


Literature Review

Exploring Gender Disparities in Executive Leadership Positions in Norway: A Qualitative Analysis

Nelufer Nazrul^{1,*} 

¹ University of Bergen, Norway

* Correspondence: nenaz6602@uib.no

<https://doi.org/eiki/10.59652/jeime.v2i2.234>

Abstract: Norway has gained global reputation for its gender equality efforts, yet a considerable gender disparity persists at the highest organizational ranks. This qualitative study explores the underlying reasons for the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions in Norway. Grounded in social role theory and the glass ceiling concept, the research involved a comprehensive literature review of academic journals, government reports, and industry publications. Thematic analysis revealed societal and cultural norms, organizational factors, and individual-level elements as key contributors to this inequality. Traditional gender roles, implicit biases, lack of mentorship and networks, gender culture, structural bias, as well as personal factors like confidence, self-esteem, and risk aversion emerged as significant barriers. The study critically evaluates existing measures aimed at bridging the gender gap, which have had limited long-term impact. Based on the findings, an integrated set of recommendations is proposed for policymakers, organizations, and individuals to increase women's representation in top executive roles. These include challenging traditions, fostering organizational inclusivity, providing individual support, strengthening accountability, and promoting collaborative efforts.

Keywords: social role theory; glass ceiling; gender equality; gender stereotypes; structural bias; policy recommendation; societal norms; gender diversity; gender justice

1. Introduction

Though there is real progress with respect to gender equality among countries highly endorsed for their gender sensitivity, the persistent underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions across various sectors and industries remains a challenging issue. Norway is known for its forward-thinking policies and values, which are no different from the rest of the world. On the one hand, this country takes the second position in the world's gender equality hierarchy (World Economic Forum, 2022). However, a profound gap remains in female presence in the upper echelons of corporate leadership (World Economic Forum, 2022). This paradox calls for an in-depth exploration of the complex factors due to which this gender gap in executive positions persists in the business sphere of Norway.

1.1. Societal and Cultural Influences

Ethical systems and cultural structures are among the norms that not only form a person's personality but also give ideas and expectations of how gender boundaries and leadership should be. As suggested by social role theory, individuals, while being socialized, tend to internalize societal ideas, which in turn may affect their behavior and career options (Eagly, 1987). Such socio-cultural norms frequently reinforce stereotypes that leadership is for people who have masculine traits. This creates gender bias and makes it difficult for women to access executive roles in organizations and institutions (Heilman, 2001). The same can be achieved even more so by traditional masculine existing cultures and values in organizations, thus creating an inhospitable environment for women (Acker, 1990).

1.1.1. Organizational Barriers

Cultural and structural factors could also contribute to the scarcity of women executive leaders, having broader consequences. Even though gender-based wage gaps, absence of

Received: June 21, 2024

Accepted: June 30, 2024

Published: June 30, 2024



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors.

Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

family policies, and step-pace promotion can challenge women and their professional growth in companies (Catalyst, n.d.), inadequate mentorship and career development programs adapted to women's unique problems can increase the obstacles they face in rising to executive positions (Ibarra et al., 2010).

1.1.2. Individual-Level Factors

Although societal and organizational aspects have enormous influence on high-level positions for women, individual aspects are also key elements that contribute to their experiences and goals. Factors like power, influence, and risk-taking can play a determining role in women's interest to pursue leadership roles, which are normally considered male territory (Ely et al., 2014). Women tend to accept common gender stereotypes and self-limiting beliefs regarding their capabilities as leaders (Correll, 2001). Besides, the career and family time balance difficulty, together with societal expectations, could make women more risk-averse, thereby discouraging them from office leadership roles that demand high sacrifices (McGinn & Castro, 2021).

2. Literature Review

Women's underrepresentation in executive leadership roles is intricately intertwined with several multifaceted factors which have caught the attention of researchers across disciplines. The purpose of the literature review is to summarize the existing body of knowledge, describe the gaps, and explain the necessity of the present study.

2.1. *Significance and Rationale*

The underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions not only perpetuates gender inequality but also deprives organizations and society of the diverse perspectives and talents that women bring to leadership roles. Previous research has shown that gender diversity provides organizations with better performance and higher efficiency in decision-making and innovations (Hunt et al., 2015). By not maximizing the capability of women managers, organizations and societies are deprived of the advantages of diverse management.

