

## **Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: A Case Study of Women in Three Institutions of Higher Education in Lebanon**

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### **Abstract**

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*The purpose of this study is to explore the barriers that hinder women's advancement to leadership positions in institutions of higher education in Lebanon, based on the perception of female academicians in three prestigious universities that follow the American credit-system. The literature review and face to face semi-structured interview are structured to have a holistic understanding of the glass ceiling in academia. Despite educational attainment and devotion, female academicians still face discriminative practices that hinder their advancement. The Middle –Eastern patriarchal society still favors men in senior positions and confines women into less influential roles. One limitation is that purposive sampling was used to measure the opinions of these females. The findings suggest that barriers do exist and that they form the invisible barricade-the glass ceiling. The originality of this study is that it observed the internal structural barriers that hinder women advancement taking into consideration the socio-cultural beliefs.*

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**Keywords** – glass ceiling; gender stereotype; leadership skills; Lebanon, patriarchal society; career advancement.

### **Introduction**

Glass Ceiling, glass cliff, glass wall, maternal wall and glass escalator are invisible barriers that limit female advancement to top managerial positions (Eagly and Sczesny, 2009, p.30). In principle, nothing should stop qualified women from reaching senior positions, but in reality, very few make it to the top. In fact, only 16.9% of Fortune 500 companies have women on board (Catalyst census, 2013). Gender stereotype, leadership style, conflict between work and family, institution culture and social values are barriers that hinder equality in the workplace.

The glass ceiling is transparent, so women can see people holding senior positions without understanding what keeps them from achieving the same success. It is challenging for women to acquire jobs that traditionally belong to males; and they are paid less as they are not considered as breadwinners of the family. The glass ceiling prevents women from advancing and realizing their full potential, thus job dissatisfaction leads to high turnover. Female entrepreneurs face difficulties in getting loans to establish a business and expand. This is considered a second glass ceiling because most women become their own boss to avoid the glass ceiling in organizations (Bosse and Taylor, 2012). As for the glass cliff, it represents the barrier that women face once they have broken the glass ceiling. Organizations that are at risk of failure assign leadership roles to women because they can manage employees better during a crisis (Ryan and Haslam, 2007).

Another barrier is the glass wall, a lateral barrier that prevents women from seeking jobs that lead to promotion. Women are usually appointed jobs that are considered more appropriate for them and denied access to general management experience (Browne and Giampetro-Meyer, 2003). Organizations nowadays are trying to create a culture of equal opportunities to be able to attract and retain the most qualified individuals and benefit from the skills of highly educated women. Diversity in the workplace has many advantages because creative ideas emerge more often. When attitude differences are well managed, employees' values and opinions increase productivity and reduce bias and discrimination (Robins, Judge and Hasham, 2012).

Motherhood raises the maternal wall as a barrier that stands between mothers and good jobs. It prevents progress once they become mothers, which explains the dearth of mothers in tenure track positions in universities (Williams and Segal, 2003). Motherhood is perceived as a fulltime job that can prevent women from being good workers and good mothers at the same time (Williams, 2005). Williams also reports that a maternal wall exists between working mothers and less supportive single or childless colleagues (2005). Employers presume that all women will become mothers (Heilman, 1995). Women still have to make sacrifices to balance family and career while men, considered the breadwinner of the household, can focus more on their job.

In addition, women have been struggling for many years to show their full potential at work and prove they are as capable as men in holding key positions. But as Groyberg and Bell (2013) stated, there are still many obstacles to women advancement, even in companies that promote diversity. These obstacles form the glass ceiling that is hard to break in some cultures and in some professions, particularly in academia. An inadequate advancement opportunity is one of the main reasons for voluntary turnover of female administrators in higher education (Jo, 2008). Academic excellence means full time availability (Donald, 2013), which makes it hard for women if they have to care for their families and to balance their worklife.

Mason (2013) observed that women seemed to be penalized for having babies; they cannot make it to the top like their male counterparts. Work/life conflict, socio-cultural or institutional barriers as well as difficulty to enter the networking circle, traditionally occupied by males, are among the factors that explain the scarcity of women in leadership positions. These barriers vary between nations and occupations. In the Middle East, the socio-cultural barriers are very strong. Traditionally women are expected to give priority to their family; their maternal duties keep them out of the office while their male colleagues are always present. Therefore, if women have the same ambition as men to progress professionally, they have more trade-offs. The cost of ambition is sometimes very high and has a detrimental effect on women's career choices (Caprino, 2013).

In 2014, many women broke the glass ceiling. There are fourteen female head of states in the US and US companies like GM, IBM, YouTube, Yahoo and PepsiCo have female CEOs (Howard, 2014). For the first time, Facebook has a female COO and a woman is the managing director of the International Monetary Fund. Nonetheless, the number of women in senior positions is still low and companies are not profiting from their proficiencies; "Women are the most underutilized resource on this planet" (Clinton, 2013). Only equal representation of women in all facets of society can shatter the glass ceiling (Jalalzai, 2008). High commitment to their profession will lead them to the top and society should support women by valuing their choices to put family or work first (Slaughter, 2012).

Family conflict arises from the natural tendency of women to be caring not only for their children but also for parents as mentioned by many interviewees. In the Middle East, women find themselves struggling between their work and their family duties. Moreover, women learn to be submissive and discreet in the Arab culture (Ghattas and Rassi, 2001), and even as they enter the work force to support their husbands, they are not considered the breadwinner of the household and their ambition should never surpass their husbands' work position. Despite this, successful business women have emerged in the Arab world (Robbins et al., 2012). Encouragement and motivation at home shapes a woman's personality and increases her ambitions and determination to succeed (Bu, 2014). In particular, if the first born is a female, then she usually gets more attention which explains why many successful female leaders are the first born in their households. Among the most significant are Hilary Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Christine Lagarde and Angela Merkel.

There is no limit to ambition, and education is available to anyone who seeks it. Women need to build their confidence, learn communication and decision making skills and promote themselves to expose their potential and abilities. Developing self- efficacy directs people's lives to attain their goals, influences their career choice and affects their leadership aspirations (Bandura, 2000).

