Barriers to Female Leadership: A Review of the Literature on the Obstacles to Accessing Leadership Positions

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Abstract

Purpose: This research aims to conduct a systematic review of the literature on internal and external barriers that limit women's access to leadership positions in organizations, covering the period 2005-2024.

Design/methodology/approach: Forty-two peer-reviewed academic articles from the Web of Science database were analyzed. The PRISMA method was used for the selection of studies, complemented by bibliometric and content analysis.

Findings: The results indicate that internal barriers (such as family responsibilities, gender stereotypes, and fear of failure) and external barriers (institutional biases, exclusionary networks, and discrimination) persist, despite the increase in female participation in managerial positions. Additionally, new barriers aligned with contemporary challenges are emerging, notably the so-called "glass cliffs," representing the trend of appointing women to leadership roles in organizations in crisis, thus increasing the risk of unsuccessful outcomes.

Practical implications: Recognizing these barriers enables the design of intervention strategies such as inclusive policies, mentorship programs, early training, and reforms in recruitment and promotion practices.

Social implications: Raising awareness and promoting understanding among the general population, and especially within the business community, about the challenge's women may face in advancing and consolidating themselves in an increasingly competitive and complex world.

Originality/value: This literature review provides an update on the internal and external obstacles women face in accessing leadership positions. It also offers insight into the possible evolution of these barriers and the emerging metaphors related to the topic.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, a significant shift has been observed in the role of women within the workforce. Currently, a growing number of women are taking on leadership positions and actively participating in the business world. Nevertheless, the proportion of women compared to men in the labor market remains lower. According to data from the World Bank (2022), while men represent 61.5% of the labor force, women account for only 38.5%. When analyzing the results of research on leadership positions held by women, carried out by the consulting firm Grant Thornton International Ltd. (2024), there is a global projection for 2024 of 33.4%, compared to 32.5% in 2023 and 31% in 2021. This growth is notable when considering that in 2004, when these data first began to be collected, only 19.4% of leadership positions were held by women. However, according to the consulting firm, if the current trend continues, gender parity would not be reached until the year 2053 (Grant Thornton International Ltd., 2024). Furthermore, the report "Women in Business 2024: Pathways to Parity" from the same consulting firm reveals a significant decrease in general management positions, dropping from 28% in 2023 to 19% in 2024. When women leaders were asked about the reasons for this decrease, they mentioned public pressure, family responsibilities, and the perception that such positions require behavior typically associated with more masculine roles (Grant Thornton International Ltd., 2024).

Another important finding of this study is the gradual increase, since 2012, in the presence of women in managerial roles in functional areas, as illustrated in Figure 1.
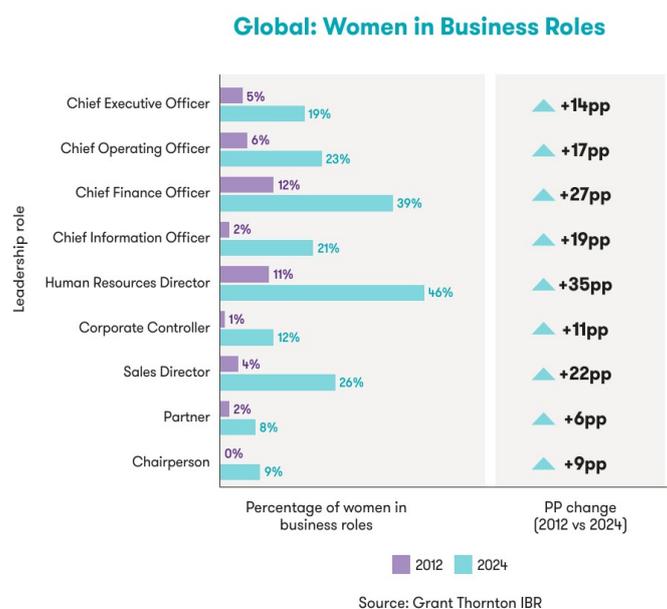

Figure 1. Women in business positions worldwide (Grant Thornton International Ltd., 2024)

Considering these figures and given that there is still a long way to go, it is essential to identify the barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership positions. In this study, the barriers to female leadership are classified as internal and external barriers. The former refers to psychological and intrapersonal factors resulting from the internalization of gender norms and stereotypes, while the latter correspond to structural and organizational obstacles that limit women's access to and permanence in leadership positions. In the various articles reviewed, both internal or psychological and external barriers are mentioned as obstacles to women's access to leadership roles. However, it is difficult to find recent literature that refers to new barriers or that indicates that existing barriers have been completely overcome by women. Kirton and Greene (2015), and Saeed, Riaz and Baloch (2022), point out that the position of women in the workplace has seen significant improvements over the past five decades. Nevertheless, Islam, Hack-Polay, Rahman, Jantan, Dal-Mas and Kordowicz (2023) affirm that, for top roles in organizations, the so-called "glass ceiling" which represents the barriers women face when advancing to new positions still exists. The difficulties women encounter in progressing to new leadership positions remain

a reality. Numerous studies, both theoretical and applied, have tried to explain why, throughout history, it has been more difficult for women to assume leadership roles. A series of internal and external barriers have been identified that limit their growth and development. Although many of these barriers are considered to be imposed from the outside, it is also recognized that women themselves impose obstacles. Given the crucial role of the human psyche, it is plausible to think that these self-imposed barriers may be even more restrictive than the external ones (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Koch, D'Mello & Sackett, 2015; Powell & Butterfield, 2015).

Despite advances in social development and efforts to promote gender equality at both organizational and governmental levels, barriers persist consistently, complicating the growth landscape for women in organizations and representing an ongoing challenge. In general terms, external barriers refer to aspects intrinsic to each organization that facilitate the development of "Glass Ceilings," such as the lack of development opportunities, organizational policies, and challenges related to teamwork (Zhang & Basha, 2023). Internal and psychological barriers are more closely related to aspects of the human psyche or to characteristics attributed to women, such as risk aversion, fear of competition, and aversion to feedback (De-Paola, Lombardo, Pupo & Scoppa, 2021). The internal and/or psychological and external barriers that women face as they ascend to leadership positions in academic and executive settings are commonly known as "Glass Ceilings." This term has accurately captured women's perceptions and is widely used in academic research and debate. The expression "Glass Ceilings" was first used in 1984 in Adweek magazine, in the profile of Gay Bryant, where it is mentioned that "women reach a certain point, which I call the glass ceiling... in middle management, and there they become stuck" (Gay, 1984, as cited in Wereszczuk, 2013: page 30). This term gained greater relevance following the publication by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) in the Wall Street Journal, where they described the invisible barriers faced by highly qualified working women, preventing them from reaching the highest hierarchical levels in the business world, regardless of their achievements and merits (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, as cited in Wereszczuk, 2013: page 30).

Over the years, a series of metaphors have been used to explain the process women face when taking on new positions. We explain this in the present review because we believe it is very useful and helps to better visualize the issues women face in these matters. One implication of the glass ceiling metaphor is that women cannot advance to the highest levels of leadership within an organization; instead, they are at a penultimate level, just below, yet within sight of the top. The image of a ceiling suggests that women face few challenges before reaching that next-to-last level and that the path to further advancement is blocked for all women. The glass composition of the ceiling creates the impression that the obstacles women face is invisible and undetectable until the very last moment, when women come up against it and are denied further advancement. Moreover, the glass ceiling metaphor implies that the overall status of women remains relatively unchanged over time, because no woman can rise to the highest level without breaking the ceiling and therefore opening opportunities for the women who follow (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

To date, numerous studies have been conducted on this subject. Now, with the increasing number of women occupying leadership roles, new research is beginning to emerge that explores the performance of women in managerial positions. Among the most frequently cited studies are those by Ryan and Haslam (2005) and Haslam and Ryan (2008), and Sabharwal (2015). These studies aim to understand how women who have managed to overcome the "glass ceiling" have impacted their managerial roles.

It has been found that women who have managed to overcome the barriers of the "glass ceiling" now face a new challenge called the "glass cliff." This term was coined by Ryan and Haslam (2005). The concept explains that women are often chosen to lead companies that are generally in crisis, which puts them at greater risk of falling off this cliff and failing. Bruckmuller, Ryan, Rink and Haslam (2014) it is noted that women are more likely to be appointed to lead companies "in times of crisis," as it is often believed they possess "soft skills" or competence to handle situations involving collaboration with others. This places them in stressful situations, with a higher likelihood of performance issues. The metaphors of the "glass ceiling and glass cliff" indicate that, although women's current situation seems more promising thanks to a significant increase in their leadership roles, barriers still persist that prevent them from taking on new positions, or that, when serving in leadership roles, they do not enjoy the same conditions as their male peers. Therefore, there is still a long way to go.

On the other hand, the growing interest in gender equity and the role of women in the workplace, together with government initiatives, makes it essential to deepen research into the barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership positions. The purpose of this document is to provide a systematic review of the literature on both external and internal barriers that hinder women's access to leadership positions in organizations. In addition, it seeks to examine whether these barriers have changed over time, if new ones have emerged, or if any have been overcome as women have taken on more prominent roles in the business world. Published articles on this topic will be investigated, analyzing the temporal evolution of the research, the growth of sources, the influence of documents and authors, as well as the origin of the studies. This systematic literature review will allow us to obtain relevant data for our research.

As García-Peñalvo (2022: page 1) mentions:

> "Systematic literature review is a systematic method for identifying, evaluating and interpreting the work of scholars and practitioners in a chosen field. Its purpose is to identify gaps in knowledge and research needs in a particular field."

This study contributes to the existing literature by offering a systematic review that not only identifies the persistent barriers to female leadership but also analyzes their conceptual evolution through organizational metaphors, integrating both classical and contemporary approaches from a longitudinal perspective.

2. Methodology

The methodology has been developed taking into account the Prisma protocol (2020) and the guidelines suggested by Kitchenham, Brereton, Budgen, Turner, Bailey and Linkman (2009).

2.1. Define the Research Questions

1. What are the internal and external barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership positions in organizations?
2. Have new concepts related to internal or external barriers emerged between 2005 and 2024?
3. What metaphors are used to illustrate the barriers that exist in accessing higher-level positions?

2.2. Search Strategies

The search strategy was designed following the guidelines of the PRISMA protocol (Page, McKenzie, Bossuyt, Boutron, Hoffmann, Mulrow et al., 2021) and the methodological recommendations for systematic reviews in social sciences proposed by Kitchenham et al. (2009). The objective was to identify peer-reviewed empirical studies that addressed the internal and external barriers women face in accessing leadership positions within organizations.

The literature search was conducted exclusively in the Web of Science (WoS) database due to its high level of selectivity, focus on internationally impactful journals, and traceability of its indexing processes, which is especially relevant to ensure the quality and comparability of studies included in a systematic review. Although other widely used databases exist—such as Scopus, Google Scholar, or EBSCO—these were not included in order to avoid duplications, inconsistencies in indexing criteria, and the incorporation of non-peer-reviewed literature, thus prioritizing methodological rigor over breadth of coverage.

