



Determinants of Glass Ceiling Factors and Their Impact on Women's Career Growth: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review examined 79 research articles on the glass ceiling and women's career advancement, retrieved from the Scopus database on 14 April 2026. Descriptive analysis, citation analysis, thematic analysis and keyword co-occurrence mapping were used to evaluate the documents. The annual distribution shows an increase in publications in 2021, 2023, 2024 and 2025, indicating a growing global focus on the glass ceiling. Country-wise and journal-wise analyses show broad international contributions, but citations appear more concentrated in the United States and New Zealand. The journals *Frontiers in Psychology* and *Gender in Management* appear to be the foremost sources of publications and citations. Through analysis of the keyword co-occurrence map, four themes have been identified: organizational barriers, socio-cultural constraints, individual-level factors, and career outcomes of the glass ceiling. Organizations could adopt transparent and fair promotion systems to reduce bias. Likewise, increasing women's representation in different leadership positions can minimize inequalities. Policymakers could support this diversity and inclusion by developing rules, regulations and policies that promote gender equality. Future researchers could focus their studies in Nepal and other South Asian countries to identify generalizability in the field.

Introduction

The working environment has changed. We can observe that the female workforce has increased significantly worldwide. Now, men and women are working equally, but in many organizations, female workers still seem to be dominated by their male colleagues. They seem to be slightly more backward than

the male workers. So the issue of gender inequality in the workplace is receiving close attention from researchers, policymakers and organizations worldwide. Although there is growth in educational and employment opportunities for women, many still face invisible barriers that hinder their career advancement. This issue is basically explained by the concept called the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is an unseen but powerful obstacle that prevents women from reaching higher-level positions



in organizations (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Martínez-Fierro & Lechuga Sancho, 2021).

Here, not only the glass ceiling but also organizational, social, and individual factors restrict women's career advancement. Studies have shown that women often face challenges such as gender bias, unequal promotion opportunities, and limited access to leadership roles (Khalid & Aftab, 2023; Sobaih & Abu Elnasr, 2024). Although women are well represented in many sectors, they remain underrepresented in senior management positions, indicating that numerous barriers restrict the growth of women's careers (Bajo et al., 2024; Magnano San Lio et al., 2025). This suggests that increasing participation alone is not enough to ensure equality in career outcomes.

There are factors that can reinforce the glass ceiling. Among them, one is an organizational element. Workplace policies, leadership structures, and organizational culture might frequently support male workers, either directly or indirectly. For instance, biased promotion systems and a lack of supportive human resource practices can hinder women's career growth and advancement (Akte et al., 2026; Hasan et al., 2024). In some situations, informal networks and decision-making processes could also exclude women. Thus, female workers might lose their chances of progressing to higher positions (Neugart & Zaharieva, 2025). Similarly, gender stereotypes within organizations are another factor. Gender stereotypes might influence how women's capabilities are perceived, often leading to undervaluation of their skills and contributions (Espinosa & Ferreira, 2022).

Another one is socio-cultural factors, which could contribute to the persistence of the glass ceiling. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations might also place additional responsibilities on women. Such responsibilities are basically related to family and caregiving. These family responsibilities could also affect their career growth (Gallardo, 2021; Wolle, 2024). In some cultures, leadership is still associated with masculine traits, creating additional challenges for women seeking leadership positions (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020). Thus, women may face both external barriers and internal pressures that might affect their careers.

Not only this, but individual-level factors also play an important role in the development of women's careers. Confidence, career aspirations, and perceptions of the glass ceiling can impact how women advance their professional paths. Research shows that women's perceptions of career hindrances influence their motivation and willingness to take on leadership roles (Fard et al., 2025; Smith, Caputi & Crittenden, 2012). But these individual factors are often shaped by broader structural conditions rather than just personal limitations.

