

# What is Preventing Malaysian Women Managers' Career Progression?

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine Malaysian women managers' career progression. More specifically, the study examined the influence of family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management on women managers' career progression in Malaysian government-linked private companies. A theoretical framework was developed and four hypotheses were proposed to be tested. A quantitative research approach in the form of a correlation study was used in this research. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. A total of 466 women managers from 17 GLCs constituted the sample. Regression analysis indicated that all four predictor variables of family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management significantly contributed 36% to the variation in women managers' career progression. All of the variables had significant relationship with women managers' career progression. Negative stereotype was found to contribute most to the variation in women managers' career progression followed by family related barriers, talent management and glass ceiling.

**KEYWORDS:** Barriers, Women Managers', Career Progression, Government-Linked Companies, Malaysia.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

The underrepresentation of women in senior management, executive roles and on corporate boards has been a great concern for gender and management scholars and has given rise to debates on how this gender gap can be addressed (Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008 [1]; Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008 [2]; Rowley and Yukongdi, 2009 [3]; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2011[4]; Vanderbroeck, 2010 [5]). According to Eowa (2006) [6] at the lower entry levels to organizations, there is a sturdy gender balance as women enter the workforce in similar numbers to men. As women are dynamic participants in education and the number of women and men with university education is equal, so in recruitment programs women and male are near equal numbers (Mills, 2005) [7]. Nesbit (2007) [8] believed that tracking data on the different percentages of women in managerial as well as supervisory tasks shows a negative relationship between their representation and the level of management. There are a number of explanations why women have not raised to the top level of management. These include lack of line experience, gender differences in linguistic styles, inadequate career opportunities, and gender based stereotypes (Oakley, 2000) [9].

### 1.2 Research Problem

The issue of women's representation in all the public, government-linked and private sector organization has been attracting increasing attention in Malaysia. Malaysia has shown a very small increment in the percentage of women in legislation and top managerial position. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2012 [10], Malaysia ranked on 100<sup>th</sup> out of 135 countries compared to 97<sup>th</sup> in 2011. The percentage of women holding positions of legislators, senior officials and managers is 24% in 2012. There has been a 0.6% decrease in women's participation in the labour force from 47.6% in the year 2011 to 47% in the year 2012. Therefore the low representation of women in managerial position is a cause for concern.

This gives rise to the question: what is preventing Malaysian women from progressing to top managerial position? Therefore effort to raise the number of women in top management in Government linked companies in Malaysia requires an understanding of the factors that are hindering these efforts.

Two authors Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) [1], studied about women manager's family, organizational- and societal barriers in Shell Company in Malaysia. Their data was acquired through an analysis of 78 executive women in this oil company. Their research shows family frame and their responsibilities to the family are the most important barriers perceived by the executive women for career promotion. In the survey, the majority of the respondents agreed that the mentioned barriers are still dominant in the firms. These women employees yearned to have an equal treatment and organizational support that would offer them career promotion or top positions based on their qualifications. While they acknowledged that women have positive roles to play and take on responsibilities in their life, they judge that these roles and responsibilities should not act as barriers to their jobs in the firms. Besides, promoting women's job progression, vital changes are required in the family and firms structures like spousal support in house's tasks. From the educational achievement viewpoint, the study

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demonstrated that though women have taken part in the labour force and have progressed significantly their opinions about barriers are still the same.

Review of past research on women's career progression has suggested that among the variables that could have impact are negative gender stereotype, personal variables, glass ceiling, lack of mentors and network and gender biased talent management.

However the scope of the research is limited to examining the influence of family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management could be the mechanism which impact directly on women managers' career progression. This study aims to address the following problem: To what extent family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management determine women managers' career progression?

