



# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: BREAKING BARRIERS AND EMPOWERING CHANGE

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## ABSTRACT:

Women have historically encountered structural obstacles that have prevented them from assuming positions of leadership. However, in recent decades, we've witnessed a remarkable rise of women shattering glass ceilings and paving the way for a more equitable future. Despite progress in gender equality, women continue to be viewed as oddities in higher education and leadership positions. Stereotypical gender norms often restrict women's leadership behaviour, leading to perceived incongruity and unfavourable performance reviews. This discrepancy makes it challenging for women to lead successfully and contribute to overall success, resulting in double binds, unfavourable performance reviews, and disparate expectations compared to male counterparts. This paper delves into the complex landscape of women in leadership, exploring the challenges they overcome, the inspiring successes they achieve, and the transformative impact they have on society.

**KEYWORDS:** Women, Leadership, Barriers, Glass Ceilings.

## INTRODUCTION:

Across history, women have been pioneers, trailblazers, and agents of change. Yet, for far too long, the path to leadership positions remained shrouded in a veil of invisible barriers and societal biases. This tapestry, woven with threads of inequality and exclusion, has kept many women from reaching their full potential, their voices unheard, their leadership untapped. However, a revolution is brewing. The winds of change are carrying the voices of women, their resilience echoing across industries, communities, and nations. The fight for women's leadership is not new. From the suffragists who championed voting rights to the pioneers who defied societal norms to pursue careers in science and medicine, women have consistently challenged the status quo. Each victory, whether a hard-fought legislative change or a ground-breaking career achievement, chipped

away at the imposing edifice of the glass ceiling. The Glass ceiling is an unacknowledged discriminatory barrier that stops women from rising to positions of power or responsibility within an organisation. It is a practice which has been performed to seal women from achieving higher positions irrespective of their qualification and experience. This kind of practice has been followed to degrade women from men. For an instance, if a enterprise is in need of an employee to a higher post in that organisation it recruits a men more than a female because still in the minds of many people women are been considered as the weaker sex and assume that they will not able to handle the peer pressure, without analysing in that particular field.

Emblematic figures like Marie Curie, the first woman to win a Nobel Prize, and Indira Gandhi, the first female Prime Minister of India, became beacons of hope, proving that leadership knows no gender. Their triumphs resonated across continents, igniting a fire in the hearts of countless women who dared to dream of leading. Yet, the journey was far from smooth. Unconscious bias, a pernicious weed in the garden of progress, continued to sprout, hindering women's advancement. The demands of work-life balance, often unfairly tilted towards women, added another layer of complexity to the climb. But instead of succumbing to the challenges, women adapted, innovated, and built their own bridges. Mentorship programs became lifelines, connecting aspiring leaders with seasoned veterans who offered guidance and support. Flexible work arrangements, once a fringe benefit, became crucial tools for balancing ambition and family responsibilities.

Women have made progress in achieving gender equality in both domestic and professional life, but they remain underrepresented in leadership positions and considered anomalies in sectors like higher education. Stereotypic gender roles often constrain women's leadership behaviour, leading to perceived incongruity and negative performance appraisals. This incongruity creates double binds, negative performance appraisals, and different standards compared to male counterparts, making it difficult for women to effectively lead and contribute to overall success.

Leadership effectiveness depends on the leader's leadership style. Women, despite facing obstacles in ascending the hierarchy, can perform efficiently compared to male leaders. They can promote workplace harmony, employee retention, better decision-making, and innovation. Women's multitasking mindset, ability to learn, coordinate, collaborate, deliver, influence, knowledge, and respect are beneficial in corporate settings. They also contribute well to organisational performance, as supported by studies in recreation clubs, government agencies, public transport companies, and students. Women leaders are found to be as effective and produce more satisfaction than male leaders.

Many Studies have identified women are effective leaders in feminine organisations like service sectors, while men excel in masculine sectors like technical and manufacturing. Women's unique characteristics, such as higher Emotional Intelligence (EI), caring attitudes, and friendships, ensure their career progression. They tend to adopt a more collaborative, cooperative, or democratic leadership style, while men prefer a directive, competitive, or autocratic style. Women intentionally exhibit more collaborative leadership due to personality differences in leadership positions. The use of collaborative processes is increasingly central to effective

leadership. Education for girls is not just about knowledge, but also about empowered leadership. It equips girls with critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills, enabling them to navigate complex equations and challenge existing power structures. Education empowers girls to advocate for their rights and lead by example, dismantling barriers and paving the way for a future where leadership is defined by merit and vision, not gender.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

Dr. Meenakshi Kaushik (2020), “Women Leadership in Indian Organizations”, paper analyses that The global economy demands talented candidates to address opportunities and challenges. Women's leadership, especially in nurturing and task-oriented styles, has become a niche. The financial crisis and global trends are reshaping the corporate landscape, necessitating urgent changes to seize new opportunities. This research paper examines how women have broken patriarchal norms in business and created new stories.

