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The Strategies of Turkish Female Managers to Break Glass Ceiling[1]

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Türk Kadın Yöneticilerin Cam Tavan Aşma Stratejileri[2]

Abstract

The number of female employees in the business world is increasing daily; however, managerial positions have disadvantages. They are not significantly represented in corporate leadership positions. The fragile and transparent but real barrier that prevents qualified women from advancing to senior management positions has been conceptualised as the glass ceiling in the literature. This study aims to identify and conceptualise Turkish female managers' strategies to break the glass ceiling through the qualitative research method within the framework of elements that create a glass ceiling, such as gender discrimination and gender prejudices in society, organisational culture, some female-specific behavioural faults, personal compromises and encouragers for a career. Content analysis of the interviews conducted with senior female managers was carried out using the MAXQDA software program. As a result of the study, it has been determined that Turkish female managers apply different strategies in three areas: work-life and family balance, professional life, and career path. These are inspiring strategies for women at all management levels, which they can use to advance their career paths. Among these strategies, the approach that the organisation can support will also be a guide for human resources management practitioners, managers and leaders, and organisational structure and culture designers.

Keywords : Glass Ceiling, Breaking Glass Ceiling, Female Manager.

JEL Classification Codes : J71, M12, M52, M54, M59.

Öz

İş dünyasında kadın çalışanların sayısı her geçen gün artmasına rağmen, yönetici pozisyonlarında bazı dezavantajlara sahiptirler. Kurumlardaki liderlik pozisyonlarında önemli ölçüde temsil edilmemektedirler. Nitelikli kadınların üst düzey yöneticilik pozisyonlarına ilerlemesini engelleyen, çok ince ve şeffaf ama gerçek olan engel, literatürde cam tavan olarak kavramsallaştırılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, toplumdaki cinsiyet ayrımcılığı ve cinsiyetçi önyargılar, örgüt kültürü, kadınlara özgü bazı davranışsal hatalar, kişisel tavizler ve kariyer için teşvik ediciler gibi cam tavan oluşturan unsurlar çerçevesinde Türk kadın yöneticilerin cam tavanı kırma stratejilerini nitel araştırma yöntemiyle belirlemek ve kavramsallaştırmaktır. MAXQDA yazılım programı kullanılarak, üst düzey kadın yöneticilerle yapılan görüşmelerin içerik analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Analiz sonucunda Türk kadın yöneticilerin iş-yaşam ve aile dengesi, iş hayatı ve kariyer yolu olarak

kavramsallaştırılabilecek üç alanda farklı stratejiler uyguladıkları tespit edilmiştir. Bunlar, her yönetim düzeyindeki kadınlar için kariyer yollarını ilerletmekte kullanabilecekleri ilham verici stratejilerdir. Aynı zamanda, bu stratejiler arasında yer alıp kuruluşun destekleyebileceği stratejiler insan kaynakları yönetimi uygulayıcılarına, yönetici ve liderlere, örgüt yapısı ve kültür tasarımcılarına da yol gösterici olabilecektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler : Cam Tavan, Cam Tavan Aşma, Kadın Yönetici.

1. Introduction

Despite a significant increase in women participating in the workforce, women have made slight progress in power and influence in working life (Berry, 2021). Women have certain qualities such as emotional intelligence, being extroverted and coping with stress, a positive approach to life, being more collaborative than men, more sensitive to co-workers than men, which are vital to the survival and success of any business (Goleman, 2004; Goleman, 2012; Berry, 2021), they continue to bang their heads against the glass ceiling (Jones & Palmer, 2011). It has been proved in several research that with these and similar qualities, women leaders make positive contributions to organisations (Nakagawa & Schreiber, 2014; Makochekanwa & Nchake, 2019; Bektur & Arzova, 2022; Graafland, 2020; Burkhardt et al., 2020). However, they must still be significantly represented in corporate leadership positions (Morgan, 1998; Glass & Cook, 2015). When the literature is examined, it is seen that some studies include the factors that create the glass ceiling for women managers. However, a few of these include suggestions for breaking the glass ceiling. Also, studies have yet to reveal strategies for breaking the glass ceiling. On the other hand, due to women managers' positive contributions to organisations, it is important to determine the strategy that can be reached at the senior level. Therefore, this study aims to identify and conceptualise Turkish female managers' strategies to break the glass ceiling through the qualitative research method within the framework of elements that create a glass ceiling, such as gender discrimination and gender prejudices in society, organisational culture, some female-specific behavioural faults, personal compromises and encouragers for a career.