Additionally, addressing this issue contributes to Norway's image as a pioneer in gender justice and equal opportunities. As an innovative and progressive nation, it is crucial to acknowledge and analyze the core problems creating the prevailing gender disparity in executive leadership positions in Norway's business setting.

This research aims to integrate social, organizational, and individual-level factors resulting in the lack of women in senior management positions in Norway's corporate situation. Using qualitative research methodology, we will provide an in-depth review of secondary data sources to reveal the network of factors and their interrelations. The research will develop evidence-based suggestions and interventions directed towards strengthened gender balance and inclusivity in management and entrepreneurial roles throughout Norway.

2.2. *Societal and Cultural Influences*

Various studies have demonstrated that societal and cultural norms could limit women's career advancement. Eagly and Karau (2002) emphasized the role of gender stereotypes in forming gender-specific dispositions where women demonstrate more communal characteristics and men more agentic traits. These stereotypical roles can thwart women's advancement into executive and leadership roles traditionally held by men (Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Another aspect assessed is the ongoing presence of conventional gender roles and stereotypes about women's primary responsibilities at home (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). These social norms limit women from devoting the same time and energy as men to professional development, impacting their career growth (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

2.3. *Organizational Barriers*

Literature has extensively examined organizational factors explaining the female executive leadership deficit. A major impediment is the absence of mentorship and professional networks required for career development and better leadership (Ibarra, 1993; Ely et al., 2011).

Additionally, the gender culture embedded in organizational processes and practices has been studied. Organizational leadership, decision-making, and styles are strongly affected by masculine mores and values (Acker, 1990). This gender culture might create an unwelcoming ambiance for women in skilled roles. Structural discrimination in organizations is another

factor cited in the glass ceiling effect, including gender pay gaps, lack of family-friendly policies, and opaque marketing processes.

2.4. *Individual-level Factors*

Along with societal and organizational levels, individual aspects have been theorized as fundamental barriers to women's career progression. Determinants including confidence, self-esteem, and risk aversion have been identified among other impediments (Ibarra et al., 2011).

It should be highlighted that these factors are not fixed features but rather results of combined societal and organizational-level pressures. By addressing root causes and providing customized assistance, companies could help women reach their potential and create a more equal and equitable environment for advancement.

2.5. *Gaps and Limitations*

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions, several gaps and limitations can be identified:

- Limited focus on the Norwegian context: though some studies have been looking at gender disparity in leadership within Norway, there is a necessity to have a more holistic and in-depth contextual understanding of the relevant cultural, organizational, and individual elements that influence the business environment in Norway.
- Lack of integrated approaches: while many studies investigate the role of particular factors or levels of analysis, it is crucial that these are accompanied by research that takes a systemic and holistic perspective, recognizing the interplay among the societal, organizational, and individual-level indicators.
- Limited evaluation of existing measures: while studies have focused on running gender equality campaigns and initiatives, there is necessity of a critical analysis of the efficacy of the measures presently enforced against this background in Norway.
- The current analysis aims to provide a complete qualitative analysis of a number of multilevel determinants of the gender gap in the representation of women in executive roles in Norway. Through incorporating societal, organizational, and individual-level perspectives, evaluating the interaction among those factors, and critically dissecting the existing measures, this research effort will provide an in-depth understanding of this endemic problem and recommend plausible solutions for the stakeholders at various levels.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon two complementary theoretical perspectives to shed light on the complex issue of the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions: each with its own particular theoretical views, such as social role theory and glass ceiling phenomenon. Social, economical, models and so on are the lenses that provide an all-round theoretical framework for understanding this gender gap which is so persistent.

3.1. *Social Role Theory*

Stereotyped social roles theory claims that society and gender roles have a key impact on self-becoming, intentions and aspirations, and perceived capabilities on the individual's path. Children experience society's norms and stereotypes from their early years which tells them what is acceptable and what is not which defines men's behavior and also the identities, as women. In socialization, culturally defined roles for males and females are stressed, giving shape to the continuation of stereotypical masculine and feminine persona. (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Social role theory suggests that the effects of socialization and gender roles on the personality of a person range from his/her behavioral patterns to aspirations to beliefs of what they can do well. From the minute they are born to adolescence, individuals are surrounded with societal norms and stereotypes, which categorize the gender roles and socio-cultural expectations to assemble them. Role division along the lines of genders is perpetuated by the processes of socialization. It is through these processes that people learn and start performing gender-specific traits (Rudman & Glick, 2001)

As social role theory indicates, women are seen to be engaged in predominantly

communal attributes, including caring, sympathy, and cooperation, whereas men are mostly applauded for competitive, assertive, and ambitious behavior. Those stereotypical roles for two sexes might be the reason why women have hard times when trying to get promoted in the executive leadership positions, which are usually male-dominated areas.

