

# Women Career Development: A Study On Enablers And Barriers To Senior Leadership Positions

Ayisha Maigah<sup>1\*</sup>, Hamrila Abdul Latip<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>\*Faculty of Economics and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan Sarawak, Email: maigahayisha1@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>\*Faculty of Economics and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan Sarawak, Email: alhamrila@unimas.my

\*Corresponding author: Ayisha Maigah

\*Email: maigahayisha1@gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

Women have struggled to gain their deserved place as senior organizational leaders, despite promising legislative frameworks and programs to eliminate gender disparities in the workplace. This paper is designed to comprehend the obstacles that stop women from assuming leadership positions and the driving forces behind their motivation for professional success. The writers thoroughly reviewed the academic and government (grey) literature on women's career development while considering Ghana's enablers and hurdles to senior leadership positions. The evaluation was arranged topically and concentrated on predetermined and newly emerging subjects, such as enablers and barriers to career development, gender, and leadership career development. The following academic databases were searched: Google Scholar, Springers, ScienceDirect, Emerald, ProQuest, Sage, and Web of Science. Keywords such as leadership roles, career development obstacles, facilitators, and others were used. It is revealed that social networking, personal considerations, work-life imbalance, and perceptions of women leaders by subordinates are the primary obstacles to women's professional advancement. On the other hand, continuous family and mentor support, a shift in employers' perspectives, and women leaders' capacity for leadership were found to be the driving forces behind career advancement for women leaders.

**Keywords:** Career development, leadership barriers, work-life balance, progression

## INTRODUCTION

Gender disparity has received attention recently as a hindrance to national development. The need to engage the human resources of both genders in holistic progress has drawn further attention to the problem. According to Mensah-Bonsu (2022), many women have historically been excluded from efforts to cultivate and use their intellectual gifts due to gender inequality. The researchers think that the creation of more feminine workplace environments that enable women to realize their full potential and forge their identities as senior leaders need to be encouraged by organizations. When this is done, women can advance their professions through networking, professional development opportunities, and mentoring. Barkhuizen, Masakane, and van der Sluis (2022) think that senior female leaders are crucial in creating work environments that support equal opportunity and fight unjustified discrimination on a variety of grounds. Justifiably, such actions can make it easier for younger, up-and-coming female talent to advance more quickly into senior management positions. It also counters the idea justifying that early career progression was developed when women were a minority in the workforce for which it must be continued. Thus, it is not surprising that organisations only concentrate on men's career progression. Despite the signs of progress made in employing females, even though at a slow pace, there is still a wide gender gap in the labour force. According to Owusu-Manu, Sackey, Osei-Asibey, Kyerewah Agyapong, & John Edwards, (2022), gender parity in the labour market is ensured by senior officials based on entrenched norms and values making changes in this direction unsuccessful. This has to do with historical antecedents that women were perceived in the study of career development between the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s as a minority (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Mustapa, Noor & Mutalib, 2018).

Women are dedicated to their families and strive for work-life balance which regrettably makes it difficult to attain some growth in their careers. This explains why respectable femininity calls on women to excel in finishing tasks at home and at work and to strike a healthy balance between the two (Mustapa et al., 2018). As indicated by Poon, Briscoe, Abdul-Ghani, and Jones, (2015) that women are said to have successful careers if they can successfully balance their professional and personal lives. By implication, several studies drew the conclusion that a significant barrier to women's career advancement has been identified as due to women's dedication to their families (Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Shah, 2014; Mustapa et al., 2018). There are few women in leadership positions in various sectors, despite the Gender Equality Law that the Ghanaian government established to promote equal opportunities for women to lower the Gender Gap Index score. In corroboration, studies elsewhere on social dynamics in South Africa revealed that women are still underrepresented in senior leadership roles in the workplace (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Seale, Fish, & Schreiber, 2021). This results in setting the goal of an equitable society in the 1996 South African Constitution 1996 (South Africa, 1996). Research on obstacles women witness in their careers as they advance to senior leadership positions globally is scarce, despite the abundance of empirical evidence on these issues (Smith & Suby-Long, 2019). There seems to be a considerable gender disparity in the leadership positions held by women across Africa, including Ghana, which suggest a paucity of regional data on top women leaders in the continent's corporate sectors. Studies revealed that the inequalities between how men and women are assessed for the abilities and behaviours that lead to leadership positions have come to light in numerous high-profile public incidents. (McClellan, Martin, Emich, & Woodruff, 2018; Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