Dr Nidhi Khinduka Jain, “Breaking Barriers: Empowering Women for a Better World”, the paper explores that, Until the last century, women in many societies were denied basic human rights and had low social status, hindering their lives and the development of families, societies, and countries. Empowering women is crucial for a more equitable and just society. It involves equal opportunities in education, health, and employment, as well as a voice in decision-making processes. Women's empowerment is not only moral but also strategic, leading to increased economic growth, reduced poverty, and improved health outcomes for families and communities.

B.K.P. Pranathi & Dr.Remya Lathabhavan, “A Study on Role of Woman in Leadership Positions”, in this paper analysis the global women workforce is increasing due to socioeconomic changes, education, and globalization. Women currently make up 23% of women CEOs in the US. Research shows that women prioritise teamwork over task completion in firms, while men prioritize task completion. Despite improved educational facilities, women still face challenges like gender discrimination, job difficulties, local laws, and family responsibilities. This paper explores the role of women in various sectors, their development challenges, and their capabilities compared to men.

R. Dhatt., et.al (2017), “The role of Women’s leadership and gender equity in leadership and health system strengthening”, The paper discusses, explores gender and leadership in the health sector, revealing gender biases and underrepresentation of women. It highlights the importance of promoting gender equity in leadership, highlighting the need for increased women's representation to enhance health system resilience and responsiveness. The study concludes with actionable steps for achieving gender equity.

Ann Baby & Binoy Joseph, “Breaking Barriers and Fostering Leadership: Empowering Women in Environmental Management”,\_This research examines the role of women in environmental management, focusing on their opportunities and challenges. It aims to highlight their contributions, identify barriers, and

propose strategies to promote gender equality. The study uses academic literature, case studies, and expert opinions to provide a comprehensive analysis of the topic, highlighting the growing importance of women in sustainable development and environmental conservation.

Victoria A. Anyikwa & etal., “Women Empowering Women”, The study examines the lack of advocacy for women in social work leadership in educational systems. It suggests that social work has lost momentum in advocating for a unified feminist voice in literature, teaching materials, and leadership models. The authors reflect on pioneers who paved the way and question their involvement in surrendering to the dominant voice. They propose eliminating status-based disparities, unifying women's stance, and strengthening the feminist voice in leadership, mentorship, and education through relational-cultural theory.

Kathy L. Cocchio (2009), “Executive leadership for Women: Examining the rhetoric and the reality”, The paper provides insights into the current operational context of executive leadership and the impact of gender on the quest for executive leadership. It also highlights the barriers that female leaders face and the organisational/societal changes that must occur to facilitate the shattering of the proverbial glass ceiling.

### **RESEARCH GAP:**

The researchers have focused on the development of women in every field and also the skills developed by them to support the development of the Country as well as their own home. Even Though the women are capable of inculcating and adapting to new technology, society etc. There is still a boundary set by others which stops them from pursuing their growth. This research study delves into the complex landscape of women in leadership, exploring the challenges they overcome, the inspiring successes they achieve, and the transformative impact they have on society.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:**

This research paper focuses on the obstacles that women face, including a lack of role models, gender biases, hostile work environments, and the idea of the "glass ceiling," which refers to an imperceptible barrier that prevents a certain group of people from rising above a certain point in society and is typically applied to women. This research paper has been chosen to discuss about the hindrances faced by the women in leadership.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To know about the barriers in women leaderships in the Chennai area.
- To understand the glass ceiling concept of empowerment change.

