



Glass Ceiling Perceptions and Women's Leadership Aspirations: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy and the Moderating Role of Organizational Support

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Leadership Aspirations, Self-Efficacy, Organizational Support, Women's Career Advancement</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Uzair Inayat Memon, Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST) University, Hyderabad Campus Email: uzair.memon@hyd.szabist.edu.pk</p>	<p>ABSTRACT This research aims to explicate the effects of glass ceiling perceptions on female leadership goals within the Karachi based, private-sector organizations and how self-efficacy mediates the relationship and how organizational support modulates the relationship. The research design was quantitative and a structured Likert-scale questionnaire was used to gather data of 250 women. The hypothesized relationships were tested by a PLS-SEM mechanism of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. The results show that the perceptions of glass ceiling have a negative and significant impact on the leadership ambitions of women. This relationship was also partially mediated by self-efficacy, which showed that psychological empowerment is an important factor to counter the impact of perceived barriers. The perception of glass ceiling and leadership aspirations moderate their influence on leadership aspirations through organizational support, which means that the negative effect of structural and cultural barriers is minimized in the context of supportive workplace practices. The findings indicate that any intervention that aims at promoting the career growth of women must consider the aspect of both personal confidence and organizational inclusiveness. The practical implications involve introduction of mentorship programs, clear promotion policy and gender sensitive HR practices to enhance the leadership potential of women. The paper is relevant to the research of psychological and institutional interactions that influence the development of female leadership patterns in the private sector of Karachi.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The perception of glass ceiling is a major obstacle in the career advancement of women even to this day, especially in developing nations like Pakistan where women cannot reach leadership positions due to the cultural and structural perceptions. Although, more women have become part of the workforce, stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudiced judgments strengthen invisible obstacles that hinder the progress of women (Taparia and Lenka, 2022; Zhang and Basha, 2023). According to the study conducted in Pakistan, organizational hierarchies are often perceived as exclusionary by women, which reduces their desire to assume leadership roles (Khan and Khan, 2022; Khalid and Aftab, 2023). The latter are particularly noticeable in the sphere of the Karachi-based private sector, as the competitive corporate environment collides with the norms of traditions to exacerbate the gender-based restrictions (Aman et al., 2025; Rafiq et al., 2024). In turn, the study of the impact of the perceptions of the glass ceiling on the female desire to become a leader has become a critical scholarly issue.

The psychological processes and in particular self-efficacy is a key mediator in determining how women perceive and act on glass ceiling challenges. By the internalization of the discriminative messages, the women lose faith in their ability to hold senior positions, undermining their hopes of promotion to senior positions (Budiarti et al., 2023; Malik, 2025). Research has always demonstrated that the perception of glass ceiling lowers self-belief and confidence, thus decreasing the career ambitions (Khan and Khan, 2022; Taparia and Lenka, 2022). The banking and education sectors in Pakistan have shown that women with effective self-efficacy tend to seek leadership opportunities regardless of the institutional obstacles (Khan et al., 2025; Aman et al., 2025). In this way, the study of self-efficacy as an intervening variable becomes critical in order to consider the role of internal psychological resources and external gendered restraints.

Besides psycho factors, the organizational support also plays a significant role in mediating the perceived glass ceilings and leadership aspirations. The adverse effects of structural barriers can be mitigated with the help of supportive workplace environments, i.e., gender-inclusive policies, mentorship, and equitable promotion (Saleem et al., 2025; Nosheen et al., 2025). It has been revealed that women with the perception of strong organizational support have a higher motivation and ambition to become a leader (Rafiq et al., 2024; Khalid and Aftab, 2023). On the other hand, the absence of organizational support enhances the perception of glass ceiling and leads to lower confidence and fewer leadership intentions (Khan et al., 2025; Zhang and Basha, 2023). Organizational support thus acts as a very critical condition that makes the difference between women who struggle, and those who give in to gender based challenges.