In the 1950s, early adulthood was the completion of the career development process, which was thought to take several years. It is shown that a career was not thought of as a lifelong process connected to work activities until the 1970s (Mustapa et al., 2018; Patton & McMahon, 2014). In addition to career development, other job-related subjects that frequently raise concerns include career choice, career success, professional goal-setting, career motivation, and career growth. Career advancement is regarded as the objective component of success, whereas career happiness is perceived as the subjective component (Shah 2014). An individual is making career progression when certain steps are taken to enhance career successes or positions in an organisation. There is career development where the individual engages in an activity over a set time period to improve performance or job position (Khadijah et al., 2015). In recent years, women's employment participation has grown significantly. When basic human traits were evaluated, Ghana was ranked 17th for female participation in economic activity, 91st for political engagement and empowerment, 104th for health and lifespan, and 111th for educational attainment (Mensah-Bonsu 2022; IFAD, 2017; Dragot & Gatto, 2018). It seems women in the subregion appeared to be performing better than their male counterparts, whether they are employed or looking for work. The National Gender Policy, which promotes empowerment and gender equality for the advancement of human rights, was followed by the implementation of the framework for gender mainstreaming in 2015 (Khoza et al., 2019; Owusu-Manu et al., 2022). Initiatives were developed by governmental and non-governmental organizations to enhance women's involvement in neighbourhood activities to address developmental concerns.

Research on obstacles women witness in their careers as they advance to senior leadership positions globally is scarce, despite the abundance of empirical evidence on these issues (Smith & Suby-Long, 2019). According to a study, there is a considerable gender disparity in the leadership positions held by women across Africa, including Ghana, resulting in a paucity of regional data on top women leaders in the continent's corporate sectors (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). This study closes critical knowledge gaps about what prevents women from reaching senior leadership roles in the workplace. It also sought to examine the barriers that impede women from rising to senior leadership positions in different industries. Further research on women's work advancement is needed given the physical, cognitive, and psychological disparities between males and females as well as the views that arise from religious and cultural proclivities, (Mustapa et al., 2018). The results of this study emphasized how crucial it is to acknowledge and value women's leadership abilities in the contemporary workplace. It would add to the body of knowledge already available on women's job advancement in Ghana. According to the Sustainable Development Goals, women must be fully, equally, and effectively represented in leadership positions (Shung-King et al., 2018; Barkhuizen et al., 2022). Many advanced countries have conducted extensive research on the obstacles and enablers that women leaders face. However, underdeveloped nations including Ghana have very little research on this subject. Owusu-Manu et al. (2022) suggest that additional research is needed to fully understand the obstacles women in Ghana still encounter as they work their way up to high leadership positions. Therefore, for a variety of reasons, we think that research on women's career advancement into senior leadership positions in the Ghanaian context is crucial.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Even though there is no accurate information on this in the country, the researchers think that the formal sector is perceived to be dominated by males and might result in difficulty in women's career progression or occupying leadership positions. In support of this assertion, Owusu-Manu et al. (2022) indicate that females are inadequately represented on boards and managerial positions of various institutions in the country. The

above assertion calls for a brief literature review of intertwined theoretical perspectives on career and professional progression at the workplace or in organisations.

The heterogeneity of careers seems to have led to alterations in jobs and institutional layout, the demographic profile of workers, economic and social factors like gender norms, and men as leaders of those norms. Individuals need to define what work means to them amid such changes to be able to adapt and manoeuvre through the challenges and career complexities (Rudolph, Zacher, & Hirschi, 2019; Akkermans & Tims, 2017). For this purpose, Career Construction Theory CCP propositions explain the individuals' vocational actions and inactions in the process. For instance, the expectations placed on women to fulfill conventional duties as a wife or a mother might have been institutionalized in such a way that it is challenging for women to navigate these responsibilities effectively and to grow in their careers. According to Akpebu Adjah, and Van der Walt (2019), women's traditional roles as housewives, mothers, and wives are disruptive to their ability to advance in their careers and live fulfilling lives. Based on these traditional roles, the identified traditional feminine occupations for women include, but are not limited to, auxiliary administrative staff, secretarial positions or jobs, sales services, nursing, teaching, as well as social work, which considers gender stereotypes in the workplace (Domenico & Jones 2006). The researchers think that the enablers like the advancement of communication and information technology as well as the modifications to the industrial and economic systems can be linked to women's holding leadership positions, thus serving as role models. For instance, women who have achieved success in their occupations and shared their success stories might result in self-efficacy and enhanced expectations that are reflected in aspirations in a variety of career fields.