**METHODOLOGY:**

The research method followed here is mainly doctrinal and partly empirical. The doctrine study is based on the Secondary data gathered from various sources such as Journals, Books and Net Sources. The Primary data is collected with the help of the google forms which were circulated to the public through the social networks and obtained the information for the questions asked in the form. From which the below table is generated by the data collected from the respondents.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION:**

**Table-1:**  
**Personal Details**

Variable	Sub-Variables	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	44	60.3%
	Female	29	39.7%
	Total	73	100%
Age	Below 20	11	15.1
	20-30	29	39.7
	30-40	11	15.1
	40-50	13	17.8
	Above 50	9	12.6
	Total	73	100%
Occupation	Student	32	43.8
	Professor	9	12.6
	Entrepreneur	12	16.4
	Others	20	27.4
	Total	73	100%
Educational Qualification	Higher Education	12	16.4
	UG	35	47.9
	PG	14	19.2
	Others	12	16.4
	Total	73	100%
Annual Income	50,000	30	41.1
	50,000-80,000	11	15.1
	80,000-1,00,000	8	11
	Above 1,00,000	24	32.9
	Total	73	100%

SOURCE: Primary Data

**INTERPRETATION:**

The demographic information was gathered from 73 respondents, of whom 39.7% were men and 60.3% were women, as shown in Table 1 above. The largest age group of responders is 39.7% was between the ages of 20-30, then between the ages of 40-50 is 17.8%, between the ages of 30-40 and under 20 is 15.1%, and above 50 is 12.3%. The majority of responders is 43.8% were students, followed by others is 27.3%, entrepreneurs is 16.4%, and professors is 12.3%. With is 47.9%, the UG applicants had the highest response rate, followed by the PG students is 19.2%, Higher Education, and others with around is 16.4%. The respondent's highest income were about above Rs.1,00,000 is 32.9%, followed by Rs.50,000 is 41.1%, Rs.50,000-80,000 is 15.1% and Rs. 80,000-1,00,000 is 11%.

**Table-2**  
**Barrier Breaking Question**

Statement	Yes		May be		No		Total	
	NOR	%	NOR	%	NOR	%	NOR	%
The increased representation of women in leadership roles will lead to demonstrably better outcomes for organizations and societies.	37	50.7%	22	30.1%	14	19.2%	73	100%
the glass ceiling requires solely individual efforts by women seeking leadership positions, or systemic changes within institutions and cultures.	37	50.7%	26	35.6%	10	13.7%	73	100%
Women are genetically less suited for leadership roles than men.	25	34.2%	17	23.3%	31	42.5%	73	100%
The unconscious bias can be entirely eliminated, or if its mitigation through continuous awareness and training remains a lifelong pursuit.	36	49.3%	19	26%	18	24.7%	73	100%
There are more female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies today than ever before.	29	39.7%	31	42.5%	13	17.8%	73	100%
The technology can be a powerful tool for closing the gender leadership gap by providing access to opportunities and dismantling geographical barriers, or if it risks exacerbating existing inequalities.	33	42.5%	25	34.2%	15	20.5%	73	100%

Source: Primary Data

**INTERPRETATION:**

We may infer from the aforementioned finding that the majority of people are aware of the idea of women in leadership based on their responses to the following surveys. 50.7% of them answered "Yes," 19.2% said "No," and 30.1% said "May be" when asked whether the increased representation of women in leadership roles will lead to demonstrably better outcomes for organizations and societies. 50.7% respondents have said "Yes", 13.7% of the respondents have said "No" and 35.6% of the respondents have said "May be". When asked that whether dismantling the glass ceiling requires solely individual efforts by women seeking leadership positions, or systemic changes within institutions and culture. Regarding the question of whether Women are genetically less suited for leadership roles than men for which 34.2% of them answered "Yes", 42.5% of them answered "No" and about 23.3% of them answered "May be".

49.3% of the respondents have answered "Yes", 24.7% of the respondents have answered "No" and around 26% of the respondents have answered "May be", when asked if unconscious bias can be entirely eliminated, or if its mitigation through continuous awareness and training remains a lifelong pursuit. Of those surveyed, 39.7% have them said "Yes", 17.8% of them said "No" and 42.5% of them said "May be" when asked Whether there are more female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies today than ever before. Regarding the question whether technology can be a powerful tool for closing the gender leadership gap by providing access to opportunities and dismantling geographical barriers, or if it risks exacerbating existing inequalities for which around 45.2% of them responded "Yes", 20.5% of them responded "No" and about 34.2% of them responded "May be".