In Lebanon, 53% of the students enrolled in universities are females as compared to 47% males (Yaacoub and Badre, 2012). Studies (Vieito, 2012) have shown that female CEOs are more efficient managers than their male counterparts. One research found that the price of company shares improves when women are on board (Credit Suisse Institute, 2012). Women believe that higher education attainment increases their chances to access managerial positions but their career progress is limited by gender inequities because of the organizational culture of Lebanese companies (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). Fortunately, in the Lebanese banking sector, women were able to compete and access managerial levels because corporate culture and practices offer equal opportunities (Jamali et al., 2006).

However, this is not the case in academia; the number of women in senior positions is much lower than their male colleagues. Academia is demanding and rigid, and requires full time availability (Donald, 2013) which makes it difficult for women to reach a work-life balance. In addition to teaching, administrative duties and student counseling, female academics are required to do research and publish to be promoted. This may lead to voluntary turnover because women have less opportunity to advance in higher education (Jo, 2008). In short, women in academia have to sacrifice or accept less demanding jobs in order to handle their family responsibilities.

Not only marital life and children but also society and attitudes impact women's career advancement in higher education in Lebanon (Karkoulian and Halawi, 2007). A report states that the war and unstable situation contributed to more women in senior positions in Lebanese universities (Ghattas, 2009). They succeeded because they were supportive and collaborative but adopted a masculine authoritative style when needed. The breakthrough to senior positions during the war did not change the culture; it is still male dominated and female professors still find barriers to reach senior positions even if they have the ambition and the qualifications.

Furthermore, the female perception of family-work conflict affects the way managers look at them (Hoobler et al., 2009). Weinberger (2011) reaffirmed that women's progress is slower than men because of the glass ceiling. Gender stereotyping is prevalent in the Lebanese society and accepting women in management still faces resistance despite their high educational accomplishments and aspirations to become managers (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). They also indicated that societal factors restrict women's career choices, and suggested that companies revise gender issues and accept diversification in senior positions. In fact, the President of AUB, Mr. Waterbury expressed his standpoint. They need to offer women more opportunities, change work conditions, and allow an extra semester as maternity leave; thus, mothers will be able to focus on the research and publications required for promotion. Accordingly, an extra semester was granted only through the efforts of women in administration. Family responsibilities should not alter women's career aspirations. Job satisfaction motivates, incites fewer turnovers, and increases organizational performance.

Institutions of higher education are expected to be pioneers in promoting diversity and accepting differences. Globalization has opened a new era of communication and acceptance of diverse perspectives. Organizational culture such as the shared values, principles, traditions and norms, defines both internal and external channels of communication. A culture that supports diversity improves performance because it contributes to creativity, better decision making and an effective workforce (Robbins and Coulter, 2009). Diversity reflects differences in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, age and other characteristics. Although diversity is beneficial to any organization, it may lead to communication problems and interpersonal conflicts if not managed properly.

The study of organizational behavior has established many theories about motivating, leading and embracing diversities by appreciating differences and exercising tolerance (Robins et al., 2012). Diverse role models in decision making positions are motivating because employees will have a chance to grow and advance (Robbins & Coulter, 2009). To enhance workforce diversity, organizations should ensure the recruitment process does not discriminate, raise diversity awareness and have top management support and commitment. Commitment to diversity will ensure that men and women will work together effectively despite the fact that they have different communication styles (Tannen, 2010).

The number of women in the workforce is increasing in most countries except in the Arab World due to cultural and religious issues (Robins et al., 2012); there are less than 2% on executive boards (Catalyst, 2014). Fortunately, today many associations support women empowerment and first Ladies like Queen Rania of Jordan and Sheikha Mozah of Qatar are good role models for Arab females. Traditional norms limit career choices and oblige them to choose jobs that are 'socially accepted'. "Male stereotyping and preconceptions" is the barrier that most senior executive females have to overcome (Catalyst, 1996).

The aim of this study is to determine the reasons behind the dearth of women in senior positions in Lebanese universities by gathering the opinions of professional women. The practical implication of the study will provide a new understanding of the role of women in higher education in a new perspective that could be relied on for further studies.

### **Gender stereotype**

Stereotyping is a generalization used to describe or distinguish a group; it is judging people depending on one's perception of the group to which they belong (Robbin & Coulter, 2009). The patriarchal societies of the Arab countries raise women to be submissive and are expected to care for the wellbeing of their family and undertake most household responsibilities (Ghattas and Rassi, 2001).

Gender stereotypes is judging all women on the basis of perceived ideas and is one of the factors that prevent women from showing their full potential and from reaching leadership positions; women are subject to discrimination and unfair evaluation of their work. Gender stereotypes reinforce the perception that women lack the qualifications to be good leaders (Catalyst, 2005). In addition, they affect the way women advance in organizations; the perception of women as warm, modest and sensitive is inconsistent of the stereotype people have of a leader as a strong risk-taker. To be able to reach high managerial positions, women tend to act in a stereotypical masculine manner (Ghattas, 2006).

'Women Take Care'; 'Men Take Charge' (Catalyst, 2005). This report reveals that women leaders are misjudged and their talents and leading abilities are undermined. This gender-based stereotyping is the perception of leadership behavior of men and women that forms a barrier to women's career advancement. Gender stereotyping makes it look normal to marginalize women and keep them away from decision making positions. Breaking this stereotype requires serious measures such as educating managers and exhibiting the qualifications of women. In short, diversity should be managed by increasing awareness, displaying tolerance and confronting stereotypes. Confronting gender stereotyping will open the door for competent women to reach senior positions and reduce the chance of their attrition.

### **Leadership**

Leadership is the ability to influence people toward the attainment of organizational goals. Leaders can inspire and motivate people beyond their normal level of performance; therefore, organizational success is highly dependent on leaders (Robbins and Coulter, 2009; Robbins et al., 2012). In today's world, a leader is supposed to manage power, develop trust, empower employees and lead across cultures. Effective leaders help followers to lead themselves by exercising self-leadership, creating opportunities and focusing on influence not control (Robbins et al., 2012).

A leader is supposed to provide encouragement, have vision and foresight, be trustworthy, dynamic, positive, and proactive. Consequently, an effective leader can be either a man or a woman. Women can improve a company's financial performance (Vieito, 2012; Adams, 2014), and improve social business practices (Boulouta, 2013). Women use their soft skills to motivate, foster communication and to produce high quality work (Sharpe, 2000). The interpersonal skills, collaborating and listening are more needed in organizations today because jobs these days require teamwork, flexibility and information sharing.