As women's contributions to socioeconomic development and growth continue to receive attention on a global scale, the researcher believes that empowering women is a pressing issue now. The proposition of the CCP is on the interpretation of process and thrashing out meaning from what they do and the reasons behind such action from the interpretive perspective (Savickas, 2005). Several studies offer a theoretical understanding of how and why individuals make certain vocational choices and what constitutes successful career life in various fields of endeavours (Rudolph et al., 2019; Taylor, Siegele, Smith, & Hardin, 2018; Zacher, Rudolph, Todorovic, & Ammann, 2018). The researchers think that career advancement viewed as a process of adaption may only be a success when there is a clear combination of personal needs with societal anticipation. This made it crucial to include women in leadership positions given the rise in the number of skilled female workers as they complete higher education. Besides, women seem to be more involved in paid work and their involvement has grown increasingly necessary ever since global labour market major changes in the twenty-first century. However, most women employed in Ghanaian institutions encounter numerous difficulties juggling their personal and professional lives, allowing them to carry out their organizational responsibilities as required and manage their family responsibilities in accordance with cultural standards (Sanda, & Sackey, 2010). This theoretical perspective explores how individuals make choices and the rationale behind the choice of professions or careers. Especially, the international character of the world's economy and the rapid technological advances that result in a gradual shift from a service to a knowledge base economy have had a significant impact on the career landscape for women. Given the complexity of women's career progression compared to that of males, the UN Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the need for an enabler like gender equality to support women's professional development (Mohamed et al., 2021). Considering barriers like cultural and social influences, a lack of familiarity with non-traditional fields, the unwelcoming nature of career fields that cater to men, discriminatory career trajectories, and the absence of women with seniority in most roles all work against their career advancements and the chance to hold higher office. Twumwaa (2018) findings confirmed that women's professional growth is hampered by a lack of role models, career counseling, opportunities for career development, access to education, respect from society and institutions for working women, and unfavorable cultural beliefs.

As a grand theory, CCP takes after perspectives that delved into developmental, differential, and dynamic in explaining individual vocational behaviour and the individuals' assimilation of self-concepts in relation to work tasks in the career process (Rudolph et al., 2019; Savickas, 2013). CCT is concerned about the personality relative to vocation, individual actions, and how individuals' dispositions permit them to accept certain changes on a job, self-management, and how to handle work obligations in their career paths. To make CCT clearer, certain concepts like life themes, career adaption, and vocational personality are added to the perspective for better understanding (Hancock & Hums, 2016; Taylor, Siegele, Smith, & Hardin, 2018). According to Savickas (2005), the career paths of individuals are carved out of one's personal meaning, past and present experiences, and future expectations. In this context, the CCP provides an elaborate explanation of the process of adaptability and enterprising career advancement throughout the lifespan. The current theoretical perspective is situated on a broader context of concerns and shifts around career and work-life issues in society. For instance, certain discriminatory and stereotyped attitudes that the minority in society have acquired can be diffused by women role models who show success in the workplace and in dealing with dissatisfaction. In many nations around the world, gender-based discrimination has an impact on the participation of women in decision-making, making it hard for them to hold the same political authority or have control over political authority (Mohamed et al., 2021). The researchers think that career development

obstacles may be more prevalent for women in this context due to the ongoing exposure to prejudice of all kinds, regardless of ethnicity or racial origin. However, there have been major changes in the work environment, duties and responsibilities, skills, and competencies needed in the contemporary labor market. As a result of the current conditions, management, and career advancement are inevitably changing.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research approach to investigate the factors that impede the advancement of women leaders in Ghana. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is a process of inquiry used to understand a social or human problem by constructing a complex holistic picture using words and detailed accounts of informants in a natural setting.