**Table-3****Challenges of Women Leadership Questions**

Statement	SA		A		N		D		SDA		Total	
	NOR	%	NO R	%	NO R	%	NO R	%	NO R	%	NOR	%
The traditional gender roles continue to significantly influence and limit women's aspirations for leadership, or if younger generations are ushering in a paradigm shift.	20	27.4 %	14	19.2%	24	32.9 %	9	12.3 %	6	8.2%	73	100%
The balancing work-life responsibilities remains												



a unique challenge for women in leadership?	18	24.7 %	18	24.7 %	22	30.1 %	8	11%	7	9.6%	73	100%
The Women in leadership positions often face additional challenges compared to their male counterparts, such as work-life balance struggles?	20	27.4 %	18	24.7 %	20	27.4 %	7	9.6 %	8	11%	73	100%
Whether mentorship and sponsorship programs are most effective when tailored to specific industries and sectors, or when guided by general leadership principles?	18	24.7 %	11	15.1 %	25	34.2 %	8	11%	11	15.1 %	73	100%
The Achieving gender equality in leadership will benefit the entire society, not just women?	26	35.6 %	13	17.8 %	18	24.7 %	8	11%	8	11%	73	100%

**Source:** Primary Data

## INTERPRETATION:

The five-scale questioning approach yielded a finding that is very different from the other tables. when asked whether traditional gender roles continue to significantly influence and limit women's aspirations for leadership, or if younger generations are ushering in a paradigm shift, 27.4% of them answered "Strongly Agree," 19.2% of them answered "Agree," 32.9% of them answered "Neutral," 12.3% of them answered "Disagree," and approximately 8.2% of them answered "Strongly Disagree."

24.7% of them said "Strongly Agree", 24.7% of them said "Agree", 30.1% of them said "Neutral", 9.6 of them said "Disagree", and 11% of them said "Strongly Disagree" for the question Whether balancing work-life responsibilities remains a unique challenge for women in leadership. Regarding the question whether women in leadership positions often face additional challenges compared to their male counterparts, such as work-life balance struggles for which 27.4% of them answered that they are "Strongly Agree", 24.7% of them



answered “Agree”, 27.4% of them answered that they are “Neutral”, 9.6% of them answered that they are “Disagree”, and 11% of them answered that they are “Strongly Disagree”.

In response to the question of whether the mentorship and sponsorship programs are most effective when tailored to specific industries and sectors, or when guided by general leadership principles, 24.7% of them respondent “Strongly Agree”, 15.1% of them respondent “Agree”, 34.2% of them respondent “Neutral”, 15.1% of them respondent “Disagree” and 11% of them respondent “Strongly Disagree”. When asked whether Achieving gender equality in leadership will benefit the entire society, not just women for which 35.6% of them respondent “Strongly Agree”, 17.8% of them respondent “Agree”, 24.7% of them respondent “Neutral”, 11% of them respondent “Disagree” and 11% of them respondent “Strongly Disagree”.

**Table-4**  
**Major Barrier that Women Face in Leadership**

Statement	Categories	NOR	%	Total	
				NOR	%
1. A major barrier that women often face in reaching leadership positions.	Lack of education and qualifications.	6	6.8%	73	100%
	Unconscious bias and gender stereotypes.	17	23.3%	73	100%
	Limited access to networking opportunities.	12	19.2%	73	100%
	All of the above.	37	50.7%	73	100%

2. The initiative would not be effective in supporting women in their pursuit of leadership roles	Providing mentorship and sponsorship programs.	16	21.9%	73	100%
	Advocating for flexible work arrangements and family leave policies.	19	26%	73	100%

	Promoting unconscious bias training in workplaces.	21	28.8%	73	100%
	Encouraging girls to pursue STEM education and leadership opportunities.	17	23.3%	73	100%

3. The "glass ceiling" refers to	The highest level of education a woman can achieve.	7	9.6%	73	100%
	The invisible barrier that prevents women from advancing to top leadership positions.	37	50.7%	73	100%
	The wage gap between men and women in similar jobs.	18	24.7%	73	100%
	The lack of childcare options for working mothers.	11	15.1%	73	100%

4. The fight for women's leadership is also a fight	Economic equality for all genders.	7	9.6%	73	100%
	Improved representation of minority groups in leadership positions.	13	17.8%	73	100%

	A more just and inclusive society for everyone.	7	9.6%	73	100%
	All of the above.	46	63%	73	100%

5. The key factor in empowering women in leadership	Increased focus on individual competition and achievement.	11	15.1%	73	100%
	Building supportive networks and communities for women leaders.	34	46.6%	73	100%
	Emphasizing traditional gender roles and responsibilities.	15	20.5%	73	100%
	Promoting a "lone wolf" mentality in the workplace.	13	17.8%	73	100%

6. Is there are fewer women than men in leadership positions.	Women are naturally less ambitious and career-oriented than men.	9	12.3%	73	100%
	Social and cultural biases that discourage women from seeking leadership roles.	21	28.8%	73	100%
	Lack of confidence and self-belief among women.	8	11%	73	100%
	All of the above.	35	47.9%	73	100%