The initial search yielded a total of 1,473 records related to female leadership and gender barriers. However, in order to confine the analysis to the organizational field and formal leadership positions, a refinement strategy was applied by using specific terms related to managerial positions. Accordingly, the following search string was used in the title, abstract, and keyword fields:

(TS= (Women OR "women leaders" OR "women managers" OR "female leadership" OR "female leaders") AND TS=("Gender barriers" OR "Organizational barriers" OR "glass ceiling" OR "social barriers" OR "cultural barriers" OR "Interpersonal barriers" OR "Intrapersonal barriers")) AND TS=("leadership positions" OR "chief executive officer" OR "CEO positions")

The review was conducted exclusively through the examination of the Web of Science database, carrying out both bibliometric and content analysis. The choice of Web of Science was based on its recognized academic

prestige, its focus on social sciences topics, and its selective index that includes high-quality journals. Additionally, its more restrictive indexing process was valued.

The selected time frame was 2005-2024, with the aim of capturing the evolution of empirical literature following the consolidation of the main theoretical frameworks on leadership and gender, as well as the emergence of new analytical metaphors such as the glass cliff. This period allows for the analysis of both the persistence of traditional barriers and the emergence of new dynamics associated with organizational, social, and cultural changes that have taken place over the past two decades.

Since 2005, there have been significant milestones in the field of gender studies, such as:

- Increase in women holding leadership positions
- More women in positions that were previously considered to be suitable only for men.
- The rise of institutional policies on gender equity and diversity in companies and governments, which has generated new lines of empirical research on their effectiveness and limitations.
- The growing focus on transformational and ethical leadership, where the neutrality of traditional leadership models is called into question.
- Raising awareness around gender differences in various spheres, especially in the workplace.
- New studies on the effect of women in leadership positions: the "glass cliff."
- The influence of global social movements such as: #MeToo (2006), Women in the Workplace (2015), 50/50 by 2030 (2010), #NiUnaMenos (2015), which have reshaped the discourse and research agenda around female leadership.

Therefore, the time frame is not only a matter of chronology, but also a necessity to capture the evolution of the field in light of new realities, actors, and discourses. This approach allows for the identification not only of persistent barriers but also of emerging ones in contemporary settings.

The retrieved studies were subsequently subjected to a systematic process of review and selection, based on explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria described in the following section. Finally, the selected articles were analyzed using a combined approach of bibliometric analysis and thematic content analysis, in order to identify patterns, trends, and recurring categories related to barriers to female leadership.

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selected studies had to meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed empirical publications.
- Focus on female leadership and internal or external barriers.
- Fields of knowledge such as management, business, economics, psychology, sociology, or gender studies.

The following were excluded:

- Non-empirical studies (book chapters, reviews, editorials, theses, interviews).
- Conference and symposium presentations.
- Publications related to health disciplines (obstetrics, gynecology, neurology, psychiatry, pharmacy), where the topics discussed focus on physiological issues rather than the development of female leadership in organizations.
- Articles focused on ethical issues without direct relation to female leadership.

2.4. Study Selection Process

After including the new Query of the 1,473 articles, 70 articles remained, from which the previously mentioned inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Of the 70 articles, 67 had been peer-reviewed. Subsequently, only articles related to management, business, economics, psychology, sociology, and topics linked to barriers in

studies about women were considered, leaving 42 articles. Articles related to health topics such as obstetrics and gynecology, pharmacy, neurology, psychiatry, and ethical issues were not considered. After applying these filters, 42 relevant articles were selected for the final analysis. The figure 2 presents the PRISMA diagram summarizing the selection process.
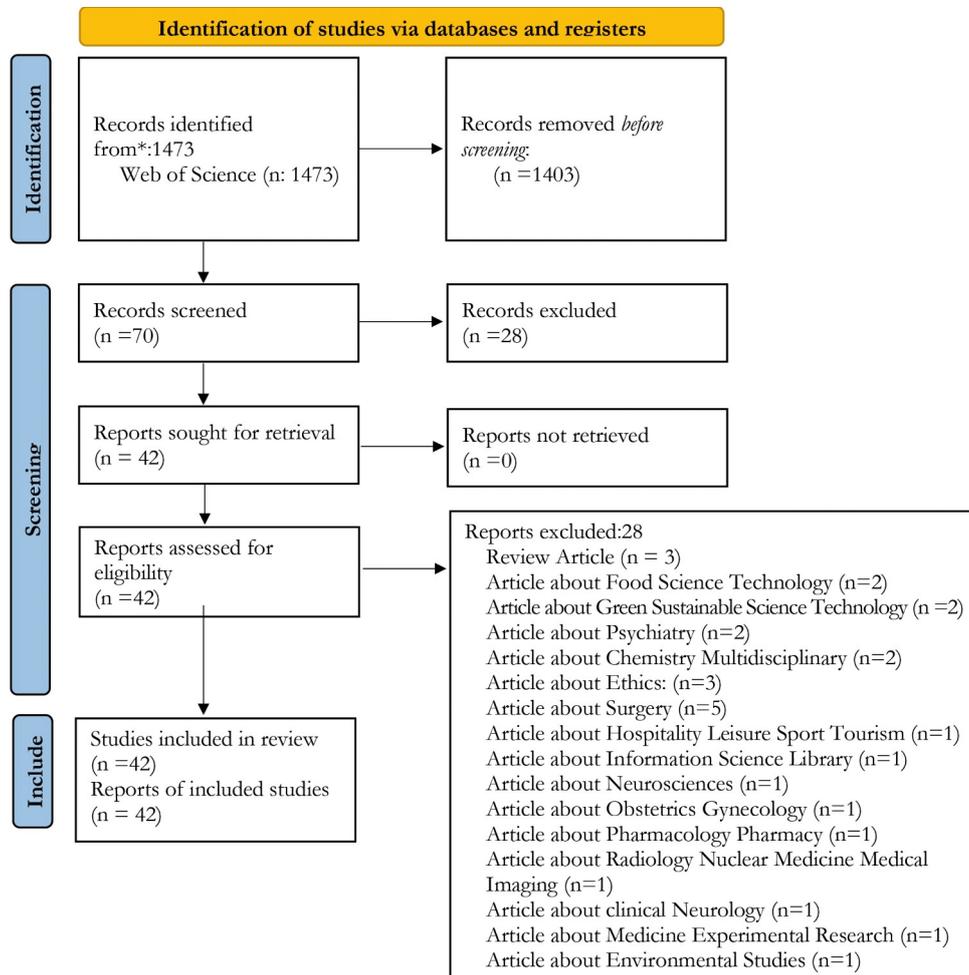

Figure 2. Prism Diagram (Page et al. 2021)

2.5. Data Extraction

Next, each preselected article was analyzed and tabulated in MS Excel using the following information: authors, title, year, methodology, country, research population, findings, and impact factor.

3.Results

3.1. Barriers

First of all, it is observed that, although women are currently taking on leadership roles to a greater extent, the same internal and external barriers identified by researchers before 2005 persist in all areas of professional development.

Internal barriers refer to psychological, cognitive, and emotional factors that influence women's self-perception, motivation, and behavior in relation to leadership. These barriers do not arise in isolation, but are the result of gender socialization processes, internalized stereotypes, and repeated experiences of discrimination or exclusion in organizational contexts.

According to Hoyt and Murphy (2016), internal barriers are linked to how women internalize social expectations that affect their willingness to apply for, accept, or remain in leadership roles. Similarly, Eagly and Karau (2002),

from the role incongruity theory, argue that when women perceive a lack of fit between their gender role and the leader role, they may experience insecurity, self-censorship, or avoid leadership altogether.

External barriers correspond to institutional, organizational, and sociocultural factors that objectively and systematically limit women's access, promotion, and retention in leadership positions, regardless of their competencies or performance.

Authors such as Heilman (2001) and Cook and Glass (2014) point out that these barriers include gender biases in selection and promotion processes, male-dominated organizational cultures, exclusion from informal power networks, and workplace practices that penalize motherhood and work-family balance.

We have classified these barriers into three categories to facilitate understanding, and have indicated the authors who mention them in this literature review (Table 1).

	Topics	Authors
Internal Barriers	Family responsibility Doubts about work-life balance Lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. Fear of failure, of criticism that may be perceived as too "soft" or too "harsh." Fear of revealing oneself. Lack of role models: the scarcity of role models in high positions can lead to a lack of vision about what is possible.	Urbániková & Čaladi (2024). Charway & Strandbu (2024) Zhang & Basha (2023) Ng et al. (2023) Heinrichs and Sonnabend (2023) Pastwa-Wojciechowska & Chybicka (2022) De-Paola et al. (2017) Sabharwal (2015) Schuh, Hernandez-Bark, Van-Quaquebeke, Hossiep, Frieg & Van-Dick (2014) Furst & Reeves (2008)
Inteernal Barriers (Psychological barriers)	Fear of rejection or conflict: Women may avoid taking on leadership roles out of fear of being judged or facing negative criticism. Self-censorship: Some women do not express their aspirations for fear of being seen as ambitious or "too aggressive." Gender stereotypes: These are widespread beliefs about the roles, characteristics, and behaviors proper to men and women. For example: the belief that women should be in charge of the home and children, while men are seen as providers and heads of the family. Emotional burdens: Many women take on a double emotional role, being responsible for the well-being of their team or family, which leads to exhaustion.	Urbániková & Čaladi (2024) Charway & Strandbu (2024) Zhang & Basha (2023) Pastwa-Wojciechowska & Chybicka (2022) Manzi & Heilman (2021) De-Paola et al. (2021) Morgenroth, Kirby, Ryan & Sudkämper (2020) Field, Souther and Yore (2020) Groeneveld, Bakker and Schmidt (2020) Amon (2017) Glass and Cook (2016) Sabharwal (2015) Schuh et al. (2014) Furst and Reeves (2008) Haslam and Ryan (2008)
External barriers	Gender discrimination and peer discrimination. Lack of professional development opportunities. Lack of support networks Organizational culture and unconscious biases Salary differences Patriarchy Poorly defined quotas Exclusion from social networks and information Types of leadership "Old boys' club" (1) "Golf Club"	Urbániková and Čaladi (2024) Charway and Strandbu (2024) Andrews (2023). Zhang and Basha (2023) Lari, Al-Ansari and El-Maghraby (2022). Fu, Wei, Shi, Yan, Li, Zhan and Wang (2018) Amon (2017) Flabbi, Piras and Abrahams (2017) Glass and Cook (2016) Sabharwal, M (2015). Schuh et al. (2014) Cook and Glass (2014) Furst and Reeves (2008)

Table 1. Barrier Details

As shown in Table 1, there is a significant number of barriers, and these appear in different areas; one or more of them may be present in each person. However, there is little information on how they originate and how to prevent them.

3.2. Metaphors

For many years, metaphors have been used to describe the barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership positions. Most authors refer to these barriers as "glass ceilings," defined as "the set of unwritten rules or corporate culture that hinders advancement" (Chinchilla et al., 2005, p.2). Additionally, the concept of the "cement ceiling" is mentioned, understood as a self-imposed obstacle stemming from personal choices, such as declining promotion to more rigid and demanding management positions" (Chinchilla, Poelmans & Leon, 2005: page 2).