Women who are direct and show that no-nonsense leadership style, which is traditionally masculine, might be shunned for their challenge of the stereotypical roles and violating of the community's expectations. Some people see them as too offensive, abusive, or deficient of the characteristic traits which are commonly thought to be more feminine. By contrast, a woman who brings a more communal and shared style of leadership may also be perceived negatively as deficient in either competence or strength to lead effectively.

3.2. *The Glass Ceiling Phenomenon*

The ceiling glass metaphor indicates an invisible yet ruthless wall that keeps deserving people who are specially women back from occupying or getting challenged to taking up higher positions within organizations (Morrison et al., 1987). The causes usually receive so many different dimensions, like structural, cultural and individual factors, and combines with deeply-enrooted gender stereotypes that not let the women go beyond the path (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986; Oakley, 2000).

Structural barriers are identified as the set of the employees' duties procedures and rules that help to maintain the status of women as secondary to men and also aggravate the women's career advance. These may comprise pay audits as well as reveal the paucity of the family-based policies that could support the work-life balance and may also suppose the suspiciously concealed promotion processes in which the transparency and objectivity could not be confirmed. Such structural barriers make the play field less even, raise the issue of women's being "in a jungle of cats to navigate the corporate world and subsequently hold executive leadership positions (Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra, 1993).

Employers is another one of the cultural aspects that work as a stumbling block on the glass ceiling. It is actually a lot of companies in this world that manifest the so-called "masculine organizational norms" that are deeply rooted in their principles, policies, and management. This "gender culture" may seem something that can create an atmosphere that is not at all welcoming for women in the leadership positions since they may well face resistance, marginalization or else efforts to pulp their own features so as to transform into masculine features.

Additionally, individual preferences like how much a woman is assertive, risks she takes, and problems maintaining work-life balance can obstruct her way to the top. Women can develop a gender stereotype and self-limiting behavior, as a result women exhibit an inadequate confidence in their abilities to position themselves in "the top" management roles that for a long time were mostly male-dominated. Additionally, dichotomous issues of work and family responsibilities together with social constraints can add to the risk-avoidance efforts thus maybe scare women away from leadership encounters which may require giving up something or other.

The combination of social role theory and the ceiling of glass theory shapes the researchers hopes to present an all-encompassing view about the complicated parameters that underlie the lack of women in executive leadership roles. This is a theoretical framework that effectively captures the sophisticated bandwidth through which socio-cultural factors act at individual, organizational, and societal levels by adopting a multi-dimensional approach to address this instance.

4. Research Objective

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. *Identifying Key Factors*

To uncover the most significant socio-cultural, organizational, and individual-level factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions within Norway's business sector.

2. *Evaluating Factor Interrelationships*

To evaluate the interplay and relative impact of these factors on women's advancement into top corporate governance and leadership roles.

3. *Assessing Current Efforts*

To critically assess the effectiveness of existing efforts, policies, and measures aimed at bridging the gender gap in executive leadership positions in Norway.

4. *Proposing Evidence-Based Recommendations*

To provide evidence-based recommendations that can guide policymakers, organizations, and individuals in improving the representation of women in executive roles across Norway. The research objectives outlined above reflect a comprehensive approach to understanding the multidimensional nature of the gender disparity in executive leadership positions in Norway. By identifying the key factors at play, evaluating their interrelationships, assessing current initiatives, and proposing evidence-based recommendations, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse and efforts towards achieving greater gender equality in leadership roles within Norway's business landscape.

The identification of socio-cultural, organizational, and individual-level factors acknowledges the complex interplay of societal norms, workplace dynamics, and personal experiences that shape women's career trajectories. Evaluating the relative impact and interconnectedness of these factors is crucial for developing targeted and effective interventions.

Furthermore, the critical assessment of existing measures and policies will shed light on their strengths, limitations, and areas for improvement, informing future strategies and initiatives. Ultimately, the proposed evidence-based recommendations will provide actionable in-sights for stakeholders at various levels, fostering a collaborative and holistic approach to addressing this persistent gender disparity.