The glass ceiling's impact on women's career advancement is significant and complex. It affects career outcomes such as promotion, salary, and job satisfaction. Additionally, it has broader implications for organizational performance and economic development. Organizations that fail to realize the full potential of their employees may experience low innovation and productivity (Cheng & Wang, 2023; Tariq et al., 2025). In the same way, gender inequality can cause social and economic disparities, too. Therefore, this systematic review will help identify

common themes, key determinants, and research gaps in this subject matter.

Various scholars have either suggested that the glass ceiling problem is highly organization-dependent or that individually and culturally driven factors greatly contribute to women's careers. Consequently, there is insufficient agreement on the most important factors influencing women's career development and how they manifest. In addition, the exponential growth of research on gender inequality and career progression makes it almost impossible for readers to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that explain the glass ceiling. Although numerous studies have been conducted, there is no coherent synthesis of recent evidence that highlights prevalent and recurring patterns, emerging issues, and existing research gaps to inform strategies for promoting women's equality. Therefore, the aim of this systematic review is to integrate the available empirical findings about the barriers of the glass ceiling on women's career advancement by: a) determining the major glass ceiling factors that impact women's career progression; b) examining how those factors affect women's advancement; c) synthesizing findings across industries and across geography; and d) identifying new themes and research opportunities concerning the glass ceiling phenomenon.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

Glass Ceiling Theory. The glass ceiling refers to hidden, unseen and implicit structures and procedures that prevent equally or better-qualified women from reaching top management and leadership positions, despite being better educated, skilled and experienced (Cotter et al., 2001; Morrison et al., 1987). Such barriers can be reflected in organizational structure and work environment, advancement mechanisms, and leadership patterns. As a result, women lack equal opportunities for career progress in organizations. The findings of this review lend support to this theoretical framework. Numerous studies in this review demonstrate that discriminatory promotion practices, unequal opportunities in access to leadership positions, and organizational bias are the reasons for blocking career progression for women. For example, Shrestha et al. (2023) found that invisible organizational barriers still blocked women's career progression in commercial banks in Nepal. In the tourism sector, Sobaih and Abu Elnasr (2024) suggested that gender discrimination in women's access to senior management roles may exist, despite women possessing relevant knowledge and competencies. Furthermore, Babic and Hansez (2021) showed that barriers to the glass ceiling negatively affect women's well-being and work-family balance, thereby limiting their career advancement to the management level. This indicates that not only can individual performance shape career progress, but structural barriers within the organization can also determine women's career progression. Glass Ceiling Theory is appropriate for understanding how work practices and institutional frameworks affect women's career development.

Social Role Theory. This theory suggests that social and gender expectations shape people's views of the roles men and women

should have (Eagly, 1987). It posits that leadership roles and decision-making responsibilities are traditionally masculine, while women are associated with childcare, home and family roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The studies within this research strongly support this. Wolle (2024) noted that stereotypes around gender are still evident and that they are associated with the under-representation of women in leadership roles. Likewise, Bruckmüller and Braun (2020) noted that social interpretations of leadership competence remain strongly related to gender inequality in the workplace, while Gallardo (2021) noted that family and child responsibilities continue to strongly influence women's academic career paths. The evidence shows that socio-cultural norms continue to influence opportunities and decision-making. Social Role Theory, therefore, offers an explanation for gender inequality despite workplace efforts to ensure equal employment.

Empirical Review

The glass ceiling is the main barrier to women's career growth and advancement. Although they have the required qualifications and experience, the glass ceiling is invisible, as are the systemic obstacles that prevent women from reaching higher managerial and leadership positions (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Martínez-Fierro & Lechuga Sancho, 2021). The study observed that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, workplace policies, promotion systems, and leadership norms frequently favor men. So, different studies have found that although women have equal performance and qualifications, biased evaluation and promotion processes can limit them from reaching top positions (Khalid & Aftab, 2023; Sobaih & Abu Elnasr, 2024). In many organizations, leadership roles are still held by men, which might create less chance for women (Bajo et al., 2024).

