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Challenges of Gender Stereotypes in Women's International Leadership Careers: Literature Review

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Abstract: This literature review examines the challenges that gender stereotypes pose to women's advancement in international leadership roles. The review identifies obstacles such as limited access to top positions, gender pay gaps, and societal attitudes that favor men. Gender stereotypes contribute to conscious and unconscious biases, discriminatory practices, unequal opportunities, and the "double bind" phenomenon, where women must balance competence and likability. These challenges are exacerbated in international contexts by cultural differences and varying societal norms. The review concludes that gender stereotypes significantly hinder women's progress in international leadership, necessitating organizational efforts to dismantle biases, ensure equal access to opportunities, and foster inclusive cultures. Further research is recommended to explore the intersectional impact of gender stereotypes in international settings.

Keyword: Women International Leadership, Gender Stereotypes, Gender Bias, Organizational Discrimination, Women Leadership Careers

INTRODUCTION

The presence and progress of women in leadership positions have been a subject of ongoing discussion and scrutiny, highlighting both the advancements made towards gender equality and the enduring obstacles that remain across different sectors of society (Chanda et al. 2024). The persistent underrepresentation of women in international leadership roles remains a significant challenge in today's globalized world (Catalyst 2020). Despite increasing recognition of the benefits of gender diversity, women continue to face systemic barriers hindering their access to and success within these influential positions. Globally, women continue to face significant obstacles hindering their access to leadership roles, a situation perpetuated by prevailing social norms, ingrained gender stereotypes, and insufficient workplace protections for women's rights. To address this inequity, organizations must proactively adopt more inclusive policies aimed at fostering a fairer work environment and actively supporting women's advancement into leadership positions (Smith and Sinkford 2022). Acknowledging the significant contributions of women's leadership to both organizations and society is paramount, necessitating a proactive effort to dismantle prevailing

gender stereotypes and biases. This requires actively challenging conventional gender roles and championing the understanding that leadership capabilities are not exclusive to any single gender (Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi 2023).

Gender stereotypes, deeply ingrained societal beliefs about the attributes and behaviors appropriate for men and women, can shape perceptions of leadership potential and effectiveness. Based on this, gender inequality persists within organizations, particularly at the highest levels of leadership. These barriers can pose significant challenges for women seeking to achieve leadership positions on par with men. Women's ability to attain leadership roles in policy and regulation within government institutions can be influenced by socio-cultural factors. The impact also encompasses women's opportunities and access to leadership positions, including the implementation of gender balance policies aimed at increasing women's representation at various organizational levels (Baiduri et al., 2023). Adams-Prassl notes that despite significant progress in women's roles in the workforce, companies still face difficulties in creating a fair environment for all individuals. The legacy of gender inequality and traditional roles embedded in society can influence workplace dynamics (Leovani et al., 2023).

These stereotypes often associate leadership qualities with masculine traits, creating a perceived incongruence with stereotypical feminine characteristics. Consequently, women may face biased evaluations, limited opportunities for advancement, and challenges in exerting authority in an international context. Usually gender bias will weaken women. Gender bias refers to the unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender (Ridgeway 2001). Conscious gender biases are the openly held attitudes and beliefs about gender that individuals deliberately express. On the other hand, unconscious gender biases operate unintentionally, often without the individual even realizing they hold them. Importantly, both conscious and unconscious biases contribute to discrimination, prejudice, and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes – those widespread social assumptions we make about people simply because of their gender (Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi 2023).

Far from a desirable situation, the environment in organizations is often based on traditional gender roles, limiting leadership concepts to one gender (Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi 2023). Furthermore, organizational structures, policies, and practices can inadvertently or deliberately perpetuate discrimination against women aspiring to or holding international leadership roles. Indeed, within numerous organizations, gender bias is widespread, often fueled by the persistence of gender stereotypes that dictate narrow expectations of women's professional appearance and demeanor (Hilman 2012). This discrimination can manifest in various forms, including unequal access to development opportunities, biased performance evaluations, exclusionary networking practices, and the imposition of higher standards compared to their male counterparts. The complexities of international leadership, often involving cross-cultural interactions and demanding work environments, may exacerbate these discriminatory practices.

