

## Concept of ‘Glass Ceiling’ in the Print Media of Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

The ‘glass ceiling’ is a concept that frequently refers to barriers faced by women, who attempt or aspire to attain senior positions in any organisation. It is a barrier that prevents women in any organisation to excel or reach the top position. Print media is of vital importance as compared to other media. The concept of glass ceiling prevails strongly in the print media of Pakistan which has a less number of female staff, particularly working at higher levels and positions. Policy makers are males, therefore the policies made are based on the requirements of the male population in these organisations. The study concludes that though gender discrimination is present, there are opportunities for women as well. They will have to come forward and work towards opening the doors of this field for other women as well.

**Keywords: ‘Glass Ceiling’ concept, print media, Pakistan**

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The glass ceiling concept can be defined as one that mainly refers to hurdles or barriers faced by women who attempt to attain senior positions and higher salary levels in their field or organisation. The term can also refer to barriers to advancement faced by racial or ethnic minorities, as well as men

The term glass ceiling effect gained currency in the late seventies. Gay Bryant as cited by Wallace (2009) wrote an article in *Ad week* containing the first documented use of the said term in 1984. The term became a permanent part of the American lexicon with a subsequent article in the *Wall Street Journal* published on 24 March 1986 by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt. While the term may be casually used, the Department of Labour took it very seriously in 1991 when they issued a definition, stating that a glass ceiling is made up of “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organisational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organisation into management-level positions.” The Department went on to establish a Glass Ceiling Commission in an effort to “level the playing field.”

#### 1.1 Glass Ceiling and Women

The term glass ceiling is used in reference to women being prevented from receiving promotions to top management positions in their organisations. This phenomenon of capable women being unable to reach the top-level positions is partially explained by the concept of

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glass ceiling effect. It is defined as a subtle and informal barrier that does not allow capable professionals to go beyond a certain level despite possessing sufficient skills to merit rising to the top of the hierarchy.

Hashmi<sup>1</sup> (2004) as cited in *Daily Times* discussed that in order to be considered fit for the top position, a woman is expected to be as tough and authoritative as a man. But when she practically acts in that manner, the behaviour is considered undesirable by her organisation. Therefore, she is in a no-win situation. One such double bind is called the femininity-competency bind. The glass ceiling effect is subtle and can be discovered by looking at the promotion statistics and noting that women are under-represented in executive positions, worldwide.

In general, top women media executives are promoted on the basis of their performance, whereas men are widely promoted to higher designations due to their potential and their connections. The glass ceiling effect may be provoked firstly based on barriers created by corporate practices, and secondly from barriers due to behavioural and cultural causes. A major sign of the effect of the glass ceiling is gender-biased compensation. Work/life balance challenges can impact women's advancement in career and, if not dealt with, may contribute to the glass-ceiling phenomenon.

A woman is considered the primary family caretaker for children and/or the elderly. Further, journalism is considered a man's job and therefore many print media organisations may not offer work/life programmes that support outside commitments, particularly for senior-level positions. Therefore, many women are at a disadvantage to take steps that would increase the likelihood of advancing up the corporate ladder.

Opportunities for promotion may favour men due to developmental prospects, such as mentoring and networks. The informal networks are highly helpful in order to get some news story. Women may not have full access to the informal networks that men use to develop work relationships in the company, and these networks often tend to exclude women due to the nature of their activities or the perception that these are 'male activities' (for instance, golf), thus contributing to gender barriers in the workplace.

## 2. STATUS OF WOMEN IN MEDIA

The trend of working women is gaining strong acceptance and the shift towards this trend is posing continuous efforts to overcome problems of balancing family and work life. As Hashmi (2004) stated women may possess a number of desirable leadership traits, but their significance is generally overlooked. These norms shape which leadership skills are going to be most valued and recognised in organisations. For example, some believe that women have lower self and organisation referent attitudes which restrains them from climbing up the corporate ladder. Another reason that allows for the glass ceiling to operate is the argument that women themselves choose family over career, and that is why they do not progress up the corporate ladder.

In an article cited by *Internews* (2009) titled 'Newspapers – A man's world?' the writer states that when he became editor of the *New Statesman* in 1998, it never occurred to him

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<sup>1</sup> Humair Hashmi is a professionally certified psychotherapist who teaches at Imperial College Lahore.

that his deputy should be a man. As he was doubtless in breach of equal opportunity laws, he limited his search to the opposite sex, among whom he found no shortage of excellent candidates. It seemed then that women were at last breaking through the glass ceiling in the national press.

