

Original Article

The “Pink-Collar” Workforce: Analysing the Glass Ceiling in Garment Factories in Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract - The garment industries provide work to women in developing countries who are mostly employed in sewing, checking and packing. Although women comprise a significant workforce in the industry, only a few leadership positions. The challenges faced by women to claim leadership positions at workplace are referred to as “Glass Ceiling”. This study focuses on the garment industries that are located in and around Tirupur in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which is an important textile manufacturing hub. Studies about gender inequality in the garment industries are conducted in countries like Bangladesh and Srilanka. Still, only a few studies have focused on India, and there is limited research about Tamil Nadu. Tirupur has many garment Industries and plays a significant role in textile manufacturing. Various methods such as semi-structured interviews, surveys and workplace observation have been used to collect data from around 135 employees working in a garment factory. The participants include workers, supervisors, executives and managers who are in the garment industry located in and around Tirupur. The study explores the challenges faced by women workers in climbing the ladder, including discriminatory treatment, lack of training, inadequate information about the promotion cycle, and communication issues. The study has highlighted that a lot of women desire to be leaders if they get the right opportunities. The research is useful for understanding why women are not treated equally in the garment industry in Tamil Nadu. It ends with offering suggestions on how workplaces can become encouraging spaces through better policy implementation. This study will provide new knowledge to the garment industry in Tamil Nadu by collecting data from the people who have worked in the garment industry. It provides useful suggestions for factory management, government policymakers, and future researchers to help create more opportunities for women to advance into leadership positions.

Keywords - Garment industry, Gender bias, Glass ceiling, Leadership, Women workers.

1. Introduction

The garment industry gives jobs to many women in developing countries. Women work in cutting, sewing, checking, and packing sections. Even though women work in all areas, only a fewer numbers reaching the leadership positions. The problem is called as the glass ceiling, which means hidden barriers that stop women from reaching to this leadership positions. Despite having the required education and skills, women face difficulty in getting leadership roles (Morrison et al. 1987). In Tamil Nadu garment industries, only about 10%–15% of women (Data collected from a few factories in sivaganga and udumalpet) are in the top managerial and administrative positions. There are many reasons for this. Some Industries prefer men for leadership roles. Women get fewer promotion opportunities and less leadership training to upgrade. Some employers think women may leave jobs for family reasons, which also reduces their career growth pace. These reasons are also documented in previous studies to highlight the lack of women in senior professional positions (Cotter et al. 2001). This happens in many industries and countries. Gender Role Theory explains this situation in a succinct manner. Society expects women to take care of the family and men to work and lead (Eagly, 1987). Because of these

established notions of the gendered division of labour, often women are not seen as leaders. In the garment Industries maximum number of women work in the production area, while the men work in the higher positions involving strategy and decision making (Kabeer 2012). Even though opportunities for women have improved, leadership equality is still a distant dream (World Bank 2020). Looking into this issue is important because many women are facing struggles in transitioning to leadership positions in the garment industries. One of the common barriers is the lack of training and leadership opportunities. Women workers are often given routine production work and may not get chances to develop leadership skills (International Labour Organization 2019). This research is conducted in and around Tirupur, which is located in Tamil Nadu. Tirupur is one of the most important centres for garment manufacturing. Studies about gender inequality in the garment industries have previously been conducted mostly in countries like Bangladesh and Srilanka (Kabeer 2012). Only a few studies have focused on India, and there is quite limited research about Tamil Nadu. Tirupur has many garment Industries and plays a significant role in textile and garment manufacturing (Government of Tamil Nadu



2019). The garment industries here provide jobs to many people.

The workforce in this industry is also very diverse. Many workers come from different states of India, especially from the northern states, while many others come from the local districts of Tamil Nadu. Women comprise a large part of the workforce in the garment industry. They work in main production areas such as sewing, checking, finishing and packing garments (Barrientos 2011). The lack or absence of women in leadership positions, referred to as the phenomenon of the glass ceiling, sheds light on the hidden socioeconomic and cultural barriers that stop women from reaching leadership positions (Morrison et al. 1987).

The participants included workers, supervisors, mid-management staff and above executive-level employees. This research has also attempted to identify the problems women face in career growth, such as a lack of training, gender bias, family responsibilities, low confidence, and language barriers. By understanding these issues, this research can help improve promotion opportunities and systematic promotion systems, and suggest policies to improve the condition of women in the garment industry. It can also support women to achieve better career growth and increase their presence in leadership roles.

