

Opportunities and Challenges of Women's Roles in Management positions in the Iranian Construction Industry

Azam Karimi Mohammad Abadi

Allaodoleh Semnani Institute, Garmsar, Semnan, Iran

Karimi.azam1987@gmail.com

Ehsan Asnaashari

Allaodoleh Semnani Institute, Garmsar, Semnan, Iran

Asnaashari.ehsan@gmail.com

Abstract

In today's world, where countries use their full capacity to be in competition with each other in terms of growth and development, holding human resources as an asset is exceptionally important. Women are a valuable resource for developing countries which are active in the fields of production and services. However, the role of women has not been significant in construction, which is historically a male-dominated industry. Although, in the recent years several studies show the growing presence of women in construction industry in various countries, it seems the flow of women's promotional status towards high ranking management positions is not parallel to their improvement in education and their ability at work. It appears that the preferment of women to higher ranks of management is obstructed by invisible barriers. The expression 'glass ceiling' or leakages in the pipelines explains this phenomenon at its best.

So that, the higher we go up in organizational levels, fewer women will be present in these areas. In reality, the presence of women in construction industry, due to the existence of those barriers, is limited to consulting, designing, estimation, and office works. These obstructions vary in different societies, cultures, and organizations. Iran, as a country with the majority of Muslim population, has had a very conservative view towards hiring women, especially in construction industry. However, in recent years there has been an impressive growth in the number of female graduates in fields related to construction industry. Thus, the system should develop appropriate infrastructure to exit this situation and exploit the capabilities of specialized women in decision-making levels of the construction industry. Thus, several interviews are conducted, with experts and reporters who are active in management positions, both male and female. Then we analyzed collected data using qualitative content analysis method. After examining the barriers in individual and family, social, and cultural areas, we categorized organizational factors and workplace damages. Among these factors, cultural factors including gender inequality, masculism, and social believe and individual factors including family and personality-related factors, had greater importance regarding the unsuitability of construction industry for women.

Keywords

Glass Ceiling, High level Management, promotion of women in construction industry, women, women's Participation

cx

1. Introduction and Problem Statement

The turning point for the presence of women in engineering fields goes back to the period of World War

with physical strength and a reduction in paterfamilias due to the Second World War as well as the lack of experts in labor market, engineering sciences and other industries began to employ women. In addition, the lower rate of women's wages compare to men helped them to survive in economic and social activities (Najm Iraqi, 2001).

Woman, as an effective member of society, can play her pioneering role in a number of responsibilities. Promoting the concept of participation and employment in life and appropriate preparation to work freely and make their presence known to the community are some examples of these responsibilities. Today, in management societies and scientific centers around the world, there is a great emphasis on the characteristics of a manager as a human being and the emphasis never takes place on separation between men and women (Shaadi Talab, 1998). Meanwhile, it is worth mentioning as a national and essential issue in social studies and planning that what are the main barriers and deterrents for women's cooperation in managerial positions.

Many people in the world believe that some jobs are for men and some for women. Whereas distribution of different jobs in countries shows that there is no inherently feminine or masculine job and what we can see are only gender stereotypes that people attribute to various jobs, and it varies from one country to another (Esfandiani, 2002). Although in recent years the number of educated and employed women has grown considerably, however, we can observe that organizations allocate key, structured, and high-ranking managerial positions to men. According to the latest report published by International Labor Organization (ILO), which includes statistics and data from over 80 countries, over the past two decades, women have reached overall 20 per cent of managerial positions and the most participation belongs to Norway and Turkey with 13.3 and 11.1 percents (Leila ostaad Hashemi et al., 2015).

Moreover, researchers in Iran have indicated a similar situation compare to the rest of the world. According to official statistics, although women in recent years have been able to make significant progress in the scientific field, the participation rate of educated women in managerial careers has considerably remained low and in terms of involvement in management, it has an unfavorable situation (Esfidaani, 2001)

This study aims to recognize opportunities and challenges of women's presence in managerial positions of construction industry in Iran. Talking about the problems of women regarding managerial levels in construction industry requires fundamental studies, since the scales and standards of economic participation of this group of women are not just subject to particular mechanisms, laws, and regulations that rule the labor market. Nevertheless, values, perceptions, as well as attitudes and theories that are common among citizens, especially men towards women's cooperation in the industry, affect these scales and standards.

