Research

Glass Ceiling for Women and Work Engagement: The Moderating Effect of Marital Status

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Abstract

Women face several obstacles and barriers in order to attain high managerial positions as compared to men. They struggle to get fair representation in corporate boards and higher management levels. This is known as 'glass ceiling'. The present study aims to explore the level of glass ceiling for women (GCW) in terms of its three major barriers, that is, personal barriers, organizational barriers and societal barriers among women managers working in the Indian service sector and identify the impact of GCW on their work engagement level as well as the moderating effect of marital status (single or married) on the relationship of GCW and work engagement. A total of 553 women managers working in the three major industries of the service sector, that is, banking, hospitality and information technology (IT), operating in the state of northern India (Punjab) were selected by using multistage sampling technique. The hypotheses were tested through one-sample t-test and moderated hierarchical regression analysis using 'Statistical Package for Social Sciences'. It was apparent from the findings of the study that the women managers face glass ceiling in terms of organizational and societal barriers at an above-average level. The study also revealed that the organizational and societal barriers had a major impact of 39 per cent on work engagement. Additionally, marital status of the women managers acted as a moderator between the organizational and societal barriers of GCW and their work engagement level. On the basis of the results, the study provides recommendations to raze the GCW in terms of organizational barriers and societal barriers and to increase the work engagement level among the women managers.

Introduction

The struggle of women to gain a significant representation at the senior management positions still continues in the modern era, although there is a notable improvement witnessed with the progression of numerous women in the corporate sector and modifications in the employment policies aimed at gender equality (Davidson & Burke, 2012). However, the obstacles/barriers experienced by women to attain high managerial positions are a universal phenomenon. When compared to men, women are generally employed at a lower-level and lower-cadre leadership positions (Mohammadkhani & Dariush, 2016), the certainty of women being sufficiently present in the labour force is scarcely present at the senior management levels, and this phenomenon has been marked as the glass ceiling, 'a barrier so subtle and transparent, yet so strong that it hinders women from moving up in the management hierarchy' (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990)

Kiaye and Singh (2013) advocated the concept of the glass ceiling as an imperceptible barrier and a strong ceiling that blocks women's advancement to the senior positions of management. According to Jasielska (2014) and Kolade and Kehinde (2013), glass ceiling is a concept that demonstrates a disadvantage for women regarding career opportunities, especially, when women have to advance in their career. Hence, this phenomenon is defined as a 'glass' because the obstacles are apparent and 'ceiling' because there are barriers present in their upward advancement (Hiau, 2008). In addition, other researchers assume that the glass ceiling includes various barriers, such as personal, organizational and societal barriers, that are less substantial and are surrounded in the culture and the society (Powell & Butterfield, 2003) and exist as psychological factors that prevent the progression of women to the leadership levels (Jain & Mukherji, 2010). According to Morgan (2015), the glass ceiling barriers are categorized into two types: artificial and natural barriers.

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