1.1. Objectives

The primary objective of this research is listed as following

1. To identify the organizational, personal and socioeconomic barriers that affect the bottom-level workers to grow to higher positions in the garment industries in Tamil Nadu
2. To study how the organization supports, the workplace environment and gender inequality affect women's leadership
3. To study whether the company practices like training, mentoring, a fair promotion system, work-life balance, and support from managers to help women progress to higher positions in the garment industry.
4. To suggest ways that garment companies and policymakers can help women advance into leadership positions by providing fair and equal opportunities for career growth.

This research is conducted using a mixed-method approach, which includes a survey with 135 participants working at a garment factory located in Tirupur. These participants include workers, supervisors, executive-level employees, and mid-level managers. The survey collected basic information about employees, their work experience, promotion opportunities, and current policies in the factory, exclusively for women's welfare and development. It also included questions on the problems faced by women in the factory to move forward, and the support they require in career development.

Interviews are conducted with selected women workers and supervisors in order to understand their

requirements, personal experiences, challenges and views they have about their career growth. The data collected from surveys and interviews is analysed to understand the barriers faced by women to move to higher positions. The study has focused on key issues such as the glass ceiling, gender discrimination, unequal promotion opportunities, lack of training, language barrier and leadership representation. The analysis will help identify common problems faced by women workers and explain why fewer women reach higher roles in garment factories.

2. Review of Literature

The word "Glass ceiling" is used to describe hidden (invisible) barriers that prevent women from reaching higher positions in organizations, even when they have the required qualifications and experience. This idea was explained by Ann M. Morrison, Randall P. White, and Ellen Van Velsor (1987) in their seminal research. In this study, it was argued that many women do not reach senior management levels due to reasons like preference for men in leadership roles, women not being considered for promotions, lack of important projects or leadership training for women and the belief that women may leave jobs due to family responsibilities, which ultimately limits women's career growth. A recent study says that now women's participation in factories has increased, but still the percentage of women reaching higher positions is low (Cotter et al. 2001). This problem exists in many countries and industries.

Gender Role Theory explains this issue. According to Alice H. Eagly (1987), society expects women to take care of family responsibilities and men to go to work and hold a good career position. Because of this, the general perception does not deem women fit for leadership or top management roles. In industries, also, the majority of women are at the worker level or supervisory level only, but men are hired for top managerial positions (Kabeer 2012). Though the education and job opportunities for women have gradually increased, the progress is still very slow and unsatisfactory (World Bank 2020).

Other than social beliefs, workplace systems and policies also affect women's career growth. These are called institutional barriers. According to Joan Acker (2006), many workplace rules were created when most workers were men, and women were expected to stay at home. Because of this, workplaces often expect employees to work long hours, travel frequently and avoid taking leave, permission or career breaks. These expectations are easier for men, but can prove challenging for women.

Workplace discrimination is another issue. Barbara F. Reskin (2003) explains workplace discrimination as men and women not being treated equally. This can happen during the stages of hiring, salary, and promotions. For example, if a newly married woman comes for an interview, employers can reject her due to the possibility of getting pregnant in the next few months, but such moral regulations are not applicable to men (Ridgeway 2011).

Leadership representation is also important. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) explains that due to fewer women being in leadership positions, they end up having less power and influence, which makes it harder for women to take part in decisions, influence policies and challenge unfair treatment. Because of these reasons, male-dominated leadership continues.

The next common barrier is the lack of training and leadership opportunities. Women workers are often given routine production work and may not get chances to develop their managerial skills, communication skills and other soft skills (International Labour Organization 2019). Another barrier is gender stereotypes, which argue that men are the breadwinners while women are supposed to take care of the household responsibilities primarily. Family responsibilities can also affect women's career growth. Many women have to manage both work and household duties, which can make it difficult for them to take on additional responsibilities at work (OECD 2017). Sometimes promotion decisions may be influenced by gender discrimination (Reskin 2003).

Because of fewer women in leadership positions, other women think that it is difficult to move to such leadership roles (Kanter 1977). Women who are working at the entry positions in the garment industry are less educated and often come from low-income backgrounds. This makes one presume that higher positions in management are meant for those who have more education or are financially strong. This thought reduces their confidence to apply for the leadership or management roles even if they have the ability and work experience (Crenshaw 1989).