### 1.3 Justification of Study

Understanding the barriers and problems of women managers and the mechanism by which these barriers impact their career progression could enable organizations to reduce or even remove the barriers thus enabling women to achieve top leadership positions in their organizations. The awareness of organization of the barriers that can affect their women managers' professional development will be useful in for women managers.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Barriers that Influence Women Managers' Career Progression

Barrier is defined by Maskell-Pretz and Hopkins (1997) [11] as a factor, event or phenomenon that prevents or controls individuals' access to making progress. Newman (1993) [12] defines career progression as the consequences of human capital, socio-psychological and systemic factors. It is an objective measure of being successful in one's own career. Stereotypes involve generalizations about the "typical" characteristics of members of the groups. In many instances it has elements of prejudice and is related to certain demography like gender and minority race. Where gender stereotype is concerned it relates to a set of principles about the role of men and women, what they are like and how they should behave in different social setting. Glass ceiling is defined as a transparent barrier which appears impenetrable that prevents women and members of minority groups from moving up to higher management roles in an organization (Altman, Simpson, Baruch and Burke, 2005) [13]. Talent management is seen as a process that could comprises activities such as staffing and employing, motivating and retaining, and appraising and training talent, while focusing clearly on those employees who guarantee the continuing competitiveness of the corporation (Cohn, Khurana, and Reeves, 2005[14]; Morton, 2004[15]; Phillips and Edwards, 2009[16]; Silzer and Dowell, 2010[17]).

Research studies on glass ceiling reveal that it is still a factor preventing women from moving up to top management (Mooney and Ryan, 2008[18]; Enache, Sallan, Simo and Fernandez, 2011[19]). According to Adler, (1994) [20], the number of women involved in international management is very low. Similarly the representation of women at the highest levels of American business has not increased much (Altman et al., 2005) [13]. Gender stereotyping produces strong barriers towards career advancement of women in several ways. Firstly, the entry barrier to certain roles argued to be more suitable to men than women. Gender segregation literature reveals that such barricaded positions are normally those that are more central to the operations of the organization which involve handling of important resources, involving visibility to and perhaps interaction with those who hold power in the organization (Oakley, 2000[9]; Furst and Reeves, 2008[21]).

Numerous studies have shown that, when an individual is subjected to a negative stereotype, they can be led to conduct in a way that reinforces that very stereotype. The attributes attendant to these gender stereotypes have been shown to be persistently contrary to the attributes, distinguished by the majority, to be involved in career professionals (Schein, 2007) [22], and women have been found to be particularly disadvantaged by such stereotyping (Ryan and Haslam, 2007[23]; Hopkins O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2006 [24]). An organizational study about researching into stereotyping has demonstrated that women perform worse in math's examinations for example, if they are first subject to the stereotype that math's is outside the 'women domain'(Organizational studies, 2005) [25].

Moreover, research by Mavin (2001) [26] illustrated that, in terms of family responsibilities, women may be disadvantaged beyond a certain level in the hierarchy where 100% obligation to the organization may be expected. A person's marital status and age can also be a barrier as individuals who are deemed "too young" or "too old" may not be deemed suitable for senior executive positions seems to play a part in career progression. Kelly and Marin (1998) [27] pointed out that organizations look less favourably on married women when it comes to promotion than those who are single. The straightforward fact of "being women" thus becomes a potent barrier for career progression among women. Morrison, Greene and Tischler (1985) [28] preach that when women display competence in leadership, they are viewed negatively while men who visibly lead are appreciated.

## **2.2 Family Related Barriers and Women Managers' Career Progression**

The barriers that women stumble upon extend far beyond the confines of the workplace to their home. A 1995 survey by recruiting company Robert Haff and Associates found that more than 80 percent of women managers who were interviewed preferred a job that featured more flexible hours, provided more family time, and slow-paced advancement than gruelling jobs that featured rapid career mobility. However, because of additional responsibility at home with their families, women do not perceive career mobility as "a methodical rise to power" (Pringle, 1999) [29]. Sue Newell (1992) [30] opines that so long as women maintain to juggle these dual roles, they may never achieve the parity they need and deserve in relation to men in the work environment. Nevertheless, research has suggested that many companies look at women with home-related commitments with disapproval, hence the 'maternal wall' or the barriers of combining family and work life seemed very daunting for a women (Swiss and Walker, 1993) [31].

