

# Chapter 6

## Why Women Are Not Leading or Left Behind: The Glass Ceiling and Other Socioeconomic Barriers Facing Women in Organizations

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### ABSTRACT

*Men greatly outnumber women in leadership positions. Women are much less likely than men to be considered leaders. The status of women and leadership has been a quiet subject that is barely pronounced consciously. This is attributable to the various levels of discrimination, barriers, and biases that the society has towards women. The glass ceiling phenomenon is a great indicator and an illustrator of the fact that women have got what it takes to lead at the top levels in various spheres, but this has been curtailed by the various manifestations of the glass ceiling. Various scholars have demonstrated the contribution of inhibitions such as human capital differences, gender differences, as well as gender perceptions and biases. This chapter explores the intricate relationship and interplay between all these factors.*

### INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have found misrepresentation of women at upper tiers (AAUW, 2016). Women representation in top leadership positions continues to be low as the numbers are nowhere near the desirable threshold of a third representation in

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most organizations and countries across the globe. The quagmire surrounding the unequal representation of women is a global reality. In the USA, women compose of 46 percent of the workforce, yet they hold only 4 percent of CEO positions and 16 percent of director seats in the Fortune 500 firms; furthermore, women maintain only one in four (24 percent) senior management roles globally (Hoobler et al., 2016; Dezso and Ross, 2012; Saleem et al., 2017). even though their levels of academic qualifications and experience may be at the same level or higher.

Adoption of various interventions such as affirmative action in countries particularly in the countries of Africa to boost the number of women in leadership positions has only had a minimum impact in generating enthusiasm and motivation for women to take up leadership positions. As such, there has been an increasing need to investigate why this observation has been the reality. Unfortunately, in some places, this is a new normal, particularly in patriarchal societies, which is dominant globally. Shames (2013) notes that formal barriers to women's participation in leadership are nowadays almost nonexistent around the world; however, the glass ceiling remains. Interestingly, this is not just a gap presenting itself in the political world but also in other spheres as achieving gender parity has become very evasive.

Leadership as discussed in this chapter refers to the number of women in political leadership, in executive boards, in chief executive officer positions, in top management level of organizations, institutions and countries. Women are disproportionately distributed in these top leadership positions in comparison to their male counterparts. In the nonprofit sector, women are more likely to be in leadership positions, but they also remain underrepresented (Algahtani, 2020). In a bid to understand this discrepancy in top leadership representation by women, this book chapter will focus on the various forms of the glass ceiling manifestation which fuel the gender perceptions and biases.

## **LITERATURE**

### **Global Status of Women in Leadership**

A survey conducted by Thornton (2020) reveals a global phenomenon when it comes to acquisition of top leadership positions by women. Table 1 shows the result of a survey that was aimed at establishing the number of women in senior management globally. In all regions of the world, women in senior leadership position were less than 40 percent.

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