The combination of these efforts and the structure of the Karachi private organizations is even more complicated because of various dynamics of the workforce and changing corporate cultures. Females working in such environments frequently have to face implicit institutional pressures, such as the lack of informal networks, the lack of representation in decision-making processes, and gender-based work assignments (Khan et al., 2025; Taparia and Lenka, 2022). Nevertheless, under the condition of promoting inclusive cultures and supportive leadership practices by organizations, women are better placed to overcome these limitations and maintain high leadership aspirations (Nosheen et al., 2025; Saleem et al., 2025). It is essential to comprehend how all of these factors can affect leadership ambitions so that to develop the policies that can facilitate the equitable career promotion (Malik, 2025; Aman et al., 2025). In this line, this research examines the role of self-efficacy as a mediator of the connection between perceptions

of glass ceiling and the ambitions of women to become leaders in the Karachi private sector through the moderation of organizational support.

Aim of the Study

This research seeks to analyze the effect of glass ceiling perception on women leadership ambitions in privately owned organizations in Karachi by determining the mediating and moderating role of self-efficacy, and organization support, respectively. It aims to find out the relationship between psychological and organizational factors in their combined influence on the intention of women to lead in gendered corporate contexts.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the impact of glass ceiling perceptions on women's leadership aspirations in private organizations in Karachi.
2. To examine the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between glass ceiling perceptions and leadership aspirations.
3. To analyze the moderating role of perceived organizational support on the link between glass ceiling perceptions and leadership aspirations.
4. To propose a comprehensive model explaining how psychological and organizational conditions influence women's leadership pathways.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of glass ceiling has been intensively tested as an institutional and cultural factor that inhibits the career growth of women in various organizational environments. Such obstacles are seen in the form of discriminatory promotional policies, reduced access to leadership networks, and gendered organizational culture (Taparia and Lenka, 2022; Zhang and Basha, 2023). Women in Pakistan often complain of encountering invisible boundaries that impede their leadership development because corporate cultures in the country are still patriarchal (Khan and Khan, 2022; Khalid and Aftab, 2023). The studies in the sphere of banking, education, and corporate ones have proven that the perception of glass ceiling is an influential factor in the way women are not motivated to pursue higher-level managerial positions (Aman et al., 2025; Rafiq et al., 2024). The findings raise the need to examine the effects of such perceptions on the leadership ambitions of women in the competitive business settings such as Karachi.

Research also highlights the importance of self efficacy in determining how women respond to barriers at work place. Self-efficacy is the conviction in being able to do something and accomplish anything, which has a strong influence on career choice and intentions to become a leader (Budiarti et al., 2023; Malik, 2025). By internalizing glass ceiling cues, women can have less confidence, less ambition, and more reluctance to become leaders (Khan and Khan, 2022; Taparia and Lenka, 2022). The data collected in Pakistan indicates that increasing self-efficacy might have cushioned the adverse impact of gender discrimination and helped women to stay dedicated to the development of leadership (Khan et al., 2025; Aman et al., 2025). The self-efficacy is, therefore, often theorized as an intervening factor between perceptions of the glass ceiling and leadership ambitions.

Another important issue that affects the career growth of women is the organizational support. Positive organizational forms, including non-discriminatory HR policies, non-discriminatory promotion programs, and mentoring offered (Saleem et al., 2025; Nosheen et al., 2025) are critical in motivating women to become leaders. When women feel that there is robust organizational support, they show a greater level of engagement, ambition and desire to make leadership strides. (Rafiq et al., 2024; Khalid and Aftab, 2023). On the other hand, the absence of

organizational support might further amplify the perception of a glass ceiling and eliminate the self-belief women have in their leadership performance (Khan et al., 2025; Zhang and Basha, 2023). Organizational support is, therefore, a significant contextual aspect that influences the way women perceive and respond to gender-based barriers.

The work of recent reveals the fact that within a dynamic corporate setting, like in Karachi, the conglomerate effects of glass ceiling perceptions, self-efficacy, and organizational support are especially relevant. In the cases of the private-sector organizations, women might experience limitations in the form of being locked out of informal circles, less mentoring, and fewer opportunities to develop as leaders (Khan et al., 2025; Taparia and Lenka, 2022). Nevertheless, the companies that are devoted to the gender equality programs have been identified to empower the women leadership intentions and minimize the glass ceiling perception effects (Nosheen et al., 2025; Saleem et al., 2025). This set of findings implies that the intentions of women to become leaders are determined both by the presence of psychological resources and organizational circumstances. Thus, an in-depth review suggests that the interaction of these variables in the Karachi context of the private organizations should be studied.