Metz (2005) [32] studied about careers progression of women managers with children. She attempted to find out whether having children affect women's job progression. Wirth concluded that the gender disparity in housekeeping is one of the barriers to women's unequal occupation of managerial positions. Hochschild (1997) [33] and Wirth (2001) [34] mentioned that family responsibilities such as childcare, child rear, and housekeeping create some conflicts for women's job progression. From the time shortage viewpoint, married women employees should spend their time to fulfil family responsibilities, so the spent time that cannot be allocated at work. Research studies report that since women's family responsibilities and housekeeping affect their colleagues' perceptions, they believe that these responsibilities are their progression's barriers (Liff and Ward, 2001[35]; Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989[36]; Swiss and Walker, 1993) [31]. These views and typecasts of women employees who are mother can create unfair behaviour, and further obstacle to progression for them.

Suvi, La'msa and Hiillos (2009) [37] studied about some barriers such as family responsibilities and the husbands' influence as deterrents on the women managers' job progression in Finland. The results of their study proved that the husband and family have an important influence on a women manager's career, and their job progression as previous studies which were done by White (1995) [38]. Some researchers have proposed that the spouse has either positive or negative role for the career of a women manager. They believe that the partner's support to a women's managerial position surely requires more research in the future (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005[39]; La'msa" and Hiillos, 2009[40]).

Family responsibilities have also been considered in the context of women's career progression (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2005[41]; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999[42]), particularly with relation to marital status and child care (Davidson and Burke, 2004) [43]. A number of studies have indicated that combining a family and career can hinder a women's career progression. Studies have shown that in the West, women managers have to make difficult choices, such as remaining single or childless in comparison to their male counterparts, who, in the majority of cases, are married with children (Powell and Graves, 2003[44]; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999[42]).

H1: There is a significant relationship between family related barriers and women managers' career progression to top management position.

## **2.3 Negative Stereotype and Women Managers' Career Progression**

Negative stereotyping based on sex has always been a major barrier to progression of women in organizations. In spite of the roles played by women in the workplace, generalized stereotype of women could range from that of a nurturer to a sex-object (Davies-Netzey, 1998[45]; Oakley, 2000[9]). The traits attendant to these sex-stereotypes have been perceived by many to be incompatible to those required in career professionals (Schein, 2007) [22], and women continue to be particularly deprived by such stereotyping (Ryan and Haslam, 2007[23]; Hopkins O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2006[24]). Generally, findings show that men are believed to possess more agented qualities and women are considered to possess more communal qualities (Rosette and Tost, 2010[46]).

Additionally, and worryingly, gender stereotypes create a 'false dichotomy' between women and male characteristics. However, empirical evidence confronts the authority of these familiar stereotypes; demonstrating that women and men are in fact more similar than they are different, and that there is more variation among women and among men, than between women and men (Women in leadership, 2007) [47]. A review of empirical literature on gender differences shows clear evidence of a gender gap in high-level positions all around the world. According to statistics from the International Labour Organization (ILO) [48], women's distribution of managerial jobs ranged between 20 and 40% in 48 countries in 2000–2002. In addition, The United States Bureau of Labour Statistics indicates that in 2008 there were fewer than 3 million women in managerial positions, of which only 6.5% reached chief executive level.

H2: There is a significant relationship between negative stereotypes and women managers' career progression to top management position.

## 2.4 Glass Ceiling and Women Manager's Career Progression

The glass ceiling is described as a well enshrined phenomenon supported by conclusive evidence (Simpson and Altman, 2003) [49]. A study by David (2001) [50] shows there is evidence of glass ceiling for women. David used random effects models and data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, and examined gender and race inequalities at the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles of white male earnings and study found the evidence of a glass ceiling for women, but racial inequalities among men do not follow a similar pattern. Additionally, Mavin (2001) [26] indicates that the glass ceiling issue has considerable impact on women's careers internationally. Furthermore, Chenevert and Tremblay (2002) [51] also declared that even if women managers have a high level of education and the desire to progress in their careers, it lingers the case that few achieve the same status or salary as their male counterparts, and that one of the reasons for this is the so-called 'glass ceiling.' Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) [52] indicate that despite the increased number of women both participating in the workforce and reaching management positions, the evidence demonstrates that, for the majority, progression towards to the very highest levels is rare and that the 'glass ceiling' still exists.