He also states the views of a journalist friend, a distinguished author and former Fleet Street journalist that women simply are not as good as men at news journalism. They are too conscientious about things like fairness, accuracy and balance; they would not stick their necks out and take risks. According to him professional women start raising families in their 30s, the crucial years for promotion. The career ladder in news involves working long, late and unpredictable hours. On the other hand, feature and magazine writing can offer an almost perfect, flexible fit with family commitments. Many talented women, therefore, gravitate to the latter. Or perhaps it is just that men have been in control of newspapers for decades that they just hold on to their positions as far as possible.

Even the title of the article (cited by *Internews*) clearly describes the existence of gender discrimination at the level of the print media. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the world has become a global village, terms like 'man's world' are losing effectiveness. This term is also discouraged in this article. Now women are entering every field and occupation and they have successfully proven themselves to be able in completing given assignments.

Joseph (2007) in her book, *Making News: Women Journalism* initiated the debate on the term 'Woman Journalist.' Many find the term demeaning as highlighting gender can work against their professional interests. Others feel the need to acknowledge gender in order to create role models.

The glass ceiling that operates in Indian journalism has been scrutinised here. More women in journalism today report than analyse, more men editorialise than women. The few women who sit in media boardrooms do so because of the privilege of birth. By and large, most of the women journalists are employed at junior positions and feature editor levels. Several are columnists. From mere reporting on flower shows in the 1960s and 1970s, women have been given assignments on fashion, entertainment, and beauty in the 1990s. Eventually, a wide range of important events and processes relating to human rights, justice, development, society and culture became their beats. The old assumption that women are cut for soft news and men for hard news has also been debated. Some women are of the opinion that hard stories are easier to cover when compared to soft news. In many parts of the country, especially the vernacular press, women are restricted to desk jobs. International and national news too are kept off limits.

Another important issue discussed here is night shifts. Women are not put on night shifts because that would mean providing transport facilities and so forth. But women journalist says that this is just one way to justify keeping women out of serious journalism.

Many also believe that the attitudes of newspaper proprietors and management inhibit their rise to the top in many other ways. Proprietors assume that women will make fewer compromises. It also looks at how in the 1990s, the Indian press drifted from seriousness to superficiality and from societal concerns to societal affairs. Some claim that the turning point came with the advent of economic liberation and globalisation. This brought in a wave of consumerism which swept into media organisations.

Sharing case studies of female journalists, it has been recommended that the working environment at newspaper offices should be made conducive for women and there should be strict implementation of regulations against sexual harassment. Female journalists should be encouraged to cover a variety of issues.

More women in media are encouraged to join media organisations, particularly in the English print media and the relatively new TV channels, including females in top positions. The greater visibility of women will not only provide role models for other women but also create and expand space for them in the public sphere, increasing their acceptability and mitigating against traditional biases that curb women's autonomy.

But despite these positive changes, female journalists are up against more odds, in terms of having to prove themselves more. They face a major problem when covering conflict areas such as lack of access to information on the physical area under conflict, and to those affected by the conflict.

### **3. WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL TO HAVE A GENDER - SENSITIVE MEDIA?**

Comparing all fields, media is considered very fast and demanding. Its importance requires making it gender-sensitive. Men and women must have equal opportunities to serve it with full devotion. This is defined by a research report entitled *From Classrooms to Newsrooms* produced by UKS<sup>2</sup> for *Internews* (March 2009) where it was mentioned that media has traditionally been a field which has remained under male domination. Whereas a woman's image may adorn various media outputs only as an ornament, there is no meaningful participation of women in the creation of media. Be it in the West or East, media rooms, news desks, and researchers as well as anchors have traditionally been males. Men design and define media policies, priorities and agenda including how women are portrayed and presented. As directors and managers, it is often men who make decisions about hiring, promoting, and assigning staff. The ratio of male-female workers in the media is therefore heavily imbalanced in support of men. The media bias comes as no surprise. This bias affects images of women in the media, and in turn has a negative effect on women's development in society.

Tasneem Ahmar, Director of the Pakistani civil society organisation UKS analyses that gender construction in the media is directly connected with various issues: these include, sexism and under representation in the media and raising the number of women in our newsrooms. Other factors responsible for invisibility of women in media organisations are low hiring rates and sexual harassment at work places.

#### **3.1 Glass Ceiling and Print Media in Pakistan**

Gender discrimination exists in many organisations and fields but when it comes to the field of media, its existence becomes obvious. Print media in particular is male dominated.

