found in the category between 20 – 25 years while the lowest percentage of in the group is category above 55 with 3.26%. All the categories of age group and marital status have participated in the research.

The overall distribution across all organisational levels indicates a majority with an Undergraduate Degree (53.49%), followed by HSC (20.93%), Diploma (11.16%), and Higher Degree (14.42%). This distribution reflects the educational diversity within the organisation and we have tried to analyse same with respect to the position of women in the financial entities, noting that education level does not really impact level on organisation given that 6.98% of respondents with higher degree are still officers.The results demonstrate that the participants are quite experienced in their jobs. Nonetheless, our questionnaire comprised an "other" option to which we did not receive any respondent.

In this study, the female bankers' reactions as well as their perceived objectivity of GC have been used to comprehend and acknowledge the presence of GC within Mauritian Banks. It is very crucial to know whether the participants perceive barriers which cloud their movement to upper positions and their stances on same. This will determine to some extent how far GC is still a visible quandary.

Table 2: Pearson correlation test between Workplace Discrimination and Underrepresentation of women

Correlations			
		Workplace Discrimination	Underrepresentation of woman in management roles
Workplace Discrimination	Pearson Correlation	1	.872**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	215	89
Underrepresentation of woman in management roles	Pearson Correlation	.872**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	89	89
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Author(s)

The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.872 indicates a strong and positive relationship between workplace discrimination and the underrepresentation of women in managerial roles. Hence, an increase in workplace discrimination simultaneously triggers a higher deficiency of female representation in senior management roles. The findings suggest that workplace discrimination poses a significant barrier to the advancement of women's professional trajectories, hindering their capacity to achieve positions of leadership. The strong correlation highlights the need to address discriminatory practices and biases inside businesses to provide a fair environment for the progression of women's professional paths.

Table 3: Pearson correlation test between Gender Stereotypes and Unconscious Bias and Underrepresentation of women

Correlations			
		Gender Stereotypes and Unconscious Bias	Underrepresentation of woman in management roles
Gender Stereotypes and Unconscious Bias	Pearson Correlation	1	.607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	215	89
Underrepresentation of woman in management roles	Pearson Correlation	.607**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	89	89
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Author(s)

This table presents a moderately positive correlation (0.607) between gender stereotypes and unconscious bias and women's underrepresentation in senior management roles. While the correlation is statistically significant, it's not as strong as the previous analysis which focused on workplace discrimination specifically. This suggests that while gender stereotypes and unconscious bias play a role in underrepresentation, other factors might also be at play. Gender stereotypes and unconscious bias contribute to underrepresentation: This finding confirms that societal and organisational biases against women based on gender roles and expectations can hinder their access to leadership positions. Addressing underrepresentation requires tackling both overt discrimination and subtler forms of bias like gender stereotypes and unconscious bias.

Table 4: Pearson correlation test between Self-imposed Barriers and Underrepresentation of women Women

Correlations

		Self-imposed Barriers	Underrepresentation of woman in management roles
Self-imposed Barriers	Pearson Correlation	1	.767**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	215	89
Underrepresentation of woman in management roles	Pearson Correlation	.767**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	89	89
. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Author(s)

This table reveals a strong positive correlation (0.767) between self-imposed barriers and underrepresentation of females in senior management roles. This suggests that women themselves might play a significant role in their underrepresentation in leadership positions, possibly due to internalized biases, lack of confidence, or worklife balance challenges. While external factors like discrimination and bias are crucial, this finding highlights the need to acknowledge and address self-imposed barriers as well to achieve gender equality in leadership. Organisations can play a role in supporting women to overcome self-imposed barriers by providing mentorship, confidence-building programs, and addressing work-life balance challenges.

Table 5: Pearson correlation test between Lack of Role Models and Underrepresentation of women

Correlations

		Lack of Female Role Models	Underrepresentation of woman in management roles
Lack of Female Role Models	Pearson Correlation	1	.217**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.042
	N	89	89
Underrepresentation of woman in management roles	Pearson Correlation	.217**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	89	89
. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Author(s)

The provided data table reveals a weak positive correlation (0.217) between lack of female role models and underrepresentation of women in management roles. The low correlation coefficient indicates that lack of female role models has a relatively small direct impact on underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. This suggests other factors might play a more prominent role. While promoting female role models is valuable, it is important to recognize it might not be sufficient to significantly boost female representation in leadership. Addressing other barriers like workplace discrimination, unconscious bias, and self-imposed limitations is crucial for achieving sustained progress. Moreover, promoting female role models can still be a valuable strategy. Seeing successful women in leadership can inspire and motivate other women to pursue similar career paths and overcome self-doubt.