In this context, the research contains four sections: the literature section that emphasises the gap in the literature and explains the framework of elements that create a glass ceiling, such as gender discrimination and gender prejudices in society, organisational culture, some female-specific behavioural faults, personal compromises and encouragers for a career; next, the sample, instruments and data-gathering process are explained in the methodology section. Afterwards, the findings of the content analysis of the interviews conducted with senior female managers are presented, interpreted and summarised, and the conclusion and discussion are presented in the final section.

2. Literature

Female manager is a significant topic in today's male that's hardly getting attention. Today's world needs women in more managerial positions (Akkaya & Üstgörül, 2020). There has been a rapid increase in female executive positions, especially with the significant number of women participating in the workforce in recent years. In the research conducted by Grant Thornton (2021) company to examine the impact of the pandemic period on female managers, with the participation of nearly 5,000 companies from 29 countries, including Türkiye, Türkiye ranked 12th with an average of 35% female managers, while Japan is in the 12th place ranked last with 15%. Considering the results of this study and similar studies, it can be said that women have made slight progress in power and influence in working life (Berry, 2021). However, women still face professional business and managerial disadvantages (Morgan, 1998). In summary, women struggling to achieve workplace equality continue to bang their heads against the glass ceiling (Jones & Palmer, 2011).

Women have specific qualities that can be vital to the survival and success of any business. Emotional intelligence is one of the features that enable the best leaders to maximise the performance of themselves and their followers, and it is seen that women with high emotional intelligence are people who can stand out, are at peace with themselves, and have a positive approach to life (Goleman, 2012). Women are much more collaborative than men in their management styles and listen to their colleagues more than men; even they are more sensitive to co-workers than men. (Berry, 2021). They also have success in being extroverted and coping with stress. They have no difficulty communicating with new people and show affectionate behaviours. Women are more successful than men, especially in empathy, harmony and perceiving (Goleman, 2004; Goleman, 2012). While women leaders positively contribute to organisations with these and similar qualities, they are less significantly represented in corporate leadership positions (Glass & Cook, 2015). This issue is stated as a glass ceiling in the literature and defined as a fragile and transparent but real barrier that prevents qualified women from advancing to senior management positions (Hu & Mybong-Su, 2008). "Ceiling" is an obstacle preventing upward progress, while "Glass" reflects the invisibility of the obstacle (Jauhar & Lau, 2018).

Considering the literature, it is seen that the elements that create a glass ceiling for women have different dimensions. Akpınar-Sposito (2013) interviewed French and Turkish senior female managers in his study and discussed potential career barriers in three categories as a result of the interviews. These are personal compromises, encouragers for career, and organisational culture. When the relevant literature is examined, it has been determined that gender discrimination and gender prejudices in society (Bishop, 2004; Omran et al., 2015; Sahoo & Lenka, 2016; Rüzgar, 2020) and some female-specific behaviours can hinder women while they are climbing the career ladder (Powell et al., 1979; Grant, 1988; Lindsay & Pasquali, 1993). Therefore, this study added categories of social factors and behavioural mistakes to the career barrier categories determined by Akpınar-Sposito (2013).

2.1. Personal Compromises

Both historical and cultural aspects of society affect individuals' sense of self and their way of perceiving equal opportunities. On the other hand, the family is a vital institution in society, especially for women (Barragan & Mills, 2011). For this reason, women make a great effort to simultaneously coordinate the responsibilities required by their work and family lives, and it is a common opinion that having a family for a woman is a significant milestone that affects her career progression (Anafarta et al., 2008: Higgins et al., 1992). There are learned codes that arise depending on the perspective towards women in society, and these codes cause balance problems in work and family life due to women undertaking some family duties or taking all the responsibilities of the family. The fact that they experience work-family conflict more than men, mainly due to the duties imposed on women, also creates an obstacle for women to rise in business life (Gordon & Hall, 1974).

Due to the responsibilities and social roles imposed on women, gender is at the centre of work-life balance (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Women are responsible for caring for children and housework, which limits their capacity to follow a career path (Jauhar & Lau, 2018). In addition, women are aware that having children will change family dynamics and prevent them from achieving senior management positions, so some women compromise by slowing down their career progress instead of promoting to an upper level when parenting (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009). Social stereotypes, such as women should give priority to motherhood and being a good wife, and the concessions made by women both negatively affect the process of women's being a manager and weaken the place of women in the business world by reproducing the barriers of women in the career development process (Evetts, 2000). In a study conducted in Mexico, it was determined that women's illegal and part-time work in low-productivity sectors causes them to earn lower income from work and disrupts their social rights (Henry & Fraga, 2019).

A study on women who had academic careers in an Oncology Clinic in England revealed that women considered academic life's cost more than their welfare. They preferred something other than academic life due to childcare, travel, time pressure, and publication conditions (Finn, 2017). On the contrary, in a study conducted on 304 women working in aviation and security business lines, it was revealed that the family responsibilities of the participants did not have a negative impact on their business life and did not prevent them from being promoted to managerial positions, being a mother, spouse or employee did not put pressure on them and did not cause role conflicts (Özenç, 2019).