Language is another barrier. The workers in many garment factories, around 60% to 70%, are from northern states of India and face difficulty in understanding the local language, which is Tamil or English. This makes the communication between the supervisors and managers difficult. This affects training, understanding workplace policies and opportunities for higher positions (International Labour Organization 2019). Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality theory, which explains that the garment industries not only have gender inequality, but also have caste, class, education, modernize and migration status. In India, Rege (1998) stated that women are discriminated against not only by gender but also by caste and class. Adding this, he stated that a woman from low caste community may have low access to get good education, so that they could not get good communication knowledge, and it makes it much harder for her to shine in her career also. In the garment industry of Tamil Nadu, Carswell and De Neve (2013) reported that many women workers come from rural and low-income families, where migration, limited education, and insecure employment create barriers to career growth. In Gujarat, research has shown that women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds encounter multiple barriers, including gender discrimination and unequal access to skill development and leadership opportunities (Kabeer 2012). Similarly, studies

conducted in Karnataka reported that women garment workers face challenges related to migration, low wages, poor working conditions, improper hostel facilities and limited opportunities for Promotion (Mezzadri 2017). These studies show that women's career advancement is affected by several interconnected factors, making Intersectionality Theory an appropriate framework for understanding the barriers faced by women in the garment industry.

Studies from other countries also show that women in the garment industry face many barriers to career growth. In Bangladesh, Siddiqi (2009) found that even though women make up most of the strength in the garment industry, only a few women are promoted to the next level, like supervisor or managerial role, due to gender inequality, lack of training and mentoring and organizational bias. Similarly, Kabeer and Mahmud (2004) reported that low wages, improper hostel facilities, and improper workplace conditions affect women from growing to grow to next level. In Sri Lanka, Samarakoon et al. (2022) found that gender norms, workplace culture, and limited leadership opportunities prevent women from moving into higher positions. Likewise, the International Labour Organization (2019) reported that women in many countries face long working hours, work-life balancing issues, inadequate training and mentoring, and low wages, so it affects women to move to top leadership positions.

Scholars provide a couple of suggestions to overcome these barriers. One important method is leadership training and skill development for women. These programs help women gain confidence and prepare for technical and other soft skills training, like leadership training, communication training, etc. (International Labour Organization 2019).

An alternative method is giving fair and transparent promotion systems by having clear criteria and performance-based evaluation that can help women understand their career growth (World Economic Forum 2021). Also, better workplace policies that support work-life balance, flexible work hours, maternity benefits and child care support can be beneficial (OECD 2017).

One important strategy to increase women in leadership roles is by setting clear targets and goals in all factories. Each factory can fix a specific percentage of women in supervisory, managerial, and mid-level positions. This will create a clear organization goal to follow. When these targets are set and followed, management will take clear and necessary steps in order to fulfil the target and take active steps like training, fair promotions and giving equal opportunities to women employees. This approach helps to increase the participation of women in higher roles, which significantly improves the gender equality in the workplace (World Economic Forum 2021).

In the garment industries in some countries, programs are conducted by the "Better work Programme" which is a

joint initiative of the International Labour Organization and International Finance Corporation (Better Work 2019). It explains that training and mentoring can help women move into supervisory roles. Studies from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also show that better training and fair systems can increase women's leadership participation (Kuruppuarachchi and Surangi 2019).

Most studies focus on general gender inequality or on women in higher positions (Eagly and Karau 2002; Cotter et al. 2001). However, very few studies focus on Tamil Nadu and on semi-skilled women workers in production roles within the garment industry (Dutta 2019). The existing research has given limited attention to important aspects of gendered labour across different socioeconomic and geographical contexts (Crenshaw 1989; Acker 2006). This research paper focuses on garment factories in Tamil Nadu and examines the experiences of women in non-managerial positions. It evaluates barriers such as cultural, institutional, and educational factors, drawing on Gender Role Theory (Eagly 1987) and Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw 1989) to explain the challenges and strategies associated with women's professional growth. The findings can help improve workplace practices by recommending better training programmes, fair promotion systems, and supportive policies for women, thereby contributing to women's career advancement in the garment industry (International Labour Organization 2019; United Nations Women 2020).