Hypotheses Development

The perceptions of glass ceiling have always been singled out as one of the most significant structural and cultural impediments that do not give women a sense of aspiration to lead. It is found that women reduce their desire to ascend to senior roles by more than half when they believe that they have been discriminated against by the promotion system, biased leadership assessment, and constraining gender expectations (Taparia and Lenka, 2022; Zhang and Basha, 2023). In Pakistan, these attitudes are further enhanced and reinforced by the presence of patriarchal culture, which restricts the upward mobility of women (Khan and Khan, 2022; Khalid and Aftab, 2023). When women assume that leadership opportunities are closed, they tend to lower their career goals and do not take up challenging jobs. On this ground, the original hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Glass ceiling perceptions negatively influence women's leadership aspirations.

The self-efficacy is a key aspect that determines the way women react to perceived organizational barriers. It is proven that internalized gender-based barriers decrease the confidence that women have in their leadership skills, which further lower the desire to take up managerial roles (Budiarti et al., 2023; Malik, 2025). The perception of glass ceiling might degrade self-confidence where women will undermine themselves and lose interest in pursuing leadership roles (Khan and Khan, 2022; Taparia and Lenka, 2022). On the other hand, the high level of self-efficacy has proven to enable women to fight the discriminatory framework and keep their leadership goals (Khan et al., 2025; Aman et al., 2025). Thereby, the second hypothesis is established:

H2: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between glass ceiling perceptions and women's leadership aspirations.

Organizational support is also another important issue that influences the way women perceive and react to glass ceiling barriers. The damaging consequences of discriminatory frameworks can be mitigated by supportive workplaces that provide mentorship, inclusive human resource management, clear promotions, and leadership training (Saleem et al., 2025; Nosheen et al., 2025). Women are more likely to retain leadership intentions with structural challenges in case they feel the strong organizational support (Rafiq et al., 2024; Khalid and Aftab, 2023). Conversely, the lack of organizational support adds to the perception of the glass ceiling and

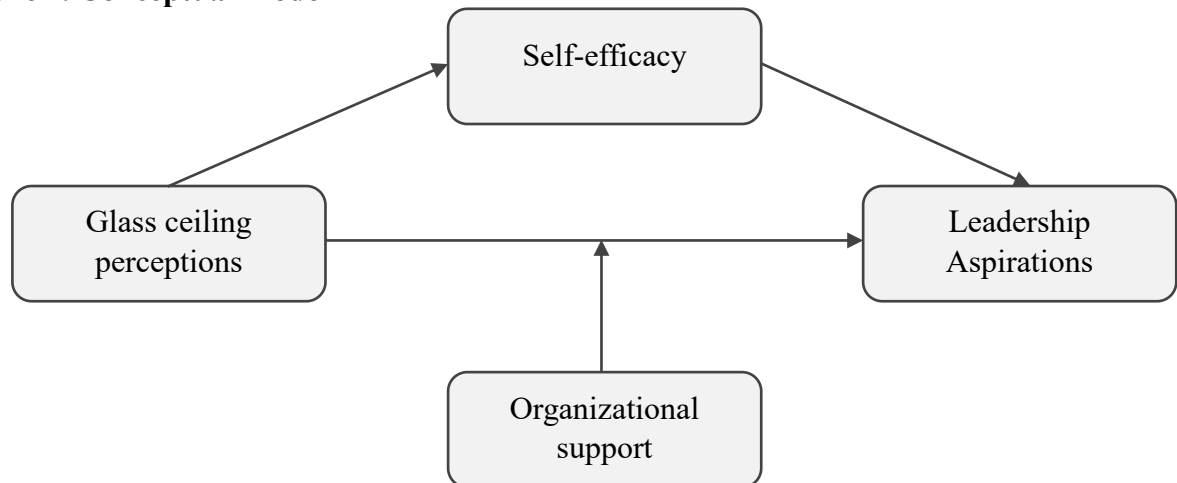
discourages women of reaching the high positions (Khan et al., 2025; Zhang and Basha, 2023). This gives way to the third hypothesis:

H3: Organizational support moderates the relationship between glass ceiling perceptions and women's leadership aspirations, such that the negative relationship weakens when organizational support is high.