The authors Eagly and Carli (2007), cited in most of the reviewed articles, questioned the term "glass ceilings" and, instead, proposed that these barriers should not be identified as a ceiling, but rather as a labyrinth. The authors contend that the glass labyrinth is a more useful metaphor for describing women's experiences when attempting to reach leadership positions. This labyrinth offers multiple paths to the exit; some women find them, others do not. Furthermore, they note that these difficulties do not necessarily appear at the beginning of one's career, but can arise at any time and are always present.

In the academic sphere, where women appear to have gained greater space and achievements, the literature indicates that these advancements primarily occur at the beginning of academic careers. However, as one progresses up the academic ladder, the path towards accomplishments, recognition, and promotions becomes more complex and restricted (Santucci, López-Valcarcel, Avendaño-Solá, Gallardo Pino, Lledó García, Martín-Perez et al., 2021). This phenomenon is commonly described as the "leaky pipeline," a metaphor introduced by Berryman in 1983 to illustrate the gradual decrease in female presence throughout the academic career trajectory. According to Heinrichs and Sonnabend (2023), in Germany, the loss of talent in the academic sphere is evident. Although, in recent years, more women than men have graduated from universities, the proportion of women decreases at each stage of the academic career.

To describe the situation of women who face even more challenging conditions, especially in underdeveloped economies where formal employment is significantly lower than informal employment and the unemployment rate is high, the term "sticky floor" has been coined in the literature. This term refers to the situation of a large number of women trapped in jobs with few opportunities for advancement and low wages (Berheide, 1992). Sociologist Catherine White Berheide introduced this metaphor to illustrate the difficulties faced by women in low-paid, low-status positions in state and local government (as cited in Noble, 1992). Her colleague Sharon Harlan suggested that the term is also applicable to any field where women cannot advance significantly beyond entry-level positions (as cited in Spaid, 1993). These sociologists used the image of the sticky floor to refer to discriminatory practices that hinder women's advancement, including occupational segregation practices that place women in jobs without defined schedules, insufficient pay in female-dominated occupations, and the lack of flexibility and promotion opportunities in these jobs (Harlan & Berheide, 1994).

Authors Simpson and Kunra (2016) developed the notion of the Teflon effect to describe how merits can go unnoticed and therefore do not "stick" to women occupying management and leadership positions.

The main breakthrough regarding barriers may refer to the concept of the glass cliff, which describes the tendency to assign women to leadership positions in organizational contexts characterized by crisis, high uncertainty, or an elevated risk of failure. Introduced by Ryan and Haslam (2005), this approach expands on the notion of the glass ceiling by pointing out that even when women gain access to executive positions, they often do so in particularly unfavorable situations. This increases their likelihood of being evaluated negatively and of leaving these positions. Unlike men, who tend to access leadership roles in more stable contexts, women face higher performance expectations and less tolerance for mistakes, reinforcing dynamics of structural inequality. Subsequent research has explored the mechanisms underlying this phenomenon, highlighting the role of gender stereotypes that associate women with relational leadership styles, which are perceived as functional in crisis situations (Ryan, Haslam, Morgenrotha, Rinkb, Stokerb & Peters, 2016). However, more recent studies have nuanced this interpretation, noting that the occurrence of the glass cliff is not universal and that institutional factors, such as the composition of boards of directors, selection processes, and the existence of support networks, significantly influence the likelihood that women will attain and remain in leadership positions (Cook & Glass, 2014; Glass & Cook, 2016).

In addition to the evidence contained in the 42 studies included in this systematic review, more recent research published in indexed journals offers complementary and nuanced evidence about the glass cliff phenomenon. For example, Cao, Li, Zhang and Chen (2024) analyze the effect of the glass cliff in the context of economic and corporate crises, highlighting how the interaction between corporate governance and female leadership influences the assignment of women to higher-risk positions.

Similarly, Reinwald, Zaunmüller and Veeser (2023) suggest that the selection of women for precarious roles does not occur solely due to organizational crisis circumstances, but also through signaling mechanisms and organizational perceptions that associate certain female leadership styles with managing difficult situations.

These recent contributions broaden and refine the understanding of the glass cliff, providing evidence and explanations that complement the classic findings and reinforce the contextual interpretation of the phenomenon across various organizational and temporal conditions.

Below is a table with the metaphors used in research to illustrate these barriers, indicating which ones are emerging metaphors (Table 2).

Name of Metaphor	Definition	Key Authors	Origins	Existing/emerging metaphor
Glass Ceiling	Even those women who rose steadily through the ranks found themselves stopped at a glass ceiling an invisible barrier to advancement that seems to block women from the top jobs." (1986) "The glass ceiling is an invisible and structural barrier that prevents women and other traditionally marginalized groups from reaching the highest levels of responsibility and leadership in organizations, despite having the necessary skills and merits. This barrier is not formally established by rules or laws, but operates through biases, gender stereotypes, and institutional dynamics that hinder professional advancement." (1987)	Hymowitz & Schellhardt (1986); Morrison, White & Van-Velsor (1987)	Was first used in 1984 in Adweek magazine, in the profile of Gay Bryant, and later used in a Wall Street Journal article by Hymowitz and Schellhardt in 1986	Existing
Crystal Labyrinth	Set of complex and non-linear obstacles that women must overcome to reach positions of power.	Eagly & Carli (2007)	It emerges as a critique of the glass ceiling concept for being static.	Emergent, but it did not experience significant development
Glass Cliff	Women are more likely than men to be placed in leadership roles that are risky and precarious, where the chance of failure is higher. This places them on what we term the 'glass cliff'.	Ryan & Haslam (2005)	It was first introduced in an article published by social psychologists Ryan & Haslam in 2005 in a study published in the British Journal of Management	It is an emerging concept, as more and more women take on leadership positions and have to lead while facing new barriers
Sticky Floor	The sociologist Catherine White Berheide coined the metaphor to illustrate the difficulties faced by women who remain in low-paying, low-status positions in state and local government (Noble, 1992) "Women are less likely to be promoted from the lowest pay levels, even after controlling for qualifications, experience and part-time status. This supports the existence of a sticky floor rather than simply a glass ceiling." Booth, Francesconi & Frank (2003).	Berheide (1992) Booth, Francesconi & Frank (2003)	It emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s to describe a phenomenon I complementary to the glass ceiling, but one that operates at the lower levels of the workplace hierarchy.	Existing metaphor

Name of Metaphor	Definition	Key Authors	Origins	Existing/emerging metaphor
Leaky pipeline	Describes the phenomenon by which women and ethnic minorities progressively drop out of the educational and professional system in science and technology at each stage of the process, from school to employment	Berryman (1983); Blickenstaff (2005)	It was introduced by researcher Sue E. Berryman in 1983, in a report on the access of women and minorities to careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).	Existing metaphor
Crystal staircase	The concept refers to the phenomenon by which men who work in predominantly female professions, such as nursing, primary education, or social work, tend to rise more quickly to positions of greater responsibility, leadership, and visibility, even when they are not actively seeking such opportunities.	Williams (1992)	It was introduced by the sociologist Christine L. Williams in her article "The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the 'Female' Professions" published in 1992 in the journal Gender & Society	Existing metaphor that is revisited by its author because the author finds limitations in the original proposal
Glass of Walls	A less common metaphor than the "glass ceiling," but equally useful for describing gender barriers associated with certain departments, areas, or organizational functions that are traditionally feminized (such as human resources, communications, or social services), is the one that prevents access to key decision-making areas, such as finance, strategy, operations, or executive management.	Powell & Butterfield (2015)	It was used informally, but starting in the 2010s it began to be used in research applied to organizations.	Emergent
Broken Staircase	The metaphor describes how women face a critical barrier at the first rung of the professional ladder: the transition from entry-level employees to supervisory or initial management roles. This early interruption in their careers prevents many women from accessing the leadership track, thereby limiting female representation in the middle and upper levels of the organizational hierarchy.	McKinsey & Company (2019).	It was first introduced in the "Women in the Workplace" report prepared by McKinsey and Company and LeanIn.Org in 2019	Emergent, however, no reference was found in this review since it is not the result of a peer-reviewed paper
Inverted crystal cliff	Men benefit from inheriting positions regained after crises led by women.		It appears in case studies of companies, politics, and sports, where women are used as "transition leaders" and are not allowed to establish themselves.	Emerging, but there are no peer-reviewed articles yet
Glass bowl	When women are in leadership positions, they are placed under a microscope, which increases scrutiny, pressure, and criticism of their performance.	Morrison et al. (1987)	Its's appear in book: Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America's Largest Corporations? (published in Center for Creative Leadership).	Only one article refers to this metaphor

Table 2. Metaphors relationship

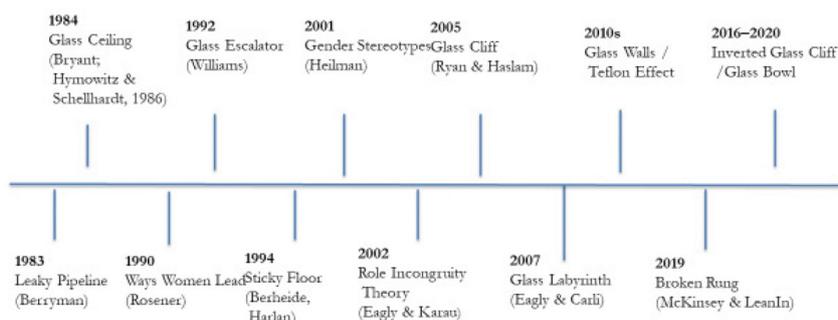We present a timeline proposal that allows us to visualize how these metaphors have been presented. (Figure 3)

Figure 3. Timeline of Metaphors and Barriers in Women's Leadership

3.3. Number of Publications

Regarding publications, Figure 4 shows an increase in the number of publications in recent years. In 2024, 4 articles were recorded; in 2023, 9 articles; and in 2022, 6 articles were registered, which may suggest a growing interest in this topic. In line with this idea, the fourth year with the highest number of publications was 2017, with a total of 4 articles. In the other years, the output ranges from 1 to 2 articles per year, and between 2010 and 2012, there was no recorded scientific production.
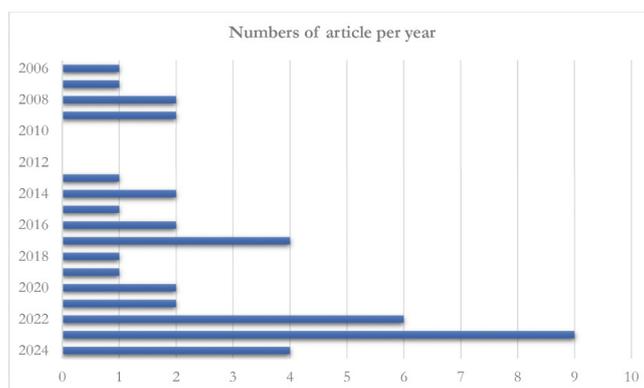

Figure 4. Numbers of article per year (Analysis of results. Based on searches
performed on the research topic. Web of Science. n.d.)