Ahmer (2004a) who presented a paper in SAFMA regional workshop titled *Gender and Media: Pakistan Perspective* stated that in examining gender patterns in South Asia and particularly in the Pakistani media, we need to analyse the participation and position of

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<sup>2</sup> UKS is a Research, Resource and Publication Centre on Women and Media.

women in the media, and the impact of those positions, on women's development. By this we mean women's right to participate in public debates and to have their views heard, and the right to see themselves portrayed in the media in ways that accurately represent the complexities of their lives. Along with under-representation, also comes the percentage of women in top positions. Very few women journalists have made it to the top ladder. For example, in the 54-year history of Pakistan, no woman has ever been editor of an Urdu newspaper and only one woman (Dr Maleeha Lodhi - *The Muslim*) has been editor of any English daily. The official wire service APP has never had a woman Director General. The *Herald* was the only English political monthly that had a woman editor as well as a predominantly female staff. This group later resigned *en masse* from *Herald* and brought out another political/social magazine, *The News Line*. In Urdu and regional language press (that has captured more than 80% of the newspaper market), there are very few women workers.

#### 4. FINDINGS OF SOUTHASIA'S FREE MEDIA ASSOCIATION (SAFMA)

SAFMA Regional Workshop on *Gender & Media in South Asia* concluded that traditionally, the media world has been male-dominated, globally as well as nationally. It is most often men who make decisions about hiring staff. The ratio of male-female workers in the media is heavily imbalanced in favour of men. It is no wonder, then, that the media is biased against women in many areas.

Along with under-representation, is the question of percentage of women in top positions. Although the media in Pakistan is becoming supportive of women in their struggle against discrimination and cases of violence against women are reported more frequently, the existing and at times growing shades of bias and insensitivity need to be examined.

Media watch groups are being formed and most of them have taken up the task of identifying the impediments to women's inclusion and survival in the media industry. Women are not only ready to take on this challenge to change the patriarchal nature of media but are also struggling to bring in more democratic values.

The focus of the workshop was on the portrayal of women in the print. It was also seen that comparatively there was no difference in the number of female journalists between Urdu and English newspapers. But working conditions between both presses are different.

Some women reporters shared their experiences of working in the Urdu Press. Both thought that women were discriminated against and were held back from active reporting. According to them, it needs a lot of confidence and courage to be able to convince your family, employers and the readers that they are no less able than male reporters. They said it is wrong that women themselves want to be just confined to women's social pages and not be involved in mainstream reporting.

According to a national study on *Monitoring & Sensitisation of the Print Media on the Portrayal of Women* (2002) the earned income of females is estimated at 26% of male earned income and female economy activity rate in Pakistan is estimated at 40% of the adult male economic activity rate. This discrimination may stem from several constraints, for instance lack of access to transport, restrictions on mobility, lack of information, lack of

skills, lack of access to credit and technology and so forth that impede women's participation in the labour market.

The research concluded that women should be inducted into the profession on the same basis as men. It is necessary to increase the number of female employees, who should also be trained and sensitised on women-related issues. Their presence will also be supportive to lone female staffers in many offices. Unless women themselves speak up for their rights, the issue will never receive attention. Also, knowing the issues first-hand, most women are committed to resolving the issues and it should be up to them to decide what constitutes a positive representation.

## **5. WOMEN MEDIA CENTER, PAKISTAN**

The Women Media Center(WMC) is playing a vital role in introducing effective female participation in Pakistani print and electronic media. WMC works on the principle that in matters of policy making and governance, women should be empowered so that gender balance could be promoted in society. The Women Media Center held a seminar on 23 December 2006 on the topic, *Expanding Women's Role in Media and Politics: Changing Attitude*.

### **5.1 Conclusions and Recommendations of the Seminar**

- Women should be given social and economic independence.
- Women need to have a strong resolution to be successful in every field.
- Belief in hard work is required for success.
- Training to communicate objectively should be given for media personnel .
- Need to emphasise the importance of the role of woman in policymaking.
- Gender bias is to be abhorred whether in politics or journalism; thus this bias must cease in politics and journalism and women should be given equal opportunities in these fields.
- There is a lack of confidence in women compared to men. This should be removed.

We need to know the different elements of society in order to bring about change in society and to create a conducive environment for women. We should know the resources available at the moment and what needs to be changed. What are the resources available to us for bringing about change and what new resources can we create and how do we go about it. What will be the outcomes of our efforts?

Shaheen (2006), the Executive Director of WMC as cited in the seminar report *Gender Discrimination in Media and Politics* described that she has been in the journalism profession for the last 15 years .Though she decided to work on important issues and did that, she found out that she was being prevented from working on serious issues. Her preference was to be a political or economic reporter. She did not want to work on fashion or women's pages. She tried her best to work on real important issues and did much work

on these concerns but when she felt the need to do more, she initiated her own magazine, *Dastak*, a progressive magazine that covers a lot of real issues.