The self-efficacy theory does not reflect any gender differences in the ability to learn or in the confidence individuals have of their ability to perform a task. It is based on previous experiences and social persuasion that communicates confidence in their abilities. People with high-efficacy look for opportunities and are convinced that they can overcome obstacles through perseverance (Bandura, 2000). Self-efficacy development can help increase female academic leaders and can provide professional development, create opportunities for experimental learning as proactive strategies to achieve gender equity (Sloma-Williams et al., 2009).

### **Previous research**

Although women CEOs have proved to improve the financial performance of their companies; (Fairchild, 2014), there are only 27 women CEOs in the Fortune 1000, most of them are married with children. In 2014, women were still underrepresented in UK universities with only 20% at the rank of professor. While females constitute 45% of the academic workforce, the system still favors males and stops women from reaching their full potential as fifty Cambridge seniors claimed (Black and Islam, 2013).

Priola (2004) looked at gender identities in higher education in a UK university where women occupy most senior positions. In-depth interviews revealed that women manage multi-tasks, encourage teamwork, care for the staff and rely on their communication skills. The feminine attributes used by women managers differentiate their style from the style of counterparts and they succeed in implementing a feministic way of leading in a masculine culture. Women are systematic and fulfill all the requirements of a job; men usually like the status they get from a position but do not want to get involved in all activities associated with the job. Men prefer prestigious universities that have access to research and power where they can use their masculinity and leave the jobs they are not interested in to women. In addition, women managers had to create a feminine working environment to be able to maintain a feminine identity in a masculine culture (Priola, 2004).

One study (Kjeldal et al., 2005) investigated the reasons why women in senior academic positions are fewer than men after two decades of the equal employment opportunity legislation in Australia. The story of three women academics who have not yet reached senior positions was analyzed to find the impediment to women advancement in a university that has implemented a workplace program intended to improve women's access to opportunities. It was found that there was an inequity in male and female teaching load that gave men more time for research and business consulting activities. Informal networking and in-group favoritism enabled men to discuss their ideas and promote themselves; they are granted more favors than women who are not even represented fairly in meetings.

Another research was conducted on the origins and the impact of work-life conflict on the career and family of working women at a Lebanese institution of higher education (Karkoulian and Halawi, 2007). Many women feel the obligation to reduce their working hours because of their value system, children's needs, and husband's attitude towards their work as well as governmental and organizational regulations. Marital status and increased work responsibilities affect women's career choice because they increase the work-home conflict. Single women with fewer family responsibilities and no children were promoted, fairly paid and did not face any gender discrimination. The university in this study (Karkoulian and Halawi, 2007) offers flexible work hours, parental leave and day care to alleviate work-life conflict. The researchers believe that this will increase self-esteem, emotional and financial well-being of women and has a positive effect on children's development. They suggested that the government enforces anti-discriminating legislation, but consented that gender equity will only be reached if there is a change within society-in people's values, behavior and attitude.

Moreover, Ghattas (2009) studied the psychological and social factors that affect the behavior of female leaders in two American universities and two banks in Lebanon. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both male and female employees from different age groups, religious and political affiliations who worked in these institutions during and after the civil war. The purpose was to find out how women leadership opportunities and styles depend on the social and economic environment. She found that women had the opportunity to lead because of the unstable situation and because men looked for better opportunities abroad. Their leadership styles in the universities were criticized by their male colleagues if they used a feminine style and by faculty members if they showed more of a masculine style and behaved in an authoritarian way. Their feminine attributes helped during the war as it was easier for them to keep the universities open without much conflict with militias. In banks, women's contributions have been acknowledged, but women who have reached leadership positions, admitted that they had to work much harder than men in order to be promoted. Family responsibilities increased the work-life conflict in both cases. In conclusion, women adapted their leadership style to the situation and this helped them with their career progress; the situational leadership style proved to be successful in both universities and banks (Ghattas, 2009).

Another research studied the impact of gender, family, and work on the career advancement of Lebanese women managers (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). Most of the respondents to the in depth face-to-face interviews considered themselves as hard working, ambitious and believe that their feminine traits are appropriate for managerial positions. They all agreed that their educational attainment and experience were essential to their career advancement. Although, few interviewees said that they had reached managerial positions by chance, many admit that nepotism (Wasta) or connections played an important role in their career. Family responsibilities did not prevent women managers from pursuing their career; most of them have domestic help and extended family support.

The researchers concluded that what hinders women advancement in Lebanese organizations is cultural; social traditions and stereotyping attitudes that favor men's advancement despite women's qualifications and skills. The patriarchal structure encourages women to choose fields that society find more suitable for their gender role but 'Wasta' sometimes plays a favorable role in women's career.

Without a doubt, women, almost half the population, have come a long way in terms of education and employment. Although they have been successful in many sectors and occupied managerial positions, they are still underrepresented on executive boards. The percentage ranges from 3.1% in Japan to 35.5 % in Norway, with only 19.2 % in the US S&P 500 index and no data for the Middle East (Catalyst Census, 2014). The socially structured stereotypes of the patriarchal society in Lebanon expect women to be homemakers and family caretakers. Even with affordable domestic help, many women feel guilty for not spending enough time with their children thus put their careers on hold until their children are grown up (Akar and Mouchantaf, 2013; Bleijenbergh et al., 2013).

Women are also subject to a psychological glass ceiling because they internalize gender stereotype and become less willing to ask for promotion (Rhode and Kellerman, 2006). Women's career choices and aspirations are highly affected by the social expectations of the patriarchal society and gender stereotypes in Lebanon (Omair, 2008). Until recently, the banking sector in Lebanon was an appropriate choice for women because of their educational attainment and convenient working hours. During the civil war, they had the opportunity to reach managerial positions when qualified men left the country for better jobs abroad (Jamali et al., 2005). Women also took advantage of the unstable situation to successfully lead in prestigious universities by adapting a situational leadership style, nevertheless, the number in senior positions in universities is still very low (Ghattas, 2009).