Another factor affecting women's promotion to senior management levels is self-efficacy. Women who feel inadequate about their job skills believe they will be unsuccessful and think being at the top will make them lonely, so they do not prefer to rise in their careers (Kanter, 1989). Women who lack the necessary knowledge, skills, self-confidence and courage to manage large organisations and enter risky businesses create glass ceilings for themselves (Taşkın, 2017). In addition, assimilating social values without judgment and

accepting negative prejudices against women can be given as examples of the glass ceilings that women create for themselves while advancing in their careers (Rüzgar, 2020).

2.2. Encouragers for Career

Mentors are usually top-level, experienced, knowledgeable and senior employees committed to supporting lower-level employees and helping them rise in their careers (Raabe & Beehr, 2003).

Mentoring relationships are considered important for male employees, but they are especially needed for female managers because mentor support helps female employees and managers overcome the individual and institutional barriers they encounter (Cross & Linehan, 2006).

Due to the scarcity of female employees in senior management positions, junior female employees cannot benefit from professional guidance. When these female managers are deprived of a talented mentor, they may feel worthless and develop intentions to resign (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016).

Women primarily want to get the support of their families and relatives in their career path. In particular, the support of their families is considered a significant factor (Er & Adıgüzel, 2015). Strong relationships and solidarity between family members mean more important opportunities for career advancement for women with children. In a study, it was revealed that women who received support from their families and husbands had significant opportunities in their career path (Akpınar-Sposito, 2013). Moreover, female managers have more leadership and managerial qualities (Akkaya & Üstgörül, 2020).

2.3. Organisational Culture

Women have difficulty developing careers due to the influence of men who outnumber them in their working lives and the masculine organisational culture created by them (Procter & Maureen, 1999). In their study, Afza and Newaz (2008) examined five factors responsible for the glass ceiling effects that restrict women's career opportunities and progression at a particular stage. The study's results showed that organisational culture and perception of management were the most critical determinants of the glass ceiling (Afza & Newaz, 2008).

The fact that organisational culture is mainly shaped by men contributes to the inequality between men and women while simultaneously forming one of the essential elements of the glass ceiling (Bajdo & Dickson, 2001; Vianen et al., 2002). In addition, most men have yet to accept successful women's leadership, and women responsible for leadership roles are often perceived as a threat and a negative challenge for the average male executive (Berry, 2021).

In masculine organisations, women must prove their abilities and perform better than men to reach the same levels as men (Gorman, 2006). In many professional organisations, women face significant barriers regarding promotion, especially when it comes to reaching senior management positions, whereas men only receive support for promotion (As cited in Ansari, 2016). The inequality between men and women in masculine organisations manifests itself differently. For example, a female manager may lose her promotion opportunity against a less experienced male colleague, or a skilled female manager may undergo demotion after maternity leave (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). In addition, it is argued that there is no glass ceiling in traditional organisations dominated by masculine culture, and it is claimed that women are given lower wages because they leave work halfway, work less and enter low-risk jobs (Rai & Srivastava, 2010).

In organisations where masculine organisational culture is dominant, the more women climb the career ladder, the higher the risk of encountering more obstacles (Lathabhavan & Balasubramanian, 2017). In addition, male managers in a masculine organisational culture generally perceive their female subordinates as poor performers and have lower performance expectations (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016).

There is no doubt that significant progress has been made in the field of gender equality in the labour market in recent years. Governments, businesses, unions, and women's organisations spend a lot of thought and energy overcoming the attitudes and institutional discrimination that keep women away from specific jobs and hinder their career advancement. Nonetheless, despite all the efforts, women are still concentrated in the world's most insecure forms of work. Breaking the "glass ceiling" still seems complicated to them, except for an elite minority (Berry, 2010).

2.4. Social Factors

Social roles and factors are important in preventing women from advancing on their career path (Kiaye & Singh, 2013). Having responsibilities in family life is not the only situation in which women are affected in their efforts to maintain work-life balance. In addition, the fact that women are considered suitable for specific roles and professions, the idea that men are leaders and gender stereotypes also have societal implications (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016).

From a traditional perspective, specific domestic responsibilities and behaviours such as childcare, laundry, and cooking are expected of women in Türkiye and worldwide. This kind of gender discrimination brings men to the fore and creates a belief that women will "fail" in the jobs that men do (Naz, 2019; Rüzgar, 2020).