Most research studies conclude that the biggest barriers to career advancement among women are beyond their personal control as the Glass Ceiling Commission indicts organizational and structural barriers as the most predominant barrier toward women's upward climb in the career ladder (Woody and Weiss, 1994) [53]. The author Bergmann (1986) [54] opined that organizational structures specifically job assignments are devised to prevent women from rising to the top management position. Job assignments are considered to be the primary route for career advancement. Another barrier cited by women is the lack of mentoring opportunities from male superiors. For instance, Dreher and Cox (1996) [55] found that working women find it difficult to gain informal mentors who are male. If they do find a male mentor, they also face challenges in the course of the mentoring relationships especially in relation to its nature and possibility of misinterpretation and some even report being subjected to sexual harassment.

Davidson and Cooper (1986) [56] cited that gender stereotyping in the organization directs to higher stress levels among women than men. This is due to gender stereotyping often pressures women to exert extra effort or to work harder and achieve better than their male counterparts in order to prove themselves equal to them. According to Collinson and Hean, (2000) [57], negative stereotype leads to social isolation among women managers and their heavy dependence on formalized relationships for career progression. The authors also believed that unless the patriarchal nature of institutions is broken down, women will find it difficult to advance their careers in what is considered male territory. Therefore, they define patriarchy as a process and a context through which male supremacy is promoted by men and institutions as well as patriarchy is a stumbling block for women because it "control access to hierarchical power and characteristics of knowledge claims" (Collinson and Hearn, 2000) [57].

H3: There is a relationship between presence of glass ceiling and women managers' career progression to top management position.

## 2.5 Talent Management and Women Managers' Career Progression

Burton (1998) [58] indicated that men tend to be promoted faster than women, because of their greater use of informal networks as opposed to women's greater reliance on formal promotion procedures alone. Studies revealed that training was of greater advantage to men than women in terms of managerial development and that work experience and education increased training opportunities added for men than women. Research findings also show that men and women have different experiences and perceptions of organizational practices. It seems as whole men believe that equal employment opportunity has been accomplished, whereas women do not (Burton, 1998) [58].

Acker (1992) [59] has investigated in detail how, within organizations, different work roles are isolated by gender according to the income and status attached to the roles. Organizations offer the perfect microcosm where such gendered roles are invented and regularly reproduced thereby creating a stereotypical statement attached to the role. Acker points out how organizational norms are generated by men and are therefore classify in relation to the experiences of men. Gender roles are consequently created by men for men and are unique to social and cultural settings. This procedure is clearly restrictive for women as work roles become correlated with a gender rather than a possessed skill or characteristic. As Silvestri states, '...practically all jobs and job ladders are gender specific and practically all job searches are gender searches' (Silvestri, 2003) [60]. Kark (2004) [61] categorizes the above perspectives as gender reform feminism and such sex-role socialization has stopped women from attaining the skills required to compete in organizations and if women developed these necessary skills they would be in a position to compete with men equitably.

Even though the negative impact of stereotype threat on performance has been clearly documented, the mechanisms by which stereotype risk manipulate performance are less clear. It seems that stereotype threat negatively influences performance due to a combination of factors including heightened physiological arousal (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, and Steele, 2001[62]; Osborne, 2007) [63], reduced working memory capacity (Croizet, Depres, Gauzins, Huguet, Levens and Meot, 2004[64]; Schmader and Johns, 2003[65]), impaired self-

regulation (Cadinu, Maass, Rosabianca, and Kiesner, 2005[66]; Inzlicht, McKay, and Aronson, 2006[67]), and poorer performance expectations (Cadinu, Maass, Frigerio, Impagliazzo, and Latinotti, 2003[68]).

Furthermore, women receive lower evaluations on both performance and potential which justified by either setting lower standards in goals or misattributing the cause of performance (Eagly, Karau and Makhijani, 1995[69]; Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky, 1992[70]). Thus, by being devalued in this way consistently can direct to sufficient de-motivation among women that they either become disengaged with the practice of career advancement or seek a different environment. This has been shown in studies where career paths of men and women have been found to be different on development processes (O’Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2008) [71]. Women tend to climb the organizational ladder by moving to other organizations at considerable rungs in the ladder, while men climb to similar positions with the same organization (Cox and Harquail, 1991) [72].