Gender stereotypes significantly permeate the career journey, frequently leading women to confront a "glass ceiling" within male-dominated work environments. This glass ceiling, a substantial barrier primarily arising from a perceived mismatch between women and higher management or leadership roles (Morrison, 1992), represents a widespread and deeply rooted gender-based challenge requiring considerable effort to overcome. Consequently, it poses a persistent obstacle for numerous women seeking to contribute their talents within organizations (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). However, surpassing the glass ceiling does not eliminate gender-based stereotypical challenges. Instead, women who reach leadership positions often encounter additional stereotypes specific to their gender, qualities, and perceived leadership capabilities. These challenges reflect a broader societal inclination to associate leadership with masculine traits, often resulting in negative perceptions of female leaders who deviate from these

expectations. Gender-based stereotypes thus constitute a formidable impediment to women's career advancement into leadership, demanding significant effort and resilience.

Against this backdrop, this integrative review aims to investigate the multifaceted challenges encountered by female leaders in their organizational career progression. Recognizing the significant impact of organizational decisions, often shaped by gender biases and stereotypes, on the careers and values of female leaders, this study examines the prevalent gender-related issues women face in the workplace and the influence of organizations on women's leadership trajectories. This will be achieved through a review and synthesis of management and career studies literature pertaining to the obstacles women encounter when advancing to leadership positions.

METHOD

This research adopts the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. A literature review is a comprehensive summary of existing research within a specific field of study, conducted using a designated methodology. Systematic reviews are typically placed at the highest level of the evidence hierarchy due to their comprehensive analysis and evaluation of findings from all relevant original research studies addressing a specific research question (Al-Khabori & Rasool, 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Women Leadership

Findings of several investigations illuminates key aspects of gender and leadership. Barkhuizen et al. (2022) underscore the critical mentoring role of women leaders, particularly within STEM fields, in the professional development of female employees, emphasizing the importance of role models for cultivating both personal and managerial identities. Baiduri et al. (2023) identify a divergence in leadership styles, noting a tendency for men to adopt more authoritarian and task-oriented approaches, while women are more frequently characterized by collaborative and relationship-focused styles.

This distinction in leadership orientation, as highlighted by Latifah et al. (2024), contributes to differential evaluations within professional settings, where assertive male leadership is often equated with success, and female leaders exhibit a participative and collaborative nature, potentially finding it challenging to express dissent. Furthermore, Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) point to the influence of gender stereotypes, suggesting that the perception of women as more emotional can introduce bias in their selection and evaluation as leaders, with women potentially facing penalties for displaying emotions associated with power. These collective insights underscore the complex interplay of gender and leadership, revealing both stylistic differences and the impact of gendered perceptions on leadership evaluation and success.

Women Challenges

Several journals consistently identified significant challenges confronting women in their pursuit and attainment of leadership positions. Barkhuizen et al. (2022) highlight gender stereotyping as a pervasive obstacle to women's career advancement. This is corroborated by Macarie et al. (2011), who attribute the underrepresentation of women in top management to deeply ingrained societal beliefs regarding gender roles. Baiduri et al. (2023) further emphasize how stereotypes associating leadership with traditionally "masculine" traits act as impediments to women's progression, underscoring the urgent need for organizational initiatives aimed at dismantling these biases and fostering gender parity.

Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) broadly assert that women encounter a multitude of challenges when assuming or aspiring to leadership roles. These challenges are further

elucidated by Thelma & Ngulube (2024), who point to the imposition of higher standards of competence and likability on women leaders compared to their male counterparts. This often manifests as harsher judgment regarding their actions, appearance, and communication, creating a "double bind." In this precarious position, women must navigate the narrow space between being perceived as competent without appearing overly aggressive, and likable without seeming passive, rendering the fulfillment of expectations exceptionally difficult.

Latifah et al. (2024) identify another substantial impediment: the perceived psychological differences between genders. The stereotype of women as being more emotional and their typical characterization as employing a supportive rather than directive leadership style can generate biases in the evaluation of their leadership potential and effectiveness. This is particularly salient in professional contexts where a more assertive or decisive leadership style is traditionally valued. Taken together, these scholarly insights reveal a complex web of stereotypes, biases, and heightened expectations that collectively hinder women's advancement in leadership.