Besides individual and organizational conditions, integrating self-efficacy and organizational assistance is a more comprehensive approach to developing a deeper insight into the development of women into leadership ambitions. It has been hinted that both psychological resources and positive workplace conditions positively affect the resilience and readiness of women to take up leadership positions (Nosheen et al., 2025; Saleem et al., 2025). These variables interact in such a way that they build up how females perceive career opportunities and barriers in the context of the Karachi private sector, where competition is intense, and gender norms are changing (Malik, 2025; Aman et al., 2025). The fourth hypothesis is based on these arguments:

H4: The indirect relationship between glass ceiling perceptions and leadership aspirations through self-efficacy is strengthened when organizational support is high.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Source: formulated by author(s) of the study after review of exiting literature

Methodology

The type of research design used in this study is quantitative and cross-sectional research design to analyze the structural relationships among the perceptions of glass ceiling, self-efficacy, organizational support, and women leadership aspirations. The approach is guided by positivist research philosophy, which involves objective measurement and statistical analysis of hypotheses that have theoretical basis. The target population is the women working in the Karachi based organizations in the private sector who represent a wide range of industries including banking, telecommunications, retail and corporate services. The sampling method used is a non-probability convenience sampling method based on accessibility limitations and under representation of women in leadership pipeline in these sectors. The collection of data is done using a structured self-administered questionnaire that is administered physically and online via survey tools.

The sample size of the study is around 250 respondents that is suitable to Complete Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) that handles complex models and non-normal

data. Ethical principles are also adhered to, so there is voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. SmartPLS is used to analyze the data and determine the measurement reliability, validity, and structural model, whereas SPSS is applied to descriptive statistics and conduct a preliminary screening. The given approach to the methodology is consistent with the prior studies researching gender-related barriers and organizational processes in the Pakistani corporate environment (Khan and Khan, 2022; Aman et al., 2025; Nosheen et al., 2025).

Measures: The development of all constructs is founded on established and validated scale based on the previous empirical research. The Glass Ceiling Perceptions are determined by items borrowed by Taparia and Lenka (2022) and Khan and Khan (2022), which assess the discriminatory practices, more biased promotion paths, and gender-based limitations. The measure of Self-Efficacy is based on the items modified according to Budiarti et al. (2023) and Malik (2025), which measure the confidence that women have in their leadership skills and competence in performing their tasks. The organizational Support scale is based on the items picked by Saleem et al. (2025) and Nosheen et al. (2025) and assesses the perceptions of mentorship, fair treatment, and supportive HR policies. Leadership Aspirations are assessed with the help of the items modified according to Zhang and Basha (2023) and Rafiq et al. (2024), the preoccupation of which is the intentions and motivation of women towards leadership. Each of them is also rated using a five-point Likert scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

The age distribution of the sample is such that it is described by the majority of young professional females (26-30 years, 36.8, and 31-35 years, 25.2), as a result of increasing involvement of young female workers in Karachi in the Karachi private-sector organization. The area of education distribution reveals that a significant percentage of the participants have earned Masters degrees (46.4%), which means that women, who have the ambitions of becoming leaders tend to have high academic degrees. One significant segment of the sample has 4-6 years experience (35.6%), implying that these women are in transition periods when leadership is usually getting established. The fact that the respondents in higher positions (44.8) are highest also underscores that a large portion of the respondents may be at an age of their careers where the perception of the glass ceiling and expectations of being promoted may be at its peak.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Age</i>	20–25 years	58	23.2%
	26–30 years	92	36.8%
	31–35 years	63	25.2%
	Above 35 years	37	14.8%
<i>Education Level</i>	Bachelor’s Degree	101	40.4%
	Master’s Degree	116	46.4%
	MPhil/MS or Above	33	13.2%

<i>Work Experience</i>	Less than 1 year	34	13.6%
	1–3 years	78	31.2%
	4–6 years	89	35.6%
	More than 6 years	49	19.6%
<i>Job Position</i>	Entry-Level	103	41.2%
	Mid-Level	112	44.8%
	Senior/Managerial Level	35	14.0%
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	136	54.4%
	Married	114	45.6%

The marital status distribution is rather even as 54.4% were single and 45.6% were married which means the work-life dynamics may not affect career aspirations equally among the sample. The fact that mid-level and entry-level participants predominated implies that the majority of women are still in the process of exploring career development opportunities and can be experiencing structural challenges directly affecting their motivation to lead. The overall demographic profile is a good and diverse representation of women in the private organizations of Karachi giving a good basis of analyzing how the perceptions of the glass ceiling, self-efficacy, and organizational support, as a collective, affect the leadership aspirations.