Organizational culture with male-dominated environments can also reinforce stereotypes about women's capabilities. It can lead to their underrepresentation in decision-making positions (Magnano San Lio et al., 2025). Similarly, the lack of supportive policies, such as mentoring programs and flexible work arrangements, further restricts women's career growth (Akter et al., 2026; Hasan et al., 2024). Likewise, in many organizations, most of the informal networks are male-centered, and these informal networks could also impact women's career advancement (Neugart & Zaharieva, 2025). Social norms and expectations, such as family responsibilities and parenting, are also creating problems in balancing women's professional and personal lives (Gallardo, 2021; Wolle, 2024). Another factor is the leadership trait. Although they have leadership abilities, women are perceived as less suitable for leadership roles (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020), which affects hiring, promotion, and evaluation processes.

Research shows that personal features such as confidence, motivation, and career aspirations can influence women's career growth, so individual-level factors also contribute to women's career growth. Women's perceptions about the glass ceiling can affect their interest in having leadership roles and taking on new opportunities (Fard et al., 2025; Smith, Caputi & Crittenden, 2012). Women have been appointed to lower- and middle-management roles, with limited opportunities for upper-level

roles (Cheng & Wang, 2023; Tariq et al., 2025). Consequently, this kind of discrimination leads to a continuous gender pay gap and gender disparity in leadership positions. In addition to these individual consequences, the glass ceiling also affects organizational performance. Promoting diversity in organizations is important for innovation and decision-making. Studies suggest that greater gender diversity in leadership positions can improve organizational outcomes and overall organizational performance (Tariq et al., 2025).

Despite extensive research on the glass ceiling, several gaps remain. Most research that appears to originate in industries such as academia, banking, and tourism is not generalizable (Mwashita et al., 2020; Shrestha et al., 2023). Likewise, the literature on glass ceiling studies examines either individual or organizational factors in isolation; they have not integrated them into a comprehensive framework. The study observed a lack of systematic synthesis of current research that examines different perspectives on the glass ceiling and women's career growth. The nature of workplaces and gender roles is developing. This systematic literature review will help identify emerging trends and challenges regarding the glass ceiling and understand the factors that impact women's career advancement.

Therefore, this study suggests that three interconnected dimensions shape women's career development, as indicated by the literature and the two theoretical perspectives discussed above. Organizational aspects include promotion policy, organizational culture, and leadership and mentoring opportunities (Cotter et al., 2001). The socio-cultural aspect is composed of sex stereotypes, traditional sex roles, social roles and family-work commitment (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012). As an individual aspect, we find ambition, self-confidence, perceived barriers and interest in leading. These three aspects influence the construction of the glass ceiling and women's career development.

Theoretical Implications

The contributions of this review to theory are threefold. First, this study supports Glass Ceiling Theory by reiterating that invisible organizational barriers continue to limit women's opportunities across professions and cultures (Cotter et al., 2001). It is evident from this review that gender inequality at the leadership level continues to be an issue regardless of advances made in women's education and workforce participation. Second, this study expands on Social Role Theory by showing that social expectations and gender stereotyping continue to affect career progression and leadership positions in the workplace (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This study makes clear that organizational and socio-cultural factors, and not just one or the other, are linked in the advancement of women into top leadership positions. Third, this study suggests integrating multiple theoretical perspectives on the advancement of women into top leadership positions, incorporating organizational, socio-cultural and individual-level explanations. This integrated perspective contributes to the literature by identifying multiple factors that account for the glass ceiling. Lastly, the thematic and bibliometric analyses suggest that new theoretical propositions need to examine the integration and interaction of organizational, socio-cultural and individual-level explanations, rather than individ-

ual explanations in isolation, when studying the progression of women to top leadership positions.

Materials and Methods

This section includes the data sources, the data collection process, and the data analysis techniques used in this study.