3. Methods and Methodology

This study is based on an interpretivist qualitative research approach, combined with a single-factory case study. An interpretivist approach focuses on understanding how people interpret and give meaning to their experiences in a specific social context rather than measuring the numerical outcomes. It is closely linked to phenomenology, which explores lived experiences, and is suitable for studying how women workers experience the glass ceiling in everyday workplace life (Moustakas 1994; Van Manen 2016). This research is conducted in a garment factory that is located in Tirupur, a major textile and apparel hub. This place is chosen because the leadership roles are more male-dominated, even though women form the larger workforce.

3.1. Participants and Sampling

The study included 135 participants representing different organizational levels within the selected garment factory. The participant distribution was as follows:

Table 1. Participant Distribution by Organizational Level

Category	Number of Participants
Sewing Machine Operator	52
Workers	25
Supervisors	42
Executive	12
Managers	4
Total	135

The study focused mainly on adult workers from working-class socioeconomic backgrounds employed in the garment sector. A purpose sampling strategy was used to select participants. It means participants were selected based on the relevance to the research question, not random. These participants were chosen with formal factory permission, based on their role in the factory hierarchy, experience and their promotion opportunities.

In this research, a short anonymous survey was used to collect the data. The survey questionnaire facilitated the collection of structured data on promotion opportunities, challenges, and support systems. Data collection was conducted over a period of 3–4 weeks. The data was stored in the cloud with no signifier. As part of the participatory action component, the researcher may also design a small Leadership Pathway Kit (for future development), which includes modules on promotion awareness, communication skills, confidence building, visible skill development, work-life balancing and exposure to leadership tasks such as shadowing or buddy systems.

For data analysis, the study used thematic analysis and descriptive analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify, organise, and interpret patterns (themes) in the data, such as confidence levels, training access, gender bias, language barriers, and promotion transparency. Descriptive analysis is a basic quantitative method that summarises survey data using counts, percentages, and simple comparisons to describe trends.

The data was coded into the following, which further contributed towards the creation of specific themes of analysis

- Confidence and self-efficacy
- Training and skill development access
- Gender bias
- Family responsibilities
- Language barriers
- Promotion systems
- Work-life balancing difficulties

This study involved a workforce that is socially and economically vulnerable, particularly the women workers in industrial settings. These workers may face difficulties related to workplace hierarchy, gender discrimination, responsibilities in the family, limited mobility and fear of negative consequences for speaking out. Therefore, strong ethical safeguards are necessary.

Access to the research site will be obtained only through formal permission from the factory management. All participants are included only after getting their consent, in which the purpose of the study is explained clearly. Participation was completely voluntary, and the participants were informed that participating in this study would not impact their job, performance evaluation or workplace relations. Data collection was conducted in a safe and comfortable environment.

Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the study. Participants' identities were protected without using their real names. All collected data, including recordings, notes and responses from surveys, were stored securely. While presenting the findings, all the individual identities

were anonymised to ensure that no individual could be identified. Special care was taken while discussing the sensitive topics such as workplace bias, harassment, and inequality, ensuring that participant safety and privacy were protected.

4. Discussion

4.1. Institutional and Gendered Barriers to Career Advancement

Table 2. Key Findings of the Study

S.No	Area of Study	Key Findings	%	Interpretation
1	Promotion Awareness	Women are aware of promotion requirements in the factory	79%	The majority of respondents are aware of promotion systems, but some still lack a complete understanding of career advancement processes.
2	Gender Bias in Leadership	Respondents who believe men are preferred for leadership roles	45%	Indicates the existence of gender bias and male preference in leadership positions
3	Long Working Hours	Respondents who believe long working hours affect women's leadership opportunities	33%	Long working hours and additional responsibilities discourage women from taking leadership positions and create work-life balance challenges.
4	Lack of Training	Respondents who identified inadequate training opportunities as a barrier to career advancement	8%	A small proportion of respondents perceived limited training opportunities as a barrier to leadership advancement, suggesting that while training is available for many employees, improving access to leadership-focused training could further support women's career progression.