Gender stereotypes in Women

The persistent leadership gap between genders can be partially attributed to the enduring influence of gender stereotypes, as evidenced by multiple scholarly investigations. According to Heilman (2012), as cited by Barkhuizen et al. (2022), these stereotypes engender bias against women's perceived competence in traditionally male-dominated occupations and roles. Furthermore, women who achieve success in these domains may face normative sanctions, disapproval, and penalties for violating gendered expectations. Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) define gender stereotypes as culturally shared beliefs and expectations concerning the attributes and behaviors of both women and men. These stereotypes, often reinforced by societal institutions and interactions such as media, education, and family structures, contribute to the perpetuation of biased perceptions.

Baiduri et al. (2023) posit that these inherent gender differences and the resultant variations in leadership styles and effectiveness contribute to the underrepresentation of women in management positions. Their research suggests that women are more frequently relegated to the role of romantic partners rather than being recognized as professional peers. The insidious nature of these biases is further explored by Thelma & Ngulube (2024), who highlight that such biases often operate at a subconscious level, rendering them difficult to identify and address. Stereotypes, as generalized beliefs about specific groups, significantly influence how leaders perceive and interact with others, manifesting in various ways within leadership contexts.

Latifah et al. (2024) propose that analyses of gender-based leadership distinctions can be approached through the examination of established leadership stereotypes or by analyzing specific behavioral styles and characteristics observed in male and female leaders. These stereotypes not only reflect prevailing societal perceptions but also delineate normative behaviors and traits associated with the dominant group, thereby shaping expectations for subsequent evaluations. Collectively, these findings underscore the significant and multifaceted impact of gender stereotypes on women's access to and experience within leadership roles.

Gender Bias in Women

Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) delineate conscious gender bias as manifesting in tangible disparities such as salary and promotion opportunities. They attribute this overt bias to the influence of gender stereotypes, defined as societal assumptions predicated on an individual's gender. Furthermore, the researchers contend that deeply ingrained cultural beliefs foster unconscious gender bias concerning workplace structure and supervision. This implicit

bias operates as an unintentional yet pervasive barrier to women's professional advancement, stemming from interaction patterns that disproportionately favor men.

Echoing this perspective, Thelma & Ngulube (2024) emphasize that implicit biases embedded within organizational frameworks can generate systemic obstacles for women. These biases frequently materialize in hiring and promotion procedures, wherein decision-makers may, without conscious awareness, favor male candidates or interpret leadership attributes through a lens shaped by prevailing gender norms. Consequently, both conscious and unconscious biases, rooted in societal stereotypes and embedded within organizational structures, significantly impede women's equitable progression in the workplace.

This literature review focuses on the challenges posed by gender stereotypes to women's advancement in international leadership roles. The research indicates that despite women playing a crucial role in leadership, they face significant obstacles.

Table 1. Literature Review Results

No	Author (Year)	Title	Keywords	Result
1	Latifah <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Analisis Perbedaan Gender dalam Kepemimpinan	Gender, Leadership, Women's Performance	- Women play an important role in leadership, they still face challenges such as limited access to top positions and gender pay gaps.
2	Thelma & Ngulube (2024)	Women in Leadership: Examining Barriers to Women's Advancement in Leadership Positions	Cultural norms; discrimination; gender disparities; leadership styles; institutional barriers.	- Indicated that deep-seated societal attitudes often favor men in leadership roles. Implicit biases, both conscious and unconscious, can lead to discrimination practices in hiring, promotion, and performance evaluations. - Women often encounter unequal opportunities for advancement, including limited access to high-profile projects, stretch assignments, and sponsorship from senior leaders. Without equal access to career-enhancing opportunities, women may struggle to develop the skills and experiences necessary for leadership roles.
3	Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023)	Challenges Women Experience in Leadership Careers: An Integrative Review	gender biases; gender stereotypes; self-gender stereotypes; glass ceiling; organizations; external factors; internal factors; leadership positions; women's career; women's leadership	- In many organizations, gender biases and stereotypes frequently occur, consciously or unconsciously, regardless of whether women take on leadership roles - Women must overcome a variety of challenges when taking on leadership roles or aspiring to become leaders