### *Data collection and recording*

The data was gathered through reading and rereading as well as through gathering relevant data that satisfies the study's goals. The study considered the relationship between work-life balance and professional growth based on an analysis of the preceding literature as the justification for the layout of the review. Work-life balance and women's professional advancement have both been shown to be essential for maintaining women in the workforce and motivating them to pursue promotions to higher positions.

### *Data analyses*

The data were analyzed using theme analyses. We used two main steps in the theme analysis process: categorization and compilation. Before breaking the data down into more insightful chunks, we first become comfortable with the existing data. Second, we checked to see if the review's substance matched the goal we were trying to accomplish. Additionally, we began by organizing the information that had been gathered into meaningful groups in terms of similarities in ideas. The initial codes were categorized, and themes and subthemes were found. Finally, we discussed the themes and paraphrased direct quotes from the literature to back them up. We used content analysis to help us analyze the data methodically and scientifically.

## FINDINGS

The thematic analyses led to the discovery of six key barriers impeding women's professional advancement in leadership positions. Some of the factors are prejudices and societal preconceptions, work-life balance, lack of role models and mentors, dynamics in corporate culture, leadership identity crisis, insufficient training and growth opportunities, and promotion opportunities. According to studies, women who hold higher positions report more role conflict. They concluded that one of the main obstacles to women's career advancement is role conflict. Women therefore demanded a greater balance between work and life in the modern workplace (Shahida, Hazelena Dewi, Mohd Hakimi & Zulhizzam 2015; Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014).

### *Prejudices and societal preconceptions*

It seems society supports authoritarian ideals and standards that continue to be discriminatory to women, especially those that marginalize them. This explains why Seale et al. (2021) suggested that female leaders must question patriarchal structures in order to promote pluralistic leadership cultures that welcome transformation in workplaces. Studies are tempted to conclude that most organizational policies that promote gender disparity may come from societies that are patriarchal in nature (Sowjanya, Krishna, & Rao, 2017; Barkhuizen et al., 2022). For instance, it is widely held that men and women are fundamentally different from one another (Berdahl et al., 2018). The patriarchal system, in which men are promoted to positions of power and respect above their female counterparts, is the most widely acknowledged explanation for the gender imbalance in the nation among many others (Jayachandran, 2015; Lloren, 2014). In traditional Ghanaian society, men are highly venerated, which means they have the final say in decisions made regarding the family, the job, and other circumstances (Adeabah et al., 2019; Mensah-Bonsu 2022).

Every field of endeavor suffers from gender prejudices and stereotypes, which can make it difficult for women to get jobs, stay in them, and advance in their professions. The deployment of prominent role models is one of several strategies employed to combat these prejudices and preconceptions. McKinnon, and O'Connell (2020) found that women may be more exposed when speaking publicly about their profession, which may have an impact on how fully they participate in their careers. To address the underlying bias and unfavorable preconceptions that women face, systemic cultural and institutional change is required in every area of human endeavour. One prevalent myth is that boys are naturally better at math and science than girls, which research has shown to be untrue (O'Dea et al., 2018). Stereotypes influence how men and women are treated, how they are held to unequal standards, and help to keep gender bias alive in our society. Studies have shown that gender stereotypes have an impact on the job choices and retention of women in various sectors and need to be dealt with in order to overcome the deeply ingrained bias and discrimination (Ellemers, 2018 McKinnon, & O'Connell 2020). Both explicit and implicit biases contribute to these judgments and assessments, with the latter being more automatic, uncontrollable, and unconscious than the former. And that, gender, cultural, and

time-specific implicit biases that support gender stereotypes can be seen from a young age (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2019).

Additionally, these prejudices may be subconscious, supporting gender stereotypes across all sexes, cultures, and historical periods (Charlesworth, & Banaji, 2019; O'Connell, & McKinnon, 2021). Besides, Mensah-Bonsu (2022) claimed that one of the main glass ceiling issues preventing women from succeeding in a sector relative to men is due to prejudice and societal attitudes. A most recent study by Agyekum, Amos-Abanyie, Kumah, Kukah, & Salgin, (2022) revealed that men still perceive female managers as lacking in leadership and other managerial traits when compared to male managers. This component revealed several issues that prevent women from advancing in their careers including discrimination during promotions, issues brought on by gender stereotypes of various kinds, career penalties, discrimination during position allocation, and working environments that are exclusively male (Agyekum et al., (2022).