Outer loadings

The external loadings reveal that there is a good individual item reliability of all items, with a higher value than the recommended level of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). In the case of the Glass Ceiling (GLC) construct, the loadings are between 0.754 and 0.812 which show that variations like biased promotions and decision-making positions are consistent to measure the perceived barriers. Self-Efficacy (SE) construct demonstrates the loadings 0.826 to 0.845 that implies that all items will always measure the confidence of respondents in their leadership abilities. On the same note, Organizational Support (OS) constructs have a range of 0.787 to 0.805, which confirms that the construct represents the mentorship, gender-sensitive policies, and supportive leadership constructs. The construct Leadership Aspirations (LA) that has a loading ranging between 0.801 and 0.819 ascertains that the indicators are useful in ascertaining the motivation and the desire by the respondents to take up leadership positions.

Table 2. Outer Loadings of Measurement Items

<i>Items</i>	<i>Glass Ceiling (GLC)</i>	<i>Self-Efficacy (SE)</i>	<i>Organizational Support (OS)</i>	<i>Leadership Aspirations (LA)</i>
<i>GLC1</i>	0.812	—	—	—
<i>GLC2</i>	0.754	—	—	—
<i>GLC3</i>	0.781	—	—	—
<i>GLC4</i>	0.769	—	—	—
<i>GLC5</i>	0.795	—	—	—

SE1	—	0.845	—	—
SE2	—	0.832	—	—
SE3	—	0.826	—	—
SE4	—	0.838	—	—
SE5	—	0.841	—	—
OS1	—	—	0.801	—
OS2	—	—	0.793	—
OS3	—	—	0.787	—
OS4	—	—	0.799	—
OS5	—	—	0.805	—
LA1	—	—	—	0.819
LA2	—	—	—	0.807
LA3	—	—	—	0.801
LA4	—	—	—	0.815
LA5	—	—	—	0.808

In general, the discussion shows that each of the items significantly contributes to its own construct, which confirms the validity of the measurement model in SmartPLS. The consistency and high loading of the constructs show that the items are coherent and will be suitable in testing the structural relationships. This gives a strong basis to further analysis of the structural model such as path coefficients, mediation effects of self-efficacy and moderating effects of organizational support on leadership aspirations.

Internal consistency dependability test

The internal consistency reliability test proves that all the constructs in the research have high reliability with a variety of measures. Cronbach Alpha of all constructs is between 0.841 and 0.872, which is above the recommended value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019) and it signifies that the items will consistently measure the latent variables associated with them. All the constructs yield slightly higher Rho A values (0.846-0.875) which are regarded as a superior reliability estimator in PLS-SEM, which again proves the stability and consistency of the measurement items.

Table 3. Internal Consistency Reliability

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha (α)</i>	<i>Rho_A</i>	<i>Composite Reliability (CR)</i>
<i>Glass Ceiling (GLC)</i>	0.856	0.861	0.894
<i>Self-Efficacy (SE)</i>	0.872	0.875	0.905
<i>Organizational Support (OS)</i>	0.841	0.846	0.882
<i>Leadership Aspirations (LA)</i>	0.859	0.864	0.891

Likewise, the Composite Reliability (CR) coefficients are 0.882-0.905 exceeding the expected 0.70 which indicates that the constructs are highly consistent in the respect of individual item loadings. Together the outcome of Cronbachs Alpha, Rho A and CR are sound arguments that the measurement model does not fail. This guarantees that the latent measures- Glass Ceiling, self-efficacy, organizational support, and leadership aspirations are measured very well and give a strong base on which the structural relationship in the model is to be tested.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

The convergent validity test states that the convergent validity of all the constructs within the model is AVE 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019); therefore, all latent variables cover an adequate portion of the variance in each indicator. Glass ceiling (GLC) has AVE of 0.635, Self-efficacy (SE) 0.701, Organization support (OS) 0.634 and Leadership aspirations (LA) 0.659 and it is observed that all constructs have a strong convergent validity. These values indicate that the measurement items correlate positively with the latent constructs that they are intended to measure, and can reliably reflect the intended theoretical concepts.