H4: There is a significant relationship between talent management and women managers’ career progression.

**2.6 Theoretical Framework**

Based on the review of literature on the barriers that influencing women managers’ career progress, theoretical frameworks are developed for this study is presented in Figure 1. This study will test the viability of the framework by testing the research hypothesis.

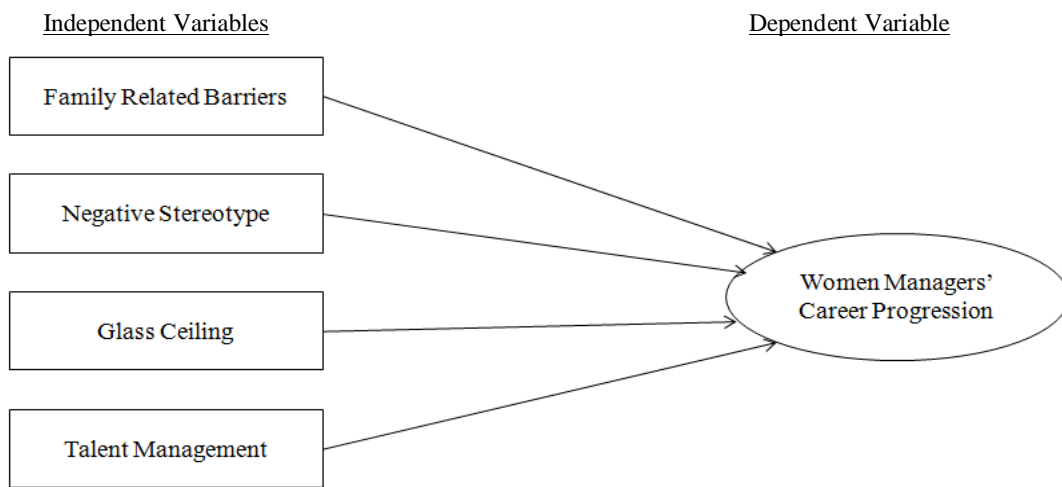


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework for the relationship between barriers and women managers’ career progression

**3 MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**3.1 Research Design**

This is essentially a correlation study that uses quantitative approach and uses the survey method to collect data. The independent variables are the family related barriers, negative stereotypes, glass ceiling and talent management. The dependent variable is women managers’ career progression. The research instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire.

**3.2 Sampling and Population**

The target population was women managers working in Malaysian Government –Linked Companies (GLCs). A convenience sampling technique was used as only those who consented to participate in the study were selected as respondents. The primary data are data gathered and assembled through questionnaire, which requires asking women managers’ in GLCs (who are called respondents) for information. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, 466 completed questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 77.67%. Secondary data was mostly collected from journal articles, Internet newspaper articles and textbooks.

**3.3 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire**

The main objective of conducting a pilot survey is to ensure the consistency and accuracy of each item in a research instrument. Face and content validity of the questionnaire was determined using 5 subject matter experts. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability of each of the 5 constructs used in the study: women managers’ career progression, family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management. A sample of 65 questionnaire responses was collected to test for reliability using the Cronbach Alpha method. The Cronbach Alpha method computes the inter-item correlation among the items measuring the construct. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the research constructs ranged from

0.701 to 0.899 (Table 1). Nunnally (1978) [73] recommends that instruments used in basic research have reliability of about .70 or better.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics of the Research Constructs in the Questionnaires

Variables	Cronbach Alpha
	Pilot Study
Women Managers' Career Progressions	0.743
Family Related Barriers	0.820
Negative Stereotype	0.899
Glass Ceiling	0.733
Talent Management	0.701

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Statistical Packages of the Social Science (SPSS) is used to perform the data analysis. Regression analysis was carried out to determine the relationship of the predictor variables to the dependent variable. The level of significance was set at  $p = 0.05$ .