### **Methodology**

The objective of the research is to investigate what form the glass ceiling takes in academia in Lebanon. The data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with 34 female academics at three major universities to be able to understand from women's subjective experiences and interpretations the major obstacles that form the glass ceiling. The main emphasis of this research is to gauge the views and beliefs of women academics having different ranks and in different managerial positions about the glass ceiling impact on women advancement in institutions of higher education in Lebanon. The interview questions (Appendix A) tackled different issues, related to interviewees' own experience about the glass ceiling, performance evaluation, institutional barriers, and their recommendations concerning the policies and practices that should be implemented to offer women more opportunities.

In a study done for Collective Research and Training on Development - Action (CRTD- A), Tailfer (2010) stated that Lebanese women are highly educated and they outnumber men in secondary schools and universities. Albeit women tend to specialize in different fields, they have limited job opportunities as employers still prefer to hire men candidates even if they are less qualified. In addition, (Tailfer, 2010) highly educated women face gender bias in hiring, and promotion and very few reach managerial positions. Also, in higher education institutions in Lebanon, as is the case in many countries around the world, the number of women in junior and middle level of administration is much larger than their number in senior positions. Thus, first hypothesis will investigate the effect of the glass ceiling on the recruitment and promotion processes: Recruitment and promotion processes engender the dearth of women in leadership positions; The shortcoming of women is the only reason behind their dearth in leadership positions.

Tailfer (2010) also disclosed that working women in Lebanon face discrimination as unequal pay, gender bias, no social services, no daycare and no law to protect them in the workplace. Tailfer blames the culture for discouraging women to enter the workforce. Professional women choose jobs that do not interfere with their family responsibilities because they are raised with school books that portray women as the family care giver and men as the decision makers. The Middle-Eastern patriarchal societies characterize men as the breadwinner of the family and women as the caregiver (Ghattas, 2009); women are raised as submissive and trained not to voice their opinions from early age (Ghattas and Rassi, 2001). Similarly, working women in Lebanon encounter an attitudinal barrier; they are considered high risk employees because the patriarchal society expects them to give priority to their family (Jamali et al., 2005). The second hypothesis will look into the impact of the patriarchal Middle-Eastern societies on performance evaluation: Performance evaluation is subject to cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes influence; Performance evaluation is based on criteria and not influenced by the culture.

The philosophical position of this thesis is phenomenological; the prime emphasis is to understand women's opinion by conducting in depth semi-structured interviews to collect data. Also, this research is interpretive; a positive approach will be used to reach objectivity when analyzing the qualitative data. The variables in qualitative data are not distinct and measurable; they are more a concept. In this case, the independent variables are the barriers that may form the glass ceiling and hinder women's advancement in higher education institutions in Lebanon. The independent variables that will be investigated and might make a difference in having more women in senior positions are recruitment and promotion processes; social beliefs and their impact on performance evaluation; gender leadership styles; and the institutional environment. The dependent variable is the number of women in senior positions.

The research is qualitative because it is a more suitable approach to understand and interpret interviewees' perceptions, ideas and opinions and thus, fulfil the purpose of this research. The purpose of this case study is to create a framework that enables the discussion of the data collected and compares the outcomes to other similar studies and generalizes the findings to the study the population. As mentioned earlier, the methodology is interpretative based on in- depth semi- structured interviews with 34 full time female academics having different academic ranks from senior instructor to professor and many occupying advanced administrative positions like associate provost, founding dean, dean, associate dean, chairperson, acting chair, associate chair and director (Appendix B).

The population is three universities in Lebanon that follow the American credit system; the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese American University (LAU); and Notre Dame University (NDU). The population is relevant considering the small number of high ranked universities in Lebanon; the 3 universities are prestigious and renowned in Lebanon and the Arab World and are considered among the leading ten universities in Lebanon.

The sampling procedure is purposive sampling; that is, the sample is chosen on purpose because the interview questions could be answered by few persons to increase the accuracy and limit the risk of misrepresentations. The study is a case study; it is more descriptive than analytical and the type is a snapshot to be able to investigate the issue at one point in time; the emphasis is on the in-depth study of a few cases but in holistic approach. All the interviews were conducted between April and October, 2014 which gave a clear view at that point in time without major events that could affect their opinion or situation as a snapshot is supposed to do. Interviews took half an hour in average and were tape recorded or hand written if the interviewees preferred so; the semi-structured interviews gave the respondents the possibility to freely express and discuss what is important to them.

The twenty-four interview questions are based on previous studies and on observation of the actual representation of female academics at the above-mentioned universities. Question 11 was about interviewees' opinion on Williams (2003) allegations, that women are evaluated based on their accomplishment and men based on their potential. Question 16 investigated if men leadership skills are more required in some positions, and it is based on the fact that men occupy most leadership positions. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews enabled the change of the order of questions depending on the respondents' arguments and to correct them when necessary. Such was the case in question three; university One and university Two did not have tenure at the time of the interviews, and the question was changed to senior position instead of tenure positions when it was more appropriate.

The data collected is qualitative and it is valid and relevant because it was collected by direct contact with the interviewees in their office environment and natural corporate culture. Data analysis is meticulous because some interviewees had non-standard responses. The marital status of the interviewees was not taken into consideration because women in Lebanon feel it is their responsibility to care for the elderly and people with special needs in the family as much as they care for their spouse and children.

The interviewees were carefully selected by inspecting each of the three universities directories and identifying those full time female academicians who simultaneously occupy administrative posts. The purpose was to acquire similar profiles from the three universities but it was impossible in view of the small population and different institutional cultures. In each of the institutions, there was at least one interviewee at the beginning of her career who will experience first-hand how the glass ceiling is perceived at that particular level. Interviewees with many years of experience and in middle managerial positions who have broken the glass ceiling have administrative posts in the three universities.

The raw data collected by recording or hand writing was analyzed to reduce the large amount of data into preliminary categories that enable the identification of key concepts for final analysis and interpretation. A cross sectional analysis is conducted to find a pattern and a non-cross sectional analysis is used to identify the particularity of each case. The reasoning is inductive thinking; beginning with the observation that there are few women in senior positions in the universities in Lebanon. The pattern is that there is only one female dean in each of the three universities; the hypotheses are related to the barriers that hinder women's advancement to senior positions; the data collected will be used to find patterns and sort data by concepts in order to support or reject the hypotheses.

