Barriers To Women Managers’ Career Progressions In Malaysian Government Link Companies (Glcs)

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Abstract: The main aim of this study was to determine the barriers to women managers’ career progression in Malaysian Government-Linked Companies (GLCs). A theoretical framework was developed with family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling as independent variables, talent management as mediating variable and women managers’ career progression as the independent variable. A quantitative research approach in the form of a correlation study was used in this research. A total of 466 women managers from 17 GLCs constituted the sample. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Regression analysis indicated that all four predictor variables of family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management significantly contributed 36% to the variation in women managers’ career progression. The results of the study support the direct relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling with talent management and between talent management and women managers’ career progression. They also support the relationship between family related barriers and negative stereotype with women managers’ career progression. Talent management was found to partially mediate the relationship between family related barriers and negative stereotype with women managers’ career progression. The results have implication for individual, organizational and governmental role in reducing barriers and increasing greater appointment of women in top management positions. The direct negative relationship between family related barriers and women managers’ career progression suggests that women lose out on their careers because of the choices they make to accommodate their family responsibilities. The direct negative relationship between negative stereotype and women managers’ career progression can be accounted for in two ways. Negative stereotype could give rise to a self-fulfilling prophecy where the women could start believing that they do not have the capacity to hold leadership position and behave in ways that results in them not being given those roles. Negative stereotype could be operating in the decision managers make about promotions and succession planning resulting in women being side tracked from leadership positions. It is interesting to note that glass ceiling was not found to be significantly related to women managers’ career progression. This suggests glass ceiling operates through other variables to influence women managers’ career progression. The relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling with talent management shows that perception of women as not having the capacity to hold top management position could result in gender biased talent management activities in the organization.

Key words: Barriers; women managers; career progression; Government Link Companies (GLCs); Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Women are under-represented in senior management, executive roles and on corporate boards. This has been a cause for concern for gender and management scholars and has given rise to debates on how this gender gap can be addressed (Schein, 2007; Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008; Rowley and Yukongdi, 2009; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2011; Vanderbroeck, 2010; Swan, 2011; Lewis and Simpson, 2011; Brady et al., 2011; LaPierre and Zimmerman, 2012). The findings from The 2012 World Development Report (WDR 2012) on Gender Equity and Development, reveals that the gender gap is shrinking in some areas. Although this news is encouraging, the same report has highlighted that there still exists gender gaps in areas which involve making decisions on policies and in the top management levels of the organization. This situation is not confined to USA and Europe. This is true for Asia as well. According to GMI rating’s 2011 women on board survey, in most Asian countries, less than 10% of seats on the board of directors of companies are held by women. The breakdown of this figure is Thailand (8.7 percent), China (8.5 percent), Singapore (7.3 percent), Malaysia (6.3 percent), Taiwan (6.1 percent), India (5.3 percent), and Indonesia (4.5 percent). Japan fares very badly with only about 0.9% of women occupying seats on boards of companies GMIRATINGS, 2011).

Malaysia’s total population stands at 27.6 million with women making up 48.8% of it (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). There has been a 12% increase in women’s participation in the labor force from 35.6% in the year 2000 to 47.6% in the year 2011. Women university graduates outnumber men by a ratio of 60:40. This means there is a larger number of women with tertiary education compared to men. This represents
underutilized talent. One way the Malaysian government is attempting to increase women in top managerial position is by initiating a drive to have 30% of women at decision making levels all sectors. This includes the public, private sector and the government-linked companies. In order to achieve this the government is prescribing a formal development program for selected women who have been identified as possessing high potential to prepare for top management jobs. In spite of these initiatives, the presence of women in top management is still low. Any attempt to bridge the gender gap in top management requires identification of barriers to women managers’ career progression.

**Barriers that Influence Women Managers’ Career Progression:**

Several factors have been cited as possible reasons for the low representation of women in leadership position. Jogulu (2008) carried out a cross-cultural study to compare the attitudes and workplace participation of middle managers from Malaysia and Australia. The study found that commitment to family or personal responsibilities topped the list of barriers to women’s career progression in both the countries. The second on the list were the gender stereotypes and preconceptions of working women’ roles and abilities and the latter barrier were connected to the negative stereotyping of women as not having the capacity to play managerial roles. The findings were similar in both Malaysia and Australia in spite of the two countries having diverse cultures. Other factors that have been cited include personal variables, glass ceiling, organizational development activities, presence of role models and mentors. This study is confined to the influence of family related variables, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management on women managers’ career progression. While there has been extensive research on the relationship between family related variables, negative stereotype and glass ceiling and women managers’ career progression, not much is known about the mechanism by which these variables influence women’s careers. Therefore this research is based on the premise that organizational development activities in the form of gender biased talent management could be one mechanism by which the three variables of family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling influence women managers’ career progression.