A combination of social attitudes and gender inequality in education and training has contributed significantly to occupational discrimination. It has resulted in diverting men and women into different jobs and occupations, a situation called "horizontal separation" (Carnavale & Stone, 1994). Cultural and social attitudes towards what constitutes "male" or

"female" jobs cause occupational discrimination (Akpınar-Sposito, 2013). A study by the International Labor Organization noted that male-dominated occupations are seven times more common than female-dominated occupations (Wirth, 2001).

The basis of gender discrimination in society is the perception that men and women have different skills. It is claimed that women lack qualities such as ambition and trust compared to men, as well as leadership skills such as sociability and influence, and it is also alleged that women do not have the necessary experience or training for leadership (Singh & Terjesen, 2008). There are stereotypes that women are not suitable for senior management positions because they do not have enough enthusiasm to succeed in the business world, are very emotional and do not show aggression (Omran et al., 2015). In addition, researchers have suggested that women need to learn how to compete and negotiate for senior leadership positions (Jones & Palmer, 2011).

In a male-dominated social culture, female managers were only taken seriously for a few years. In such societies, men saw women as short-lived "office flowers" that displayed a decorative appearance with their presence (Bishop, 2004). However, the number of women in executive positions in influential and high-performance-oriented organisational cultures that care about gender equality and human values is increasing (Bajdo & Dickson, 2001).

2.5. Behavioural Faults

It is thought that management is related to masculine behaviours and patriarchal thoughts (Koenig et al., 2011). In generalisations about women's being emotional, they are seen as "motherly". Expecting women to be sincere and affectionate or labelling them as "iron women" when they behave harshly stems from the masculine thoughts women are exposed to (Kanter, 1989). Management has been masculinised because the characteristics attributed to managers, such as entrepreneurship, courage, ambition and adapting to the competitive environment, are thought to be more dominant in men (Basow, 2013). Therefore, the perception that a good manager should be a "man" or "act like a man" is common among both men and women (Powell et al., 1979). So, can women achieve senior management positions without losing their femininity and speaking skills?

Numerous recent studies on organisational behaviour have answered this question. The literature has shown few personality or behavioural differences between male and female managers. As women move up the organisational hierarchy, their identification with the male managerial model of success becomes so essential that they reject even a few valuable feminine managerial traits they previously endorsed (Grant, 1988). Women think they will be empowered by identifying themselves with men who consider themselves successful and by distancing themselves from women who consider themselves ordinary and unsuccessful (Hatmaker, 2013). Many women take a "masculine" attitude when they qualify as managers (Simpson, 1997).

While the barriers created by male managers in career promotion are the subject of discussion, the barriers imposed by female managers are ignored. However, "queen bee syndrome", expressed as women struggling with each other, is one of the behavioural faults women make and prevents female managers from advancing to the upper management levels on the career ladder (Rüzgar, 2020).

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

Within the scope of this research, which was completed in mid-2021, interviews were held with ten female executives who worked at senior management levels, such as Board Members, General Managers, and Regional Managers in various sectors. By adopting the purpose-oriented sampling technique, the study aimed to reach women who worked at senior management levels during the data period when the interviews were conducted. Therefore, senior female managers constitute the sample group of the research to determine which strategies they used to overcome the glass ceiling.

3.2. Instruments

Some studies in the literature (Akpınar-Sposito, 2013; Bishop, 2004; Omran et al., 2015; Sahoo & Lenka, 2016; Rüzgar, 2020) found that factors such as gender discrimination and gender biases in society, organisational culture, some female-specific behavioural errors, personal compromises and encouragers for a career can be an obstacle to women while climbing the career ladder. Based on these studies, a semi-structured interview form was created to conduct in-depth interviews to determine the strategies that female managers who reached senior management positions implemented to overcome these obstacles. The interview form consisted of two sections: questions for determining demographic characteristics and questions for determining the strategies of female managers to overcome the glass ceiling.

### 3.3. Data-gathering Process

To present a study that could be useful to female managers working in different sectors, in-depth interviews were conducted online via Google Meet with a total of 10 senior female executives from differentiated sectors such as Pharmaceuticals, Energy, Law, Art, Aviation, Cosmetics, Banking, Technology and Food, on predetermined days and hours. All interviews were recorded during the interview thanks to the service provided by the Google Meet application. Each interview video was then replayed and deciphered. The deciphered interview texts were uploaded to the MAXQDA software program and read individually. Different codes for main themes, sub-themes, and different expressions were also defined during readings. This process continued until the end of 10 interview texts. To ensure the validity and reliability of the defined codes, the re-encoding process was performed one week later, and the new codes and the codes made a week ago were compared. The comparison clustered the main themes, sub-themes, and codes similarly.

A committee of researchers and academicians who know about the glass ceiling discussed the codes and themes that emerged from the coding process. As a result of the discussions, some codes and themes were renamed.