1 Literature Review

Gurjao in 2006, noted about the role of female labor force in the construction industry. In her research, she examined different theories including gender discrimination, glass ceiling, and mental image of construction industry and consequently she considered these factors effective on women's promotion to managerial positions. Glass ceiling explains barriers and invisible problems, which influence the advancement of women to higher levels. Another barrier is mental understanding and perception of public opinion towards this industry. This perception originates from the past, so that when we talk about the construction industry, the first thing that comes to mind is bricklaying and working in a workshop condition, which requires physical strength as a priority rather than mental strength for the success of a project.

Ryan and Haslam in 2007 in their study "The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding women's appointment to precarious leadership positions" argued that the number of women who have broken the glass ceiling and achieved high organizational positions, now are facing with another challenge called glass cliff. Glass cliff comprises all boundaries of women's appointment to unstable managerial positions. This phenomenon indicates that the possibility for the risk of failure and criticism when women are appointed to management positions have been higher than men and if we consider the relationship between performance and gender, it becomes clear that those units with women responsible for their management, are largely in crisis.

Joan Acker In 2009 in her research "from glass ceiling to inequality regimes" has addressed the barriers to the presence of women. She views unequal regime as a more specific metaphor to explain the barriers of job opportunities for women that includes processes, practices, and instruments, which are the result of

establishing gender and racial inequality in organization. The idea of "unequal regime" is an analytical approach to understand the continuous establishment of inequality in the organization of work. We can use this approach to identify the methods of creating inequality in organizational processes. The formation of processes and patterns of unequal regime in various organizations is different. However, gender, race, and class inequality are common. According to this researcher, glass ceiling is the result of generating unequal regime.

Kolade and Kehinde in 2012 have conducted a study called "Glass ceiling and women career advancement in Nigerian construction industry ". This research examines the effects of glass ceiling syndrome on women's career development in the construction industry of Nigeria and indicates that women have necessary knowledge, skills, competencies, training, and experience to perform effectively and efficiently in the construction industry. Nevertheless, employers hamper them to enter the industry; and therefore they experience obstacles in their professional development. Low participation of women in construction industry in Nigeria originates from course selection in schools and continues during the recruitment process. A series of studies named "women in construction industry" published by Smith Institute in 2014, suggest that construction industry is a male-dominated industry and women in this industry are facing with numerous problems. Three major problems of women in this industry are the lack of perspective for growth and progress, lower wages compare to male colleagues for the same activities, and a feeling of isolation. Unfortunately, in Iran no researcher has conducted studies in the field of women's participation in management levels of construction industry. Only a number of researchers have examined the factors of women's cooperation in other various fields of management, which we will point to some of them in the following.

Esfandiani (2002) believes that organizational culture is one of the most important organizational elements that affect the participation of women. Concerning the opinions from management specialists, we can examine the issue of organizational culture from different aspects. One of the important aspects of organizational culture in our country is its masculism nature. The existence of such an attitude might result in the emergence of glass ceiling in Iranian organizations based on the attitudes and prejudices of organization's members.

Razavi Al-Hashem (2009) in his article "Analyzing the participation of women in political and social development process of Iran's Islamic Revolution" acknowledges that given the increasing trend of women's participation in the workforce, their involvement in managerial careers is negligible. The reasons that Al-Hashemi advocates are traditional basic reasons intertwined in the mind of people in society such as a man's job in any case is more important than a woman's job, or bringing up the conflict of roles including serious barriers to the realization of women's rights.

Hosseini Pour et al (2012) consider masculism culture as one of the most important external barriers to the lack of women's advancement in workplace. Masculism is a name for a system and structure that takes control of women through its social, political, and economical establishments. The extent of men's control over women varies in different societies. However, in all of these male-dominated societies, men have a greater share of social benefits such as power, wealth, and respect.

2 Research Methodology

In this study, we applied qualitative method. Qualitative method is an appropriate approach to explore questions that come together with social issues, cultural norms and personal beliefs (Asna Ashari et al., 2009). The other reasons that we chose qualitative approach are feminists' theories to choose research method. Many feminists reject quantitative method for data collection and analysis. They believe that in sociology studies we should apply qualitative methods (Pamela Abbott, 2001). This study in terms of orientation is an applied research.