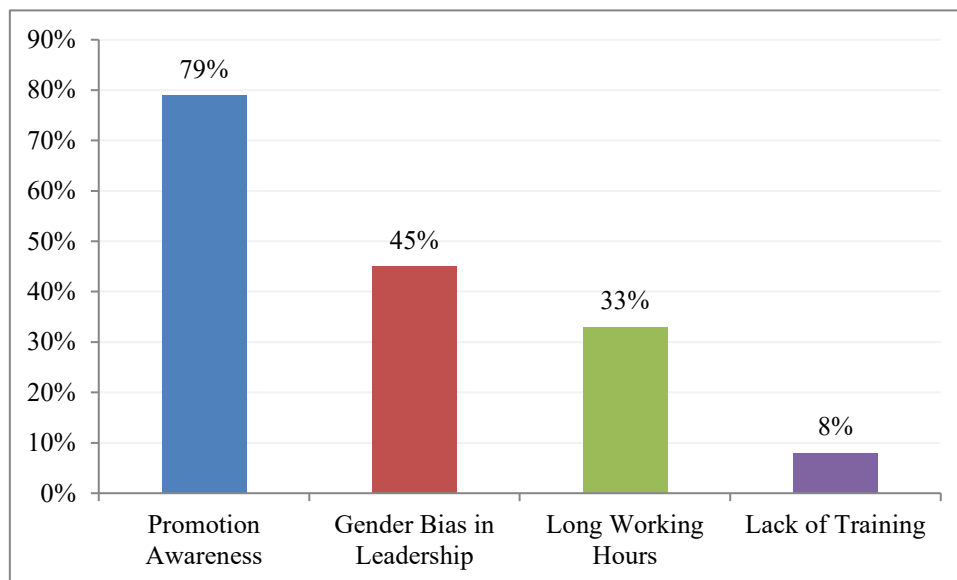


Fig. 1 Institutional and Gendered Barriers to Career Advancement

The interviews and survey show that women in garment factories in Tirupur still face a lot of problems because of the system. Many women know about the systems for getting promoted. However, they do not always know how to accelerate in their careers or become leaders. Women in garment factories in Tirupur know that they need to understand how to get promoted. 79% of the women survey respondents said they know what they need

to do to get promoted at their factory, but some women in garment factories in Tirupur do not know everything they need to do. This means that women in garment factories, in Tirupur, still do not know all the steps to move up in their careers.

The study also found evidence of gender-based perceptions in leadership roles. 45% of participants said

that men are preferred for the leadership roles. This clearly shows that gender bias exists in workplaces. Some women participants reported working “like men” because of authority and long working hours.

Many women workers said they were not often included in leadership training or opportunities to manage. Language barriers also caused problems with communication for migrant workers from northern states. They found it hard to understand policies and workplace expectations.

These findings support studies on inequality and gender roles as discussed previously in the literature review section. They explain how workplace structures and social beliefs limit women’s chances of moving up in industries.

Many women said they were not included in leadership training or in managing because of language problems for the communication with migrant workers from northern states. They found it hard to understand policies and the workplace expectations.

These findings help in studies on inequality and gender roles in institutions. They explain how workplace

structures and social beliefs were the barrier women’s chances of moving up in industries.

The study also found that long working hours affect the work-life balance, which makes them less likely to pursue leadership roles. (Ref. Table: 2) 33% of women felt that if they were in a leadership role, work-life balance should be affected, so it would be one of the reasons for not moving to leadership roles. Discussed with the women during the interview, they said that if the working hours were 7 to 8 hours, they would be more willing to take the leadership roles. Most of the garment factories are working nearly 9 to 12 hours, so women thought that it would affect their personal lives.

The study also found that 8% (Ref. Table: 2) of employees identified a lack of training and mentoring as a barrier to women’s career improvement. Even though this data represented a small proportion of the survey, it indicates that the women are interested in leadership positions if the organization supports them through training and mentoring. If the organization provides required skill development and mentoring (buddy system) support, a larger number of women may be inspired and willing to pursue women’s leadership.

4.2. Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors Shaping Women’s Ambition

Table 3. Key Findings of the Study

S.No	Area of Study	Key Findings	%	Interpretation
1	Family Responsibilities	Women stating that family responsibilities affect career growth	25%	Family care responsibilities limit women’s ability to take leadership roles and additional responsibilities.

Women’s career growth is affected by a lot of things outside of work. For example, 25% (Ref. Table: 3) of the women in the study said that taking care of their homes and families makes it hard for them to take on more work or be a leader. Many women said that it is really tough to balance work and family duties, and this gets harder after they get married and have kids.

Family expectations also play a role in what women decide to do with their careers. Most women said their families support them working. Some women said their families do not want them to be leaders because it means they have to work longer hours, travel or take on more responsibilities. This is because people often think women should take care of their families instead of focusing on their careers.