**Family Related Barriers and Women Managers’ Career Progression:**

Many women have to juggle roles as mothers, housewives, home-makers and managers at work. Work-life balance is a challenge for them and has affected their ability to meet their various commitments. Work-life balance is defined as the balance between satisfaction and good role play at work and also at home with a minimum role conflict (Clark, 2000). Therefore, the main concerns in the women’s perspective were the duration or working time that is required longer than they expected (Mooney and Ryan, 2008). In addition, the organization would anticipate its managers to be flexible to the needs of business. When demands of the job increasingly encroach into family life, women experience conflict which affects their career outcomes (Voydanoff, 2005). Lopez- Claros and Zahidi (2005) stated that work-life balance is very difficult for women with young children especially when they try to balance their role as the primary caregiver with additional responsibility in the organization.

Where family demands are concerned, ambitious women seldom rely on organizational support for fear of reinforcing the communal stereotype (Broadbridge, 2008). Therefore, many women who are executives and those in elite occupations handle by making discreet choices between their career advancement and family such as “opting out” or postponing their marriage and parenting (Blair-Loy, 2001; Nelson and Burke, 2000). In other circumstances, women also enhance their personal domain resources by relying on spousal support, for example dividing house responsibilities and taking care their children (Brett and Stroh, 2003). However, in certain cases such couple-level adaptive strategies, even though packaged as a couple’s collective decision, do not necessarily promote women’s work-life balance (Wierda-Boer et al., 2008).

According to Keene and Reynolds (2002), because of family and job responsibilities, women managers are at a disadvantage. Since family needs more attention, women managers are forced to avoid overtime. Therefore, this idea is supported that women are not involved in their job as much as their male counterparts.

H1: There is a significant relationship between family related barriers and women managers’ career progression

**Negative Stereotype and Women Managers’ Career Progression:**

Gender stereotyping of the managerial role arises when the attributes regarded to be necessary in order to fulfill the role are attributed to one sex (Schein, 1973, 1975, 2001, 2006). This is the top managerial roles are more suited to males. Achievement orientation, forcefulness and strength in decision-making are attributes that are regularly ascribed to men, and these traits are considered as essential in fulfilling managerial roles (Lyness and Heilman, 2006). Therefore, it is essential to believe that effects related to gender role stereotypes does occur in the workplace. Research by Oswald (2008) and Rudman and Phelan (2010), found that gender role stereotypes influence occupation preference by both affecting perceived ability and interest in different jobs. In addition, gender role stereotypes guide to vary the perceptions and expectations of leaders (Cabrera et al., 2009)
as well as influence income (Blau et al., 2002) and performance ratings in the organization (Bauer and Baltes, 2002; Bowen et al., 2000).

There are several researchers who studied about stereotype especially stereotype of women as a deterrent to women job progression (Bass et al., 2001; Ching-Yim and Harris Bond, 2002; Mostafa, 2003). They stressed that although women have gained a lot of achievements, negative attitudes and stereotyping women managers still exist in many cultures of the organization. They believe that a common stereotype is “think manager, think male”, meaning success is a male characteristic. Schein (1996) found that when a women employee prefers to collaborate with a male boss rather than a women boss, it supports the continuity of the “think managers, think male” syndrome. Hsung and Chow (2001) found that men managers were recognized as better superiors and respectable compared to women managers.

H2: There is a significant relationship between negative stereotypes and women managers’ career progression to top management position.

Glass Ceiling and Women Manager’s Career Progression:

The glass ceiling term symbolizes a variety of barriers faced by women and by minorities as they seek to improve their employment status in the organization. Several studies validated glass ceiling hypothesis and indicated that women in their early lives experienced a number of barriers during their career path (Phillips and Imhoff, 1997); and also invisible barriers, which continued to prevent women from moving up to a higher position in organizations (Baxter and Wright, 2000; Lyness and Thompson, 2000).

The majority of women aspiring to senior management positions or higher believed that glass ceiling as barrier exist towards career progression, according to a report surveyed by a leading UK management organization. The survey of 3,000 members of the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) indicated that 73% of women respondents felt barriers still existed for women seeking senior management and board-level positions in the UK. In contrast, just 38% of men believed there is a glass ceiling. Moreover, in starting of their careers, in comparing with 45% of women managers, 52% of male managers had a reasonable or clear picture on how they wanted to work in a particular role and it is pointed that less than half of women said they wanted or expected to become managers, versus the two-thirds of men. Even among the under-30s, gender aspirations remained entrenched, with 45% of men and 30% of women expecting to become managers or leaders.