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Relationship between barriers (family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management) and women managers' career progression

Results of the regression analysis between independent variables (family related barriers, negative stereotypes, glass ceiling and talent management) and dependent variable (women managers' careers progression) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: ANOVA table of predictors of women managers' career progression

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3113.785	4	778.446	64.701	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	5546.475	461	12.031		
	Total	8660.260	465			
a. Dependent Variable: WMCP						
b. Predictors: (Constant), BTM, BFB, BGC, BNS						

Based on the ANOVA results in Table 2, the model is significant  $\{F_{(4, 461)} = 64.701, p < 0.05\}$ . This means that at least one of the 4 predictor variables can be utilized to model women managers' career progression.

Table 3: Model summary of predictors of women managers' career progression

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.600 <sup>a</sup>	.360	.354	3.46863	.360	64.701	4	461	.000	1.550
a. Predictors: (Constant), BTM, BFB, BGC, BNS										
b. Dependent Variable: WMCP										

Based on the results in Table 3, R-square value = 0.360. This means that 36% of the variation in women managers' career progression can be explained by variation in any or all of the predictor variables. Durbin Watson value = 1.550 which is between acceptable range of 1.5 and 2.5. It indicates that independence residual is accepted in the model and there is no autocorrelation error in the data.

Table 4: Correlations

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	33.237	1.395		23.821	.000		
	BFB	-.179	.028	-.261	-6.343	.000	.820	1.220
	BNS	-.130	.029	-.205	-4.398	.000	.641	1.559
	BGC	-.118	.032	.152	3.720	.000	.836	1.196
	BTM	-.289	.042	-.330	-6.805	.000	.591	1.692

Table 4 shows there is significant relationship between family related barriers and women managers' career progression ( $b = -0.179, P < 0.05$ ), negative stereotype and women managers' career progression ( $b = -$

0.130,  $p < 0.05$ ), glass ceiling and women managers' career progression ( $b = -0.118$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and talent management and women managers' career progression ( $b = -0.289$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The results indicate that all the four significant variables have low variation inflation factor (VIF) values ( $< 10$ ), indicating that there is no problem with multicollinearity. Therefore, based on the results of the regression analysis, we fail to reject H1, H2, H3 and H4.

**4.1.1 Stepwise Regression Method**

Regression analysis using stepwise method retained all the predictor variables in the model as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Result of stepwise regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.467 <sup>a</sup>	.218	.216	3.82107	.218	129.146	1	464	.000	
2	.541 <sup>b</sup>	.293	.290	3.63630	.075	49.351	1	463	.000	
3	.583 <sup>c</sup>	.340	.336	3.51649	.047	33.089	1	462	.000	
4	.600 <sup>d</sup>	.360	.354	3.46863	.019	13.836	1	461	.000	1.550
a. Predictors: (Constant), BNS										
b. Predictors: (Constant), BNS, BFB										
c. Predictors: (Constant), BNS, BFB, BTM										
d. Predictors: (Constant), BNS, BFB, BTM, BGC										
e. Dependent Variable: WMCP										

Based on the model negative stereotype explained the most variance in the women managers' career progression with 21.8%. Family related barriers explained a further 7.5%. Talent management added a further 4.7%. Glass ceiling added another 2%. Thus, all the four predictor variables together explained 36% of the variance in women managers' career progression. This suggests that there are other variables that could explain women managers' career progression Malaysian GLCs that have not been included in the study.

**5 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION**

**5.1 Relationship between independent variables and women managers' career progression**

The main aim of this study was to determine to what extent family related variables, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management influence women managers' career progression in Malaysian government-linked companies. The relationship between the independent variables (family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management) and dependent variable (women managers' career progression) were investigated in this study. Four hypotheses were developed for testing. The results of the analysis concluded that all the four independent variables have positive significant relationship with women managers' career progression. Therefore, H1, H2, H3 and H4 are not rejected.

The results of the current study demonstrate that there is significant relationship between family related barriers and women managers' career progression. The findings of the study are consistent with some earlier studies. Previous researchers found that family related barriers are important barriers for women career progression since women's family responsibilities, housekeeping and husbands' influence act as a deterrent on women managers' job progression (Suvi, La`msa and Hiillos, 2009) [37].

In spite of the roles played by women in the workplace, negative stereotyping based on sex has always been a major barrier to career progression of women in organizations. The results of current study demonstrate that there is positive significant relationship between negative stereotypes and women managers' career progression. This result is consistent with that of Schein (2007) [22] and other researchers who found that working women continue to be particularly deprived by negative stereotyping (Ryan and Haslam, 2007[23]; Hopkins O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2006[24]).