3.4. Countries where it is Published

Regarding the countries, as shown in Figure 5, the United States is the country with the highest scientific output on this topic with 14 publications, followed by England with 5 and Spain with 4 publications. Germany, the Netherlands, and the Republic of China each have 3 publications; Italy, Canada, and Australia have 2 published articles each. There is a diversity of countries interested in this topic, generally with more output in North America and Europe; in the case of Latin America, there are 2 publications, one in Colombia and another in Brazil.
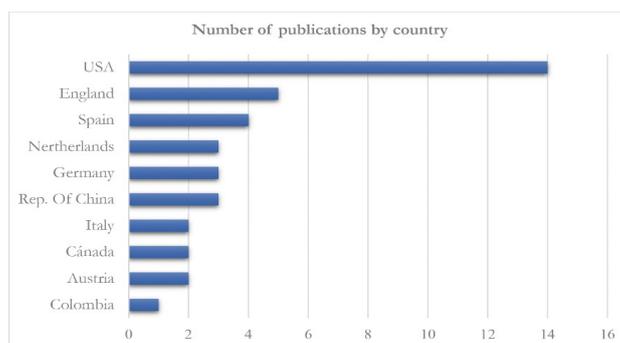

Figure 5. Number of publications by country (Analysis of results. Based on searches
performed on the research topic. Web of Science. n.d.)

3.5. Number of Publications and Citations

Regarding the most cited articles up to February 2, 2025, Table 3 shows that the works by Ryan and Haslam (2005) with 637 citations and Haslam and Ryan (2008) with 241 citations are the most prominent. These authors are recognized for their research in the field of social psychology, especially for their contribution to the concept of the "glass cliff." In third and fourth place are the authors Cook and Glass (2014) with 214 citations and Glass and Cook (2016) with 210 citations. These authors investigated three theories that may influence women's access to senior positions and their retention in those roles: the glass cliff, diversity in decision-making, and the savior effect (Cook & Glass, 2014; Glass & Cook, 2016). In fifth place is the article by American sociologist Williams (2013) with 184 citations. Williams (1992) coined the term "glass escalator" in her book "The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the 'Female' Professions," in which she explored how men working in traditionally female-dominated fields, such as nursing or teaching, often experience faster advancement in their careers compared to their female colleagues. The "glass escalator" highlights the advantages men may have in certain female-dominated professional contexts, in contrast to the barrier's women face in traditionally male environments. It is noted that the article by Sabharwal (2015) has fewer citations but more references than all the preceding articles, with a total of 152 references.

Position	Authors	Citations in WOS	Citations in all databases
1	Ryan & Haslam (2005)	637	930
2	Haslam & Ryan (2008)	241	336
3	Cook & Glass (2014)	214	427
4	Glass & Cook (2015)	210	448
5	Williams (2013)	184	280
6	Sabharwal (2015)	112	271
7	Schuh et al. (2014)	92	205
8	Zhou & Lee (2017)	88	134
9	Folke & Rickne (2016)	72	86
10	Field et al. (2020)	65	85

Table 3. Most cited publications (Analysis of results. Based on searches
performed on the research topic. Web of Science. n.d.)

In Figure 6, we find 5 clusters, with the most cited articles being: Ryan and Haslam (2005) "The Glass Cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions," followed by "The Road to the Glass Cliff: Differences in the Perceived Suitability of Men and Women for Leadership Positions in Succeeding and Failing Organizations," by the same authors in 2008. In third and fourth place are the articles by Glass and Cook (2016), "Leading at the Top: Understanding Women's Challenges Above the Glass Ceiling," and "Women and Top Leadership Positions: Towards an Institutional Analysis," by Cook and Glass in 2014.
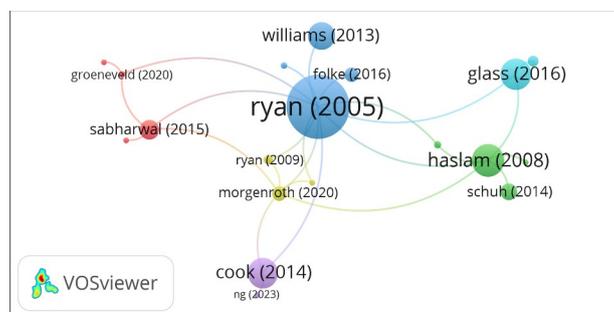

Figure 6. Most cited authors (VOS viewer)

It is identified that the years with the highest number of citations were 2023, followed by 2022 and 2024. According to Elsevier's Scimago journal classification, 61.9% of the reviewed articles belong to Q1 journals,

19% to Q2, 11.9% to Q3, and finally, 7.1% to Q4 (Figure 7). This suggests a high-quality output since nearly 80% of the articles are in the top quartiles.

It is worth noting that the studies analyzed in this review were published in journals indexed in the Web of Science, with a strong representation of Q1 and Q2 journals in the fields of organizational studies, leadership, and gender.
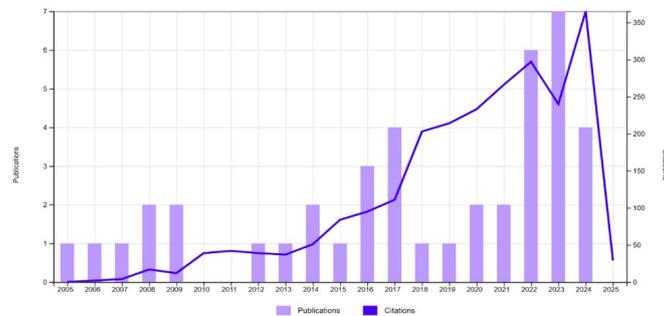

Figure 7. Times Cited and Publications Over Time (Analysis of results. Based on searches performed on the research topic. Web of Science. n.d.)

Of the 42 articles reviewed for this analysis, 6 articles were written by a single author and the remaining articles were co-authored. Likewise, most authors have only 1 article; only the authors Ryan and Haslam (2005) have 4 articles, and Cook and Glass (2014) have 2 articles, making them the most frequently cited authors, as mentioned previously (Table 4).

Authors	Record Count	% of 42
Haslam, S.A.	4	9.524
Ryan, M.K.	4	9.524
Cook, A.	2	4.762
Glass, C.	2	4.762
Abrahams, S.	1	2.381
Adams, J.	1	2.381
Al-ansari, M.	1	2.381
Al-salem, A.	1	2.381
Amon, M.J.	1	2.381
Andrews, R.	1	2.381
Antwi, A.A.	1	2.381
Arrizabalaga, P.	1	2.381
Attiogbe, E.J.	1	2.381
Aibar-Guzmán, B.	1	2.381
Aibar-Guzmán, C.	1	2.381
Avendaño-Sola, C.	1	2.381
Bakker, V.	1	2.381
Bark, A.S.H.	1	2.381
Basha, D.	1	2.381
Bautista, M.C.	1	2.381
Benkraiem, R.	1	2.381
Boafo, G.K.	1	2.381
Bohorquez, M.V.U.	1	2.381
Caladi, T.	1	2.381
Charway, D.	1	2.381

Table 4. Number of publications by authors (Analysis of results. Based on searches performed on the research topic. Web of Science. n.d.)

3.6. Journals where Publications

Appear The publications are distributed across a variety of journals (Table 5), with the most representative being the following: "Gender in Management" with 5 publications, a Q1 journal that began publishing in 2008 and focuses on gender issues within management and leadership contexts. "Leadership Quarterly" has 3 publications and is a social sciences journal dedicated to the scientific study of leadership. With 2 published articles each, the following journals are included: "British Journal of Management," a journal dedicated to management topics founded in 1990; "Frontiers in Psychology," the largest journal in its field according to the Scimago ranking, publishing research across all psychological sciences; "Gender & Society," a journal founded in 1987 that investigates gender issues; and "Gender, Work & Organization," founded in 1994, which focuses on gender equality and its role in the workplace.

Publication Titles	Record Count	% of 42
Gender in Management	5	11.905
Leadership Quarterly	3	7.143
British Journal of Management	2	4.762
Frontiers in Psychology	2	4.762
Gender Society	2	4.762
Gender Work and Organization	2	4.762
American Behavioral Scientist	1	2.381
Applied Economics Letters	1	2.381
Asian American Journal of Psychology	1	2.381
Behavior Therapy	1	2.381
Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences Revue Canadienne des Sciences de Administration	1	2.381
Comparative Political Studies	1	2.381
Human Resources for Health	1	2.381
Internasjonal Politikk	1	2.381
International Journal of Manpower	1	2.381
International Review for the Sociology of Sport	1	2.381
Journal of Business Ethics	1	2.381
Journal of Financial Economics	1	2.381
Journal of Medical Ethics	1	2.381
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	1	2.381
Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	1	2.381
Journal of Women Politics Policy	1	2.381
Journalism mass Communication Quarterly	1	2.381
Journalism Practice	1	2.381
Labor Economics	1	2.381

Table 5. Magazines where the publications are made (Analysis of results. Based on searches performed on the research topic. Web of Science. n.d.)

3.7. Publication Areas

With regard to the field of study in which the publications have been made, a diversity of applications can be observed, as shown in Figure 8. The most representative areas are Management with 39%, followed by Business with 28%, and Women's Studies with 25%.
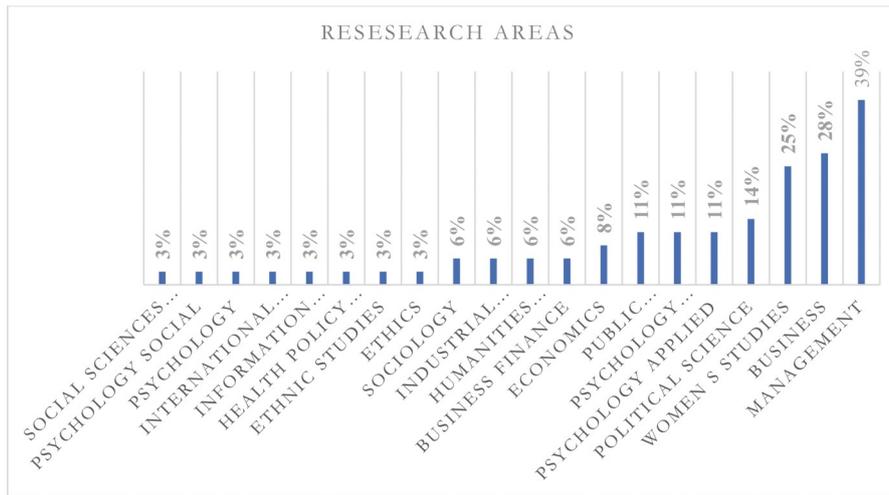
Figure 8. Research Areas (Analysis of results. Based on searches performed on the research topic. Web of Science. n.d.)

3.8. Keywords

The use of Web of Science allows access to the list of keywords for each article, which in turn facilitates the organization of conceptual categories within the theoretical framework or discussion in future research, providing a logical structure to the review. The most frequent word in the 42 articles reviewed in this study is "glass ceilings," a finding that was expected given that this term is commonly used to identify the barriers that prevent access to leadership positions. In second and third place are the words "leadership" and "female leadership," which refer to the exercise of leadership by women, considering not only their presence in positions of power or influence, but also the characteristics, styles, barriers, and opportunities that define their careers. The emerging metaphor known as the "glass cliff or glass sewer" is also identified, as well as, in its different dimensions, the results derived from the difficulty in accessing equitable conditions, such as inequality or gender gaps, stereotypes, and barriers. Below, a table is presented with the main keywords identified in this review. (Table 6).