By aligning with Norway's reputation as a global leader in gender equality, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts towards creating an inclusive and equitable environment for women to thrive in executive leadership roles, unlocking the full potential of diverse perspectives and talents within Norway's business landscape.

5. Materials and Methods

The investigation was conducted with a qualitative research methodology aiming at enhancing the awareness of the root causes responsible for the low number of women in executive leadership positions in Norway. The approach used was the concept of extensive review and thematic analysis of the secondary data sources from publication of academic journals, government reports and industry publications.

5.1. *Data Collection*

The data collection process commenced with a comprehensive literature search across multiple databases, such as Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search strategy utilized a combination of relevant keywords, including "gender equality," "women in leadership," "executive positions," "Norway," "glass ceiling," and "gender disparities." This initial search yielded a substantial number of potential sources, which were further screened for relevance and quality.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issue, the literature review encompassed a diverse range of sources, including:

- Scholarly journal publications particularly from popularly cited sources in gender studies, organizational behavior, and leadership.
- Among other sources will be featuring Norwegian government reports and policy documents from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH) and the Ministry of Children and Family.
- Survey of the industry sources, journals, and journals from specialized organizations, think tanks, and leadership development.
- The sources were thoroughly screened, important data was extracted, passed through coding and sorted into thematic categories using NVivo software for qualitative analysis.

5.2. *Thematic Analysis*

The thematic analysis followed the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved: The thematic analysis followed the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved:

1. By re-reading and making notes are the way of familiarize data.
2. Code's generation to curve the high risks of coding error by a step-by-step logic identifying and labelling segments of data.
3. Creation of themes by pooling codes and creating potential, either dominating or relevant themes.
4. Considering the main topics and editing them accordingly so they have a clear story and to avoid redundancy.

5. Themes capturing the ideas and principles once dealt with in abstract will be defined and named.

6. Alongside that, I will devote sufficient time on the report development by doing the merge of the analytical narratives and data extracts that will outline the conclusions.

The thematic analysis process was progressive and iterative enabling us to refine and rearrange themes as additional understandings were made out of the data. Such method of analysis allowed for discovery and tracing of repeated patterns, similarities and distinctions between the multiple sources and, therefore, a complex picture of the multi-dimensional factors, causing the under- representation of women in executive leadership positions in Norway, emerged.

5.3. Integrity and Research Accuracy

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, several strategies were employed: To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, several strategies were employed:

5.3.1. Triangulation

A variety of information sources, such as peer-reviewed literature, government data, and industry publications, were used in a coupled manner so as to serve the purpose of verification and validation, and result in a more reliable and relevant investigation.

5.3.2. Peer debriefing

We carried out frequent communication with fellow specialists on the matters of women studies and organization behavior to receive new points of view, evaluate the data, and modify the interpretation from time to time.

5.3.3. Audit Trail

An audit trailed of all the researching processes was kept, which recorded the details of data collection procedures, encoding keys as well as analytical memo that ensures transparency and able to be examined by external related parties to the research process.

5.3.4. Reflexivity

Critical self-reflection is therefore continuous for a researcher in a way that enables him/her to get rid of influences of cognitive myths, preconceptions, and personal beliefs that may cause distortion in data interpretation. By adhering to these strategies, the study hoped to establish trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability of the findings and contribute to a deeper

Understanding of the complex factors shaping the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions in Norway. The qualitative approach for this thesis was an abridged literature review combined with a rigid thematic analysis. This allowed for a rich and nuanced understanding and description of contextualized factors, both on a societal, corporate and individual level that may affect the explanation of the enduring gender gap in top managerial positions in Norway. The current study thereby provides ground for evidence-based interventions and suggestions for increased gender equality and diversity in executive leadership positions in the business sector in Norway.

6. Results

The thought-provoking qualitative analysis of available literature exposed me to the sophisticated characteristics of social, organizational, and individual dynamics which are a strong force for women to be underrepresented in male dominated executive leadership positions in Norway.

6.1. Societal and Cultural Norms

The literature underscores to how much cultural and social norms affects women career progress pertaining to this. Norway is considered as a land where gender inequality does not exist at least to a certain extent; women as well as their roles in society are still somewhat affected by stereotypes which shape women either in workplace or society. Research by the Norwegian School of Economics revealed that Norwegian women faced more problems with harmonizing occupational and familial duties, which rendered their possibilities of professional development lower, when compared to men (Norwegian School of Economics, n.d.). The social norm that lays the unequal burden of household and caretaking works again women has been highlighted to constitute a tremendous gap for the women to pursue job growth in the same manner as men due to the report of (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Benschop &

Doorewaard, 1998).