Sources of Data and Search Strategy

This study focuses on a systematic review of papers on the determinants of the glass ceiling and their impact on women's career growth. Only articles published in the Scopus database as of 14 April 2026 are included in this study. For this study to extract the papers related to the topic, the following Boolean operators have been applied as a search strategy on the Scopus database:

((“glass ceiling”) AND (“career advancement” OR “career progression” OR promotion) AND (women OR female))

It was deemed necessary to search one database because Scopus covers a wide range and provides citation data to find high-quality peer-reviewed literature across management, social sciences, economics and gender studies, as it is one of the most comprehensive multidisciplinary citation databases available. Unlike other databases, it is also strong in international coverage and normalized bibliographic data, both of which are particularly advantageous for bibliometric and systematic review analyses. By limiting the search to a single database, the screening and selection process could be managed consistently and without duplicates.

Data Collection Process and Article Screening

Using the given search strategy, a total of 410 journal articles were retrieved on 14 April 2026. Those articles were then selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in Table 1. After initial screening, 91 articles were extracted. Of these, 3 were found to be review papers during the title review, and through full-text review, 9 articles were found irrelevant. Therefore, 12 articles were removed from the study, and the final list included only 79 articles.

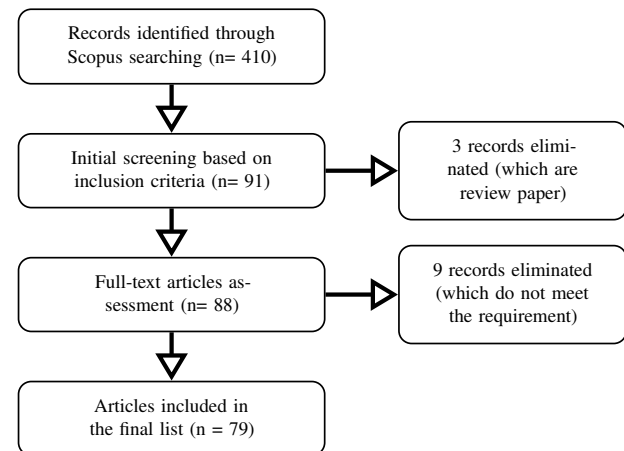
Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Document type: Journal articles	Books
Language: English	Non-English articles
Source: All open-access journals	Review papers
Focused on the glass ceiling, career advancement and women	Studies not related to the glass ceiling, career advancement and women

Figure 1

PRISMA Framework



Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis used in the study is described below:

- The general attributes of the papers have been scrutinized through yearly, journal-wise, and country-wise distributions of articles.
- Citation analysis has been applied to assess the importance of selected articles, while a keyword co-occurrence map has been used to reveal correlations among major keywords. Both citation analysis and the keyword co-occurrence map were constructed using VOSviewer software.
- A thematic analysis has been conducted to integrate the study's primary findings.

Results

This review identified 79 relevant articles, as of 14 April 2026, on the glass ceiling and career advancement of women. This section presents the overall analysis of the selected articles.

Descriptive Analysis

To understand the general attributes of the selected journal articles, this section presents the yearly distribution, distribution by journal, and country-wise distribution of the selected articles. The annual distribution shows a rise in research on the glass ceiling and women's career advancement. In the initial years, only a small number of studies were available, and in 2010, 2011 and 2016 no relevant research was found. After that period, there is a substantial increase in research studies on the subject, confirming wider academic interest in the field.

Figure 2

Yearly Distribution of Articles

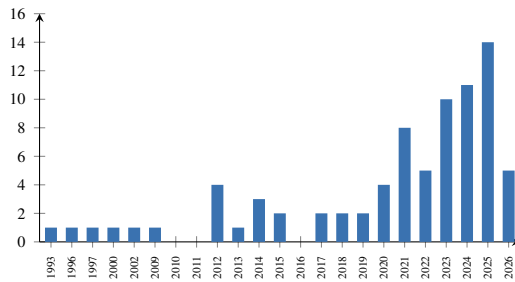


Figure 2 displays the rise in research on the glass ceiling, career advancement and women. In the initial year, only a small number of studies are available. However, in 2010, 2011 and 2016, no relevant research on the subject was found. After that, there is a substantial increase in research studies on the subject, confirming that the topic was being introduced and that there is wider academic interest in the field.