Keywords	Frequency	Thematic Category
Glass ceiling	18	Metaphors of barriers
Leadership	15	Leadership
Leadership female/ executive/congregational	13	Leadership
Women in different fields	13	Gender
Gender inequality /structural inequality	12	Inequality/Gender
Gender	8	Inequality/Gender
Glass Cliff	8	Metaphors of barriers
Stereotypes	6	Limitations
Barriers	6	Inequality/Gender
Gender Gaps	5	Gender
Management	3	Company/Organization
Organizational Culture	2	Company/Organization
Social norms	2	Society
Structural inequality	2	Company/Organization
Organizational barriers	2	Company/Organization

Table 6. List of keywords

It has been included in a bibliometric analysis using VOS viewer software to obtain a list of keywords found in these articles (Figure 9).
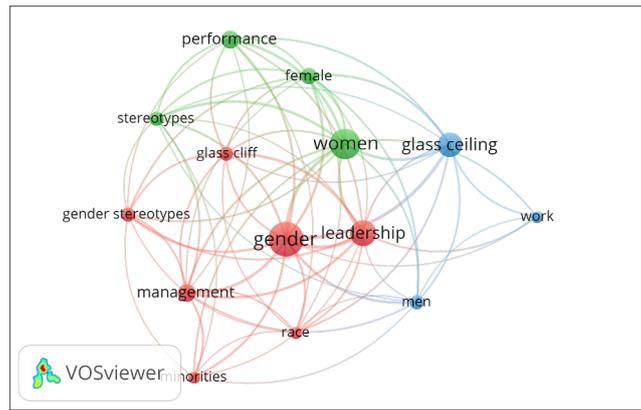
Figure 9. Keys words -VOS viewer

3.9. Application

The analysis of the empirical literature published between 2005 and 2024 shows that both internal and external barriers faced by women in accessing leadership positions persist across various organizational sectors, regardless of cultural context or level of economic development. Despite the progressive increase in women's participation in managerial roles, the studies reviewed agree that gender inequalities continue to be reproduced through deeply rooted structural, cultural, and organizational mechanisms.

From an organizational perspective, Sabharwal (2015) identifies the main barriers to female leadership as the lack of access to informal power networks, the limited availability of institutional resources, and the persistence of gender stereotypes in evaluation and promotion processes. These factors operate even within organizations that have formal equality policies, suggesting that the mere existence of rules does not guarantee substantive changes in power dynamics. Additionally, Furst and Reeves (2008) argue that women tend to attain managerial positions in organizational contexts characterized by high uncertainty and a need for change, where more participatory leadership styles are valued; however, these same contexts often entail greater risks and less stability, which limits the consolidation of their professional careers.

Regarding individual career paths, Matsa and Miller (2011) show that motherhood continues to be one of the most significant barriers to women's professional advancement, as it interrupts their careers and reduces their promotion opportunities compared to their male peers. This phenomenon is not only the result of personal decisions but also of organizational practices that penalize the reconciliation of work and family life. In the academic field, Heinrichs and Sonnabend (2023) demonstrate that, even in systems that present themselves as meritocratic, women have lower chances of reaching higher hierarchical positions and of remaining in academic careers, which reinforces the existence of structural barriers that operate throughout the entire professional trajectory.

Likewise, selection and promotion processes have been identified as a critical point for maintaining gender inequalities. Groeneveld et al. (2020) highlight that implicit biases in evaluation criteria and recruitment practices tend to place women in higher-risk or lower-projection scenarios, reinforcing phenomena such as the glass cliff. In sociocultural contexts marked by patriarchal norms, these dynamics intensify. Lari et al. (2022) show that cultural and organizational barriers systematically limit women's participation in leadership positions, although they note that a higher level of education can partially help mitigate these effects.

Recent sectoral studies in areas such as sports, journalism, and other traditionally male-dominated sectors confirm that these barriers are not exclusive to a single field of activity, but rather stem from shared organizational and cultural patterns. Although the specific manifestations may vary by sector, the evidence suggests that the combination of gender stereotypes, exclusion from informal networks, and rigid organizational practices continues to limit women's access to and presence in leadership positions.

Taken together, the application of the findings from this review highlights the need for organizations to move beyond normative or symbolic approaches and adopt structural strategies aimed at revising their selection, promotion, and performance evaluation processes. The implementation of mentoring and sponsorship

programs, the strengthening of support networks, the incorporation of transparent promotion criteria, and training in inclusive leadership emerge as key mechanisms to reduce persistent barriers and move toward greater gender equity in organizational leadership.

3.10. Advances in the Study of Barriers to Female Leadership
3.10.1. Conceptual and Theoretical Advances

 In the last two decades, the study of barriers to female leadership, explained through metaphors, has undergone conceptual advances. While early research focused mainly on the concept of the glass ceiling as a static and invisible barrier preventing women from accessing higher hierarchical positions (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986; Morrison et al., 1987), later studies have broadened this perspective by proposing more dynamic and complex models.

In this regard, Eagly and Carli (2007) introduced the metaphor of the glass labyrinth, arguing that the career paths of women are marked by multiple obstacles that can appear at different stages of their careers, and not only in access to top management. This reconceptualization allowed the analysis to expand toward a more hopeful, process-oriented view of female leadership.

A relevant conceptual advance is the incorporation of emerging metaphors that reflect new forms of inequality, such as the glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005), the sticky floor (Berheide, 1992), and the leaky pipeline (Berryman, 1983). These metaphors make it possible to capture not only barriers to access, but also those that affect the retention, performance, and professional progression of women in different organizational contexts.

3.10.2. Empirical Advances and Debate in the Evidence

At the empirical level, the most significant advances stem from the growing availability of longitudinal and comparative data, which have made it possible to test the initial hypotheses about female leadership. The pioneering studies by Ryan and Haslam (2005) and Haslam and Ryan (2008) showed that women are more likely than men to be appointed to lead organizations in times of crisis, which increases their risk of failure and exposure to scrutiny.

However, subsequent research has sparked considerable debate in the field. For example, Cook and Glass (2014) and Glass and Cook (2016) did not find conclusive evidence that women are systematically promoted to CEO positions in companies undergoing crises, although they did find that a greater female presence on boards of directors increases the likelihood that women will attain and retain executive positions.

These findings have helped to nuance the concept of the glass cliff, shifting the focus from an explanation based solely on risk to a broader understanding that incorporates institutional factors, power networks, and organizational governance dynamics. Likewise, Ryan et al. (2016) suggest that men may be less willing to accept precarious leadership positions, which opens up new avenues of research on decision-making in crisis contexts.

3.10.3. Applied and Organizational Advances

In the applied field, recent studies have begun to explore organizational strategies aimed at mitigating barriers to female leadership. Among the most notable advances are the design of diversity and inclusion policies, the implementation of mentoring and sponsorship programs, and the adoption of gender quotas on boards of directors and executive teams (Flabbi et al., 2017; Dezsö & Ross, 2012).

Likewise, there has been increased interest in analyzing the impact of female leadership on organizational performance, innovation, and corporate social responsibility. Some studies suggest that gender diversity in senior management is associated with better decision-making processes and greater organizational sustainability, although these results vary depending on the sectoral and cultural context (Glass & Cook, 2016; Dezsö & Ross, 2012).

Another term found in the literature, though less frequently, is the "Glass Escalator," coined by Williams (1992). This term refers to the advantage's men receive in professions traditionally considered feminine, such as nursing, teaching, librarianship, and social work. It includes the presumption that men are more suitable than women for leadership positions in these fields.

Overall, these advances reflect a progressive shift from a descriptive approach to a more strategic and applied analysis, which seeks not only to understand existing barriers but also to identify mechanisms to overcome them.

4. Conclusions

The objective of this research is to explore the latest trends regarding the barriers women face in taking on leadership positions, reviewing for this purpose the studies conducted over the past 20 years, from 2005 to 2024.

In previous research, most studies on these topics focused on defining and explaining "female leadership." Gutek (2001) refers to how female leadership was studied during the 1980s and 1990s. Eagly and Carli (2007) introduce the concept of "labyrinths of glass" to describe the obstacles women face when trying to reach leadership positions. Unlike glass ceilings, they consider these obstacles as a labyrinth, since they are encountered exclusively by women and there are ways to navigate around them. The obstacles include prejudice, resistance to female leadership, family responsibilities, and low investment in social capital. Another contribution by Eagly and Carli (2007) is the assertion that theoretical definitions of leadership have been built from the male experience in organizations, ignoring female characteristics, which means that, in many cases, women do not fit the leader role. Furthermore, Eagly and Karau (2002) developed the Role Incongruity Theory, which states that men and women are assigned specific roles in society, and when people do not behave according to those roles, it leads to rejection, lack of commitment, and an inadequate perception of their performance. Traditionally, women have been assigned roles that emphasize human interactions, interest in social causes, and supporting others, while men are assigned roles focused on power, authority, and achievement, traits associated with strong leadership. Heilman (2001) posits that the reason women do not reach leadership positions lies in the "stereotypical conceptions of what women are like and how they should behave" (Heilman, 2001). Therefore, men are characterized as aggressive, achievement-oriented, independent, and decisive, while women are described as kind, helpful, understanding, and caring towards others. The conceptions about women and men are not only different but are often opposite, with the belief that members of one sex lack what is considered most common in members of the other sex (Heilman, 2001). In studies conducted by Rosener (1990), it was found that women tend to have a transformational leadership style, as they seek to interact and listen to the opinions of all employees, are charismatic leaders, people-oriented, highly dedicated to work, and enjoy building relationships with others.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in investigating the barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership positions, commonly known as "glass ceilings." A review of the existing literature confirms that this concept remains relevant today, and the barriers continue to be the same despite significant advances in the development of women in leadership roles.

Based on a review of the literature, it is observed that barriers to female leadership are consistently reproduced across different organizational sectors, regardless of the field of activity. Recent studies in contexts such as academia and politics show that, even in environments that present themselves as meritocratic, women face greater obstacles than men in accessing and consolidating leadership positions, due to the persistence of gender biases, masculinized organizational cultures, and limited access to power networks (Lari et al., 2022; Xiao, Pinkney, Li & Paul, 2023; Counter, Wali, Gaeun, Sabeena, Jessica, Lucy et al., 2023).

Complementarily, research in sectors such as sports, health, and journalism confirm that these barriers are not specific to a single field but instead reflect shared structural patterns, characterized by lower female representation in leadership positions, greater penalties associated with family responsibilities, and more demanding evaluation standards for women compared to their male counterparts (Charway & Strandbu, 2023; Heinrichs & Sonnabend, 2023; Martinez-Corcuera & Faedo, 2024). Taken together, the reviewed evidence shows that sex-based differences in access to leadership persist across sectors, reinforcing the need to address this phenomenon from both organizational and gender perspectives.