Table 6: Pearson correlation test between Work-life balance and Underrepresentation of women

Correlations				
			Work-life balance	Underrepresentation of woman in management roles
Work-life balance	Pearson Correlation		1	.470**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
	N		215	89
Underrepresentation of woman in management roles	Pearson Correlation		.470**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N		89	89
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Author(s)

This table reveals a moderate positive correlation (0.470) between work-life balance and female underrepresentation in management roles, substantiating that as work-life balance improves, this underrepresentation tends to decrease, though not dramatically. This indicates that work-life balance is one factor influencing underrepresentation, but other factors also play a role. The data suggests that work-life balance challenges faced by women, particularly juggling family and career responsibilities, might contribute to their underrepresentation in leadership positions. Implementing "flexible work arrangements, family-friendly policies, and promoting a healthy work-life culture" can be valuable strategies to support women's career advancement and improve gender equality in leadership (Transperfect, 2023).

Table 7: Pearson correlation test between Organisational Culture and Underrepresentation of women

Correlations				
			Organisational Culture	Underrepresentation of woman in management roles
Organisational Culture	Pearson Correlation		1	.879**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
	N		215	89
Underrepresentation of woman in management roles	Pearson Correlation		.879**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N		89	89
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Author(s)

The provided data table displays a very strong positive correlation (0.879) between organisational culture and female underrepresentation in senior management roles. This suggests that organisational culture plays the major role in influencing this underrepresentation in leadership positions. A supportive and inclusive culture with gender equality principles embedded can significantly upping the representation of women in senior

management positions, while a negative culture can hinder their advancement. Investing in creating a more inclusive and equitable organisational culture is crucial for achieving gender equality in leadership.

Focusing on eliminating bias, promoting diversity and inclusion, and fostering a supportive environment for women's career development can lead to significant progress. Organisations should assess their existing culture to identify areas of bias and discrimination and implement targeted interventions to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all employees, regardless of gender.

Summary of Hypotheses and their findings

Table No. 8: This table summarizes the correlations between various factors and female underrepresentation of in senior management positions.

	Hypotheses	r2 Value	Significance
H1	Workplace discrimination and the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles	0.872**	Significant
H2	Gender stereotypes and unconscious bias and underrepresentation of women in senior management roles	0.607**	Significant
H3	Self-imposed barriers and underrepresentation of women in senior management roles	0.767**	Significant
H4	Lack of female role models and underrepresentation of women in senior management roles	0.217**	Significant
H5	Work-life balance and underrepresentation of women in senior management roles	0.470**	Significant
H6	Organisational culture and underrepresentation of women in management roles	0.879**	Significant

- Strongest correlations: Organisational Culture (0.879), Workplace Discrimination (0.872) and Self-Imposed Barriers (0.767) have the strongest positive correlation with underrepresentation, highlighting their significant impact.
- Moderate correlations: Gender stereotypes & bias (0.607) and work-life balance (0.470) show moderate impact, suggesting they play a role but to a lesser extent. o Weakest correlation: Lack of female role models (0.217) has the weakest correlation, indicating its limited direct impact.

All hypotheses are statistically significant, suggesting all factors, to varying degrees, contribute to the underrepresentation of women in management roles. Overall, the data emphasizes the multifaceted nature of underrepresentation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In fact, it is borne out from the findings that GC is very much a vexing issue globally as well as on a domestic plane. Dhote at al. (2023) have rightly explained that GC may be alluded to the imperceptible yet demanding barriers clamping down the progress of women across the corporate ladder. This present research purports to gauge the extent to which women are underrepresented at the highest levels in the banking sector in Mauritius and the causes of this underrepresentation whilst assuming all other conditions remain static.

The cornerstone of this research remains the four main objectives which had been established and responded in the previous chapter. The analysis of the data and the findings trigger the emergence of the following conclusions:

- 40% of the female bankers have agreed to perceiving GC within their institutions, followed by a relatively lower margin of respondents who do not agree to its prevalence. The majority echoes the acknowledgement of the presence of this phenomenon in Banks nonetheless, the rest do not perceive the existence whilst others have demonstrated their uncertainty. Hence, it may potentially be the story of waiting a long time prior to reaching the quasi-fully gender-neutral society. There is this underlying indication that notwithstanding its presence, GC is still not viewed as a perplexing issue by certain bankers.
- 80.47% of respondents opted for a more equitable workplace, reflecting a salient proportion of the sample and hence, depicting that although unconscious of the existence of the barriers, respondents do note the presence of an unequitable workplace.
- Whilst most participants accorded to their organisations being fair to both genders, 40% agreed to a perceived barrier to women's progression to top management levels hence, projecting the larger picture on its impact on underrepresentation.
- In spite of ambivalent opinions with regards to Gender stereotypes and unconscious bias, its presence within the Banking sector did not remain veiled. Howbeit, there is a dearth of existing research findings which could be linked to this factor.
- 35.81% of participants expressed a low level of confidence to use their merits as Rockstone to escalate the corporate levels. This finding coupled with the fact that promotion in organisations is dependent on potential networks, sheds light upon broader pictures of self-imposed barriers leading to underrepresentation.
- Coming to the lack of role models, 125 employees vouched that female managers were outnumbered by male ones in their entities. Whilst we have had other findings which were penchant to disagreement to the statements, this outnumbering remains pivotal to show that there is a lack of role model to push others forward. A considerable 57.67% of employees actually agree that more female managers could be the stepping stone to advancement.
- The present research paper obtained responses mainly from single and relatively young employees with most of them not having children, substantiating that there have not been sufficient number of women bearing the triple burden to depict a diverging perspective on the work-life balance.
- Regarding organisational culture, 32.09% agree and 7.44% strongly agree that there are discouraging corporate cultures, exhibiting wider dimensions on how this affects representation of women.