Table 2

Publication per Journal

Name of Journal	Articles	Name of Journal	Articles
Frontiers in Psychology	3	Journal of Construction Engineering and Management	1
Gender in Management	3	Journal of Economics and Management Strategy	1
Administrative Sciences	2	Journal of Education and Health Promotion	1
Gender, Work and Organization	2	Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health	1
Higher Education	2	Journal of Health Administration	1
Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences	2	Journal of Human Capital	1
African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	1	Journal of Infectious Diseases	1
Architecture Image Studies	1	Journal of Information and Organizational Sciences	1
Archives of Health Science and Research	1	Journal of Labor Research	1
Bioscience	1	Journal of Management in Engineering	1
Bottom Line	1	Journal of Modern Italian Studies	1
Brq Business Research Quarterly	1	Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity	1
Business Ethics and Leadership	1	Journal of Strategic Security	1
Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences	1	Mai Journal	1
Canadian Prosthetics and Orthotics Journal	1	Neurosurgical Focus	1
Career Development International	1	Organizatsionnaya Psikhologiya	1
Cogent Education	1	Plos One	1
Cogent Social Sciences	1	Political Studies Review	1
College and Research Libraries	1	Problems and Perspectives in Management	1
Corporate Governance (Bingley)	1	Psychology of Sport and Exercise	1
Economic Research-Ekonomska Istrazivanja	1	Recherche Et Formation	1
Economics Letters	1	Revija Za Sociologiju	1
Educacion XXI	1	Revista De La Construcccion	1
European Economic Review	1	Revista De Psicologia Social	1
Frontiers in Sociology	1	Revista Estudos Feministas	1
Gender in Management: An International Journal	1	Sa Journal of Industrial Psychology	1
Genus	1	Social Sciences	1
Governance	1	Socius	1
Higher Education Research and Development	1	Studies in Higher Education	1
Human Resource Development International	1	Sustainability (Switzerland)	1
Indian Journal of Public Health Research and Development	1	The American Review of Public Administration	1
Innovar	1	Tohoku Journal of Experimental Medicine	1
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	1	Tourism and Hospitality	1
International Review of Financial Analysis	1	Tourism and Hospitality Management	1
Journal of Applied Economics	1	Women's Studies International Forum	1
Journal of Computers, Mechanical and Management	1		

Table 2 shows that 79 articles on the glass ceiling and the career advancement of women have been published across 71 diverse journals, reflecting the topic's multidisciplinary nature. *Frontiers in Psychology* and *Gender in Management* each have 3 studies. Similarly, *Administrative Sciences*, *Gender*, *Work and*

Organization, *Higher Education*, and *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* each have 2 studies. The remaining 65 journals have 1 study each, demonstrating the increasing research focus in the subject area.

Table 3

Country-Wise Distribution of Articles

Country	Articles	Country	Articles	Country	Articles
United States	11	Iran	2	Finland	1
Spain	9	Netherlands	2	France	1
Italy	7	Norway	2	Indonesia	1
Australia	6	Pakistan	2	Ireland	1
South Africa	6	Romania	2	Japan	1
United Kingdom	5	Saudi Arabia	2	Malaysia	1
Canada	4	Turkey	2	Mexico	1
Brazil	3	Albania	1	Morocco	1
China	3	Austria	1	Nepal	1
India	3	Bangladesh	1	Qatar	1
New Zealand	3	Croatia	1	Russian Federation	1
Belgium	2	Egypt	1	Singapore	1
Germany	2	Ethiopia	1	Sweden	1

Country-wise distribution of the study is shown in Table 3. The United States has the highest number of contributions, with 11 studies, showing greater interest in research on the glass ceiling and women's career advancement. Spain and Italy contributed 9 and 7 studies, respectively, showing their strong presence in this subject. Australia and South Africa each contributed 6 studies. The United Kingdom and Canada show 5 and 4 studies, respectively. Brazil, China, India and New Zealand each show 3 studies. Belgium, Germany, Iran, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Romania, Saudi Arabia and Turkey each show 2 studies, and the remaining 19 countries each have 1 study. Thus, research on the glass ceiling and women's career advancement has been extensively conducted across various countries.