The findings of this review confirm the relevance of the glass cliff concept for understanding contemporary dynamics of female leadership, while also highlighting the need to approach it critically and within context. The literature shows that although there has been an increase in the presence of women in leadership positions, these

appointments occur more frequently in organizations facing crises, high uncertainty, or reputational decline—situations where the risk of failure is significantly higher (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan et al., 2016).

Nonetheless, more recent research nuances this interpretation. Empirical studies indicate that the assignment of women to precarious leadership positions is not solely a response to organizational crises, but is also mediated by institutional factors such as the composition of boards of directors, selection processes, and the availability of internal support networks (Cook & Glass, 2014; Glass & Cook, 2016). These works suggest that in contexts with more inclusive governance structures, the likelihood that women will attain and remain in leadership positions increases, partially reducing the risk associated with the glass cliff.

Likewise, the evidence reviewed indicates that even after breaking through the glass ceiling, women continue to face barriers similar to those encountered in earlier stages of their professional careers, including disproportionate organizational pressures, challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, and exclusion from informal decision-making spaces. In this regard, Groeneveld et al. (2020) highlight the need to critically review selection and promotion processes to avoid gender biases that systematically place women in high-risk scenarios, thereby limiting their tenure and consolidation in leadership roles.

We dare to suggest that these barriers persist due to the lack of clear policies in countries, both at the educational and business levels, to address this issue, as evidenced in the literature. The role of women as the primary caregivers of children is one of the most frequently mentioned barriers in the literature, being a deeply rooted topic in the social structure and, therefore, difficult to solve. Likewise, the cultural association of leadership with masculinity persists, which intensifies the negative attribution toward women leaders. This phenomenon becomes a vicious circle, as the characteristics of leadership positions are defined based on the male profile, and women, having different characteristics, can hardly fit this profile, which ultimately leads to the selection of a male figure, perpetuating the cycle. Another possible reason is the lack of clear willingness on the part of some governments and organizations to improve equity, thus perpetuating traditional leadership systems. However, we consider it necessary to further investigate this issue, given that no significant evidence has been found in the reviewed articles.

In relation to what some researchers have pointed out concerning the development of women as leaders, the importance of providing greater access to education from an early age is emphasized. This access is essential for ensuring greater opportunities in the future and for leveling the playing field for candidates seeking leadership positions. One of the arguments frequently used to justify the lack of opportunities for women is the supposed lack of training or insufficient education compared to the academic backgrounds of male applicants.

Likewise, establishing mentoring or sponsorship programs is fundamental, as research has shown that the presence of women on boards or in management positions makes it easier for other women to feel more comfortable in leadership roles. Furthermore, this allows talented women to connect with mentors who support their development and growth, thereby promoting their professional advancement.

On the other hand, the implementation of career paths and the training of women to take on leadership roles are fundamental steps to promote their professional development. Furthermore, companies should incorporate training programs that include topics such as inclusive leadership, unbiased decision-making, and gender equality training for executives.

The implementation of gender quotas in companies can be beneficial, although their application often generates controversy. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that this measure can serve as a first step toward creating more equitable work environments.

Additionally, it is fundamental to establish support networks where women can share experiences, advice, and resources, which is essential for strengthening their development as leaders. These networks offer a safe space for the exchange of knowledge and the building of relationships that can be crucial for women's professional success. Taken together, these actions can make a significant contribution to promoting gender equality in leadership and to empowering women in all fields.

An important topic that has not been explored in depth in these studies and which would also contribute to the development of this subject is gaining a better understanding of the outcomes of women in leadership positions.

Only one article has been found that bases its results on a study about the relationship between female leadership and organizational performance, focusing on how the presence of women in management roles can influence productivity and the allocation of resources within companies. In the article by Fiabi et al. (2017), it is mentioned that the presence of women in top management is associated with better performance, especially in sectors where diversity is valued. Furthermore, companies led by women demonstrate more equitable practices in hiring and talent management, and the impact of female leadership varies depending on the sector and organizational characteristics.

Figure 10 seeks to represent, in a linear manner although this is not always the case the path women take to access leadership positions, as well as the barriers they face and the names of the metaphors commonly used to represent these obstacles. This model could serve as a basis for validation in future research.

It is proposed that women go through a series of phases over the course of their professional careers, and in each of these phases, there are specific barriers, although other barriers may also still be present.

First phase: Starting Point: Sticky Floor and Leaky Pipeline

- Associated metaphors: Sticky floor (Berheide, 1992), leaky pipeline (Berryman, 1983)
- Characteristics: women trapped in low-paying jobs with few prospects for advancement; gradual dropout throughout their academic or professional careers.
- Predominant barriers: lack of opportunities for training, job insecurity, initial recruitment biases, domestic overload.
- Coping strategies:
  - Public policies that ensure access to education and ongoing training.
  - Early workplace flexibility and work-life balance.
  - Job placement and networking programs starting at entry-level stages.

Second phase: Intermediate Ascent: Glass Ceilings, Walls, and Labyrinths

- Associated metaphors: Glass ceiling (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986), glass walls, glass labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007).
- Characteristics: at middle management levels, women encounter invisible barriers blocking their promotion to senior positions or confining them to feminized areas (HR, communications, teaching).
- Predominant barriers: structural discrimination, gender stereotypes, exclusion from power networks, lack of role models and mentors.
- Coping strategies:
  - Reforming hiring and promotion processes to eliminate biases.
  - Implementing well-designed gender quotas.
  - Encouraging mentoring and sponsorship with female leaders and male allies.
  - Promoting diversity in strategic areas (finance, operations, strategy).

Third phase: Reaching the Top: The Glass Cliff and the Broken Rung

- Associated metaphors: Glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005), broken rung (McKinsey, 2019), inverted glass cliff.
- Characteristics: when women break through the glass ceiling, many are appointed to leadership positions during times of crisis, increasing their risk of failure and reinforcing stereotypes of supposed "female incapacity." Moreover, at the "first rung" (broken rung), a slowdown in career progression can already be observed.
- Predominant barriers: instability of the positions attained, overexposure to scrutiny, lack of organizational support, social and family pressure.
- Coping strategies:
  - Equitable distribution of leadership roles in both risky and successful contexts.
  - Support networks among women leaders to navigate critical situations.
  - Inclusive policies for shared family responsibility (shared leave, flexible work).
  - Resilience and crisis leadership training programs.

Cross-cutting Coping Strategies

- Throughout the journey, the reviewed literature highlights some common approaches to overcoming barriers:
- Early education and training as a driver of mobility.
- Visibility of female leadership models in various sectors.
- Mentoring and support networks (networking) within and between institutions.
- Inclusive public and organizational policies that address structural biases.
- Cultural change regarding gender roles and the association of leadership with masculinity.
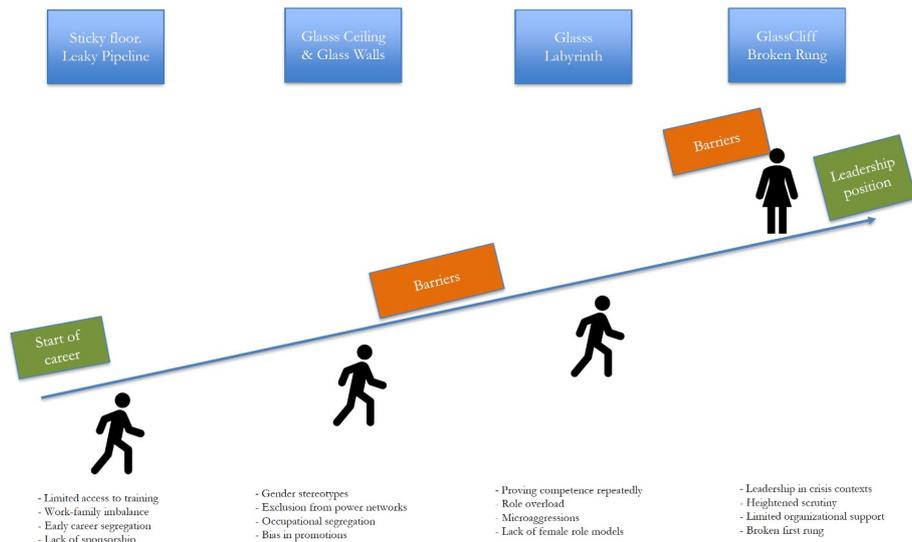

Figure 10. Timeline of Barriers in Women's Path to Leadership

The reviewed studies show that barriers to access and retention in leadership positions do not affect women and men in the same way. While men tend to follow more linear career paths with fewer penalties associated with family responsibilities or role stereotypes, women experience greater structural, cultural, and organizational obstacles throughout their careers. In particular, the literature indicates that women are more frequently evaluated under stricter standards, face greater penalties related to motherhood, and have less access to informal power networks, which deepens gender gaps in leadership positions. These sex-based differences underscore the need to address leadership from a gender perspective that recognizes persistent structural inequalities.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the literature by offering an integrative and updated synthesis of the internal and external barriers women face in accessing and remaining in leadership positions. By articulating both classic and emerging organizational metaphors such as the glass ceiling, the glass cliff, the sticky floor, and the leaky pipeline, this review provides a dynamic and process-oriented understanding of women's leadership trajectories. Additionally, by consolidating high-impact empirical evidence published between 2005 and 2024 in journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus, the study brings theoretical clarity and establishes a conceptual foundation for future empirical research and for the design of organizational interventions aimed at promoting gender equity in leadership.

5. Future Research

As has been shown through the review conducted, there is an abundance of information about the barriers to accessing leadership positions and some proposed interventions. However, very little research has been done on how to prevent these barriers from arising in the first place. The focus has been on presenting proposals to overcome them through education, training, mentoring, and changes in culture and laws, rather than on developing initiatives to create an environment where such barriers cannot emerge. We believe that this is a very important and decisive line of research for achieving better development of women in all areas of life.

One line of research we propose is to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics that women possess to overcome these barriers and move forward. Various studies have shown that women have attained leadership positions both in times of crisis and in companies with good results, and they have performed exceptionally well. This raises the following questions: Is there a common trait among these women? Have they had to adopt more "masculine" characteristics, or have they maintained their own characteristics?

A third line of research focuses on determining whether the positive outcomes for women in attaining leadership positions and the existing barriers can be associated with certain cultures, such as European, American, or Latin. Throughout the research, it becomes evident that these barriers are present in all fields, including the clergy, medicine, sports, and politics. However, there is no specific information available regarding the different regions or cultures that would allow for comparisons and an assessment of whether the customs of various peoples have a greater or lesser influence on the existence and development of these barriers.

Likewise, it is essential that research facilitates the identification of methods for both private and public companies, as well as governments, to actively commit to implementing solutions and monitoring their effectiveness over time. It is crucial to delve deeper into which of these governmental strategies or corporate regulations have proven effective and assess their potential for application in other organizations and states. Only through a collaborative and ongoing effort will it be possible to overcome these barriers and move toward a more just and equitable society for all.

In addition, it is important that research not only identifies existing barriers, but also proposes concrete and effective solutions to address them. This will make it possible to develop more effective proposals and intervention strategies, especially through educational initiatives and national and international government legislation.