7. An important step towards achieving gender	Implementing quotas for female representation in leadership positions.	10	13.7%	73	100%
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equality in leadership.	Creating a culture of equal opportunity and meritocracy.	13	17.8%	73	100%
	Providing targeted training and development programs for women leaders.	12	16.4%	73	100%
	All of the above.	38	52.1%	73	100%

8. The wage gap between men and women are similar jobs	Has been completely eliminated globally.	11	15.1%	73	100%
	Is decreasing rapidly in most countries.	13	17.8%	73	100%
	Remains a significant challenge in many parts of the world.	29	39.7%	73	100%
	Is irrelevant to the discussion of women in leadership.	20	27.4%	73	100%

**SOURCE:** Primary Data

### **INTERPRETATION:**

The barrier-breaking questions were discussed based on the table above. when asked what is a major barrier that women often face in reaching leadership positions, 50.7% of them responded “All of the above”, 23.3% of them responded “Unconscious bias and gender stereotypes”, 19.2% of them responded “Limited access to networking opportunities” and 6.8% of them responded “Lack of education and qualifications”. 28.8% of them responded “Promoting unconscious bias training in workplaces”, 26% of them responded “Advocating for flexible work arrangements and family leave policies” 23.3% of them responded “Encouraging girls to pursue STEM education and leadership opportunities” and 21.9% of them responded “Providing mentorship and sponsorship programs”, for the question which initiative would not be effective in supporting women in their pursuit of leadership roles. The question about the "glass ceiling" were answered by 50.7% of them answered “The invisible barrier that prevents women from advancing to top leadership positions”, 24.7% of them answered “The wage gap between men and women in similar jobs”, 15.1% of them answered “The lack of childcare options for working mothers” and 9.6% of them answered “The highest level of education a woman can achieve”.

Regarding the question of whether the fight for women's leadership is also a fight for which 63% of them responded “All of the above”, 17.8% of them responded “Improved representation of minority groups in leadership positions”, 9.6% of them respondent for “Economic equality for all genders” and 9.6% of them

respondent for “A more just and inclusive society for everyone”. 46.6% of them answered “Building supportive networks and communities for women leaders”, 20.5% of them answered “Emphasizing traditional gender roles and responsibilities”, 17.8% of them answered “Promoting a "lone wolf" mentality in the workplace” and 15.1% of them answered “Increased focus on individual competition and achievement”. In response of why there are fewer women than men in leadership positions for which 47.9% of them answered “All of the above”, 28.8% of them answered “Social and cultural biases that discourage women from seeking leadership roles”, 12.3% of them answered “Women are naturally less ambitious and career-oriented than men” and 11% of them answered “Lack of confidence and self-belief among women”.

52.1% of them responded “All of the above”, 17.8% of them responded “Creating a culture of equal opportunity and meritocracy”, 16.4% of them responded “Providing targeted training and development programs for women leaders” and 13.7% of them responded “Implementing quotas for female representation in leadership positions”, when asked what was an important step towards achieving gender equality in leadership. In response of the question of whether the wage gap between men and women are similar jobs for which 39.7% of them answered “Remains a significant challenge in many parts of the world”, 27.4% of them answered “Is irrelevant to the discussion of women in leadership”, 17.8% of them answered “Is decreasing rapidly in most countries” and 15.1% of them answered “Has been completely eliminated globally”.

### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY:**

The study is limited to Chennai City. The field of study was performed to the people belonging to educational Professionals, students and other people of the surroundings. The total respondents for this study are 73.

### **SUGGESTIONS:**

- Challenging stereotypes and shattering glass ceilings.
- Empowering women through mentorship and support.
- Overcoming gender bias and discrimination.
- The power of diversity in leadership.

### **CONCLUSION:**

“You are not born with power; you have to be in-charge and take power.” – Beyoncé

The rise of women in leadership is a significant shift in power dynamics, challenging the monolithic model and embracing diverse voices. Despite challenges like glass ceilings and biases, women are leading the charge in dismantling these barriers. Men must be allies in this revolution, championing equal opportunities and fostering inclusive cultures. Organizations must offer support systems and flexibility that empower women to thrive. The power of women in leadership lies in their collective impact, enriching decision-making, sparking

innovation, and forging solutions that resonate with the complexities of our world. Celebrating women breaking barriers and rising strong is crucial for building a future where every voice resonates, talent flourishes, and every individual has the opportunity to lead and shape the world.

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