Validity of the research is measured by the best approximation of the truth of a given proposition or conclusion; and reliability is the extent to which the study will give the same result if it is repeated (Trochim and Donnelly, 2007). Internal validity refers to whether what we are observing makes a difference and changes are attributed to our propositions not to other possible causes, and whether there is enough evidence to support it. There was no threat to the internal validity of this study. There was no selection bias as the sample was carefully selected to be as consistent as possible in the three universities. The discrepancy in the interviewees' academic rank is due to the fact that AUB was founded in 1866, while LAU was founded in 1835 as an American School for Girls and evolved since to become an officially recognized college in 1970 and changed the name to LAU in 1994, and NDU was founded in 1987. The other reason is the universities' by-laws and internal policies. There was also no mortality, history, or maturation threats as nobody dropped out and the data was collected within a short period. As for regression, instrumentation and testing, they do not apply to this exploratory and descriptive case study.

## **Findings**

The thirty-four participants from the three universities that follow the American credit-system have given a clear view of the glass ceiling impact on women advancement in higher educational institutions in Lebanon. The participants were carefully selected to be full-time female academics that have had or still have different managerial positions and different academic ranks. In each of the three universities there was only one female dean of faculty at the time of the interview and there was only one female associate provost. The data collected from each university was investigated individually and then the outcome of the data from the three universities was compared and added together to be able to test the hypotheses and establish a theory.

### American University of Beirut

Twelve interviews were conducted with female academics at AUB. They are categorized as ten professors, one associate professor and one assistant professor. Most of them occupy high senior administrative positions such as associate provost, current and previous dean, associate dean, chairperson, acting chair and founder of community programs. They succeeded in having the university implement a policy that supports female promotion by stopping the clock for a semester as a maternity leave policy. Accordingly, female academics would have time to adjust, take care of their babies and work on their research and publications to be able to apply for promotion on time.

Academic promotions are granted every seven years for candidates who present a portfolio that meets the requirements. For instance, an assistant professor should have a number of teaching hours, administrative and committee duties and a significant number of publications to be promoted to associate professor and the same applies to be promoted from associate professor to professor. Every seven years, candidates are either promoted or terminated if their portfolio does not meet the university requirements. They all strive to become professors because it proves their competence. Administrative jobs are rotating but being assigned a managerial position is a kind of recognition for their work.

Nine of the interviewees considered the glass ceiling as a limitation or difficulty to move upward which hinders women progress. One respondent explained that it is a gender inequity in rank and pay but another affirmed that the glass ceiling is rising to the highest senior positions. Three of the interviewees have not heard of the glass ceiling.

In this university, women's career aspirations are to become full professors, for them this title shows their competence and achievement. Most did not seek administrative positions but they were chosen because they have proven to be credible, trustworthy and capable. The criteria for recruitment and promotion are clear; they all agreed that being in academia requires dedication and passion.

Although, as one interviewee mentioned, political affiliation is one of the barriers that forms the glass ceiling; the glass ceiling is very high in this institution as many women hold senior positions and many are on the board of trustees.

The evaluation of academic performance is based on end results and is not influenced by the patriarchal Middle-Eastern culture but it is not the case for administrative advancement. They all believe that hard work is recognized and that sometimes women choose not to be too involved for personal reasons especially when the children are young. Most of them insist that women are able to balance family and career and that having children should not stop women from advancing in their career. None of them believe that men can be better leaders but in the Middle-East, males are preferred to deal with certain situations outside the university.

This university was the first to take measures to improve the conditions of women by stopping the clock for a semester as part of the maternity leave policy, so women will not lose the promotion track. But they all believe that there are still many measures to be taken in order to reduce the life-work conflict that hinders women advancement.

#### Lebanese American University

In this university, the interviewees are full time senior instructors, assistant professors, associate professors, professors having at the time of the interview administrative positions as founding dean, associate dean, chairperson, associate chair and coordinator. They defined the glass ceiling as a barrier, not a legitimate barrier but that hinders women advancement even if they have the credentials. One interviewee confirmed that it does not exist in academic promotions but does exist in administrative positions. One of the interviewees specified that the glass ceiling in academia is not gender related but it is related to majors and to the universities from which they graduated.

The glass ceiling was defined as a barrier that hinders women advancement; seven out of eleven interviewees have encountered it in this university; one of them specified it is not related to gender. The glass ceiling is felt more so in administrative rather than academic promotions but it is becoming thinner. Institutions do not have discriminatory policies but women still have to prove themselves for managerial positions and they are only considered when there is no competent male available. As for performance evaluation, there are criteria for recruitment and promotion; criteria are clear for academic promotion but in administration, criteria can be twisted by male evaluators who have been raised and live in a patriarchal Middle - Eastern society.

None of the interviewees thought that academic leadership needs male attributes. They believe in leadership skills and only one said that being in the Middle-East, a male figure is more accepted by neighboring countries and governmental organizations. This university has implemented policies to improve the condition of women by granting them a semester off as part of maternity leave and one extra year when they apply for promotion, but many believe there is still more to be done. Respondents recommended that women should set their priorities, get help at home and husband's support to be able to be devoted to their work, and that each woman should fight every barrier and discriminatory action against her; their effort together will help to break the glass ceiling. Women who have broken the glass ceiling have been determined, credible, serious and hard workers. Their advice is to be perseverant, smart and most of all to put their brain, heart and free soul in what they believe.

#### Notre Dame University

At NDU, eleven interviews were conducted with women academics having the rank of senior lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor and professor; some simultaneously occupying an administrative job. There is only one female dean in this university, there are also five chairpersons and one director.

Most of the respondents believe that the glass ceiling is a limitation of growth opportunities, some have never heard the term but when explained, they admitted that they have felt it but did not know that it is well defined and documented. Most agreed that the glass ceiling is felt at upper levels since there are many women occupying middle managerial positions. Only two women confirmed that there is no glass ceiling at their institution; one of them has been at this university for only one year.

The interviews carried out at this university indicate that there is a glass ceiling for senior positions and that it is felt by unconscious behavior of male managers and unfair performance evaluation.

Although not clearly stated, many have given the impression that nepotism exists and that in-group favoritism has hindered their advancement. Work-life balance has the most impact on women's career choice and advancement opportunities. The findings reveal that criteria for recruitment and promotion are the reason for the dearth of women in senior positions and that the beliefs of the patriarchal Middle-Eastern society influences the way managers, who are mostly men, assess women's accomplishments.