### ***Dynamics in corporate culture***

Negative gender competency stereotypes in the workplace can be dispelled by female leaders. Studies have shown that despite being more effective than males in professional and academic settings as well as mid- and upper-level roles, women are held to a higher standard of leadership ability than men (Hejase, Haddad, Hamdar, Massoud, & Farha, 2013; Ngcobo, 2016; Paustian- Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). The favorable self-perceptions of job advancement and self-confidence in one's ability to function in workplaces with a male predominance can both be improved by having more women in leadership positions (Born, Ranehillb, & Sandberg, 2018; Herbst, 2020; Barkhuizen et al., 2022). The researcher thinks that dynamics of corporate culture are reflective in the workplace across the nation probably because women continue to be under-represented in managerial positions. The findings of recent studies are that more women in leadership roles can enhance both the positive self-perceptions of career advancement and self-confidence in one's capacity to perform in workplaces with a male predominance (Born, Ranehillb, & Sandberg, 2018; Herbst, 2020). Hoel and Vartia, (2018) found that workplace harassment, assault, and bullying of women are on the rise with heavy toll on their psyche. In confirmation, Bosch (2019) found women to be susceptible to numerous sorts of abuse, such as sexual harassment at work, as a result of certain socio-political and culture in some organisation. The researchers think this could be because women are underrepresented in many organisations and firms' management positions and boards. According to Owusu-Manu et al. (2022), another reason that makes it difficult for women to progress to higher levels is the institutional cultures of these businesses are due to the male-dominated nature of those sectors.

The concept of gender is redefined by the gendered organization's framework, which moves away from the biologically based divisions of labor and lack of structural chances and power to social interactions ingrained in the workplace culture of every organization (D'Agostino, Levine, Sabharwal, & Johnson-Manning, 2022). In contrast to other perspectives, gender is viewed as a set of social relations that are enacted across social behaviors that are part of company culture. Efforts to put in place strategies to improve women's livelihoods demand prioritizing the principles of equality. D'Agostino et al. (2020) discussed the effects of workplace culture and practices on career advancement, where informal practices, norms, and patterns of work are defined as gender-specific work expectations, the use of work-life balance policies, and informal networking opportunities that influence career advancement in the workplace. In this regard, gender is viewed as a set of social relations and behaviors that are ingrained in institutional culture. This understanding helps explain why achieving fairness may be challenging and why some laws may not produce a meritocracy in terms of career advancement. The roles of Ghanaian males and females are clearly differentiated based on sex. As part of differentiation according to Tangonyire et al., (2022), males are described as efficient, energetic, competitive, and aggressive and women as responsible for childbearing, nursing babies, and home care.

### ***Mentorship and role models in social networking***

Women executives play a critical mentoring role in guiding colleague women as they choose their career paths and line of work. Senior women require role models to assist them develop their personal images and management identities (Sealy & Singh, 2010). Helping juniors overcome obstacles that may impede career growth is the goal of mentoring. Inadequate mentorship creates barriers to dealing with problems at work because it is thought to be significant support for people's career growth. The researchers opined that role models may be significant to minorities in their job development since discrimination and limited career possibilities tend to diminish expectations and in turn, leads to lower career aspirations. As such, the individuals who are worthy of imitation might share their experiences with the results of choosing career pathways and show coping mechanisms when faced with work-related decision-making duties. For instance, Tony, Kirezi, Ashford, and Glover (2022) indicate that women are unable to assume leadership positions due to barriers at the self-image level such as their continued acceptance of the world as being masculine, their worry over balancing work and parental responsibilities, and their lack of mentors and role models. Recent studies have demonstrated that mentors who belong to underrepresented groups may be more critical of their peers, or to put it another way, women may be more critical of other women (O'Connell, & McKinnon, 2021; McKinnon, & O'Connell, 2020). The researchers think that mentoring enables everyone, especially women, to