Table 4. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

<i>Construct</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>GLC</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>OS</i>	<i>LA</i>
<i>Glass Ceiling (GLC)</i>	0.635	0.797	–	–	–
<i>Self-Efficacy (SE)</i>	0.701	0.462	0.837	–	–
<i>Organizational Support (OS)</i>	0.634	0.485	0.514	0.796	–
<i>Leadership Aspirations (LA)</i>	0.659	0.438	0.553	0.498	0.812

The discriminant validity analysis according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion also ensures that every construct is unique to the other. The inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal values) are lower compared to the square root of AVE (diagonal values) of all constructs, which means that the constructs have stronger similarities with their indicators than other constructs. Considering the example of the square root of AVE of SE(0.837), it has a greater correlation with the SE than with GLC(0.462), OS(0.514) and LA(0.553), which proves that it is discriminant valid. On the whole, convergent and discriminant validity outcomes suggest that the measurement model corresponds to the strong and can be used to analyze the structural model relationships, mediation, and moderation analysis.

R² and F² Values of Structural Model

The R² values show that the structural model has a significant amount of variance that is explained on the endogenous constructs. The mediating variable of self-efficacy (SE) has an R² of 0.312, which indicates that Glass Ceiling (GLC) explains 31.2 per cent of the variance in SE. The R² of Leadership Aspirations (LA) is 0.426, which indicates that 42.6 percent of the variations in leadership aspirations of women can be attributed to GLC, SE, and Organizational Support (OS). The R² of 0.198 of Organizational Support (OS) indicates that it does not have as much influence on the other constructs in the model, but it is a moderator nonetheless.

Table 5. R² and F² Values for Structural Model

<i>Endogenous Construct</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>F²</i>	<i>Predictor(s)</i>
<i>Self-Efficacy (SE)</i>	0.312	0.455	Glass Ceiling (GLC)
<i>Leadership Aspirations (LA)</i>	0.426	0.362	Glass Ceiling (GLC), SE, Organizational Support (OS)
<i>Organizational Support (OS)</i>	0.198	–	–

The F2 (effect size) values also show how strong are the predictor variables on that endogenous construct. In the case of SE, GLC demonstrates a significant effect ($F2 = 0.455$), which proves that the perceptions of glass ceiling do have significant effect on the self-efficacy of women. In the case of LA, the joint predictors (GLC, SE, OS) produce an intermediate impact ($F2 = 0.362$), showing significant roles of both the mediating psychological one and organizational support in bringing about leadership ambitions. On the whole, these findings suggest that the model is sufficiently explanatory and that mediating concern of self-efficacy and moderating concern of the organizational support are applicable in explaining leadership ambitions of women working in the private organizations of Karachi.

Path Coefficient Analysis

The path coefficient analysis indicates that Glass Ceiling (GLC) negatively impacts Self-Efficacy (SE) ($b = -0.558$, $t = 8.421$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that the greater the beliefs associated with glass ceiling barriers, the lower the self-efficacy levels of women in their leadership capabilities.