As for academic leadership skills, almost all assert that women are as competent as men and leading in academia does not require muscles. Albeit academic institutions value diversity and want to have more women in senior positions. Men occupy most of them because they ask more, network and portray their work better. Moreover, their beliefs are strong that as the primary breadwinner of the family, they should be given the chance, especially that women have other responsibilities and will not be as committed to their jobs.

## **Discussion**

The majority of the respondents agreed that there is a glass ceiling in academia; some confirmed that the glass ceiling is for administrative senior positions and not for academic promotion. They define the glass ceiling as a limitation to women advancement even if they have the credentials. One respondent defined the glass ceiling as inequity in rank and pay. Only seven participants believe there is no glass ceiling in academia; one of them said that the glass ceiling in academia is not related to gender but to the field and the university they graduate from and the other revealed that the glass ceiling is irrelevant in her faculty.

The major obstacle that hinders women advancement to senior positions are family responsibilities which are considered as a personal choice. The institutional barriers that affect women advancement in the workplace are divided among gender stereotype, workload, internal politics. Other factors include the war, recruitment policy, lack of resources, lack of appreciation, and language for non- Arabic speaking women who do not hold a PhD degree. The highest percentage of institutional barriers is for gender stereotype followed by internal politics that intentionally keep women away from decision making positions and form the glass ceiling. Institutional barriers are internal to each university, even if those barriers are not written barriers, they are practiced routinely. Only outstanding women can pass through the glass ceiling when no qualified men are available as was specified by one of the interviewees.

Almost 56% of the participants believe that performance evaluations are based on criteria but most of them stated that it is not as true for administrative positions because evaluation can be manipulated. Some criticized the fact that evaluations are based on end results and accomplishments and do not take into consideration their devotion and commitment. Almost 15% of the respondents believe that there are no criteria; performance is appreciated not measured. Only 29% said there is no proper evaluation in their institution.

Thirteen of the respondents find it is true that women are evaluated based on their accomplishment and men based on their potential. Some of them find that there is some truth in this statement because most evaluators are men and unconsciously they believe that men are better. Others are not sure because they never thought of it but this statement makes sense. One respondent added that a women's look is also relevant not only her accomplishment. Fourteen did not believe it is true but they explained that men portray their work better and that women should make known their capabilities.

In addition, many agreed that women should accomplish more to be promoted and as they explained it "women work, men take the credit" and "men talk, women accomplish". One respondent explained that women do not need to achieve more but need more time to achieve. Twelve of the respondents have encountered situations where less qualified male colleagues took the job; many did not want to talk about the incident but one respondent said that he was a 'good communicator'.

Professional growth opportunities were discussed in question 18. Thirty said they are available but women should want them, also some mentioned that they are available only in certain fields and more in academic than administrative. But many implied that women are reluctant to take the professional growth opportunities because they do not have time to spare and they are not sure whether it will make any difference in their promotion.

The answers for question 19 (Appendix A) about measures taken by the university to increase the number of women in senior positions were not identical even in the same institution. Thirteen explained that there have been some measures the most important of which is stopping the clock for women.

Although this policy is implemented in two of the universities, fifteen said there are no policies but the practice is better than before and there are no restraints, and six did not know about any policy or did not want to comment on the subject. All the interviewees agreed that much can be done to improve the conditions of women on campus. Only two suggested having a quota for a short period to reach gender equality in senior positions. One of them clarified that it is demeaning for women to be hired or promoted only to satisfy the quota and not because they are qualified.

When asked if men's leadership skills are more required in some positions, most of them laughed. They joked that academia leadership positions do not require muscles. None of them accepted that being assertive is only a male attribute, and they insisted that women are assertive when needed and their leadership skills and style are suitable for senior positions. One respondent said that the best choice is to have both males and females in senior positions because they complete each other. Only three advanced that sometimes it is better to have men in leadership positions, one of them explained that men take decisions faster and this is required in leadership positions. The other two confirmed that it is a cultural issue in the Middle-Eastern societies; governmental organizations and embassies of neighboring countries prefer to deal with men.

Moreover, many interviewees who have high administrative positions did not think that they have broken the glass ceiling; some said that they have managed to crack it only. Twenty respondents admitted they have broken it with determination, perseverance, credibility, seriousness, patience, communication skills and by fighting every battle along the way. Only five interviewees believed there is no glass ceiling to break, and one said that she does not care about the glass ceiling; she will keep doing good work and move forward.

The interviewees did not all agree that having women in top positions will make it easier for others to pass through; some said it depends on the woman herself but it will definitely be a breakthrough and establish precedence. Some believed that women in senior positions will use their posts to improve women's working conditions but others suggested that they will only be role models and inspire junior female academics.

Based on their experiences, the interviewees offered valuable advice to help women build their careers. The most imperative are to focus, build a record, perform, have good relationships with male colleagues, believe in themselves, keep their dignity, be perseverant, be determined, have passion, set their priorities, be motivated, take initiative, get involved, be professional, deliver results, be visible and to put their brain, heart and free soul in whatever they believe in.

More than 70% of the interviewees confirmed that the glass ceiling is a limitation for women in academia to reach senior positions, with only 20% denying its existence. Many said that their career is very demanding but that they love what they are doing. Some had to postpone their PhDs till their children became adults and their family responsibilities lessened. A significant fact is that there is only one female associate provost and three female deans, one in each of the three universities. Many of the interviewees hold high managerial positions and have founded new faculties or were founding members of new programs or new branches of their university, and their contributions have been recognized in Lebanon and abroad.

The barriers that the interviewees named as hindering their advancement were diverse: 32% for the glass ceiling, 20% for family-work conflict, 12% for many responsibilities to juggle, 6% for nepotism and political affiliation, 9% for the shortcoming of women, 3% lack of role model, and 9% believed that men push more. The interviewees believed that women decide to put on hold their career because of family-work conflict; women make this personal choice particularly when the working environment is not women friendly. Many women chose not to lean in to be able to care for their family but also some feel that managers are cautious to hire or promote young women because they are worried that they might not be fully committed to their jobs if they decide to start a family. The institutional barriers that create the glass ceiling are gender stereotype, internal politics, workload and in-group favoritism. Many complained of the workload that prevents them from doing what helps their career progress and discourages them from applying to higher positions. The institutional barriers are not distributed evenly in the three universities; each university has its own practices that are affected by the institution's culture and by top management's attitude.

