

## Glass Ceiling Among Female Managers and Its Impact on Well-Being at Work

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### Abstract

Despite governmental attempts in years to significantly encourage and support legislation aimed at gender diversities in the workplace, women have continued to be notably underrepresented in leadership roles. Women have typically held lower-level leadership positions than men, and there is little supporting evidence that women are appropriately executed in decision-making positions. Such a phenomenon is commonly called the 'glass ceiling', highlighting that achieving fair representation in management boards remains challenging for women. While the glass ceiling has become a popular research topic, only some theoretical models have tried to comprehend this social phenomenon and its implications for social change. Therefore, this study aims to provide a further understanding of the glass ceiling and its consequences. Drawing on the theory of conservation of resources, this study investigates sequencing relationships among glass ceiling, work-to-family conflict, and well-being at work. The mass survey was distributed among female managers at Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. There were 275 valid cases for descriptive and inferential analysis with partial least square structural equation modelling. It reveals three main findings, including significant sequencing relationships among glass ceiling, work-to-family conflict, and intention to quit with positive impacts; a significantly positive causal relationship between the glass ceiling and intention to quit; and work-to-family conflicts as a significant mediator intervening causal relationship between glass ceiling and intention to quit. This study may bring theoretical and practical implications on the glass ceiling among female managers at work.

**Keywords** *Glass Ceiling, Work-To-Family Conflict, Job Satisfaction, Intention To Quit, Female Managers*

### INTRODUCTION

The proportion of women in the total workforce increased from 37% in 1970 to 47% in 2012. Vietnam has attained a commendable global position regarding female involvement, with 79% of women either employed or actively pursuing employment in recent years. Vietnam underwent an economic transformation in the 1990s, leading to significant economic growth and decreased poverty levels. The integration also resulted in alterations to Vietnam's trade patterns, particularly an upward trend in exports, thus generating several prospects for the nation's workforce. The economic reform in Vietnam has positively influenced the participation of women in the labour force, creating more job prospects, especially in the services industry (Pham & Reilly, 2007).

Although women make up a significant portion of the labour force, they are still underrepresented in higher-level positions compared to men. Multiple studies have investigated the factors contributing to such occurrences, highlighting the ongoing global discrepancies in job prospects between males and females. Despite substantial endeavours to foster diversity in enterprises and legal mandates guaranteeing equal opportunity for both genders, it is imperative to recognize that women still face severe underrepresentation in leadership positions. These constraints collectively create a barrier that prevents women from reaching higher positions in the workforce. The term "glass ceiling" denotes women's obstacles when progressing to higher echelons in their professional pursuits. This phenomenon has been examined in various sectors,

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including organizational structure, business and medical science (Bell et al., 2002). However, theoretical frameworks have thus far accomplished inadequate work to comprehend the "glass ceiling" issue and its societal impact, even though it is a very popular research topic. Hence, this study is imperative to investigate the intangible obstacles that deter female managers from advancing in their professional trajectory, notwithstanding the considerable endeavours made towards feminization in society. These findings substantially influence women's empowerment and cultivate a sense of ambition in women's professional careers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Glass ceiling

Kiaye and Singh (2013) introduced the notion of the glass ceiling, describing it as an unseen yet formidable obstacle hindering female managers from moving up the corporate ladder and holding senior management positions. It is claimed that an individual's gender identity may prevent her from climbing higher to top or even middle managerial positions. Women endure several barriers that limit their ability to pursue honouring positions with opportunities to grow to higher levels. Considering global feminism and the enhancement of gender equality legislation in the modern world, this kind of public bias is prohibited, which makes detecting glass ceilings even more challenging.

Vietnamese women had long been perceived as being disadvantaged compared to men in terms of both social and family roles, functions, and responsibilities (Tran & Nguyen, 2020), and despite the effort of the government to enact gender equality in the workplace, the social influence of Confucian and feudal ideologies is still evident (Dang, 2012). Female managers frequently battle cultural pressure to step into leadership roles. It also suggests that evidence of a glass ceiling is presented through the gender wage gap, even though there is a narrowing of the gender pay disparity across various levels of earnings in Vietnam, particularly at the upper end of the scale. The previous study on gender representation in higher education management in Vietnamese universities shows that women are underrepresented, particularly in senior leadership positions (Tran & Nguyen, 2020). Therefore, literature suggests that the glass ceiling exists in every industry, including those in the education field, and that its prevalence hinders women's advancement within organizations.