4. Findings

The analysis determined that female managers who reached senior management positions used strategies in three main areas: ensuring work-life and family balance, coping with various situations encountered in business life, and progressing in their career paths.

Figure: 1
Main Areas Women in Work Life Apply Strategies
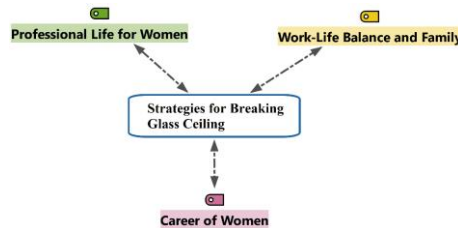
4.1. The Strategies for Women's Professional Life

In the analysis performed regarding the difficulties faced by women in the business world, it was determined that eight women emphasised the extra burdens caused by gender roles, six women the obligation of working and endeavouring more, three women gendered judgments in 5 different points, five women gender-based discrimination in 6 different points, seven women gender-based exclusions in 13 different points, one woman fear of being stigmatised due to gender-based disadvantages in 2 different points and one woman sexual harassment.

Among these difficulties, to deal with discrimination, gender stereotypes, and inhibitions, it was observed that they implemented strategies such as common and open communication, overwork and being lawless, discreet communication, patience and unresponsiveness, self-limitation for appearance, avoidance of conflict, developing a hobby for joining the group, and respect for privacy and family life.

Among these strategies applied for acceptance, it is pretty remarkable that women impose dress restrictions on themselves, develop common hobbies to be included in the work networks of their male colleagues, and emphasise respect for privacy to prove that they are harmless women in terms of family life. Women's statements regarding dress restrictions are as follows:

"I have paid great attention to my clothing; there is no décolleté, I pay attention to that. It's already annoying. Even if it's just one person, it already bothers you as soon as you feel it" (Interviewee 2, 49)

"When I got divorced, I abstained from…until I got married again, paid attention to my appearance... I applied less makeup, dressed more unpretentiously...." (Interviewee 8, 40)

Figure: 2
The Difficulties and Strategies for Women's Professional Life
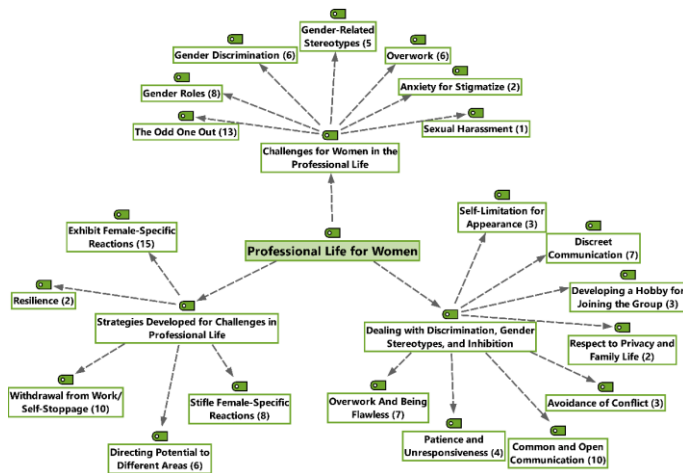
Female executives' statements about developing common hobbies to be included in their male colleagues' networks include:

"…I mean, sometimes if revilement needs to be necessary, I use bad language too; when there is a football game, I go to the game… I had a season ticket, too, so I was going to. We had a few drinks at Develi Restaurant and then went to the game. But men need to accept you there, too. Not just you alone either. The issue of being together as a man and a woman is critical there. (Interviewee 8, 40)

"I have luck with that issue; for example, there are always game comments at our house on Sunday evenings. My favourite team is Fenerbahçe. I don't know about offside, but I'm generally close to sports. That's why I always had a keen ear for things that interest them. I mean, at first, I didn't do this consciously. But then I tried to make it up a bit. So I could be included among them. Nobody says you can't get into a group, but an invisible wall has been drawn into the room when you cannot be included in that conversation." (Interviewee 10, 50)

The expressions of female managers about the strategies of emphasising respect for private life to prove that they are harmless women in terms of family life are as follows:

> "First of all, the most important factor here is my connection to my family, my connection to my husband, their knowledge of that relationship and the fact that I share them. Then, my interest in his wife or children or his relationship… I respect his private life and ask about his wife and kids. I think it's a significant factor that each of us knows our private lives and somehow knows the family structure, even from a distance. ……" (Interviewee 1, 42)

> "……as I said, you have a good family life. Most importantly, you pay more attention to your clothing when with those people. Thirdly, with your behaviour, your speeches, your expressions, your gaze, you give the impression that in any way I or my husband will not harm you or pose a threat to you." (Interviewee 2, 49)

To cope with other difficulties encountered in business life, it was found that female managers sometimes implement strategies such as showing female-specific reactions, stifling female-specific reactions, withdrawing from work/self-stoppage, directing potential to different areas and resilience. Half of the participants admitted that they had female-specific reactions and stated that their reactions did not harm them on their career journey and that they continued to show such reactions consciously.