4	Baiduri <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Gender dan Kepemimpinan : Sebuah Kajian Literatur	Leadership, Glass Ceiling, Labyrinth.	-	Gender is still a significant factor in leadership practice, especially in high levels of leadership dominated by men. - There are differences in leadership styles between men and women
5	Barkhuizen <i>et al.</i> (2022)	In search of factors that hinder the career advancement of women to senior leadership positions	career development; leadership identity; mentoring; stereotypes; women leadership; work-life balance.	-	Revealed six factors that hinder the career advancement of women to senior leadership positions: societal perceptions and stereotypes, a lack of mentorship, masculine corporate cultures, leadership identity distortions, inadequate training and development and poor work-life balance.

These obstacles include limited access to top positions and gender pay gaps (Latifah et al., 2024), as well as deeply ingrained societal attitudes that favor men in leadership (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024).

A key challenge identified is the prevalence of gender stereotypes, which are defined by Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) as "culturally shared beliefs and expectations concerning the attributes and behaviors of both women and men." These stereotypes contribute to biases that hinder women's career advancement. The studies also highlight the existence of both conscious and unconscious biases, which can lead to discriminatory practices in hiring, promotion, and performance evaluations (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). Furthermore, women often encounter unequal opportunities, including limited access to high-profile projects and mentorship (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024), and may experience a "double bind" where they must navigate conflicting expectations of competence and likability.

The literature consistently demonstrates that gender stereotypes remain a significant barrier to women achieving leadership positions, and this is likely exacerbated in international contexts. As Barkhuizen et al. (2022) note, these stereotypes create bias against women's perceived competence, particularly in male-dominated fields. This issue is further compounded by what Thelma & Ngulube (2024) describe as the "double bind," where women are judged more harshly on their actions, appearance, and communication. This makes it exceptionally difficult for women to meet expectations, as they must balance being seen as competent without appearing aggressive, and likable without seeming passive.

The impact of these stereotypes is evident in various aspects of career progression. As Thelma & Ngulube (2024) point out, "Implicit biases, both conscious and unconscious, can lead to discrimination practices in hiring, promotion, and performance evaluations." This highlights how deeply ingrained societal attitudes, as mentioned by Thelma & Ngulube (2024), create systemic obstacles for women. Latifah et al. (2024) add another layer to this, noting that the stereotype of women as being more emotional and employing a supportive leadership style can lead to biases in evaluating their leadership potential.

Moreover, the challenges women face in leadership roles are not solely due to individual biases but are also embedded within organizational structures. As Thelma & Ngulube (2024) explain, women often encounter "unequal opportunities for advancement, including limited

access to high-profile projects, stretch assignments, and sponsorship from senior leaders." This lack of access to career-enhancing opportunities further hinders their ability to develop the necessary skills and experience for leadership roles. Baiduri et al. (2023) also emphasize that "There are differences in leadership styles between men and women," which can contribute to how they are perceived and evaluated in different organizational cultures.

When considering international leadership careers, these challenges can be amplified by cultural differences and varying societal norms regarding gender roles. Women may face additional barriers due to differing expectations and stereotypes in different countries, making it even more difficult to navigate the complexities of leadership across borders.

CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed reveals that gender stereotypes pose a significant and multifaceted challenge to women's advancement in international leadership careers. These stereotypes, as Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) state, mean that women "must overcome a variety of challenges when taking on leadership roles or aspiring to become leaders." These challenges manifest as biases in evaluation, limited access to opportunities, and the pressure to conform to conflicting expectations. The studies highlight that addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Organizations must actively work to dismantle both conscious and unconscious biases, provide equal access to career-enhancing opportunities, and foster inclusive cultures that value diverse leadership styles.

Further research is needed to explore the intersectional impact of gender stereotypes in international contexts, considering the influence of cultural differences and varying societal norms on women's leadership experiences.

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