### Underpinning Theory and Hypothesis Development

The theory of Conservation of Resources serves as the fundamental theoretical underpinning for the structure of the conceptual framework. The foundational idea of COR theory is that people endeavor diligently to acquire, hold onto, nurture, and secure the things that are most significant to them. People face a sense of vulnerability regarding "potential or actual loss" which are of great importance to them, often known as "resources". In line with that, glass ceiling is when female managers face a metaphorical barrier that limits their opportunities for advancement, which puts them on the edge of encountering "potential or actual loss of resources". Utilizing resources to manage a situation of resource depletion can also be distressing as it may exhaust an individual's reservoir of resources (Hobfoll, 1989).

It is stated that when the resources used to cope with a problem are greater than the benefits gained, the consequence of coping tends to be adverse. Consequently, in situations where resources are depleted and no action occurs or resource investment fails, an ongoing cycle of resource loss happens, known as a "loss spiral", leading to a continuous depletion of resources (Hobfoll, 2001). This spiral has a detrimental impact on both psychological and physical well-being. In this study, we employed COR theory to explain triangle relationships (e.g., glass ceiling, WFC, and job satisfaction; glass ceiling, WFC, and intention to quit) and measure the mediating effects of WFC.

We adopted the conceptual framework from (Babic & Hansez, 2021), with four concepts to identify their causal relationships, triangle relationships, and mediating effects (see Figure 1).

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Data collection

The survey was administered to participants through Google Forms and covered the first two weeks of November 2023. The target population for the survey was female managers working under VNU-HCM, considering both administrative and education units. This study approached female managers across VNU-HCM from all member universities, member institutes, affiliates, and functional departments with the support of the Department of Organizational and Personnel of VNU-HCM. The survey is divided into two sections: Part one asks questions about the respondents' demographic information, including their positions, working year, major, and marital status, and part two employs a five-point Likert scale to address questions about the respondents' opinions and experiences regarding glass ceiling and its impacts on job well-being.

### Measurement items

The measurement scale was adapted from previous studies, including glass ceiling with six items Elacqua et al. (2009) (cited by Babic and Hansez, 2021), WFC with three items (Geurts et al., 2005), job satisfaction with four items Eisenberger et al. (1997) (cited by Babic and Hansez, 2021), intention to quit with four items Hom and Griffeth (1991) (cited by Babic and Hansez, 2021).

### Assessment method

This study utilized partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS software version 3.0 to empirically investigate the proposed hypotheses and correlations specified in the conceptual framework. PLS-SEM is a multivariate data analysis technique that stands out due to its application of "total variance to generate linear combinations of indicators as composite variables, thus empirically capturing the underlying conceptual constructs" (Hair et al., 2017).

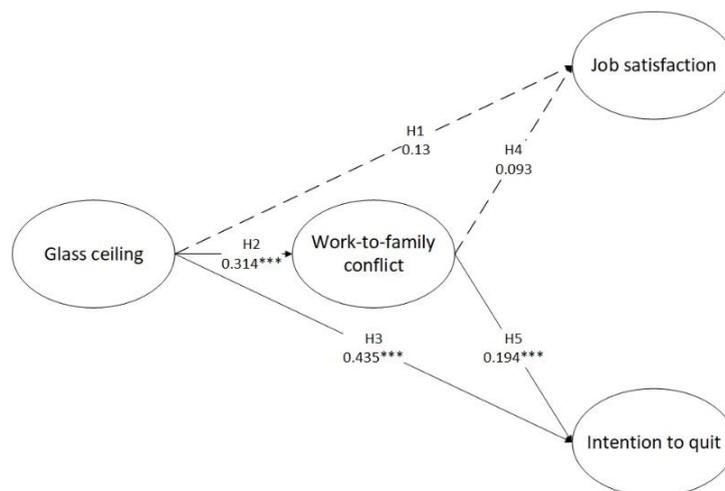
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The extensive survey was distributed among women managers working in VNU-HCMC, resulting in 292 responses, with 275 valid cases used for further analysis and 17 invalid cases deleted due to missing data and low variation. Figure 1 reveals three significant causal relationships and two insignificant causal relationships. Indeed, the glass ceiling had significantly positive effects on WFC and intention to quit (i.e., H2 and H3 were supported); in turn, WFC had a significantly positive impact on intention to quit (i.e., H5 was supported). In contrast, the glass ceiling and WFC had insignificantly causal impacts on job satisfaction (i.e., H1 and H4 were not supported).