International Labour Organization (1997) in its report on *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management* recommended that breaking through the glass ceiling requires understanding of the concept as “a series of events in the careers of female managers and professionals rather than a fixed point beyond which advancement is impossible. Even women may fail to recognise the glass ceiling for what it is: a cumulative outcome of attitudinal, cultural and organisational biases that are at work in corporations”. Once understood, a systematic enterprise-level approach addressing all existing barriers is essential for women to break through it.

Policies promoting women in management, although more advanced in industrialised countries, should not be viewed as a luxury. Rather, they are indispensable to enable firms worldwide to use and develop women’s increasing capacity and potential to the fullest.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The glass ceiling concept affects productivity of women in the media, and in turn has a negative effect on women’s development in society. Gender construction in the media is directly connected with various issues: these include, sexism and under-representation in the media and raising the number of women in newsrooms.

The print media has been male-dominated since the very beginning. Men design and define media policies, priorities and agenda including how women are portrayed and presented. It is most often men who make decisions about hiring staff as well and in doing so sometimes fail to take into account the opinions and views of females.

Women doing daily reporting are few and exceptional. Even those women who are ready to work as reporters are not given encouragement by their editors or managers. Denying women the right to cover hard news discourages them from pursuing careers in journalism.

Today a lot of females are seen in Pakistani TV channels but a look at the print media, reveals hardly any names of female editors; no woman has ever been editor of an Urdu newspaper and only one woman, Maleeha Lodhi, has been an editor of an English daily.

Women need to battle on all fronts to bring more women into journalism. There are several examples of women who have made their name in journalism by sheer hard work. Men and women with potential and abilities need to be allowed to take their place and progress.

In Pakistan, female journalists have specifically contributed to an increase in reporting on issues relating to violence, education, health, sports, entertainment and economics. Despite these positive changes, female journalists are up against more odds than their male colleagues, in terms of having to prove themselves to a greater degree. Female journalists are not considered seriously in developing a news story while they have the advantage of access to female victims of conflict, particularly in traditional areas where women might not feel comfortable talking to a male reporter.

From an analysis of the situation, it is evident that there is imbalance in the number of female and male journalists. So a lack of participation and position of women in the media

greatly impacts the conditions and opportunities that should be provided for women's development.

The greater visibility of women not only provides role models for other women but also creates and expands space for them in the public sphere, increasing their acceptability and mitigating against traditional biases that curb women's autonomy. Women journalists need encouragement as it is their knowledge and competency that counts rather than their gender to get a promotion.

Trends are changing and the perceptions about women being naïve and shy are changing. Both men and women believe that the women entering the field of journalism are serious and sufficiently competitive. As the general image of women is changing, more women are leaving their homes to work. We see that though an increasing number of women have made their mark in electronic media, the print media still is not a favourite of women. But it must be stated that female journalists are confident and competitive enough to take on any challenge.

It is not always right to say that organisations do not provide women with equal opportunities as in several cases, women are not even aware of them. A major reason is the lack of presence of women in the decision making at high levels in organisations. Another major challenge is that male journalists often are not sensitive to gender issues. Therefore they often tend to ignore women's views on the issues that include on-the-job-training, workshops, organising media trips and media monitoring.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Taking a look at media in Pakistan, it is observed that there a lot of women anchors, news casters, hosts and females reporting on our television screens everyday. But when we talk about the most important and serious forms of journalism i.e. print media, it is a totally different story.

In the past few years, there has been a change in trends and mindsets of people and they are becoming more receptive to the concept of 'woman journalists'. When we talk about gender inequality, it is not that widely prevalent but is still present in our offices to haunt women and poses a barrier between women and their goals and achievements. Work inequality in newspaper offices exists to a point that even the journalists who believe that women should be given opportunities themselves favour men over women when it comes to assigning challenging and important responsibilities and assignments.

As it is human psyche that women feel more comfortable with other women, similarly men also feel comfortable and more confident with other male employees. That is one of the reasons that males are inclined to other males than females in offices. Journalism requires serious and professional attitudes where men and women need to work on equal and mutual terms, It will not be totally correct to say that gender discrimination by organisations or males are the only barriers to women from reaching the top but sometimes women are not even aware of the opportunities that exist. Secondly, women unlike men, have other responsibilities that need their time and therefore they are sometimes not able to give their undivided attention to their work, which may affect the efficiency and quality of their work.

But still it is not correct either to place all women in the same category because there are women who are willing to sacrifice a lot for the profession.

To bring about a change in the situation and condition of women, there is a need to involve women in policy and decision making processes. More and more women should be encouraged to work and assignments should be given on the basis of equality rather than gender.

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