Some scholars from a Malaysian university Dimovski, Skerlavaj, Mok and Man (2010) surveyed the glass ceiling’s existence in Singaporean and Malaysian companies. Their sample for the study was Singaporean and Malaysian mid-level women managers. The study surveyed the influence of company’s culture, climate, and practices on a glass ceiling from mid-level women managers’ viewpoint in Malaysian and Singaporean firms. The results indicate that the general principles of the glass ceiling concept are maintained in the Malaysian and Singaporean firms. The outcomes illustrates that Malaysian women mid-level managers in their firms encounter a glass ceiling in their work place that prevent their promotion, and acts as an obstacle to the job progress opportunities for women personnel.

H3: There is a relationship between presence of glass ceiling and women managers’ career progression.

Talent Management and Women Managers’ Career Progression:

Talent is understood to be one of those workers who guarantees the competitiveness and future of a corporation (as specialist or leader) through the organizational or job specific qualification and knowledge, the social and methodical competencies, and characteristic attributes such as eager to learn or achievement oriented (Davis et al., 2007). Talent management is now considered a key management function (Boston Consulting Group [BCG], 2010). Several studies have pointed out the value of talents to organizational success. Talent pools are built (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2005), and employees are classified in performance-level groups (Huselid, Beatty, and Becker, 2005; Ready, Hill, and Conger, 2008).

Talent management frequently focuses on groups with high potential, who are seen as future leaders (Brouwer, Sonnenberg, Van der Tuin, and Bovee, 2009). Consequently, talent management is used as an instrument for succession planning (Hills, 2009; Rothwell, 2005), is seen as a process for developing employees (Berke, Kossler, and Wakefield, 2008; Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD], 2006) or works as a mechanism to retaining best workers (Allen, Bryant, and Vardaman, 2010). Therefore, talent management is seen as a process that could comprises activities such as staffing and employing, motivating and retaining, and appraising and training talent, while focusing clearly on those employees who guarantee the continuing competitiveness of the corporation (Berke et al., 2008; Phillips and Edwards, 2009; Silzer and Dowell, 2010). Research has shown that women tend to overlooked in many talent management initiatives due to them being considered as not having the capacity or that they may not be worth investing in because they may leave their job for family or even thought of as being not interested in those activities (Schein, 2007).

H4: There is a significant relationship between talent management and women managers’ career progression.
Relationship between Family Related Barriers, Negative Stereotype, Glass Ceiling and Talent Management with Women Managers’ Career Progression:

Literature reviewed above shows the separate relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management with women managers’ career progression. In reality, all these variables influence women managers’ career progression simultaneously. From the literature it appear that talent management could play a mediating role in the relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and women managers’ career progression. Talent management could be the instrument by which the three variables influence women’s career progression. Managers perceive women because of their responsibilities are either unable or would not want to participate in value added talent management activities that would enable them to be visible leadership materials (Hartmann, 2010). These result in women, who either not acquiring the competencies as well as the visibility to move up the professional ladder. Due to negative stereotype, women are regarded as not having the capacity to be leaders and therefore are not selected for challenging assignments, high powered training and development programs and other organizational development activities. Thus again, this lack of inclusiveness practiced by organizations result in women not having opportunities for career progression.

The implementation of glass ceiling means that there is already a set limit to the level that women would be allowed to move up in the organization. With this in mind, women are excluded from value added talent management activities. This ensures that women would not be able to move up to top leadership position. Therefore it is argued, that talent management acts as a mediator in the relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling with women manager’ career progression.

H5: Talent Management mediates the relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling with women managers’ career progression

Theoretical Framework:

Based on the review of literature on the barriers that influencing women managers’ career progress, theoretical frameworks are developed for this study is presented in Figure 1. This study will test the viability of the framework by testing the research hypothesis.

![Theoretical Framework](image)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main purpose of this research is to examine the barriers of women managers’ career progression in Malaysian GLCs.

Research Design

A quantitative approach in the form of a correlational study was adopted for this research. The independent variables are family related variables, negative stereotype and glass ceiling. The mediating variable is talent management. The dependent variable is women managers’ career progression.