While previous studies well elucidate the glass ceiling, the research topic about the impacts of the glass ceiling on job well-being factors, together with WFC as a mediator, remains a large room for research and investigation, especially when considering the context of the Vietnamese public education sector. Inheriting the theoretical model developed by Babic and Hansez (2021), this research responds to the need for the advancement of theoretical models and empirical research concerning the glass ceiling and its impacts. To be more precise, the key objective of this study is to fill the gaps in the current literature regarding the problem of insufficient representation of women in influential managerial roles utilizing the principles of COR. This was achieved by investigating the triangular association between the glass ceiling, WFC, and job satisfaction, as well as the triangular association between the glass ceiling, WFC, and intention to quit. Additionally, the study explored the mediating effects of WFC on two causal relationships: the relationship between the

glass ceiling and job satisfaction and the relationship between the glass ceiling and intention to quit.

Through the first hypothesis, results indicated a lack of a positive connection between the glass ceiling and job satisfaction. Meanwhile, our third hypothesis postulated the positive linkage between the glass ceiling and the intention to quit. Since few papers attempted to acknowledge the causal relationships between the glass ceiling and two job well-being factors, our study is the first to shed light on the examination of these two causal relationships and presented empirical evidence that contributes greatly to the existing body of literature in terms of how glass ceiling impact on intention to quit or job commitment especially in the public education sector. On the other hand, in comparison with other studies carried out with the glass ceiling as a research topic, the distinctive achievement of our study lies in the fact that we measure the mediating effect of WFC through the impacts of the glass ceiling on job well-being factors. The findings confirmed our second hypothesis, which demonstrated a favourable relationship between WFC and the glass ceiling. This is in line with the results in our key paper by [Babic and Hansez \(2021\)](#). Besides, the correlation between the glass ceiling and the intention to quit was fully mediated by WFC. An observed negative relationship was identified between the glass ceiling phenomenon and job satisfaction, and no mediating effect of WFC was detected between these two variables. However, these outcomes exhibit a contrasting conclusion compared to our key paper ([Babic & Hansez, 2021](#)), which stated that WFC serves as a mediator in the relationship between the glass ceiling and other work-related factors.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical estimation.

Note: \*\*\* p-value  $\leq 0.001$ ; \*\* p-value  $\leq 0.01$ ; \* p-value  $\leq 0.05$ .

Source: The authors.

Our findings further reveal new insights by elucidating the triangular relationship between the glass ceiling, WFC, and intention to quit, whereas WFC acts as a mediator. It also helps to address gaps in the literature, specifically regarding the relationship between the glass ceiling and WFC, since almost no previous research has explored this aspect. Likewise, the triangular relationship between the glass ceiling, WFC, and job satisfaction was examined to furnish an in-depth understanding of gender inequality in the workplace. However, no mediating effect was detected. This result enhanced the existing body of literature about the glass ceiling, in which we provide a comprehensive and holistic framework that considers relevant job-related factors and family-job-related items.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study offers practical implications for organizations by comprehensively understanding gender discrimination in the professional environment. The findings indicate that the presence of a glass ceiling could potentially have negative consequences on the ability to balance work and family responsibilities, as well as on overall well-being in the workplace, including increased intention to quit and decreased job satisfaction. From the perspective of organizational gender culture, organizations must implement and advocate for policies that promote gender equality. This is especially critical to prevent women from experiencing feelings of discrimination or exclusion. Furthermore, it is imperative to address gender stereotypes by implementing exacting standards and regulations to prevent any form of detrimental, unprofessional behaviours (Bell et al., 2002). Corporations should contemplate implementing glass ceiling stimulation programs designed to assist their staff in acquiring and applying social awareness, desired behaviour, and respect for every human being (Ghosh et al., 2012).

Organizations must acknowledge the advantages of eradicating the glass ceiling and establish innovative methods to transform their organizational culture to foster a neutral and non-discriminatory context. Organizations could additionally offer initiatives and endeavours to enhance employees' comprehension of the gender gap and the challenges posed by the glass ceiling. Simultaneously, corporations must guarantee that their recruitment, assessments, and career management procedures are not hampering women's progress in their professional growth. Organizations can reduce the glass ceiling by transforming their culture, enhancing employee understanding of the gender gap, and ensuring diversity in recruitment, assessments, and career management. Research can help organizations improve talent management strategies and recruitment procedures.

Prioritizing career advancement can boost employee commitment and reduce turnover. Implementing training programs, network-building initiatives, and offering support can help shape perceptions of career opportunities. Managing gender diversity metrics, such as the ratio of women in various roles, compensation levels, and promotion rates, can also help mitigate the glass ceiling. Also, as mentioned earlier in the literature part about job well-being, there are other factors, both positive and negative dimensions, such as job engagement, job strain, etc. Our study examined two factors, including job satisfaction and intention to quit, which laid the foundation for future research to deepen and comprehend the knowledge of the glass ceiling and WFC on diverse aspects of job well-being.

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