More so, performance evaluation and criteria for recruitment and promotion are fundamental and can prove if institutional barriers are formal. Recruitment criteria are based on academic attainment and experience; and an interview will determine if the applicant's personality fits the corporate culture and the job requirements.

Each university has its own culture and mission and it was clear how much they are shared with interviewees of the same institution. Even if recruitment and promotion requirements are particular to each university, all the interviewees agreed that their personality and perseverance have played a major role in their career advancement.

Furthermore, promotions in academic ranks are systematic: a PhD holder will join as assistant professor and in a period of 6 to 7 years, assistant professors apply for promotion to associate professors with a portfolio of teaching hours, committee and administrative duties, student counseling and at least three publications. Research and publications are given priorities; candidates are either promoted or terminated if they do not meet the requirements; however, there is ambiguity about this issue at NDU. The same applies to be promoted from associate professor to full professor. The bias in evaluation happens in administrative promotion as the interviewees confirmed that even if evaluations are based on criteria, they can be twisted and their hard work and devotion are not taken into consideration. Gender stereotype, the patriarchal society and the Middle - Eastern culture affect consciously or unconsciously how women's work is assessed. Many agreed that evaluators look at women accomplishments and do not consider their potential, while a man with less qualification is sometimes promoted only because he is considered the breadwinner of the family.

Other factors that influence male evaluators are the in-group favoritism and networking. Many respondents said that men push harder and they are better in portraying themselves; and by delegating much of their administrative work to women in their department they have more time to network. Also many interviewees believe that women should accomplish more than men to be promoted and should always fight to receive fair treatment. Some said that women should prove themselves at the beginning of their career and overcome every obstacle. Half of the interviewees confirmed that institutional barriers exist and they had to fight their way through but some said that when women excel in their work nobody can deny it, and their achievements will be recognized. Growth opportunities are available almost equally for both men and women, but some of the interviewees confirmed that taking the opportunity will increase their life-work conflict.

Two of the universities have recently implemented a maternity leave policy that grant women a semester off at each delivery by stopping the clock so they will not lose promotion track. The interviewees of the three universities agreed that there is a lot to be done to have their institutions women friendly. They suggested having a daycare on campus, elderly care, equal benefits, training, support and respect for women leaders, maternity and paternity leaves and flexible schedules.

Finally, the hypotheses stated in the methodology are justified and are further discussed and interpreted in the following sections. All the interviewees asserted that women have all the attributes that make them good leaders. They explained that men have a different way of looking at things and can give more time to their work but women are more democratic in upper administration; they resolve conflict between people and work well with others to benefit the institution. One interviewee said: 'Leadership needs heart and brain, so women are better'.

## **Conclusion**

We can conclude from the findings that women do not lack ambition; they are highly motivated and hard-working. They are working in a field they choose and love, they are perseverant and devoted. Family is an important aspect of women's life and to balance between their work and family many had to compromise and give up administrative positions for the sake of their family. Although they are working in institutions that promote diversity, women in academia face practices that are discriminative and prevent them from being fairly evaluated and promoted. Women who had reached senior positions had to fight their way through, worked hard and made their achievements known. Many interviewees, who have focused on their jobs, have been recognized for their achievements and assigned administrative positions they did not seek. They insist that once you deliver nobody can deny it but these women have been fully dedicated to their work, always present, prepared and had their arguments ready and definitely they outperform their male colleagues.

Clearly, recruitment and academic promotion are based upon criteria applied for both male and female candidates, but many factors affect the recruitment process. Nepotism and connections play a major role in recruitment decisions and this is true for men and women, the glass ceiling is detectable when decision makers prefer to hire men equally or less qualified, because they believe that women will not be fully committed, especially young candidates who might decide to start a family. Academic promotion is systematic and candidates who satisfy criteria and meet requirements will be promoted despite gender. The glass ceiling manifests when criteria are not clear.

The glass ceiling is omnipresent in administrative promotions where evaluators consciously prefer people from their own kind, the in-group favoritism, or are unconsciously influenced by gender stereotype and socio-cultural beliefs.

Most interviewees believe that they should work harder and sometimes accomplish twice as much as men to be promoted; many reported that a less qualified male took a job they had applied for. Also many interviewees admitted that institutional barriers really exist, others affirmed that women have the perception that senior positions are not open for them but they couldn't explain why there are few women at the top. Most of the interviewees confirmed that professional growth opportunities are available for everyone who seeks them, but many agreed that women have many responsibilities and cannot take advantage of these opportunities.

The maternity leave policy, that senior academic women have worked hard to implement in two universities, supports women in pursuing their academic career and in keeping up with the academic promotion track. Leadership skills are required for any senior positions and women have all the attributes to be good leaders. Proactive policies and fair practices would change institutions' environment to become women friendly and offer equal opportunities to men and women. Women friendly environment is able to attract and retain qualified women which will add value to the institutions.

The other interesting finding is that young participants in the three universities are certain that there is no glass ceiling and that they have equal opportunities as their male colleagues. The glass ceiling was most felt by mid-level managers that have experienced discriminatory situations, and by some of the interviewees who have reached senior positions. They admitted that the glass ceiling had impeded their career progress but they have been so determined to break it.

Many interviewees who have broken the glass ceiling admitted that they have worked hard, given their job first priority and with time they have been appreciated and their contributions have been acknowledged. Gender stereotype, internal politics and in-group favoritism are the institutional barriers that have a large impact on the career progress of female academics. Work overload is the reason why many women choose not to lean in to senior positions; they are worried they will not have enough time for their families and for research and publications essential for their academic promotions. Each institution has its own culture, policies and practices and they affect the way women perceive their advancement and growth opportunities.

Moreover, in the three universities, gender stereotype and the patriarchal Middle-Eastern culture had the same impact on assessing women's work specifically in administrative promotion. Male networking and in-group favoritism keep women less informed of leadership opportunities. Those barriers are practices that form the glass ceiling and make it hard for women to navigate. They are not written policies but they are institutional barriers as half of the interviewees confirmed. The lack of women in top positions makes it hard for others to overcome those barriers as they cannot find mentors that can help them advance, while men have more time to network and to portray their accomplishment.