Research Instrument:

The research instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire for this research comprises of five sections. Section A consists of twenty three question that solicits information regarding the demographic variables of the respondents. Section B consists of eight statements that solicit information regarding the respondents’ career progression. Section C has three parts: the first part consists of ten statements which are related to family related barriers; the second part consists of eleven statements about negative stereotype about women and third part consists of twelve statements about glass ceiling. Section D consists of eight statements about the gender bias in the form of talent management in the organization. For sections B, C and D the respondents were asked to express the extent of their agreement to the given statements using a five-point likert-type scale ranging from 5 - strongly disagree, to 1 - strongly agree. Finally section E consists of and open ended question. The respondents are asked to describe their own personal experiences on loss of opportunity for career advancement due to the barriers in section B, C or D.
**Population and Sampling:**
The target population was women managers working in Malaysian Government–Linked Companies (GLCs). A convenience sampling technique was used as only those who consented to participate in the study were selected as respondents. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, 466 completed questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 77.67%.

**Data Analysis:**
Descriptive statistics in the form of mean and standard deviation was used to describe the central tendency of the research variables. Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the relationship among the research variables. Regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between all the predictor variables and the dependent variable. Regression analysis was also used to examine the mediating effect of talent management on the relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling on women managers’ career progression. The level of significance was set at \( p = 0.05 \).

**Results:**
Descriptive analysis in the form of mean and standard deviation for the factors influencing women managers’ career progression is presented in Table 1. The mean and standard deviations of the respondents to women managers’ career progression (mean = 2.513, SD = 0.539), family related barrier (mean = 2.726, SD = 0.268), negative stereotype (mean = 3.386, SD = 0.619), glass ceiling (mean = 3.237, SD = 0.462) and for talent management (mean = 3.465, SD = 0.616).

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<th>Table 1: Descriptive Statistics</th>
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The normality test is essential as it will allow the flexibility to apply the appropriate statistical test. Skewness and Kurtosis tests are used to test this assumption and the result of this assumption for variables is shown in Table 2. It is noted that the acceptable range for Skewness and Kurtosis is to ensure that the normality lays between -1 to 1 (Chan, 2003). However, the accurately distributed normality, the value would be zero. The results for both Skewness and Kurtosis show that the data is not exactly normal, distributed, but they fall within the range of -1 and 1. Therefore, the variables are assumed to be normally distributed.

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<th>Table 2: Normality Test: Skewness and Kurtosis</th>
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Table 3 presents the alpha coefficients and correlations between women managers’ career progressions, the three barriers (family related barriers, negative stereotypes and glass ceiling) and talent management. Preliminary analysis were carried out to ensure that no serious violation of the assumptions of normality.

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<th>Table 3: Correlation Matrix of the Research Variables</th>
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Note: The numbers in parenthesis denote the Cronbach alpha (\( \alpha \)) values for internal consistency of the items in the constructs.

**Testing the Mediating Effect of Talent Management on Barriers and Women Managers’ Career Progression:**
It is quite common to have a third variable existing in a relationship between independent and dependent variables. A study shows that this third variable could act as a mediator variable in the relationship between two
variables (Lockwood and MacKinnon, 1998). For this study, talent management is hypothesised as mediating the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

H5: Talent Management mediates the relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling with women managers’ career progression

H5 posits that talent management would mediate the relationship between barrier variables and women managers’ career progression. To test this hypothesis we followed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) recommendations for examining mediating effects in regression. They argued that mediation is demonstrated if three conditions are fulfilled: The first condition stipulates that the independent variable and the proposed mediator must each be significantly related to the dependent variable when considered separately. The correlation analysis presented in Table 3 reveals that two of the independent variables, family related variables (r = -0.440, p < 0.05) and negative stereotype (r = -0.467, p < 0.05) were significantly related to the dependent variable (women managers’ career progression) independent of the proposed mediator (organizational commitment). However the relationship between glass ceiling with the dependent variable was not significant (r = -0.30, p > 0.05). To determine whether the proposed mediator was related to the dependent variable, the correlation matrix in Table 3 was again examined. From Table 3 it was observed that talent management was positively and significantly correlated with women managers’ career progression (r = 0.27, p<0.01). Therefore the first condition for mediation was satisfied. The second condition requires that the independent variable to be significantly related to the proposed mediator. From the correlation matrix in Table 3, it can be seen that three independent variable, family related barriers (r = 0.323, p < 0.05), negative stereotype (r = 0.546, p < 0.05) and glass ceiling (r = 0.397, p < 0.05) are significantly related with talent management. Hence the second condition for mediation is also satisfied.