In relation to the metaphor of the "glass cliff or drain," further research is needed to determine the validity of the hypothesis that women are chosen to lead companies in crisis. The studies conducted by Ryan, Halsman, Cook, among others, do not allow for a definitive conclusion on this matter. Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate in different contexts and types of companies whether women can successfully manage organizations just as men do. The results obtained so far, due to the small sample size, make it difficult to obtain meaningful data that would allow for a more conclusive response.

Validation of the proposed model: conduct an empirical assessment of the relevance of the metaphor model developed, identify its limitations, and propose adjustments to allow for greater applicability and conceptual precision.

Examine how other alternative theoretical frameworks, such as theories of power, intersectionality, or action theory, can contribute to a deeper understanding of the persistence of gender barriers in leadership.

6. Limitations

Despite the methodological rigor applied in this systematic review, it is necessary to acknowledge certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

Firstly, the literature search was conducted exclusively in the Web of Science database. While this decision was based on criteria of academic quality and selectivity, it is possible that relevant studies indexed in other databases, such as Scopus, EBSCO, or Google Scholar, were not included.

Secondly, the review was limited to peer-reviewed empirical studies, excluding gray literature, institutional reports, and book chapters. This decision contributes to methodological consistency, but it may have excluded applied approaches or emerging perspectives relevant to the analysis of female leadership, such as the concept of the "Broken Rung" published by McKinsey and Company (2019).

Likewise, most of the studies analyzed are published in English, which could create a linguistic bias and limit the representation of research conducted in other cultural or regional contexts.

On the other hand, by using the range of years (2005-2024) as exclusion criteria, earlier studies that could contribute to understanding the historical context of the barriers are omitted. Other limitations may arise from the nature of the studies themselves, as some are qualitative, others quantitative, and others mixed-methods, making it difficult to achieve a uniform synthesis.

The query used may have limited the range of topics covered by the articles reviewed. For example, there were no references found regarding the importance or the role played by women in these positions, a crucial topic to support the necessary improvements at all levels to eliminate the barriers women face when accessing leadership positions, as well as new theories that explain this phenomenon.

Finally, thematic content analysis, although systematic, involves an interpretive component on the part of the researchers, which can influence the categorization and synthesis of the barriers identified. Future research could complement these findings through empirical studies, comparative analyses between databases, or mixed methodological approaches.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest either among the authors themselves or with any third parties.

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Annex 1: List of articles

	AUTHORS	ARTICLE TITLE	YEAR OF PUBLICATION	REFERENCE TO BARRIERS	TYPE OF RESEARCH
1	Urbániková, M; Caladi, T	The Many Shades of Sexism: Female Journalists in Leadership Positions Reflect on Barriers to Career Advancement in Journalism	2024	Gender inequality in society. Many women take on more household and childcare responsibilities, and journalism demands long and unpredictable hours. Many women doubt themselves more, apply less often, or wait to be "100% ready" before applying for leadership positions, while men are more likely to take risks. Important decisions are often made within informal men's networks ("old boys' clubs"), where women are not invited or cannot participate.	Qualitative with semi-structured interviews
2	Martínez-Corcuera, R; Faedo, NI	From Glass Ceilings to Harassment: Women's Experiences in Spanish Sports Newsrooms	2024	Glass ceilings: even when they work as much or more, women face barriers to reaching management or leadership positions. Constant questioning: women are tested all the time. Male-dominated work culture: it is described as a "men's environment," with crude jokes, unequal treatment, and a lack of real support. Less visibility in key spaces: They have little participation in opinion columns, cover stories, and prestigious reporting assignments.	Qualitative with semi-structured interviews
3	Lakhal, F; Hamrouni, A; Jilani, I; Mahjoub, I; Benkraiem, R	The power of inclusion: Does leadership gender diversity promote corporate and green innovation?	2024	Underrepresentation in senior management. Reliance on "quotas" as the only strategy. Few independent women present	Quantitative, empirical study with panel data
4	Kang, M; Park, J; Le, CN; Kang-Le, S	How Glass Ceilings and Iron Rice Bowls Create Glass Bowls: Gendered Barriers and Protections in Public Sector Employment in South Korea	2024	Reference is made to gender barriers ("glass ceiling") and job security ("iron rice bowl") in the South Korean public sector. While the glass ceiling refers to invisible and impenetrable barriers, especially, but not exclusively related to gender, the concept of the glass bowl also emphasizes the fragility of glass to highlight the tenuous progress women have made in long-term employment and leadership positions. It shows how women are drawn to the public sector due to protections in hiring and long-term employment, yet face persistent barriers regarding promotions, pay, and leadership roles, especially if they are mothers	Empirical qualitative and comparative study
5	Garcia-Sanchez, IM; Bohorquez, MVU; Aibar-Guzmán, C; Aibar-Guzmán, B	The COVID-19, a crossroads for female directors	2024	Persistent glass ceiling at the highest levels of corporate governance. Exclusion of women from strategic committees and informal power networks. Higher likelihood of women being laid off during economic crises. Increase in domestic and caregiving responsibilities, which affects women's availability and productivity. Reinforcement of gender stereotypes associated with the caregiver role.	Empirical and quantitative research
6	Charway, Derrick; Strandbu, Ase	Participation of girls and women in community sport in Ghana: Cultural and structural barriers	2024	Gender stereotypes (sports as a "man's thing"). Overload of household and caregiving tasks assigned to girls and women. Religious beliefs that restrict female participation. Early marriages and pregnancies. Male power networks and resistance to female leadership. Delegitimization and questioning of women who attain positions of authority.	Qualitative research, with semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and focus groups.
7	Da Silva, SMC; Nova, SPDC	Stained glass ceilings: Gender and race in accounting academia in Brazil	2024	Inequality in access to academic networks and funding. Promotion processes dependent on subjective decisions. Women of color face double exclusion based on gender and race, even when they have equivalent or superior academic credentials.	Qualitative research with semi-structured and in-depth interviews.
8	Zhang, CZ; Basha, D	Women as leaders: the glass ceiling effect on women's leadership success in public bureaucracies	2023	Salary discrimination. Lack of training and development opportunities. Rigid and biased organizational policies. Teamwork hindered by gender bias. Greater exposure to risk and precarious conditions when occupying high-level positions (glass cliff effect).	Empirical and quantitative study
9	Xiao, Yunyu; Pinkney, Edward; Li, Tianzi; Yip, Paul S. F.	Breaking through the glass ceiling: unveiling women's representation by gender and race in the higher education hierarchy	2023	Lack of real opportunities for advancement: although there are more women in universities, few reach senior positions. Double difficulty (gender + race): a woman from an ethnic minority faces more obstacles than a white woman. "Leaky pipeline": many women and minorities drop out along the way before reaching managerial positions. Pay gaps and workplace inequality: it is noted that there are salary differences (for example, between white and minority academics), which reflects structural inequality.	Empirical, quantitative, and retrospective.

	AUTHORS	ARTICLE TITLE	YEAR OF PUBLICATION	REFERENCE TO BARRIERS	TYPE OF RESEARCH
10	Santucci, C; López-Valcarcel, BG; Avendaño-Sola, C; Bautista, MC; Pino, CG; García, LL; Martín-Perez, E; López, PG	Gender inequity in the medical profession: the women doctors in Spain (WOMEDS) study	2023	There are many women working in medicine, but they do not rise to leadership positions, deaneries, or presidencies in the same proportion. Women have less access to funding and receive smaller budgets, which limits their career and scientific leadership opportunities. Medical organizations continue to operate with historical patterns where high-ranking positions have been held by men for decades.	Quantitative and descriptive
11	Ng, ES; McGowan, RA	Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Views of Women from the Second-Wave Feminist Movement	2023	Family care, institutional barriers, and individual psychological factors	qualitative, theoretical, and conceptual review based on historical-documentary analysis.
12	Markwei, U; Attiogbe, EJ; Antwi, AA; Boafo, GK	Women in uniform breaking the glass ceiling? An exploratory study of female officers in leadership positions in Ghana's Security Services	2023	The commonly identified subtopics are discrimination, underrepresentation, biological factors, and work-family balance. Pregnancy and childbirth turned out to be one of the main challenges faced by the participants. The findings of the study also suggest that, although both men and women are considered equal in the service, women faced challenges in their daily experiences as leaders due to their gender. Gender barriers created a strenuous situation for women to ascend to higher leadership positions in the Security Services.	Qualitative and exploratory
13	Ihmels, A; Haslam, SA; Shemla, M; Wegge, J	Through a Glass Cliff Darkly Evidence That the Media Visibility of Companies Moderates Their Willingness to Appoint Women to Leadership Positions in Times of Crisis	2023	Women attain leadership in contexts of risk, not under stable conditions. Women are perceived as more suitable for "rescue" roles during crises, but less so in situations of sustained success. There is greater scrutiny and pressure on their decisions. This reinforces inequalities by associating women with organizational failures.	quantitative empirical research
14	Counter, William B.; Ahmed, Wali; Rhee, Gaeun; Jalal, Sabeena; Singh, Jessica; Lei, Lucy Y.; Khosa, Faisal	Are Differences in Research Performance Creating a Glass Ceiling for Women Faculty in Business Schools?	2023	Gender disparity still exists in academic ranks and leadership positions.	Quantitative and descriptive research
15	Andrews, R	Do women leaders of nonprofit public service organisations help to reduce the gender pay gap?	2023	Glass ceiling: women can reach high levels, but not necessarily the "top position" or positions with real power. Representation without impact: having women in high positions doesn't always mean real changes for other women (sometimes it's more symbolic). Feminized but poorly paid sectors increase the wage gap because many women end up concentrated in lower-salary jobs.	Empirical and quantitative
16	Pastwa-Wojciechowska, B; Chybicka, A	Outstanding women psychologists mainly from Europe - What helped and what limited them in their scientific careers? Guidelines for gender equity programs in academia	2022	Less visibility and less access to management positions. Double burden: academic work + traditional roles. Less support from partners in some contexts. It is mentioned that some women receive less respect in male-dominated spaces (for example, committees or working with male students/doctoral candidates).	Qualitative (research based on narratives/professional biography).
17	Lari, N; Al-Ansari, M; El-Maghraby, E	Challenging gender norms: women's leadership, political authority, and autonomy	2022	It is believed that men make better leaders than women. Many people feel more comfortable taking orders from a man than from a woman. Women are expected to prioritize family and home over their professional careers. Marriage and motherhood are often seen as more important than a woman's professional development. High-level positions continue to be held primarily by men. Some women doubt their own abilities because they have grown up hearing that leadership is "a man's thing."	Empirical and quantitative
18	Heinrichs, K; Sonnabend, H	Leaky pipeline or glass ceiling? Empirical evidence from the German academic career ladder	2022	Greater need for workplace flexibility, especially due to maternity or family responsibilities. Social factors and gender norms that influence decisions and opportunities. Possible indirect discrimination in hiring/promotion.	Quantitative (statistical analysis with surveys and probability models)
19	Manzi, F; Heilman, ME	Breaking the Glass Ceiling: For One and All?	2021	Gender stereotypes that portray women as lacking "what it takes" to be a good leader.	Theoretical and critical review article
20	De Paola, M; Lombardo, R; Pupo, V; Scoppa, V	Do Women Shy Away from Public Speaking? A Field Experiment *	2021	Many women may have the same abilities as men, but they are more likely to avoid activities where they will be observed, evaluated, or publicly judged (such as presenting, speaking in large meetings, or sharing ideas).	Quantitative, field experiment
21	Morgenroth, T; Kirby, TA; Ryan, MK; Sudkamper, A	The Who, When, and Why of the Glass Cliff Phenomenon: A Meta-Analysis of Appointments to Precarious Leadership Positions	2020	The glass cliff means that when a woman is chosen during a crisis, she enters with a high risk of failure, which creates a greater emotional burden (stress, exposure, burnout). A perception is triggered that crises require "feminine" traits such as cooperation or caring (the think crisis–think female association), which can influence how women are evaluated and in what situations they are selected. Women break the glass ceiling but end up in unstable or difficult positions (precarious leadership). In more unequal countries, the glass cliff is stronger. This shows that the problem is also cultural and structural, not just organizational.	Quantitative, systematic review + meta-analysis.