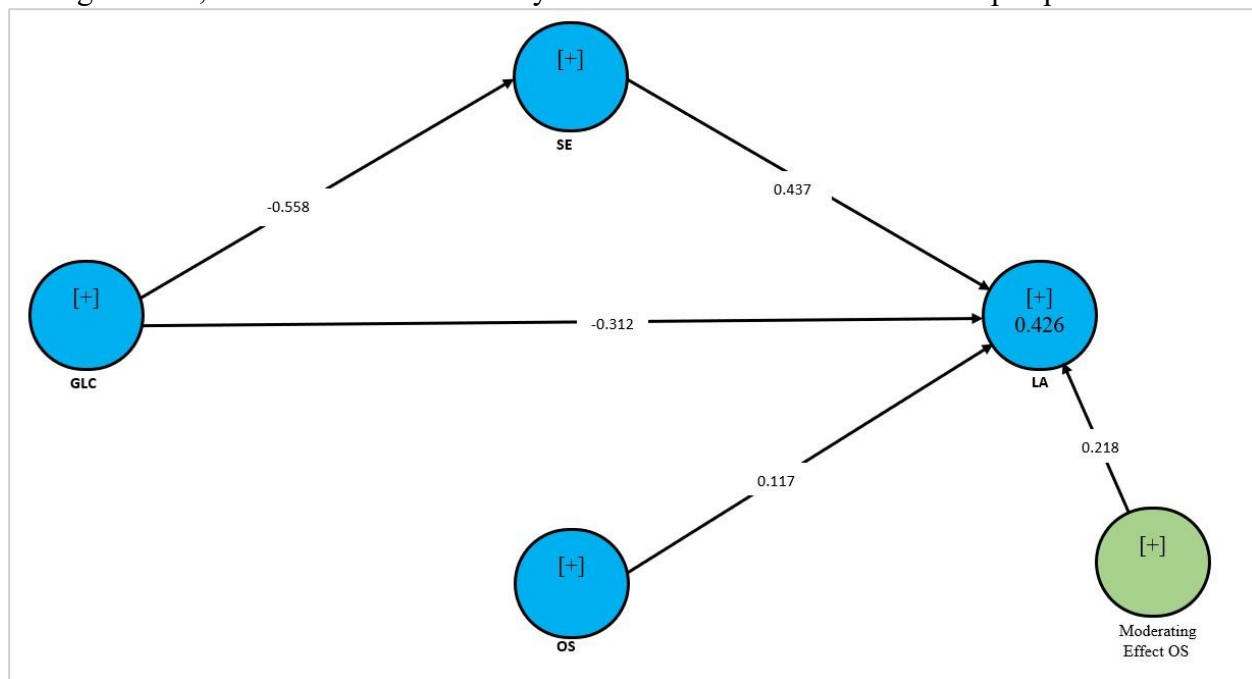


Figure 2. Measurement Model of the study

Self-Efficacy (SE), which positively influences Leadership Aspirations (LA) ($b = 0.437$, $t = 5.762$, $p < 0.001$), imp The direct impact of GLC on LA is also adverse and significant ($b = -0.312$, $t = 4.109$, $p < 0.001$) and it proves the fact that structural and cultural barriers directly inhibit leadership intentions.

Table 6. Path Coefficient Analysis

Relationship	β (Path Coefficient)	t-value	p-value
Glass Ceiling \rightarrow Self-Efficacy (GLC \rightarrow SE)	-0.558	8.421	0.000
Self-Efficacy \rightarrow Leadership Aspirations (SE \rightarrow LA)	0.437	5.762	0.000
Glass Ceiling \rightarrow Leadership Aspirations (GLC \rightarrow LA)	-0.312	4.109	0.000
Organizational Support \times Glass Ceiling \rightarrow Leadership Aspirations (OS*GLC \rightarrow LA)	0.218	3.276	0.001
Glass Ceiling \rightarrow Leadership Aspirations (Indirect via SE)	-0.244	4.135	0.000

The findings also demonstrate that there is a significant moderating effect of Organizational Support (OS) on the association between GLC and LA ($b = 0.218$, $t = 3.276$, $p = 0.001$), which means that supportive organizational practices can lessen the adverse effect of glass ceiling perceptions on leadership aspirations. Furthermore, the partial mediation of the effect of GLC on LA via SE ($b = -0.244$, $t = 4.135$, $p < 0.001$) proves the presence of the indirect impact of self-efficacy on the reduction of negative impacts of gender barriers. Altogether, these results prove the relationships assumed in the hypothesis and emphasize the interaction of structural, psychological, and organizational variables on the determination of women leadership ambitions in the Karachi private sector.

Discussion

This study has shown that glass ceiling perceptions have detrimental effects on the leadership aspiration of women, which directly answers the first research objective which was to determine the influence of glass ceiling perceptions on leadership aspiration of women in the private organization of Karachi. The adverse direct impact is consistent with the previous studies that demonstrate that women are subjected to structural and cultural factors, including biased promotions and no opportunities to take part in decision-making processes, that undermine the desire to occupy leadership positions (Khan and Khan, 2022; Taparia and Lenka, 2022; Zhang and Basha, 2023; Khalid and Aftab, 2023). This result can be deemed as validating that glass ceiling obstacles are still a problem affecting professional women in Karachi, as it was observed in the corporate and academic spheres of Pakistan (Aman et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025; Rafiq et al., 2024).