The educational background and financial limitations are also challenges faced by women. Many women come from economically weaker backgrounds, and they did not have a chance to go for higher education, communication or professional programs.

Some felt underconfident in applying for senior positions and managerial roles because they believed that they required good education, English communication and technical knowledge was mandatory.

This shows that career growth is influenced not only from workplace but also by the social, economic and educational background that shapes women’s ambitions and opportunities.

C. Personal Barriers towards Leadership Position

The findings indicate that 14.8% (Ref. Table: 4) of respondents believed that lack of education was a barrier to career improvement.

Even though the majority of people did not identify education as a major barrier, a small proportion believed that insufficient educational qualifications restricted their opportunities for career progression.

The study found that 2.2% (Ref. Table 4) of respondents reported language as a challenge to career advancement.

Even though a minority of respondents experienced this issue, a lack of fluency in English or other workplace communication with management may affect employee’s confidence, so providing language and communication skills training may help these employees improve their effectiveness in the workplace and enhance their readiness for leadership positions.

Table 4. Key Findings of the Study

S.No	Area of Study	Key Findings	%	Interpretation
1	Lack of Education	Respondents who identified limited educational qualifications as a barrier to career advancement	14.8%	One-fifth of the respondents perceived limited educational qualifications as a barrier to career advancement, indicating that educational attainment may influence eligibility for leadership positions and access to promotion opportunities.
2	Language Barrier	Respondents who identified language proficiency as a barrier to career advancement	2.2%	Only 3% of respondents reported language barriers as an obstacle to career advancement, suggesting that language is not a major barrier for most employees. However, improving communication skills and language support may benefit a small group of workers seeking leadership roles.

D. Awareness of and Aspiration towards Leadership Roles**Table 5. Key Findings of the Study**

S.No	Area of Study	Key Findings	%	Interpretation
1	Leadership Aspirations	Women interested in becoming supervisors or managers	73%	Shows strong ambition among women workers for career advancement
2	Interest in Training Programs	Women willing to attend leadership or skill development training	90%	Indicates high interest among women to improve skills and career opportunities

Despite the challenges found earlier, this study also showed that women workers have a dream of becoming leaders. 73% (Ref. Table: 5) of the women wanted to move into roles like supervisors or managers in the future. In fact, 90% (Ref. Table: 5) of them said they would attend training programs to improve their skills and career chances.

Seeing female supervisors and managers also positively influenced women workers and helped in gaining confidence. Most women said that women in leadership roles make them appear more achievable. This plays a significant part in representing women as role models for the motivation of employees.

The study also found that many women knew about the systems in place for career growth and believed women could be leaders in the garment industry. However, some still felt that the way promotions work is not entirely fair because of hidden biases, limited chances, or a lack of experience in leadership roles.

Overall, the findings of this research show that women workers have ambitions for their careers, but they need more support from their organizations, such as fair promotion systems, leadership training, mentorship opportunities, and supportive workplace policies to move into higher positions successfully. These findings reinforce the importance of creating inclusive workplace practices that encourage women's leadership participation in the garment industry.

5. Conclusion

This research examined the issue of the “glass ceiling” faced by women employees in garment factories in and around Tiruppur. The study focused on understanding the

institutional, social, educational, and cultural barriers that affect women's career advancement into supervisory and managerial positions. The findings from both primary and secondary data show that although women form a major part of the garment workforce, their representation in higher leadership positions still remains limited.

5.1. Policy Recommendations**5.1.1. Transparent Promotion Policies and Skill Gap Training System**

Although most participants were aware of promotion requirements, interview findings suggested that many employees assumed the promotion process lacked transparency, so this research strongly suggested to organizations that if they create a “People Value Matrix” (PVM) means a skill matrix. For each employee, the organization should keep a skill matrix based on their work nature. Based on the requirement, the organization should analyse where the employees are. If anybody meets the requirement, they should be promoted as per the PVM System. Otherwise, they should undergo training, and the company should take responsibility to improve them through skill gap training.

5.1.2. Mentoring and Career Guidance

Formal mentoring programs are a way to help women employees who want to become leaders. Experienced managers and supervisors can mentor employees by sharing what they know about how the organization works, how to get promoted, what leaders do and how to develop professionally. It is known as the “Buddy System”.

5.1.3. Childcare Facilities

Providing crèche facilities at the workplace can support women employees by ensuring that their children are cared for in a safe environment during working hours.