fulfill the institutional objective and advance to roles of responsible leadership. According to Chauhan, Mishra and Bhakri (2022), women face challenges such as having unreasonably high expectations of mentors, being disconnected from mentors, not being able to communicate with mentors, being overly dependent on mentors, and managing the presence of a direct superior in receiving formal mentorship. This explains why Tony et al. (2022) advised that successful leaders be given the opportunity to share their experiences, serve as mentors, and discuss how they overcame cultural hurdles because networking was viewed as a valuable resource by the women leaders. Mentoring which can sometimes act as an impediment when there is inadequate support is broadly accepted as a great assistance to the individuals' career development. Chauhan, Mishra, and Bhakri, (2022) in their recent study indicated that an individual at the junior level needs help to overcome certain obstacles that can affect career advancement, thus mentoring comes to play. The researchers believe that it is tremendously beneficial to have a mentor with whom individuals can discuss problems and manage this connection as a role model. With proper mentoring, women can meet organisational goals or target that propels them to leadership responsibilities or senior managerial positions.

### ***Work-family conflict***

While some researchers showed a strong negative correlation between work-life balance and career progress, others discovered a favorable correlation. For instance, these studies have shown that gender prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination against women, and long work hours are further barriers to women achieving top positions (International Labour Office, 2016; Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan, & Rajasekar, 2017; Orser, Riding, & Stanley, 2012). The report concludes with several recommendations for future research as well as tips on how to enhance work-life balance and professional progression opportunities for career growth. In corroboration, several studies indicate that the barrier for many women has been work-life balance which is consistent with past findings disregarding the location or culture to the women belong (Alsubhi et al., 2018; Fazal et al., 2019; Maheshwari, & Nayak, 2022). The researchers think that women are less motivated to advance to higher positions, and many of them leave positions of authority because of this demotivation and family expectations at home. According to studies, women did not anticipate promotions because firms preferred men over them for higher positions (Posholi 2013; Murniati 2012). It is assumed that brooding over home and work, women often take a long time to develop in their jobs, and they are occasionally only given a small number of work options, due to cultural and societal norms rather than because their abilities and skills are constrained (Flynn, Earlie, & Cross, 2015; Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Mustapa et al., 2018).

Self-made barriers to women's leadership include a lack of confidence in their capacity to take on leadership roles, in addition to the family obligations that prohibit them from progressing in their profession (D'Agostino et al., 2022). Several studies have supported this assertion that traditions and culture in many nations prevent women from fully participating in decision-making, which frequently results in the complete deprivation of women of fundamental and useful knowledge for the utilization of specific resources to improve their standard of living (Demedeme & Opoku, 2022). Tangonyire et al. (2022) women's access to leadership positions in patriarchal societies in Ghana is informed by cultural beliefs, attitudes, value systems, traditions and behavioural norms that grant men leverage in training, education, and political decision-making powers. The researchers opine that with these and more, women have trouble combining (even though easy for them) job responsibilities and family life as some of these factors constrain them to manoeuvre.

### ***Leadership identity crisis***

The disparities shown between men's and women's assessment for skills that result in leadership responsibilities have gained public attention in recent times. For instance, Herbst, (2020) indicates that when it comes to obtaining senior leadership jobs, women are still not shattering the glass ceiling. As such, the barriers women face at the workplace and their career challenges resulting in a lack of progression in managerial positions are noticeable globally. This explains why the Sustainable Development Goals SDGs demand that women participate fully, effectively, and equally in leadership positions (Shung-King, Gilson, Mbachu, Molyneux, & Muraya, 2018; Barkhuizen, Masakane, & van der Sluis, 2022). Contrary to women's greater visibility at lower levels in organizations, they are underrepresented at higher levels. Herbst, (2020) found that dynamics of gendered power relations in organizations, which constantly uphold these ingrained disparities constitute the key causes of women's underrepresentation in responsible positions. This could result in women consequently encountering a gendered institutional culture and a dearth of senior female role models. The researchers think that the performance of senior women may be hindered by gender stereotypes and misconceptions regarding their capacity for leadership. Haslam, Steffens, Reicher, and Bentley (2021) indicate that even while regulations encouraging gender equality have increased and explicit bias has decreased, there are still some forms of second-generation gender bias that impair women's perceptions of themselves as leaders. This might explain why women's career and leadership issues are increasingly becoming a topic of interest on both the national and international levels as there seems to be a growing acknowledgment of their contribution to socioeconomic growth.