Citation Analysis

Citation analysis reveals the number of citations made to articles, journals and countries during a certain period. This paper includes citations by country, journal, and article.

As shown in Table 4, among 39 countries, only 14 met the criterion of at least 30 citations, demonstrating substantial contributions to the subject matter. The United States has a major influence on research, with a maximum of 235 citations across 11 documents. New Zealand follows with 162 citations across 3 documents, Australia has 151 citations across 6 documents, and Spain has 139 citations across 9 documents. Belgium (128 citations, 2 documents) and the Netherlands (89 citations, 2 documents) indicate strong research influence relative to output. Overall, the data show a global contribution to the field of the glass ceiling and women's career advancement. Table 5, presented next, extends this analysis to the journal level.

Table 4

Citation by Country

Country	Articles	Citations
United States	11	235
New Zealand	3	162
Australia	6	151
Spain	9	139
Belgium	2	128
Netherlands	2	89
United Kingdom	5	80
China	3	62
Italy	7	60
South Africa	6	45
Pakistan	2	40
Japan	1	38
Saudi Arabia	2	36
Ireland	1	30

Table 5 shows the number of citations by journal, limited to journals with at least 30 citations; out of 71 sources, 12 met this threshold. *Frontiers in Psychology* has 151 citations and *Gender in Management* has 144 citations, each with 3 articles, showing significant influence in the field. *Career Development International* received 70 citations from 1 article, and *Higher Education* received 69 citations from 2 articles. Other journals, such as *Economics Letters*, *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, *Tohoku Journal of Experimental Medicine*, and *Higher Education Research and Development*, have moderate citation counts. Overall, this citation analysis shows that many different journals are contributing to the study of the glass

ceiling and women's career advancement.

Table 5

Citations by Journal

Source	Articles	Citations
Frontiers in Psychology	3	151
Gender in Management	3	144
Career Development International	1	70
Higher Education	2	69
The American Review of Public Administration	1	62
Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health	1	61
Bioscience	1	56
Revista De Psicologia Social	1	50
Economics Letters	1	45
Gender in Management: An International Journal	1	38
Tohoku Journal of Experimental Medicine	1	38
Higher Education Research and Development	1	34

Table 6 shows the papers used in this study and the number of times each was cited; of the 79 papers reviewed, only 14 were cited at least 30 times. Mooney and Ryan (2009) and Babic and Hansez (2021) have the highest citations, with 107 and 106 respectively, indicating the highest impact on this subject. Smith, Caputi, and Crittenden (2012), Newman (1993), McManus and Sproston (2000), McGuire et al. (2012), Rhoads and Gu (2012) and Sarrió et al. (2002) were also cited frequently, with 70, 62, 61, 56, 56 and 50 citations respectively, indicating their importance to the field. Some other papers, such as Groot and Van Den Brink (1996), Van Veelen and Derks (2022), Okoshi et al. (2014), Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi (2012), Dobelet al. (2014) and Flynn et al. (2015), were cited with 45, 44, 38, 38, 34 and 30 citations, respectively, showing that these papers were also important to the field. The table shows that researchers and academics maintain strong interest in studying the glass ceiling and its effects on women's careers.