> "So sometimes, as women, we can have a higher sensuality. No matter how much you try to destroy it, there are times when your eyes are close to being full of tears, and you have difficulty in gulping. I think it's important to prevent them because men never react that way to anything in business. I have been in this situation a few times but didn't see it as a mistake." (Interviewee 1, 42)

> Still, it is necessary to be more strategic about some things. I underwent the results, and it's induced. But I would not linger on myself; I said, "So be it...". I'm a moderate but straightforward woman, and if it had created a problem, I said, "That's who I am. " I understood it and said, "That's why it happened." But I didn't dwell on it. (Interviewee 5, 56)

> "I don't see it as a mistake. But it can be seen as a mistake by men. I always try to solve things tolerantly. I always empathise and think about why the other person reacted that way. Although some male managers characterise this as a lack of willpower or too maternal, I have never been harmed by it." (Interviewee 6, 50)

> "I believe very much that the naive side of female managers is a balance. The breathing of a female manager creates steps that balance the management at points where a male manager may be aggressive. Female managers have a feature that softens what needs to be managed and can turn a hard situation

into a soft one. This is not negativity; on the contrary, I have experienced many times the positivity of it." (Interviewee 7, 40)

"I do things like If my daughter or son calls me at the most important meeting, I pick up the phone and say it's important to me. I used to do it more often when the kids were little. Now, for instance, after losing my mother, my father is alone. My father's caretaker calls, and I say I have to pick up that phone, and I do so…. But I can say, when I go back in my career, these are the things that every male manager would not do….. I prefer to reveal my feminine reactions more clearly on purpose because I don't need to succeed like a man." (Interviewee 10, 50)

4.2. The Strategies for Work-Life Balance and Family

The analyses revealed that women emphasised family culture, childcare, social support, and their efforts in terms of work-life balance and family. They can balance work-life and family life by combining their efforts with the opportunities offered by family culture, childcare, and social support.

Figure: 3
The Difficulties and Strategies for Work-Life Balance and Family
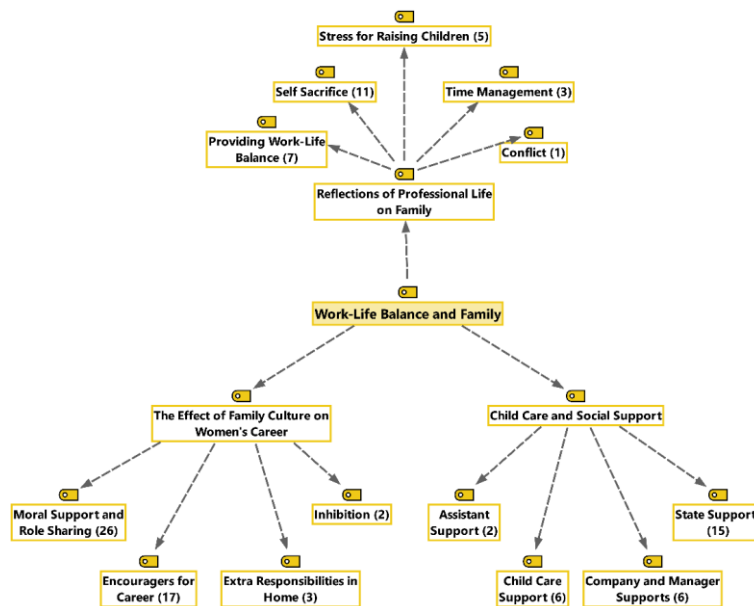
It has been understood that female managers adopt an understanding that cares about women's being in working life in the family culture of both their parents and spouses and

spouses' parents in terms of providing work-life and family balance. It has influenced women's career paths and is an important reflection of this culture. Moral support, role sharing, and encouragement for careers have influenced the career path of women and are important reflections of this culture. Only two female managers stated that their husbands' families wanted to prevent them, but they did not allow this due to the influence of their own family culture.