### ***Insufficient training and growth opportunities***

Women's access to leadership positions at work has been hampered by issues like an "old boys' network," unequal compensation, and unequal promotion opportunities. Studies have found that women who work in environments where women predominate and with a mix of genders perceive their leadership competency more favorably than women who work in environments where men predominate and consider their leadership competency weaker (Larsson & Alvinus 2020; Born et al., 2018). It is likely that women still lack the self-assurance and confidence necessary for high leadership positions, which are usually held by men. The insensitivity to women's household responsibilities, inadequate work-life balance regulations, and a lack of leadership development and gender-awareness training programs are only a few organizational obstacles (Pološki Vokić et al., 2019). These authors claim that women prefer jobs that are women-friendly and have work-life balance, which leaves little time for networking. Social barriers including the double load, a lack of accessible childcare, a lack of gender quotas, and a lack of female role models continue to exist in addition to the traditional perception of women's responsibilities and misconceptions about their abilities to learn certain technical issues in society. As such, women in top management roles may be acknowledged professionally and socially, but they still encounter issues with the organizational culture, uncaring team members, and a lack of confidence from superiors and even subordinates (Barkhuizen, Masakane, & van der Sluis, 2022). The obstacles confronted by women when looking for work, getting training, developing themselves, or competing for horizontal or vertical promotions include social, organizational, and individual barriers to women's career enhancement and growth that cannot be ignored. The findings of Larsson and Alvinus (2020) suggest that women leaders do not lack confidence in their leadership roles in some work situations, which is contrary to the notion that women underestimate themselves. The findings support the conclusion that there is no difference in leadership behaviour between men and women in workplace environments where men predominate, especially where there are equal opportunities for training.

## **DISCUSSION**

Even though there is inadequate information on this, the researcher thinks that the formal sector is dominated by males in Ghana and might result in difficulty in career progression or women occupying leadership positions. A recent study support of this assertion that females are inadequately represented on boards and managerial positions of various institutions in the country (Owusu-Manu et al., 2022). There is a wide gender gap in the labour force despite the signs of progress that have been made in employing females even though at a slow pace. The deeply ingrained norms and attitudes resulting in adjustments in this direction are ineffective since senior officials are supposed to ensure gender equity in the labour market. Despite advancements in the eradication of explicit bias and an increase in laws supporting gender equality, forms of second-generation gender discrimination still have an impact on how women perceive themselves as leaders.

Gender equality law promotes equal opportunities for females in all sectors of the economy. As such women's participation has expanded in the labour market dramatically in the recent past. Studies have shown that women are acknowledged globally to have fewer opportunities for career progression than men thus relating to the idea of the glass ceiling as the route of this prejudice (Azzez & Priyadarshini, 2018; Mensah-Bonsu 2022). The country has made good progress regarding the score of the gender gap index. For instance, studies have shown that Ghana placed 70<sup>th</sup> out of 135 countries on the Global Gender Index (IFAD, 2017; Dragot & Gatto, 2018; Mensah-Bonsu 2022). This shows that, despite the country's high economic participation rate, there are still significant gender disparities. This could be due to the idea of caregiving perceived traditionally as the primary role of women as observed in almost every culture without change in sight. This traditional responsibility leads to believe that women bearing children has the tendency to increase the level of work-life conflict. Studies have shown that women without children consider their situation as better since having children would have the tendency to prevent them from achieving high positions (Metz, 2017; Mustapa et al., 2018). In this case, only single mothers and women whose children joining the teenage years think of pursuing higher positions.