Moreover, the socialization process is so deep that it has become clear that the traditional expectations as well as implicit biases on leadership traits and management roles are still there. As the research conveys that the stereotypical “masculine” traits espoused in leadership such as assertiveness and competitiveness, may be gender biased against and even unconsciously discriminated by women who are more communal and collaborative (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Schein, 2001).

6.2. *Organizational Factors*

Besides social forces, the element of the organization has also been a factor that makes women underrepresented in executive leadership positions. The literature highlights that one of the major barriers that is faced in this area is that there is a lack of mentorships and professional networks which are key for one’s advancement in their profession and developing their leadership skills (Ibarra, 1993; Ely et al., 2011). Informal networks have always tended to be dominated by males, and women therefore face limits to the ability to access them. This ultimately serves to restrict more women from such networks and to spread gender bias.

On the other hand, the evidence puts forward the existence of a “gender culture” within organizations, where masculine norms and values deeply penetrate into organizational practices, decision-making processes and leadership styles. Through this gender culture, a climate of incredibility is produced where it is rather challenging for women to be in executive positions and manage. Structural obstacles in organizations like unequal pay for women and lack of services favorable to children, and unclear promotion processes, are the other important features that present women with a glass ceiling (Catalyst, n.d). These stereotypes can disfavor women advancing in their careers and become as well as deepen the belief that such leading positions in the company are the territory of men.

6.3. *Individual-Level Factors*

Besides social and organisational factors, there are also personal contributors to the situation and, as it has been seen, women have desire for positions of chief executive officers. Among the constructs believed to hinder the women’s career progress are self-confidence, self-esteem, and the level of acceptable risk (Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra 1993).

Outsourcing can be perceived due to internalization of societal gender stereotypes and other career clueless beliefs that make women lack confidence as they can assume executive positions that are often occupied by male persons. Furthermore, the overall conflict of interest in terms of family care responsibilities and social cultural norms, pull and push factors may have an implication of raising risk averse personalities among female. Hence the competition between family obligations and social and organizational expectations hampers women to take up leadership positions where they might be required to make a lot of sacrifices or incur a higher level of risks.

The continuation of this qualitative research is manifested in the survey results and hence shows weighted evidence of the causes for the current depletion of women in the European nation’s executive compartment. These factors include social and cultural norms, roles, and assumptions that may hinder actual change, available resources and structures within the organisation, and self-beliefs and attitudes of individuals involved in implementation, which is why efforts aimed at translating evidence into practice should address all of these factors simultaneously.

7. Discussion

The findings from this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions in Norway. This discussion interprets and explains these findings in relation to the research objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature. Additionally, it addresses the implications and significance of the findings and discusses the limitations of the study.

7.1. *Interpretation of Findings*

The primary objective of this study was to identify the key socio-cultural, organizational, and individual-level factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions in Norway. The findings revealed that societal and cultural norms, organizational barriers, and individual-level factors are intricately intertwined, creating a complex web of challenges for women aspiring to executive roles.

7.1.1. Societal and Cultural Norms

The study found that traditional gender roles and societal expectations regarding women's responsibilities significantly impact their career advancement. Despite Norway's reputation for gender equality, these norms persist and shape women's experiences in the workplace. The literature supports this finding, highlighting that societal norms place a disproportionate burden of domestic and caregiving responsibilities on women, limiting their ability to dedicate the same time and energy as men towards professional growth (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998).

Furthermore, deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and implicit biases influence perceptions of leadership qualities and suitability for executive roles. Stereotypically masculine traits, such as assertiveness and competitiveness, are often associated with effective leadership, creating an unconscious bias against women who may exhibit more communal or collaborative leadership styles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Schein, 2001). These findings align with social role theory, which posits that gender socialization and stereotyping engrave themselves in identity and career building (Eagly, 1987).

7.1.2. Organizational Barriers

The organizational aspect also behaves as a major analyzer that causes the gap to be even wider for women to climb this executive ladder. For many, the challenge of not being able to locate the equivalent of mentors and public networks was too big. Women frequently confront barriers in joining such inconspicuous networks as well they are primarily commonplace among males and contain biased stereotypes in most cases which do not give them opportunities to build helpful relationships and receive implicative information (Ibarra, 1993; Ely et al., 2011).