We used structured interviews to collect data regarding the novelty of research topic in Iran as well as the fact that people may not easily express their issues or the interview process might vary among men and women. Research sample consisted of 12 women and men working at three operational, middle, and high managerial levels in construction industry. The reason for including both sexes in statistical population was to satisfy feminists' opinion. They believe that sociological studies are valid when both sexes are present and it creates a comprehensive, and complete research (Pamela Abbott, 2001) .We determined the overall

framework for questions concerning the extensive literature review and based on research objectives, then we evaluated the framework by presenting it to three experienced individuals in the construction industry. We conducted the interviews after editing and finalizing the questions. In order to conduct the interviews, we used a combination of convenient and targeted judgmental and snowball methods to select the experts. Researcher directly selected the first person based on the desired criteria (judgmental sampling), other experts were selected by prior interviewees in addition to expertise criteria (snowball sampling). Interview process continued until the fulfillment of theoretical saturation, beyond that we could not achieve any new concepts and issues. We collected desired data in these interviews using structured questions, which lasted between 45 to 80 minutes. We also used content analysis method to analyze qualitative data in this research. In this case, we extracted the interview's transcript from recorded audio of the interview sessions and completed them using notes taken during the interview sessions. First, we identified all independent ideas in the form of concepts and sub- themes for each conducted interview after careful study of the texts, and then we allocated a unique code to each one. We performed such action for each of the interviews and we used the same prior allocated code as indicators in case there were parts with similar contents in the transcript of previous interviews. Then, we conducted a classification that was more general based on all identified sub-themes in the study, which resulted in exploring main themes. Finally, we employed direct quotations from people in different parts of analysis to clarify the ideas.

3 Discussion

Research findings divided the barriers to the presence of women in Iran's construction industry into five groups of individual and family, social, cultural, and organizational barriers, and workplace damages. The results of data analysis are as follows:

3.1 Individual factors

Individual factors refer to a set of factors related to psychological characteristics, individual skills, and family responsibilities. These barriers are not general and can vary from person to person. We can divide individual factors into four categories of personality-related barriers, interpersonal relationships, expertise and proficiency and family responsibilities.

3.1.1 Personality-related barriers

In this study, personality-related barriers refer to factors that are due to the lack of self-esteem, rejection of authority delegation and a sense of guilt. These are wrong beliefs that have negative impact on career development. Self-esteem is an inner experience. It is what a person feels or thinks about him/herself. Unfortunately, many working females in the construction industry do not have the required self-esteem for improvement. They often wish for a savior to pave their way. All respondents believed that individual barriers are main factors that hinder women to have access to managerial positions. Female respondent 9 believes that women should consider that they could keep the wolf from the door in this career. Male respondent 4 says, "Self-esteem and accepting authority is the requisite for success." Women sometimes do not accept responsibilities. They have more desire for simple and routine works (Female respondent 1). The most important negative personality-related feeling of working women in the construction industry is a sense of guilt towards their family members. They stated that the nature of management in construction industry is different from other professions. Visiting sites, receiving different feedbacks from employers and contactors, and dealing with workers with different cultural levels are some differences that take a lot of energy from a woman. These issues sometimes destroy female elegance and morale. Some women feel guilty because they do not dedicate enough time and energy to their family members. Female respondent 2 feels guilty because she does not have required tenderness and kindness for her child and husband.

Female respondent 11 says, "It is a woman's skill to be able to manage her emotions. Emotion and femininity should be like a dress. Woman should be able to put on menswear when she leaves the house and change her clothes and wear women's dress when she returns."

3.1.2 Interpersonal relationships

Individualism and too much sense of competition are factors that barricade women to achieve managerial positions.

3.1.3 Expertise and experience

Conversance and expertise are contributing factors that will lead to the selection and appointment of women in managerial levels. Male respondent 8 expresses that women do not have the required knowledge and expertise to reach managerial levels and they have merely become scientist rather than empowered thanks to their academic education. Women by acquiring experience and expertise must be a solution for the organization rather than their presence creates problems for the firm (Female respondent 1)

3.1.4 Family responsibility

Family barriers refer to those obstacles that close family members generate for women in the industry. Job and family conflict are family barriers in which job and family roles due to the nature of this industry that requires long and sometimes irregular working hours are incompatible. If a family has this belief that women are the first person responsible for family issues, they will not assign duties and roles properly. Woman in such situations does not have the opportunity to develop her career and allocate required time and energy to her managerial profession. Sometimes a woman as a project manager may need to go to a meeting or a specific visit during the project, which requires collaboration and approval from her husband (Female respondent 1). "I had a colleague who was responsible for a project outside Tehran. She had worked hard for the project, but due to her family's dissatisfaction, she could not go to the mission outside Tehran to attend at the project presentation; as a result, all of her efforts became worthless," female respondent 1 said.