This can reduce childcare-related concerns, improve work-life balance, and make women to focus more effectively on their work. As a result, women may be more willing to participate in training programmes, accept supervisory responsibilities, and move to leadership positions.

5.2. Limitations of the Research and the Road Ahead

This research has several limitations. First, the study was conducted only in one garment factory in Tiruppur; the results may not represent all industries in India. Second, the sample size is limited to only 135 participants, which restricts the wider generalisation of results. Third, some of them did not share their honest opinion because of the fear of workplace discrimination or professional consequences. Language differences among migrant workers also created some communication challenges during data collection, which probably meant that the workers could not express themselves completely. Time limitations and limited access to factory records further restricted a deeper organizational analysis. In addition, the study mainly focused on women employees and did not include detailed perspectives from male managers or top-level management.

The primary data collecting method of the survey helped to achieve the research objective. Survey responses provided clarity on information about promotion opportunities, leadership aspiration, equality, training, family responsibilities and career challenges faced by women workers.

The secondary data collected from books, journal articles, government reports, International Labour Organization reports, and earlier studies helped provide a theoretical and conceptual understanding of the glass ceiling phenomenon. Concepts such as gender role theory, workplace inequality, educational barriers and leadership representation supported the research. Studies from other countries, such as Srilanka and Bangladesh, helped us to compare the situation of the workers with Tamil Nadu.

The primary and secondary data together helped to achieve the main objectives of the research to identify the challenges in women's growth, understand socioeconomic influences, and check organizational systems affecting promotion opportunities.

This research can be further developed in several ways in future. Future studies can include a large sample size covering multiple garment industries across different states of India for broader comparison. Researchers can conduct studies for different genders and social groups to understand the differences in career growth opportunities and workplace perceptions.

The studies that help to examine women's career growth and development over time are referred to as longitudinal studies. Future studies can focus on the workplace with mentorship programs, women leadership

training, flexible work culture, crèche and transparent promotion systems.

In addition, future researchers may study the experiences of migrant women workers separately, especially regarding the language challenges, communication challenges and cultural adjustment. Quantitative statistical analysis and policy evaluation studies can also be conducted to measure the long-term impact of a gender-inclusive workplace in the garment industry.

Overall, this research contributes to understanding gender inequality, leadership barriers in garment industries and tells us the importance of fair promotion systems, leadership training program and supportive workplace policies to improve women's participation.

Overall, this research contributes to understanding gender inequality and leadership barriers in garment factories and highlights the importance of fair promotion systems, leadership development programs, and supportive workplace policies to improve women's participation in leadership roles.

Appendix

The survey instrument comprised the following items:

1. Age Group
2. Education
3. Marital Status
4. What is your residential status?
5. Total Work Experience
6. Date of Joining
7. Department
8. Designation
9. Are you aware of the company's career ladder?
10. Are you aware about the promotion criteria at your workplace?
11. Do you know that if you keep improve your competencies, then you can apply and grow in that career ladder through the Internal Promotion System?
12. Do you aspire to move into a leadership role with Passion when you have competencies? Yes (or) No, If No, then Why?
13. Do you believe women can become leaders in the workplace?
14. Do you think Men are preferred over Women on Leadership Levels?
15. Have you ever expressed your interest to become leadership position through internal promotions?
16. Have you been explained about the Career ladder and Promotion criteria during your Induction?
17. Do you think you have equal opportunities as Men on career growth?
18. Is there any female leaders in your workplace who joined as front-line workers?
19. Have you joined the company with a long-term career plan or a short-term career plan? If short-term, then why?
20. Does your family support your career growth?

21. Do household responsibilities affect you to come forward towards career growth?
22. Would you be allowed by your family to take a leadership role if you are selected, even after marriage? If not, then why?
23. Do you feel confident in taking leadership responsibilities?
24. Are you ready to attend training programs to achieve a leadership position?
25. What, according to you, is the major barrier for you to get a promotion for Women?
26. What changes do you suggest for women front-line workers to reach leadership positions?
27. What changes do you suggest for a company to bring women to leadership positions?

Author Contribution Statement

The author conceived and designed the research, developed the survey and interview instruments, conducted all primary data collection through surveys, semi-structured interviews, and workplace observation at the garment factory in Tirupur, performed the thematic and descriptive analysis of the data, and wrote the manuscript in its entirety.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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