Table 6

Citations by Article

Authors	Title of Article	Citations
Mooney and Ryan (2009)	"A woman's place in hotel management: Upstairs or downstairs?"	107
Babic and Hansez (2021)	"The glass ceiling for women managers: Antecedents and consequences for work-family interface and well-being at work"	106
Smith, Caputi, and Crittenden (2012)	"How are women's glass ceiling beliefs related to career success?"	70
Newman (1993)	"Career advancement: does gender make a difference?"	62
McManus and Sproston (2000)	"Women in hospital medicine in the United Kingdom: Glass ceiling, preference, prejudice or cohort effect?"	61
McGuire et al. (2012)	"Dramatic improvements and persistent challenges for women ecologists"	56
Rhoads and Gu (2012)	"A gendered point of view on the challenges of women academics in The People's Republic of China"	56
Sarrió et al. (2002)	"Glass ceiling in the professional promotion of women"	50
Groot and Van Den Brink (1996)	"Glass ceilings or dead ends: Job promotion of men and women compared"	45
Van Veelen and Derks (2022)	"Equal representation does not mean equal opportunity: Women academics perceive a thicker glass ceiling in social and behavioral fields than in the natural sciences and economics"	44
Okoshi et al. (2014)	"Gender inequality in career advancement for females in Japanese academic surgery"	38
Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi (2012)	"Measuring women's beliefs about glass ceilings: Development of the Career Pathways Survey"	38
Dobelet al. (2014)	"The cracked glass ceiling: Equal work but unequal status"	34
Flynn et al. (2015)	"Gender equality in the accounting profession: One size fits all"	30

Keyword Co-occurrence

Figure 3

Keyword Co-occurrence Map

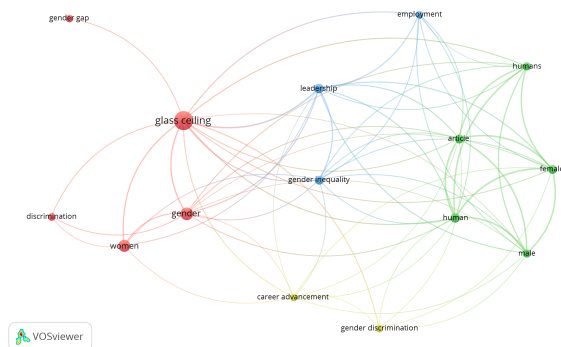


Figure 3 was created using VOSviewer software, which maps keywords used together across the selected studies. Only keywords occurring at least 5 times were included; out of 425 keywords, 15 keywords met this threshold. The most prominent keywords are *glass ceiling*, *gender* and *women*, which are connected to many other related terms, confirming their centrality to the field. The next key terms are *human*, *leadership*, *article*, *female*, *gender inequality*, *humans* and *male*, which focus clearly on gender inequality in the leadership roles of men and women. Keywords such as *career advancement*, *discrimination*, *employment*, *gender discrimination* and *gender gap* focus on prevailing gender discrimination and the gender gap in the working environment. *Glass ceiling*, *gender* and *women* remain the dominant terms used when discussing women's careers and the glass ceiling.

Themes

The process for thematic analysis began with multi-stage coding. First, concepts and factors that seemed to be linked to the glass ceiling phenomenon were identified across the retrieved studies. Second, categories of related concepts were combined. Third, concepts were continually re-compared and refined into broader themes. Finally, four main themes were derived: organizational barriers, socio-cultural constraints, individual-level factors, and career outcomes.

Organizational Barriers. The glass ceiling is supported by several organizational barriers, such as biased promotion systems, a lack of transparency in decision-making, and male-dominated leadership structures. These factors restrict women from reaching higher-level positions (Khalid & Aftab, 2023; Sobaih & Abu Elnasr, 2024). In many workplaces, masculine leadership traits also contribute to the undervaluation of women's capabilities (Magnano San Lio et al., 2025). The absence of sup-

portive human resource practices also impacts women's career growth (Akter et al., 2026; Hasan et al., 2024).

Socio-Cultural Constraints. Socio-cultural constraints, such as traditional gender roles and societal expectations, can also limit women's professional experiences (Gallardo, 2021; Wolle, 2024). The glass ceiling is also supported by gender stereotypes: although women have the capability and qualifications, they may be perceived as less capable of handling leadership roles (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020).

Individual-Level Factors. Individual-level factors are personal attributes such as confidence, motivation, career aspirations, and perceptions of workplace barriers. Research reveals that women's beliefs about the existence of the glass ceiling can affect their willingness to pursue leadership roles (Fard et al., 2025; Smith, Caputi & Crittenden, 2012).