Taking care of children is another family restriction. In this regard, male respondent 6 says, "My wife is a workshop supervisor and I have no problem with that, but when she takes maternity role in addition to be a wife, I am no longer willing that she should be in a job."

3.2 Organizational barriers

Organizational factors are among barriers that deter women to attain managerial levels in construction industry. The current study examines organizational barriers in two areas of human resources management and management preferences policies.

3.2.1 Human resource management

The lack of successful female managers as role models and lack of equal employment opportunity are human barriers for women in construction industry. In Iranian society, successful and leading female managers in construction industry are very few. Role models could stimulate women's ambition and lead them to success. Low knowledge of women about role models and lack of comparing their performance with their male colleagues is one of the reasons that withhold women to reach managerial positions (Male respondent 8). Female respondent 9 says, "Having a role model is very important. When we realize that a person despite all environmental conditions has been able to attain this position, then we unconsciously tell ourselves that we can achieve this status as well." Female respondent 2 believes that promoting role models and showing the capability of women not only increases individual motivation but also equalizes employment opportunities.

3.2.2 Management Preferences

Top managers' approach to admit women in key and managerial positions in this industry plays a significant

role. When employers do not trust women in terms of working and jump to conclusions about the success of women in supervision and management levels, women undoubtedly will face with problems in their promotions. Male respondents 3 and 5 when there is a quite the same conditions for women, prefer to exploit male work force to manage their projects. In this regard, female respondent 10 who has experienced such discriminations states that we should not give up and we can win against these decisions with diligence and strong will. Female respondent 7 says, "Sometimes we have to fight for our success."

3.3 Cultural barriers

The cultural factors refer to a set of factors related to customs and beliefs that shape values and norms of a society. These factors simply cannot be solved by individual efforts, but require information and gradual evolution that create value in the society. We can divide cultural barriers into four classifications of gender inequality, masculism culture, cultural norms and values, and rejection of women by men in working groups. All respondents referred to cultural barriers and considered them as the most effective barriers of women's career advancement.

3.3.1 Gender inequality

Gender inequality is one of the problems that human had dealt with from the past. The type of inequalities only have changed depending on the time and place conditions and based on the culture of each community. Gender inequality is an important factor for women's lack of advancement in terms of equalization of working conditions in construction. In this case, female respondent 2 believes that segregation by careers is one of these inequalities. He states that employers usually select men for managerial and executive works in organizations, while they appoint women to designing and section managerial jobs. The difference in wages is another instance of inequality. Men in the same working conditions usually enjoy higher wages and benefits than women (Female respondent 7).

3.3.2 Masculism culture

Masculism culture is one of the most important cultural barriers that affect promotion of women in workplace. Female respondent one believes that a male-dominated culture is negatively associated with management by women and employers in such organizations usually assign women to lower tasks. Hofstede believes that in such organizational culture, masculism index, and work stress in the workplace is high and fewer women occupy high-level positions (Kazemi and Dehghanpour Farshah, 2013). It seems that the glass ceiling theory that also represents negative attitudes and bigotries for women's promotion in organizational hierarchy is the result of a male-dominated society.

3.4 Social barriers

Social barriers such as the lack of attention to women's education and work discrimination between men and women affect the access of women to managerial levels. Authorities should train employed mothers both maternity and marital roles as well as job creation roles in the industry throughout the society to avoid single parenthood phenomenon (Male respondent 8). The attitude of "Man is the breadwinner" is another social barrier for the employment of women and their involvement in managerial positions. The belief that there is no need for women's work and they have to stay at home has led to the creation of male-wage earner culture. In this attitude, when there is an equal opportunity for both men and women to take a managerial position, a man would be preferable.

3.5 Workplace damages

Workplace damages are hindering factors for women in management levels of construction industry. This study examines these damages in two areas of sexual harassment and stress.