It is not only the existence of a "gender-centric culture" within organizations that establishes patriarchal norms and values within organizational practices, ideals, and way of management, but also promotes the perpetual entrenchment of these masculine expectations (Acker, 1990). High structural prejudices against females are manifested in salary disparities (Catalyst, n.d), which lacks family-friendly policies as well as vague promotion procedures, creating the glass ceiling effect. These results are in sync with the same concept of the glass ceiling phenomenon, which refers to how invisible barriers typically prevent capable human beings, mostly women, from advancing up to higher levels within the corporate environment (Morrison et al., 1987).

7.1.3. Personal level factors

The role of individuals in career progression, in terms of confidence, self-esteem, and risk perception, was mapped out as well as barriers for women. Women have been found to ingest gender stereotypes that limit their careers and self-assurance by believing in themselves that they can be executive role models and perform above expectations (Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra, 1993). Besides, a whole lot of women struggle to manage their workforce and households litigation as society's expectation phases appears to make risk averse, which is likely to de-motivate them from getting into leadership roles.

7.2. *Implications and Significance of Findings*

The study's results have some very meaningful consequences, which will influence the policies makers, companies and men, whose desire is to enhance the misrepresentation of the women in the executive position in Norway.

7.2.1. Policy Implications

Policy makers may give a consideration to strategies that enhance equitable work environments, while at the same time, focus on the enhancement of policies that advance women empowerment at the workplace. Enacting those provisions is through, for example, applying existing gender equality legislation, pass of mandatory reporting provisions and performance rewards to those organizations which will be able to show their efforts and commitment to closing gender gap. Moreover, the policies which promotes work-life balance including parental leaves and flexi-work opportunities work as a socialising force in countering the undue load of domestic responsibilities on women.

7.2.2. Organizational Implications

Organizations should strive to set in place a single environment that is inclusive and equitable. This can be accomplished through leadership training programs that address such patterns of prejudice as unconscious biases and raise competence in a wide range of

leadership styles. It is not something to be overlooked creating sales process redesign through transparency and fairness. Moreover, companies can make available tailored support to women, for example via mentorship and professional circles, and so to help her develop the competences to be eligible to the top positions.

7.4.3. Individual Implications

At individual level placing women in leadership positions is essential they should be taught how to build confidence and self-esteem through mentorship and leadership development programs. Enslaving considerations other than the woman, such as the avoidance of risk and balancing between the work and home life, is still of paramount importance. The main purpose of the project is to empower women and concurrently equip them with the necessary instruments and support, thus women can become more successful in their careers.

7.3. *Limitations of the Study*

The obtained explorative study supports a substantial finding that alongside globalization, the increasing change of technology act as a major barrier to women aspiring for executive position.

The multidimensional effect in which substance abuse encompasses not only the toxicity to individuals' physical health but also their emotional state, interpersonal relations, and overall well-being.

The research had the main focus put on the second-hand data and analysis sources, like academic journals, government reports, and industry-oriented materials. However, these sources duly reported the overall advocacy of women in top positions, though one-on-one interviews or surveys of women in executive management could have advanced the study even further and added more insight.

In some instances the context-specific findings include. The present study gave exclusively Norwegian nationality's results that may not be convenient for specific countries or regions. Diverse aspects of culture, society, and organization differ from each other, which might bring about women's under-representation as decision-makers in executive roles in different contexts. The future research needs to be carried out through the application of the comparative studies aimed at the investigation simultaneously the similarities and differences within the different settings.

This research is based on a secondary data which could introduce biased information indeed as the sources selected and the meanings are done from only what the researcher perceives. Steps were taken to guarantee that a coherent and nonbiased review of the literature was accomplished, however, issues like biases in the sources' content are likely to remain and hence influence the findings.

7.4. *Future Research Directions*

To build on the findings of this study, future research should consider the following directions: to build on the findings of this study, future research should consider the following directions. Let's analyze them in details:

Primary data collection. Undertaking interviews or polls aimed at women leaders in the executive positions may serve to awaken their experiences and barriers enriching the analytical scope of the causes of their underrepresentation.

Comparative studies. Examining the marginalization of women in senior leadership roles in diverse countries and regions can highlight commonalities and divergences, which will in turn expand the viewpoint to the topic.