The last condition for mediation stipulates that when both the independent variable and mediator are included in a regression equation, the direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable should become significantly smaller, indicating partial mediation, or non-significant, indicating full mediation. To test this last condition we utilized the hierarchical multiple regression technique.

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<th>Table 4: Testing for Mediator Effects Using Multiple Regression</th>
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<td><strong>Independent Variable</strong></td>
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Note: b-standardized coefficient; n=418; Durbin-Watson= 1.503; VIF-variance inflation factor; Sig.-significance.

Table 4 shows the results. When women managers’ career progression was regressed with family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling, it was found that family related barriers (b = -0.207, p < 0.05), negative stereotype (b = -0.223, p < 0.05) were significantly and negatively related to women managers’ career progression while the relationship between glass ceiling and women managers’ career progression was found to be not significant (b = -0.036, p > 0.05) (step 1). In step 2, talent management was added to the equation, the relationship between talent management was significant (b = -0.289, p < 0.05) but the beta weights for the relationship between family related barrier and women managers’ career progression decreased from -0.207 to -0.197 and the relationship between negative stereotype and women managers’ career progression was also significant but its beta weight decreased from -0.223 to -0.130. The comparisons are made on absolute values. The beta value for glass ceiling was increased from -0.036 to -0.118. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.503 also fell between the acceptable ranges of 1.5-2.5, implying that there is no autocorrelation problem in data. The result indicated variation inflation factors (VIF) were all less than 10.

Taken together these results imply that talent management partially mediated the relationship between family related barriers and negative stereotype with women managers’ career progression.

Therefore H5 is only partially rejected.

Discussion And Conclusion:

This is the first study to explore the association between family related variables, negative stereotype, glass ceiling, talent management and women managers’ career progression in Government-Linked Companies (GLCs) in Malaysia. The objective of the study was to examine the direct and indirect relationship between
family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling, talent management and women managers’ career progression.

The results of the study support the direct relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling with talent management and between talent management and women managers’ career progression. They also support the relationship between family related barriers and negative stereotype with women managers’ career progression. Talent management was found to partially mediate the relationship between family related barriers and negative stereotype with women managers’ career progression.

The direct negative relationship between family related barriers and women managers’ career progression suggests that women lose out on their careers because of the choices they make to accommodate their family responsibilities. The direct negative relationship between negative stereotype and women managers’ career progression can be accounted for in two ways. Negative stereotype could give rise to a self-fulfilling prophecy where the women could start believing that they do not have the capacity to hold leadership position and behave in ways that results in them not being given those roles. Negative stereotype could be operating in the decisions management makes about promotions and succession planning resulting in women being side tracked from leadership positions. It is interesting to note that glass ceiling was not found to be significantly related to women managers’ career progression. This suggests glass ceiling operates through other variables to influence women managers’ career progression. The relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling with talent management shows that perception of women as not having the capacity to hold top management position could result in gender biased talent management activities in the organization. Men are selected over women for specific positions, given more challenging assignments that enable them to show their ability and give them high visibility and given high value training and development opportunities that enable the men to obtain skills and competencies which make them eligible for top management positions. The gender biased talent management activities have a detrimental effect on women managers’ career progression.

The findings of the study are consistent with some earlier studies. Previous studies on barriers to women managers’ career progression suggests that family related variables(Hartmann, 2010), negative stereotype (Oswald, 2008; Rudman and Phelan, 2010), and glass ceiling(Simpson and Altman, 2003) are related to talent management. Similarly studies do support the finding that family related variables (Voydanoff, 2005; Blair-Loy, 2001) and negative stereotype (Cabrera et al., 2009; Embry et al., 2008) do influence women managers’ career progression.

Implication And Recommendation:

The research findings has implication for continued education and professional development of women, work life balance, stereotyping of women, imposition of glass ceiling and talent management in organizations. There should be equal opportunities for women in education and professional development. Organization should introduce policies and practices that facilitate work life balance for women like flexible working hours, time off for men to support women, education of men to change their mind set, role models and mentors for women.

Limitations Of The Study And Suggestions For Further Research:

This study is based on self report by women and data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The study was confined to women managers in Government-Linked Companies in Malaysia. A further study with samples drawn from other public and private sector organizations would give a clearer picture of factors influencing women managers’ career progression in Malaysia. A combined research design consisting of both quantitative and qualitative approach would give the women an opportunity to voice their opinions. In fact a phenomenology study could give an in depth information on the barriers that women face in their career progression. The study could be extended to men and comparisons made on their opinions to see whether they significantly differed from women. More variables should be included in the study to give a clearer picture of the factors influencing women’s career progression.

REFERENCES