Even though there are more women working than ever before, very few of them are successful. Some women decline excellent job offers, and others refuse to continue working. Mustapa et al. (2018) found that family commitment, work-life balance challenges, and a lack of family and work support are a few of the factors that have discouraged women from pursuing career progress. While the job of females in most developing countries follow the M-shape curve indicating several breaks in the history of women's employment, that of the West employment curve is U-shaped (Cho et al., 2017; Maheshwari, & Nayak, 2022). This implies that a larger number of females in developing countries take jobs in their 20s with many of them quitting in their 30s because of the responsibility of child-rearing and thus returning in their 40s after a long break for childcare. There is a sharp rise in employment of women in their 20s which does not decline until they attained 60 years. The M-shape curve in developing countries can be attributed to family responsibilities where women are supposed to care for children which invariably affect the opportunity for career advancement and promotion. This explains why most career women prefer to remain unmarried just to avoid the trouble of childcare in order to be able to manage their work effectively. Supporters of gender and development contend that the

societal structures and practices that produce and uphold male dominance and female subordination are the primary barriers to women's growth (Tourigny et al., 2017; Owusu-Manu et al., 2022). However, the lobbying of gender activists has led to the rise in the number of women in entry-level and middle-management roles as well as shifts in political systems' policy priorities, and business policies promoting equality.

Outreach initiatives need to be launched in most educational institutions to support and inform female students interested in the science technology engineering and mathematics STEM fields in order to alleviate fears. Such initiative may ensure equitable participation to advance gender parity. Studies found that there are fewer conversations on how to encourage girls and women to be interested in subjects where boys and men have dominated. This is related to raising the interest of both men and women (Owusu-Manu et al., 2022; Kwame Ameade & Majeed 2015). This demonstrates the need for continuing initiatives that can improve women's capacity to fill positions in organisations. It can be suggested that the factors contributing to the success of women for them to successfully adapt to needs for professional development and be successful in life are to be encouraged by various sectors and institutions. The belief of a glass ceiling at the tip of institutional hierarchy sometimes hinders women from obtaining the same positions as males. Studies argue that the issue of glass ceiling puts women at risk of having to assume leadership roles, which increases the likelihood that they will fail (Buchanan & Badhan 2020; Mensah-Bonsu 2022). Quite apart, there are still pay gaps between men and women, and women who choose a career over a family life frequently encounter prejudice and negative attitudes from society, including from fellow females. Despite the potential available for women to advance to higher positions, they must overcome many obstacles along the way. Especially when a study has shown surprisingly few women in leadership positions (Lahti, 2013). Most cultural practices and social traditions continue to emphasis the roles of women as family nurturers has made some women believe that having a family is enough excuse to prevent them from advancing in their careers.

Women still face challenges at the self-image stage as they still recognise the existence of a masculine world, have the fear to balance career and family tasks, are unavailability of role models and mentors, unwillingness to take up positions with heavy responsibilities, are ignorance of organisational culture are some of the deterrents for women to hold leadership positions. Guihen (2019) investigated English women and found that they could navigate the challenges of culture, stereotypes, and internal barriers in different ways. Major barriers to women participating in leadership responsibilities include cultural issues like the belief that women are less capable than men, male prejudice reflecting stereotypes of women as less suitable for leadership, the socialization of girls and boys into different roles, and societal expectations. A study on motives for accession by Garcia-Rodriguez et al. (2020) found that men have the tendencies to be oriented toward relationships and that women place a lesser value on extrinsic motivation than them.

## CONCLUSION

This study has significant applications in real life. First, preconceptions and unfriendly institutional environments that traditionally hamper careers still apply to women leaders. The need to acknowledge women's ability to perform in senior and executive leadership roles on par with that of their male counterparts cannot be anytime than now, thus a mentality that organisations must imbibe. A workplace culture that considers the various workplaces and societal responsibilities that women still play in this neoliberal environment needs serious consideration by the top management of transitions. This may necessitate more adaptable work settings that will help women successfully juggle their obligations at home and at work. Additionally, cutting-edge mentorship programs that can help women leaders advance their careers are commendable, and therefore budgetary allocations in both private and public sectors are laudable, thus resolving the issue of lack of role models or mentors. Such investments in cutting-edge mentorship programs can help women leaders advance their careers. As a result, such initiatives make internal networks possible and grant women access to the experience they need for professional growth and career progression. Finally, it is not a bad idea for management to create talent management strategies and techniques that enable the inclusion of women in talent pools depending on their competency. The researchers also think that to address developmental issues, governments, and non-governmental organizations must design programs and initiatives that can increase women's participation in community activities. This will enhance diversity in management and help to eliminate gender stereotypes that are harmful to both individual and organizational effectiveness.

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