The glass ceiling still prevents women from reaching leadership positions despite the fact that they have the educational attainment, leadership skills and ambition. The dearth of women in leadership positions gives the perception that they cannot be good leaders. Male dominance, nepotism and networking promote men's accomplishments and undermine women's achievements. Women endure most of the workloads such as teaching hours, administrative and committees' duties as well as students' counseling which leave them with little time for research, publications and networking.

The glass ceiling impedes women's advancement in higher education institutions; the barriers are societal and institutional. Policies are not enough to make the change and practices are influenced by gender stereotype and in-group favoritism. Academic policies should be accompanied by many measures to change the practices and make the institutions' environments more women friendly. It takes time for the policies to be well integrated and to change people's attitudes and convictions. Work-life conflict is a major factor that affects women's choices in advancing their careers; women have many career interruptions when they decide to have a family and this will inhibit their career progress when they decide to come back to a full time job.

Many interviewees confirmed that there are equal growth opportunities for male and female academics. The findings also revealed that taking the opportunity doesn't mean the path to promotion is easier than other factors like in-group favoritism and the ability for men to network affect their advancement.

The findings also imply that growth opportunities are more available in academic strands rather than in administrative duties, and that excessive workload makes it hard for women to take advantage of these opportunities.

Work overloads include tasks that their male colleagues delegate and that they cannot refuse. Many participants have complained that they do the work while men take the credit and that men are better in portraying and promoting their accomplishments. The findings suggest that evaluators should take into consideration their participation in the work and not only the end result. The findings also reveal that if performance evaluation covers all aspects of the job and include women devotion and participation over time, more women would have reached senior positions. With a fair assessment, women wouldn't feel that they have to work more and harder than men to be promoted; this would increase their job satisfaction and commitment.

Similarly, the study revealed that successful women who have reached leadership positions were strong minded and did not let discriminatory practices hinder their advancement; they would always prepare their arguments and speak up without being intimidated by the large number of males in meetings. Outstanding women reach senior positions because they are always prepared, focused and outperform their male colleagues. The study also finds that having more women at the top is an opportunity to change the misconception that women are not good leaders; they will be role models and mentor young females to progress in their career. Mentoring is very important to compensate for the little involvement women have in informal networking and support them when they are vulnerable and under a lot of pressure to advance. The breakthrough to senior positions will encourage others to plan their careers, take opportunities and develop attitudes for success.

In conclusion, this study confirms that women can be effective academic leaders. They do have the attributes required for academic leadership; they are competent, have passion for their work and share their vision with other decision makers. In fact, a few respondents mentioned that each position imposes a different style of leading.

### **Limitations**

The research included three major universities in Lebanon that follow the American credit system; the population is small but relevant if we consider the number of universities that follow the American system in Lebanon. It is relevant also because the three universities are among the leading ten universities in Lebanon; they are prestigious institutions that have contributed to research and initiatives and are well recognized in Lebanon and in the Middle-East. The disparity in the rank of the interviewees among the three universities is due to the internal recruitment and promotion policies that are particular to each university and to each university history.

The purposive sampling was intended to select participants of different academic rank and administrative positions in each university to be able to understand how women with different positions interpret their institution's environment. Also purposive sampling is considered to cause a limitation of the research; the participants of the three universities were carefully selected to have maximum variation sampling in each university. The major limitation of the research is the fact that all interviewees are women and it only takes into consideration females' points of view and opinions. Another limitation is that the finding cannot be generalized to other universities in Lebanon because they follow different systems or because they have different policies and practices.

### **Recommendations**

The findings and the recommendations given by the interviewees all aim to improve women's working conditions in higher education institutions in Lebanon. Institutions should have proactive policies that enable women to participate in decision making. The proactive policies should provide professional development, flexible workplace structure that offers part time jobs or the ability to work from home, parental leave, improved promotion criteria, and support to empower female leaders.

Professional development prepares female academics to leadership positions, raises awareness of the importance of diversity and creates a culture that respects and supports female leaders. Policies should be clear on the amount of teaching hours, administrative duties and student's counseling. Having more women leaders will change the perception that they are not good managers and will open the path to others.

Flexible workplace policies encourage women to keep their jobs by working part time or from their home so they will not miss the promotion track.

Women who have career interruptions are afraid of losing their competitive edge when they go back to full time positions. Many interviewees suggest having childcare and elderly care available on campus and suggest that parental leave instead of maternal leave will help ensure equality in the workplace.

The proactive policies also encourage having mentors that promote women's accomplishments and encourage young faculty members to advance to leadership positions. Re-evaluating promotion criteria is an important measure to take to reach gender equality. The promotion criteria should be clear and take into consideration all the contributions that female academics provide with less emphasis on research and publications.

Institutions that are women friendly offer equal growth opportunities and fairly assess women's achievements are able to retain qualified women and profit from their expertise. Women are encouraged to pursue their goals and seek leadership positions when other women have made a breakthrough; the position will not be threatening when they see that others excel in their work and are able to balance their family and work commitments. At the same time if women believe that leadership positions are not open for them or could increase their family-work conflict, they will not apply for advanced positions and prefer to remain in their post.

Institutions should implement policies that reduce gender discrimination at the work place and take many measures to make the change possible. Seminars, awareness campaigns, recognizing women's achievement, and strict policies on teaching hours and administrative duties are measures that help reach equity in the work place. Women should have a voice on boards and in meetings so that they will be able to participate in the decisions made. All male faculty members should be encouraged to mentor women and help them reach their goals by giving advice and promoting their accomplishments.

As a final point, this study confirms that there is a glass ceiling in higher education institutions in Lebanon and it is impeding women's advancement to leadership positions. The socio-cultural barriers of the patriarchal society are changing slowly; women are present in many economic sectors and are competing with men in many fields that were considered as male domains. Women today seek high educational attainment and expertise to be able to prove themselves and overcome societal barriers. Today, the Lebanese society accepts that women need to work not only to support their family financially but also because they are ambitious and want to pursue their career aspirations.

Finally, the internal structural barriers have the most impact on career advancement; institutions should take measures and implement policies that reduce practices that discriminate women in the workplace. Universities should promote diversity and be the first to have equal representations of males and females in leadership positions. Simple measures can encourage women to seek higher positions and to take extra responsibilities. Women who have broken the glass ceiling in this study have been outstanding and focused. If the institution's internal policies and practices support women in their career, they will benefit from their devotion and expertise.

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