Recommendations

"There is no 'perfect' decision. One always has to pay a price. One always has to balance conflicting objectives, conflicting opinions, and conflicting priorities. The best strategic decision is only an approximation-and a risk" Peter Drucker.

GC is certainly very much a predominant quandary to which Banks are beset and it is advisable that actions are spearheaded to curb this evil. The recommendations as prescribed in this section have been reckoned and doctrine considering certain aspects agreed by bank staffs themselves in their best interests.

The Mission and Vision Statements

The embryonic step to leading an organisation to cultivate and foster gender diversity and inclusion would be through vividly expressed mission and vision statements which pave the direction and itinerary of an organisation. These statements can outline the intentions whilst motivating and leading the team towards a common goal and it could be an inspiring vision of the future, namely, to be an equal and inclusive employer. This is where the signal should come, and this is where the confidence is restored.

- **Recruitment Stage**

The recruitment process must be transparent, and the team must be professionals, both males and females, recruiting the best according to the pre-established criteria and above all accountable. There must always be the possibility of appeal. Records must be kept for any future query. The wider the base for female recruits, the more probable of a better female distribution in higher positions – the promotional system is always pyramidal.

- **Early Promotions**

There needs to be more discipline in managing the early promotions and treating them with the same care that is put toward the most senior openings and opportunities. This already sets the tone for future promotional prospects. o Put an end all sorts of microaggressions towards women

This will be a powerful signal towards women's professional recognition.

Microaggressions undermine women's ability to show up as their best self. They undermine their confidence and their belief that they do have a reason to be at the senior table.

- **Training, Mentorship, Sponsorship and Support**

Women need to have the same degree of training, mentorship, sponsorship, and support, like their male counterparts, in order to get the required degree of confidence to go for higher responsibilities.

- **Women's Ambitions**

It used to be a reflection of society, a misunderstanding or a misperception that ambition from women is something negative, whereas ambition from men is something positive.

In fact, men's, and women's ambitions are the same. The ambition to be a leader, to be promoted, is the same among men and women. Women have gradually become less inhibited about articulating their ambitions. There was even a period when women's ambition was viewed as almost a frontal criticism.

- **Equitable Workplace Environment**

The in-person workplace environment is not an equitable and equally enjoyable environment for both men and women. The environment is still not equitable. Men still describe a better experience when they show up on-site than women do, in terms of getting connectivity, feeling in the know, building their network. This must change to meet the expectations of women also.

- **Flexible Work Arrangements**

This model could definitely be considered as an enabler to facilitate the breaking of the 'glass ceiling' to facilitate women's managerial positions.

- **Developing an Ideal Culture to Promote Equality, Inclusivity, and Innovation**

The banks need to measure their actual culture against the ideal culture, seek ideas and innovations from within on how to transform the organisations and implement actions to close those gaps. By so doing, they will ensure that all employees truly have a voice, they will be heard and everyone will have a say in how their organisations continue to grow from strength to strength.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The research is de facto not immune to limitations. Out of 250 questionnaires administered, only 215 were returned. Whilst the response rate stands reasonable, the main issue begs the question as to whether 'there are systematic differences between those who answered and those who did not'. Additionally, the study takes into consideration the opinions of female bankers and not male bankers. The latter might have responded in a diverging perspective. A futuristic study may be considered involving the survey of female as well as male bankers. Unavailability of the top management female staffs due to their busy schedules draws a limitation as the opinion of certain senior managers might have changed the course of certain responses.

Another limitation would be the fact that this study has pivoted mostly around quantitative research methods, reflecting certain subjective cum more expressive views which could have had been generated should it have been a blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches. his research has been directed to the Banking Sector only and may not be reflective of trends in other sectors. As such, future studies may be conducted in other pivotal realms such as education, medicine and public sectors, amongst others.

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