Longitudinal studies. Longitudinal studies have the power to measure changes, adjustments as well as determine the efficacy of programs that define women's representation in leadership roles.

Intersectional Analysis. It is recommended to conduct future studies on an intersect approach, which demonstrates how background indicators like race, ethnicity as well as socioeconomic status join gender to have a bigger influence on women's career advancement.

Thereby adequately emphasizing the significant challenges to be overcome; by addressing these research directions, scholars can make a significant contribution to the development of a more complete and sophisticated comprehension of the multifaceted factors determining the minimal representation of women in executive leadership roles. This, in turn, enables the creation of evidence-based policies interventions promoting the gender equality in the work-place. In the end, this research emphasizes the multifaceted character of the factors impairing the attendance of female leaders in the top offices of Norway's executive



sphere. Developing awareness of society and culture as a business barrier, a strategy of overcoming the opponents, and a multilevel system through the comprehensive and integrated way will help us create a more supportive space for women to move up to the executive levels.

8. Conclusions

This qualitative study, have been informed by a detailed narrative of multilayered aspects that have a negative effect on the number of women in top position in company in Norway. While probably the world's model country in terms of the status of women, the research conclusively shows that the influence is two- fold deserving of more thorough analysis.

The analysis brought to the light the existence of the age-varying social and cultural norms that aren't favorable to women's career progress. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes of women's duty in workplace which are still the reality of today are the core reasons for both their actions and attitude in the company. The always at home and care giving duties that put women are hands when they are only left with them also limits their time to devote the same energy as men towards their growth at work (Eagly and Carli 2007; Benschop & Doorewaard 1998). Moreover, gender stereotypes and subtle biases held unconsciously in people's heads determine competence and leadership qualities. For instance, the more accommodative and communal leadership styles typically found in women are biased against (Eagly & Karau 2002; Schein 2001)

With regard to mentorship and professional partnership, it turned out to be the critical issue of organizational level for the women on their way to achieving the top executive position. It is these unofficial networks that are often patriarchal and may serve to keep women from forming friendships and gaining insights that are vital for their professional growth (Ibarra 1993; Ely et al. 2011). As for gender culture which are masculine-biased norms, values, and practices established in various organizations might create uncomfortable environment for women in leadership positions (Acker 1990). Structural bias which includes pay gaps based on gender, lack of family-friendly policy and ambiguous promotion processes also exacerbate the glass ceiling phenomenon. Psychologists found that women who spoke confidently and forcefully were perceived as difficult and unprofessional.

At an individual level, lack of confidence, self-esteem, and fraud-risk-aversion were recognized as necessary resistances for women's career promotion. Men and women could unconsciously practice the social gender stereotypes and career limiting believes which therefore negatively affect the confidence of the women in their capabilities to take up the executive roles that were initially reserved for men by birth (Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra 1993). In addition to early socialization, expectations, and the struggles of balancing work and family responsibilities, a heightened sense of risk aversion may be fostered that stems from big sacrifices or trade-offs regarding leadership may paradoxically prevent women from pursuing top leadership positions.

The outcomes of this research are going to have a serious consequence for policymakers, organizations and the individuals that are involved in /trying to fight the imbalanced male and female representation in the upper management tiers of the Norwegian corporate leadership. The policymakers have to review the available gender equality legislation or introduce further legislation, which requires obligatory reporting, and organizations are sponsored according to the progress they have already made in closing the gender gap. Besides, those policies that permit work-life balance like parental leaves and flexible work schedules can ease the weight off the shoulder of women who take the bulk of household duties.

The first step that should be taken in such a program is to develop training approaches for leaders who address biases without regard to skin color or gender while promoting diverse styles of leadership. Developing and implementing revised selection and progression methods to make them transparent and safe is another important step. Moreover, to this end, it is necessary that business entities provide career development tools for females (e. g. mentorship, and networking) to enable them navigate successfully their way to executive positions.

At the individual level, women should be encouraged to build confidence and self-esteem through leadership development programs and mentorship initiatives. Addressing personal factors that may discourage women from pursuing executive leadership roles, such as risk aversion and work-life balance challenges, is also essential. By empowering women and providing them with the necessary tools and support, they can overcome the barriers to



career advancement.