Career Outcomes of the Glass Ceiling. The glass ceiling negatively affects women's career growth, promotion, salary, and job satisfaction. Women are frequently underrepresented in senior leadership positions and experience slower career growth (Cheng & Wang, 2023; Tariq et al., 2025). The glass ceiling also contributes to the gender pay gap and prevents women from reaching decision-making roles. These factors affect individual careers and have broader implications for organizational performance; organizations that fail to promote gender equality may lose their competitiveness (Tariq et al., 2025).

Discussion

This study examines the factors that contribute to the glass ceiling and how it affects women's careers. The glass ceiling is a problem made up of many factors, including those that arise at work, in society and within women themselves. The study found that the glass ceiling is composed of workplace, social and personal factors, all of which affect women's careers. The findings of this study suggest that workplace environments are the primary factor in the glass ceiling, as they restrict women's access to higher-level positions (Khalid & Aftab, 2023; Sobaih & Abu Elnasr, 2024). This aligns with the co-occurrence analysis, which shows strong connections between employment-related terms and gender-related concepts. Organizational culture further reinforces these barriers, as leadership is often associated with masculine traits (Magnano San Lio et al., 2025).

Socio-cultural constraints, such as childcare responsibility and parenting, also emphasize the influence of societal norms and gender roles on women's career growth (Gallardo, 2021; Wolle, 2024). This is similar to the co-

occurrence analysis, where there is a connection among terms such as gender, women, discrimination, and glass ceiling, showing a strong link between social inequality and workplace outcomes. Individual-level factors focus on how personal attributes and perceptions influence women's career progression. Women's confidence, motivation, and beliefs about career opportunities can affect their willingness to pursue leadership roles (Fard et al., 2025; Smith, Caputi & Crittenden, 2012). This is similarly reflected in the co-occurrence analysis, where connections between gender-related terms and career advancement suggest that individual experiences are closely linked to broader structural conditions.

Career outcomes also affect women's professional growth. Women often experience slower career growth, limited promotion, and pay gaps compared to men (Cheng & Wang, 2023; Tariq et al., 2025). This is reflected in the keyword co-occurrence map, which shows the connection between career advancement and gender discrimination. Overall, the integration of thematic analysis and the keyword co-occurrence map provides a comprehensive understanding of the glass ceiling phenomenon. The keyword co-occurrence map clearly shows that terms such as gender discrimination, organizational structures, and career advancement are interconnected, indicating that the glass ceiling is caused by multiple factors. The findings also highlight the need for a broad strategy to address gender inequality in the workplace.

Conclusion

To understand the glass ceiling and its effects on women's careers, this study reviewed 79 Scopus-indexed studies published by 14 April 2026. The findings show growing interest in this topic: research on the glass ceiling has increased notably since 2020, indicating that researchers are becoming increasingly interested in the subject. Some researchers argue that the workplace environment is the main contributor to the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling remains an issue for women's career advancement, and researchers are working to better understand it. The country-wise distribution shows that research on this topic spans 39 countries, with the United States and Spain particularly active, while the journal distribution shows that *Frontiers in Psychology* and *Gender in Management* are the leading journals in this area. Through thematic analysis and a keyword co-occurrence map, this study identified four themes: organizational barriers, socio-cultural constraints, individual-level factors, and career outcomes of the glass ceiling.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for organizations as well as policymakers. Companies can use transparent promotion practices to reduce unfairness in decision-making, and can implement supportive HR practices such as mentoring programs, leadership training, and flexible work schedules to help develop a working environment where everyone feels included. Organizations should diversify their workforce structures and foster an inclusive management environment. Likewise, increasing women's representation in various leadership positions can help reduce inequalities. Policymakers could support this diversity and inclusion by developing rules, regulations and policies that promote gender equality. Most of the research appears to be concentrated in developed countries, so future researchers could focus their studies in Nepal and other South Asian countries to improve generalizability in the field.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use and Disclosure

In the preparation of this manuscript, AI tools were used for some sections, with minimal or no editing.

Similarity and Originality Confirmation

The manuscript is original, not under review elsewhere, and complies with TUJ publication ethics.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability

Data will be available from the corresponding author on request.

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