Furthermore, even though women tend to have higher level of education and the desire to progress in their careers, despite the increased number of women participating in the workforce and reaching management positions, evidence demonstrates that, for the majority, progression towards to the very highest levels is rare and that the 'glass ceiling' still exist (Chenevert and Tremblay, 2002[51]; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000[52]). Therefore, the finding of this research agrees with those acquired by previous researchers who believe that glass ceiling acts as a barrier to women managers' career progression.

Last but not least, numerous studies have shown that women in sex-role congruent jobs received higher evaluations than those in sex role incongruent jobs (staff vs. line) and women in line jobs had to accomplish higher evaluations than men to be promoted (O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria, 2008) [71]. Therefore, the finding

of this research is in agreement with those acquired by previous researchers who believe that there is a significant relationship between talent management and women managers' career progression.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The main goal of this study was to examine the relationship between family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling, talent management and women managers' career progression. The results of this study support the direct relationship between independent variables (family related barriers, negative stereotype and glass ceiling and talent management) and dependent variable (women managers' career progression).

## **5.3 Recommendations**

The recommendations are grouped under differing variables that have been found in this research to influence women managers' career progression: family related barriers, negative stereotype, glass ceiling and talent management.

### **5.3.1 Overcoming Family Related Barriers**

- a) Flexible working schedules for women managers to enable work life balance.
- b) Use of home-based work option.
- c) Companies could provide a fixed allowance per year for childcare support and maternity leave for eligible staff that have children.
- d) Women managers can apply for travel support to meeting / conferences for dependents (people under their care).
- e) Provided work policies to allow women, and men who choose to share dependent care, to balance work and family responsibilities.

### **5.3.2 Overcoming Negative Stereotype**

- a) Create awareness of the importance and benefits of gender diversity as different approaches to problem solving and to decision making can make teams, departments, and companies more successful in a competitive marketplace.
- b) A greater awareness about gender diversity could bring about change in the mindset of leaders. Responsible for major decision making and provide them with a stronger incentive for removing gender bias and stereotyping in their organizations.
- c) Demonstrate institutional commitment to diversity through strategic plans, mission statements, and other communication to employees.
- d) Educate organizational leaders on how stereotypes, especially those that are unconscious, affect hiring and evaluation decisions.
- e) Educate all employees about how stereotypes affect decisions.

### **5.3.3 Overcoming Gender Biased Talent Management and Glass Ceiling**

- a) Educate leaders about how stereotypes can negatively influence job assignments and performance appraisals.
- b) Train employees at all levels to recognize effective gender-neutral leadership characteristics.
- c) Review practices from other companies and create strategies that increase development and advancement opportunities for women.
- d) Evaluate the presence of gender-stereotypic language in talent management systems.
- e) Provide coaching and mentoring to women to assist with confidence building and career planning.

## **5.4 Limitations of the Research and Suggestions for Future Study**

Like other empirical studies, this study is not without its limitations. There are two major limitations in this study which need to be noted. First, the research was conducted with women managers' from Malaysian Government link companies (GLCs) using convenience sampling method. Therefore the findings of the research is only generalizable to women managers from the organizations studied and cannot be generalizable to a larger population. The data for the research was obtained through the use of a structured questionnaire with women managers as respondents. So the findings are based on the perception of women managers only. Also since the respondents views were limited by the questionnaire items, they did not have the opportunity to relate other reasons that may be responsible for their career progression. The results show that the four predictor variables contributed only 36 percent to the variation in women managers' career progression. This suggests that there are other variables that could be used as predictors that have not been included in the study.



A further study with samples drawn from other public and private sector organizations would give a clearer picture of factors influencing women managers' career progression in Malaysia. A combined research design consisting of both quantitative and qualitative approach would give the women an opportunity to voice their opinions. In fact a phenomenology study could give an in depth information on the barriers that women face in their career progression. The study could be extended to men and comparisons made on their opinions to see whether they significantly differ from each other. More variables should be included in the study to give a clearer picture of the factors influencing women's career progression.

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