> "My mom and dad never set a barrier before me; they always set me free. Since I was kind of a child who did my work and always showed it, they couldn't set it. Then, my husband's family wanted to set it, but they failed." (Interviewee 6, 50)

> "That's true. I was experiencing things like this, but it wasn't something that prevented me. I heard a sentence saying that your job is a priority. But that's not what caused us to break up. Yes, his family had a more traditional attitude on this issue. But it didn't affect me much as our cities were different, so it didn't affect me in that sense. I mean, at least I didn't stop for something like that. More precisely, because of the family that raised me or my character, I always gave importance to my career, and I am not someone to see my husband or children as an obstacle." (Interviewee 8, 40)

Although there is an understanding that values and supports the presence of women in the work life, it is understood that, nevertheless, due to gender roles, women may have to take on more responsibility within the family to balance work-life and family life.

> "Unfortunately, cooking is on women. If I prepare breakfast, we have breakfast. But on the weekends, my husband prepares breakfast. There is such a share of work, but only on the weekends. For example, I prepare it for five days. If I don't do anything, we will all be hungry. It is always women who think even about what to eat. So why is it always me?.....

> ..... When you consider it, yes, even if there is no such pressure, there is such acceptance. The woman cleans the house, the woman cooks, the woman is responsible for doing the laundry……..

> ..... For example, my husband is incapable of even cutting bread. I accepted that he doesn't have that dexterity. There's nothing to do. He wasn't taught to do that. He was told that he couldn't. It's in our hands, in the hands of mothers. So, I'm trying to encourage my son to go in the kitchen and tell him, "I'll tell you, and you'll do it now. Learn to make pasta; you have to feed yourself; don't be dependent on anyone; you have to do your own thing." (Interviewee 9, 47)

In the case of childcare, which is an important element of work-life and family balance, the female managers stated that the state support and the permissions offered for

the woman were inadequate, that the maternity leave period should be extended, that the options of working from home after childbirth and/or part-time work should be offered, and that fathers should be given the right to use as much leave as the woman with the newborn baby. The examples for these recommendations are as follows:

> "I think that men and women, not just women, should be given responsibility together. Since I also want to go out and work. It doesn't comfort me that I'm given a year of unpaid leave……. regulation needs to take men in and women in. Men should be given what is given to women in childcare so that tradition could change slightly." (Interviewee 8, 40)

> "In that sense, it is important for the state to remind also men that he has a baby, as well as just as hold the women responsible. In this sense, holding men responsible is important to make it easy for women. Otherwise, it is unfortunately possible to use the woman as a birth machine." (Interviewee 10, 50)

> "…….. Since working systems such as home office have increased even more, I think that in that period, maybe after the first six months, the women can be supported with a system such as working from home until the child turns one year old." (Interviewee 9, 47)

> "I think there should be the opportunity to work part-time there. I support this a lot. You can work part-time. Secondly, if you can do your job from home, you should be allowed to work from home. You can get your files and enter them from home. Thirdly, the measures against the risk of women's losing their job should be much more stringent, and the maternity leave should be extended to at least one year." (Interviewee 5, 56)

While the support of family and caregivers in childcare is important for female managers, the support of the company and managers is undeniable. Five different female managers benefited from these supports. A few examples of the support received by women managers are given below.

> "…apart from that, the opportunities provided by the companies more than any opportunity provided by the state-supported me in this regard." (Interviewee 1, 42)

> "…….. such incidents have been overcome as a result of processes such as my senior manager's providing a more sharing environment and taking more responsibility when faced with these situations." (Interviewee 3, 43)

> "…. we had breast-feeding permission at the time. I didn't have a chance to go home as I was working at the airport on breast-feeding permission. So, I determined one day a week to combine breastfeeding permission times until the kid was one year old and did not go to work that day. I hardly went to work

on Wednesdays. It helped me that way. Other than that, I used unpaid leave. I took unpaid leave to take care of the baby until she was six months old. I mean, I was having a little trouble, to be honest….." (Interviewee 9, 47)

"The company I worked for was very flexible in that sense. ….. At that time, although there was no opportunity in Türkiye, I could use maternity leave for six months each. Since I worked in a company that gave me more opportunities to be promoted every 2-3 years and had flexible working hours, no one called me then and said anything. Therefore, I think that the policies of the institutions are very balanced. …… We had an American manager when I worked for a multinational company. I clearly remember walking into his room, shivering. He also thought that I was going to quit my job. …… He was a male manager. I said I was pregnant, the man jumped up, hugged me and, kissed me, congratulated me and said, "You are living one of the best things in your life; you are good at your job; I will take care of your promotion, don't worry about it." (Interviewee 10, 50)

4.3. The Strategies for Career Path

As a result of the analysis, it has been revealed that women emphasise the prevailing opinion on promoting women in the organisation, their managerial influences, and their efforts and characteristics on the career path. Based on their efforts and characteristics, it is understood that they can advance in their career journey by benefiting from the institution's support for promoting women and combating the adverse effects of other managers.