	AUTHORS	ARTICLE TITLE	YEAR OF PUBLICATION	REFERENCE TO BARRIERS	TYPE OF RESEARCH
22	Groeneveld, S; Bakker, V; Schmidt, E	Breaking the glass ceiling, but facing a glass cliff? The role of organizational decline in women's representation in leadership positions in Dutch civil service organizations	2020	Glass ceiling: difficulties in initially accessing leadership positions. Glass cliff: higher likelihood of being appointed in crisis situations. Leadership stereotypes that consider women more suitable for resolving conflicts, but not for leading in stable times. Lack of organizational support and power networks to secure their permanence. Greater scrutiny and social pressure compared to their male peers	The article is based on empirical research, with a quantitative approach supported by data on appointments and organizational performance, complemented by comparative analyses to validate the glass cliff phenomenon.
23	Field, LC; Souther, ME; Yore, AS	At the table but can not break through the glass ceiling:Board leadership positions elude diverse directors	2020	Structural biases in the labor market that favor men in hiring and promotions. Social norms and family expectations that pressure women to leave or scale back their professional careers. Gaps in access to professional networks and mentors, which limits opportunities for advancement. Higher professional dropout rates among women due to challenges in balancing work and family. Cumulative effects of small disadvantages that, over time, turn into more pronounced glass ceilings.	Empirical and quantitative
24	Fu, GC; Wei, JX; Shi, YL; Yan, YF; Li, YJ; Zhan, JH; Wang, JF	Examining Discrimination against Women, non-Han Minorities, Intellectuals, and non-Communist Members among the Current China's Provincial Political Elites	2018	Traditional gender biases that continue to associate women with domestic roles. Preference for traditionally male political paths. Concentration of power in male-dominated structures. Social expectations that prioritize the female family role, reducing their availability for long and demanding political careers.	Empirical and quantitative
25	Zhou, M; Lee, J	Hyper-Selectivity and the Remaking of Culture: Understanding the Asian American Achievement Paradox	2017	Glass ceilings: difficulty accessing leadership positions despite academic success. Cultural and social pressure that limits individual career choices. Structural discrimination that persists in the labor market and in access to leadership.	Mixed theoretical and empirical study
26	Flabbi, L; Piras, C; Abrahams, S	Female corporate leadership in Latin America and the Caribbean region Representation and firm-level outcomes	2017	Gaps in access to leadership: women still have a lower likelihood of reaching top positions. Gender stereotypes create biases in the perception of their leadership abilities. Rigid organizational structures limit inclusion in networks of power. Lack of sustainable equality policies that encourage female participation.	The study is quantitative and empirical, based on the econometric analysis of company data and their performance in relation to the gender composition in leadership positions.
27	Amon, MJ	Looking through the Glass Ceiling: A Qualitative Study of STEM Women's Career Narratives	2017	Many participants point out that they are not recognized as leaders, and therefore must constantly prove their abilities and establish legitimacy through positive relationships. Women are highly aware of how they are perceived by others, which consumes additional time and energy. Several women reported difficulties in finding mentors and also real-life role models who allow them to imagine "professional success + a viable personal life." The idea is repeated that women have less access to support networks, internal reputation, and strategic connections ("social capital").	Qualitive Research
28	Al-Salem, A; Speece, M	Women in leadership in Kuwait: a research agenda	2017	Cultural and social: stereotypes about the role of women, family and social pressure. Absence of equality policies and lack of support. Networks dominated by men, discrimination in promotion processes. Self-limitation due to the internalization of stereotypes	The study is qualitative and analytical in nature, based on a review of literature, theoretical frameworks on gender and leadership, and analysis of specific cultural contexts.
29	Williams, CL	THE GLASS ESCALATOR, REVISITED: Gender Inequality in Neoliberal Times, SWS Feminist Lecturer	2016	Persistence of gender stereotypes in traditionally feminized professions. Lack of job security and protections within the neoliberal framework, which widens inequality. Limitation of professional advancement for women, even in sectors where they have broad representation.	Theoretical research and critical review.
30	Simpson, R; Kumra, S	The Teflon effect: when the glass slipper meets merit	2016	Their ideas are questioned more, their authority is perceived as "harsh" or "unpleasant," or their confidence is interpreted negatively. The idea of the "ideal leader" is still male and they tend to receive more recognition. Women often feel they have to be very careful about the way they speak, behave, and dress.	Conceptual and theoretical studies
31	Glass, Christy; Cook, Alison	Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the glass ceiling	2016	Rise in high-risk positions: they are appointed when the company is in crisis and it is easier to fail. Less support and less real power: less authority compared to the board of directors. Open or subtle resistance to their authority: colleagues or subordinates ignore them, discredit them, or do not accept their leadership. Exclusion from key networks: informal spaces dominated by men (for example, social events and golf). Excessive self-demand: they feel they cannot afford to make mistakes. Anxiety about image and impression: constant concern about how they will be evaluated. Exhaustion and burnout from having to prove themselves twice as much for years.	Mixed approach: qualitative and quantitative
32	Folke, O; Rickne, J	The Glass Ceiling in Politics: Formalization and Empirical Tests	2016	Discriminatory promotions based on gender, more evident at the top of the hierarchy. Cumulative effects of constant disadvantages: a lower probability at each level results in a large gap at the peak. Biases in the allocation of resources and political networks: men receive more informal support, facilitating their advancement. Differences in career paths: over time, women tend to be systematically sidelined or held back compared to men. Subjective perception of "merit": qualifications traditionally associated with men are valued more highly than women's skills or experiences.	Quantitative, empirical, with panel data (longitudinal).

	AUTHORS	ARTICLE TITLE	YEAR OF PUBLICATION	REFERENCE TO BARRIERS	TYPE OF RESEARCH
33	Sabharwal, M	From Glass Ceiling to Glass Cliff: Women in Senior Executive Service	2015	Glass ceiling in public hierarchical structures. Lack of real implementation of equality policies. Gender bias in performance evaluations and promotions. Family and social responsibilities that affect the balance between work and personal life.	The study is qualitative and analytical, based on a review of literature, analysis of regulatory frameworks, and empirical evidence on the representation of women in the public sector.
34	Schuh, SC; Bark, ASH; Van Quaquebeke, N; Hossiep, R; Frieg, P; Van Dick, R	Gender Differences in Leadership Role Occupancy: The Mediating Role of Power Motivation	2014	Women are required to demonstrate higher performance in order to be considered leaders. In some cases, they are promoted to "difficult" or risky positions (associated with the glass cliff, crisis leadership). Leadership continues to be associated with characteristics considered masculine. When a woman displays those traits, she may be criticized or judged negatively ("she's not feminine," "she's hostile"). Because leadership is linked to power, and power is "masculinized," many women may develop less interest or motivation to seek positions of authority, as society punishes them more harshly for doing so.	Empirical and quantitative
35	Cook, A; Glass, C	Women and Top Leadership Positions: Towards an Institutional Analysis	2013	Glass ceilings prevent women from reaching elite positions. They refer to glass cliffs, exposing women to greater risks once they assume leadership roles. This points to cultural norms that associate leadership with masculinity. There is a lack of sponsorship and power networks that limits access to key opportunities. Rigid institutional processes perpetuate inequalities in promotions.	It is a theoretical and institutional analysis
36	Santamaría, A; Merino, A; Viñas, O; Arrizabalaga, P	Does medicine still show an unresolved discrimination against women? Experience in two European university hospitals	2009	Most important positions are held by men, and this situation remains unchanged over time. Many women fall by the wayside and do not reach the highest levels, even though they have the same training and experience. Women take on more family and caregiving responsibilities, which affects their availability to compete for promotions. Implicit ideas persist that men are more suitable for leadership.	Empirical, quantitative and descriptive
37	Ryan, MK; Haslam, SA	Glass Cliffs Are Not So Easily Scaled: On the Precariousness of Female CEOs' Positions	2009	Women may be chosen when the position is difficult or has a high chance of failure. In negative situations, people tend to look for someone to blame, and women may face more pressure because they are still a minority, are given less room for error, and have less time to show results. They do not have the same support or resources.	Conceptual article/scholarly discussion (critical commentary), based on previous evidence
38	Haslam, SA; Ryan, MK	The road to the glass cliff: Differences in the perceived suitability of men and women for leadership positions in succeeding and failing organizations	2008	Women are assigned leadership positions when the company is in crisis or decline. In times of crisis, the leader becomes an easy target. Since women leaders are less common, failure can be more "notable." Less real support and more pressure.	Experimental quantitative (3 studies)
39	Furst, SA; Reeves, M	Queens of the hill: Creative destruction and the emergence of executive leadership of women	2008	Stereotypes ("they don't fit as leaders"). Doubts about work–family balance. Promotion processes that favor men. Lack of mentorship and female role models. Women often have less access to key experiences that drive promotions, such as training or strategic assignments.	Conceptual and theoretical
40	Adams, J	Stained glass makes the ceiling visible - Organizational opposition to women in congregational leadership	2007	Formal exclusion of women from ordination processes and from leading the liturgy. Glass ceilings, rigid and formal structural and doctrinal barriers. Religious norms that legitimize gender inequality. Institutionalized patriarchal culture that defines leadership as masculine.	The article is a theoretical and institutional analysis based on documentary evidence and a comparative study of different religious denominations.
41	Skard, T	Through the glass ceiling. Female state and government leaders 1945-2006	2006	The findings suggest that the number of women reaching executive positions is low, but it varies geographically. Female executives have diverse educational and political backgrounds. An important stepping stone to office in Asia and Latin America has been the familial ties of women to prominent political leaders.	Study
42	Ryan, MK; Haslam, SA	The glass cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions	2005	Glass cliff: women are more frequently appointed in contexts of crisis or poor organizational performance, which increases the risk of failure. Greater scrutiny: female leaders are observed and criticized more than men, even when the company's conditions were already negative before they arrived. Reputational effect: if the organization fails, women bear the stigma and see their future opportunities reduced, while structural factors are rendered invisible. "Think manager–think male" bias: the cultural association of leadership with masculinity persists, which exacerbates negative attribution toward female leaders.	Archival Study