Addressing the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions in Norway requires a holistic and integrated approach that acknowledges the interplay between societal, organizational, and individual-level factors. By challenging traditional gender roles, fostering organizational inclusivity, providing individual-level support, strengthening accountability measures, and promoting collaborative efforts among stakeholders, Norway can further solidify its reputation as a global leader in gender equality and unlock the full potential of diverse perspectives and talents in executive leadership positions.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The reliance on secondary data sources may introduce potential biases, and the findings are specific to the Norwegian context, limiting their generalizability to other countries or regions. Future research should consider primary data collection through interviews or surveys with women in executive leadership positions, as well as comparative studies across different cultural and organizational contexts.

Ultimately, this study serves as a call to action for stakeholders at all levels to address the complex and deeply rooted factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions in Norway. By implementing evidence-based interventions and fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment, Norway can continue to lead the way in promoting gender equality and harnessing the full potential of its diverse workforce.

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society, 4*(2), 139-158.
- Benschop, Y., & Doorewaard, H. (1998). Covered by equality: The gender subtext of organizations. *Organization Studies, 19*(5), 787-805. <https://doi.org/10.1177/017084069801900504>
- Bertrand, M. (2011). New perspectives on gender. In O. Ashenfelter & D. Card (Eds.), *Handbook of labor economics* (Vol. 4, pp. 1543-1590). Elsevier.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.
- Catalyst. (n.d.). Pyramids: Women in S&P 500 companies. <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-sp-500-companies/>
- Correll, S. J. (2001). Gender and the career choice process: The role of biased self-assessments. *American Journal of Sociology, 106*(6), 1691-1730.
- Crosen, R., & Gneezy, U. (2009). Gender differences in preferences. *Journal of Economic Literature, 47*(2), 448-474.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social role interpretation*. Erlbaum.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. *Harvard Business Review, 85*(9), 62-71.
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review, 109*(3), 573-598.
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 10*(3), 474-493.
- Ely, R. J., Stone, P., & Ammerman, C. (2014). Rethink what you 'know' about high-achieving women. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2014/12/rethink-what-you-know-about-high-achieving-women>
- Heilman, M. E. (2001). Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(4), 657-674.
- Hunt, V., Layton, D., & Prince, S. (2015). Why diversity matters. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>
- Hymowitz, C., & Schellhardt, T. D. (1986). The glass ceiling: Why women can't seem to break the invisible barrier that blocks them from the top jobs. *The Wall Street Journal, 57*, 1-4.
- Ibarra, H. (1993). Personal networks of women and minorities in management: A conceptual framework. *Academy of Management Review, 18*(1), 56-87.
- Ibarra, H., Carter, N. M., & Silva, C. (2010). Why men still get more promotions than women. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2010/09/why-men-still-get-more-promotions-than-women>
- Lyness, K. S., & Thompson, D. E. (2000). Climbing the corporate ladder: Do female and male executives follow the same route? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85*(1), 86-101.
- McGinn, K. L., & Castro, M. R. (2021). Why did so many wives leave the labor force? *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/09/why-did-so-many-wives-leave-the-labor-force>
- Morrison, A. M., White, R. P., & Van Velsor, E. (1987). *Breaking the glass ceiling: Can women reach the top of America's largest corporations?* Addison-Wesley.
- Norwegian Institute of Public Health. (n.d.). Gender equality in Norway: Trends and challenges. <https://www.fhi.no/en/publ/2022/gender-equality-in-norway/>
- Norwegian School of Economics. (n.d.). Work-life balance and career advancement: Experiences of women in Norway. <https://www.nhh.no/en/research-centres/gender-equality-in-business/>
- Oakley, J. G. (2000). Gender-based barriers to senior management positions: Understanding the scarcity of female CEOs. *Journal of Business Ethics, 27*(4), 321-334.
- Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (2001). Prescriptive gender stereotypes and backlash toward agentic women. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(4), 743-762. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00239>
- Schein, V. E. (2001). A global look at psychological barriers to women's progress in management. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(4), 675-688. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00235>



- Seierstad, C., & Opsahl, T. (2011). For the few not the many? The effects of affirmative action on presence, prominence, and social capital of women directors in Norway. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 27(1), 44-54.
- Storvik, A., & Schøne, P. (2008). In search of the glass ceiling: Gender and recruitment to management in Norway's state bureaucracy. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 59(3), 729-755.
- Teigen, M. (2012). Gender quotas on corporate boards: On the diffusion of a distinct national policy reform. *Comparative Social Research*, 29, 115-146.
- World Economic Forum. (2022). Global gender gap report 2022. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022>