3.5.1 Sexual harassment

Women are facing with different types of harassments in workplaces; these harassments vary depending on the type of environment and working status as well as education level of women. In this research, we divide sexual harassments into three types of verbal abuse (sexual jokes and ironies, proposition for continuing the relationship outside of the workplace and sexual questions), non-verbal abuse (irritating looks), and physical abuse (touching the body and violent sexual behavior). Almost all interviewees mentioned verbal and non-verbal annoyance. They either had experienced themselves such abuses or closely had witnessed them. They have not mentioned some cases of physical abuse in the interviews. However, it seems that their reluctance to mention these cases is due to the lack of trust in researcher and fear of disreputation and labeling by society rather than their uncertainty. Female respondent 1 believes that the type of women's dress and type of their conversation with people in organization, especially in workshops, is a solution to diminish sexual harassment. Female respondent 9 says, "Women determine the type of relationship. They should learn how to communicate with the opposite sex in order to avoid getting lost in these relationships. Sometimes, you should ignore a series of issues to have more peace."

3.5.2 Stress

Female managers are more visible to others compare to men when they achieve management levels in organization. This is because, achieving to this level is opposed to the dominant idea in society. They have to be more careful about their performance and feedbacks to be able to keep their positions. This status of being under supervision creates emotional pressure and stress for women. Female respondent 10 says, "I usually have too much stress doing my job than my male colleagues. I may even have not enough sleep and rest the night before submission of the project due to the stress. "

4 CONCLUSION

This research has investigated the challenges of women's presence in management levels of construction industry in Iran. We identified and examined five major barriers including individual and family, social, cultural, organizational barriers and workplace damages along with 20 Subcategories. The results indicated that factors such as skeptical attitudes towards women's empowerment, cultural values and norms, masculism culture, and failing to prove capabilities has led the public, specially male colleagues, to have a different attitude towards women in managerial levels of construction industry. Therefore, we suggest that we should pay attention to individual and cultural factors. Individual and cultural changes require a gradual nature, meaning that these barriers have not formed overnight and we cannot resolve them at once. However, according to its gradual nature, the solution or improvement requires in depth, long-term, and realistic planning. Special involvement by government and adopting appropriate mechanisms are essential. So that, they can take an important action for the participation of women in construction industry to attain appropriate degrees and awareness of public to accept the active position of women in this industry as well as the benefits of their effective cooperation in executive and managerial positions.

5 References

- Hashemi L., Mirhosseini, S., Khalvati, M., Asefi, M. 2015. Barriers to promote women working in governmental banks to higher levels of management from the employee's perspective. *Women's Bulletin*, issue 4.
- Esfandiani, M. 2001. Barriers to women's achievement to managerial positions. *Women's research quarterly*, 4th edition.
- Esfandiani, M. 2002. Investigating the barriers to women's presence in executive managerial positions of government. A master's thesis, University of Tehran.

- Abbott, P., and Wallace, C. 2001. An introduction to sociology: feminist perspectives. Translated by Najm Iraqi, M., Tehran: Ney Publication.
- Hussainpour, M., Hajipour, B., Hosseinian, E. 2012. Barriers to women's presence in middle and senior management levels. Scientific and research Journal of Women and Culture, Issue 14.
- Razavi Al-Hashem, B. 2009. Analyzing the status of women's participation in political and social development process of Iran's Islamic Revolution. Social Science Quarterly, Issue 21.
- Shaditalab, J. 1998. Management by women and the need to change the behavior management sector, Joint conference by Industrial Management Institute and Sociology Association.
- Kazemi, A., Dehghanpour Farshah, A. 2013. Identifying and prioritizing the barriers to women's presence in managerial positions of Oil industry, Journal of Women in Development and Policy, Vol 11, Issue 2.
- Asnaashari, E, Knight, A, Hurst, A and Farahani, S S, 2009, Causes of construction delays in Iran: project management, logistics, technology and environment, Association of Researchers in Construction Management, Vol. 2, 887–906.
- Joan Acker, 2009, From glass ceiling to inequality regimes, Science Direct
- Institute the smith, 2014, Building the future: women in construction, www.designengineerconstruct.com
- Sonia Gurjao, 2006, the Changing Role of Women in the Construction Workforce, Chartered Institute Of Building(UK)
- Obamiro john Kolade & Obasan Kehinde, 2012, Glass Ceiling and Women Career Advancement: Evidence from Nigerian Construction Industry, Iranian Journal of Management Studies.
- Ryan, M. K.; Haslam, S. A. 2007. "The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding women's appointment to precarious leadership positions." Academy of Management