The research also confirms the mediating effect of self-efficacy which addresses the second research purpose to test the mediating effect of self-efficacy in the mediating relationship between glass ceiling perceptions and leadership aspirations. Greater self-efficacy in women helps to neutralize the adverse impact of perceived obstacles, and they continue to have the motivation to become leaders (Budiarti et al., 2023; Malik, 2025). The findings confirm prior research that identified psychological resources, such as confidence and perceived competence, as key factors when it comes to addressing career constraints caused by structural barriers (Khan and Khan, 2022; Saleem et al., 2025). The observed partial mediation indicates that women can become empowered by the efforts to enhance self-efficacy and remain in the leadership ambitions despite the difficult environment of organizations (Khan et al., 2025; Nosheen et al., 2025).

Also, the organizational support was observed to significantly mediate the association between glass ceiling perceptions and leadership aspirations, which fulfilled the third research objective: to examine the moderating effect of perceived organizational support on the relationship between glass ceiling perceptions and leadership aspirations. Women who feel that the organization supports them strongly, in the form of mentorship programs, gender-sensitive policies, and rewards of their contributions, have a lower negative effect of glass ceiling perception on their leadership intentions (Rafiq et al., 2024; Nosheen et al., 2025; Saleem et al., 2025). These findings support the previous studies that affirm the necessity of supportive organizational practices to promote female leadership (Khan et al., 2025; Taparia and Lenka, 2022; Zhang and Basha, 2023). This highlights the fact that institutional interventions on structural and cultural barriers can enable women to have an upward mobility.

Lastly, the overall impact of the psychological (self-efficacy) and organizational (support) variables gets to the fourth research aim: the suggested comprehensive model to explain the

impact that psychological and organizational factors have on the leadership trajectories of women. The research validates the hypothesis that the desire of women to be leaders is created through the interaction between internal and external resources (Budiarti et al., 2023; Malik, 2025; Khan and Khan, 2022). The successful interventions should thus be based on individual empowerment and institutional inclusivity to support the former findings in Pakistani corporate and educational settings (Khalid and Aftab, 2023; Aman et al., 2025; Saleem et al., 2025; Nosheen et al., 2025). Overall, this study demonstrates that addressing both psychological and organizational dimensions is critical for mitigating the adverse effects of glass ceiling barriers and promoting women's leadership in Karachi's private sector.

Recommendations

Organizations should implement structured mentorship programs and leadership development initiatives specifically designed for women. These programs can help build self-efficacy, enhance career confidence, and prepare women to navigate structural and cultural barriers. Additionally, promoting transparent promotion policies, gender-sensitive HR practices, and recognition of women's contributions can strengthen organizational support and reduce the negative impact of glass ceiling perceptions on leadership aspirations. Regular training for managers on unconscious bias and inclusive leadership can further foster an environment where women feel empowered to pursue senior roles.

Private-sector organizations in Karachi should also focus on creating flexible work arrangements and supportive policies that balance professional and personal commitments. Establishing networks for women leaders, providing opportunities for cross-functional projects, and encouraging participation in decision-making forums can increase exposure and career advancement. By combining individual-focused interventions with organizational reforms, companies can enhance women's leadership potential and contribute to a more equitable workplace culture, ultimately improving organizational performance and employee satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships between variables. Second, data were collected using convenience sampling from private organizations in Karachi, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to other regions or sectors. Third, the reliance on self-reported survey measures may introduce response biases, such as social desirability or overestimation of leadership aspirations and self-efficacy.

Future research could address these limitations by using longitudinal designs to capture changes in women's leadership aspirations over time and examine how interventions influence self-efficacy and organizational support. Expanding the study to include public-sector organizations or other metropolitan areas can improve generalizability. Additionally, incorporating qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, can provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of women facing glass ceiling barriers and inform the development of tailored policies and programs to promote female leadership.

Conclusion

This study confirms that glass ceiling perceptions significantly hinder women's leadership aspirations in Karachi's private-sector organizations. Self-efficacy partially mediates this relationship, highlighting the importance of psychological empowerment in overcoming structural barriers, while organizational support moderates the effect, underscoring the role of supportive workplace practices. Together, these findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how individual and organizational factors interact to influence women's leadership pathways.

Implementing strategies that enhance self-efficacy and strengthen organizational support can effectively mitigate the negative impacts of glass ceiling barriers, fostering a more inclusive and equitable corporate environment.

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