Women managers emphasised that personal characteristics and efforts such as the power of expertise, personality characteristics, analytic intelligence, discipline and diligence, holistic approach, detailer, solution-oriented, relationship-oriented, emotional intelligence, and training are important to advance their career journey by distinguishing themselves from their competitors.

It is understood that with the superiority created by these personal characteristics and efforts, they apply the strategies of using the understanding that supports the promotion of women and managing the adverse effects of other managers. Although eight female managers stated that there is an understanding supporting the promotion of women in the organisation, only one female manager said that she faced positive discrimination in promoting women.

"………an American firm, it's something desirable for women to come to the top level here. ….. They already had women improvement projects, you know, aimed at increasing the number of female managers. ….. There was a project like if two candidates applied for a job application and everything was equal, privilege would be given to the woman." (Interviewee 1, 42)

On the other hand, three women stated that the understanding of equality prevails in promoting female and male candidates, and their confidence in them supports promotion.

Although female managers stated that the promotion of women was supported in the institutions they worked for, they said that subordinates and other male managers made negative assessments of the promotion of women. From the negative assessments stated, it is understood that women are only sometimes accepted in the positions they are promoted to. The sample statements for these assessments are as follows:

"…… I see that the executive style of women is a little less supported; I can say that. In other words, I hear that women have more rigid insight, are more despotic than men, and take straight and firm steps. I've been witnessing many of them. It is also said that it is easier to work with men, but more difficult to work with female managers………" (Interviewee 2, 49)

"…. Male managers, especially if they have been doing this job for many years, have an " I know it better" attitude to new female managers. They tend to show that they have been here for years and know this job best. They have an insight that the new manager is not that good, especially if the newcomer is a woman." (Interviewee 4, 58)

Figure: 4
The Difficulties and Strategies for Career Path
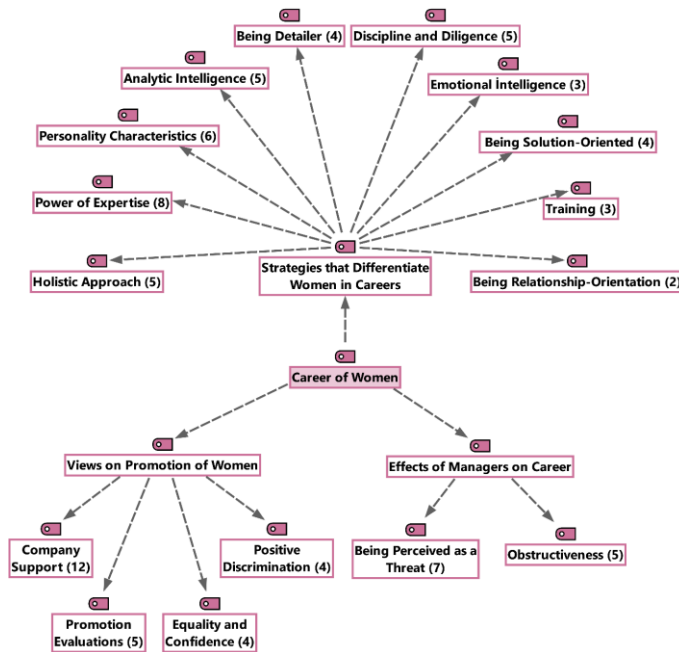
The latest situation understood in the analysis is that in their career path, women managers had to apply strategies such as convincing the male managers that they were no threat, keeping a distance and focusing on their work to regulate their relations with other managers who perceive themselves as a danger. Examples of women managers' perceptions of threats by different managers and the strategies they implemented are as follows:

"In a company where I had just joined, some of the responsibilities of a female manager had been given to me due to my competencies. Therefore, I was seen as a threat. Frankly, I first tried to approach it like this: I tried to understand the situation of that woman as a woman. I tried to convince her that I understood her a little more and was not a threat to her. She went on a little longer; I kept myself away from her. When I put that distance, I focused on my work and got out of her span of authority; after a certain period, she was more relaxed. After that, we did not make any moves that would hurt each other, as she was probably convinced in her way. In other words, there was still a secret women's solidarity there." (Interviewee 1, 42)

"Such behaviours were shown. But I don't think they are behaviours related to being a woman or a man. I'm a woman; they're men. This is just human nature." (Interviewee 5, 56)

"I mean, such things occurred; for instance, men expected to be promoted to my position. But I was brought to their top position, for example, and I was brought from outside my institution. So, of course, they tried to find fault in what I did; they conveyed this to the bosses, they tried to make me look unsuccessful at work, and they tried to undermine the trust of my customers with words like" she can't do this as her team is insufficient in number", but somehow I overcame them all." (Interviewee 6, 50)

Some female executives stated that they were not only seen as a threat but also encountered other managers who deliberately tried to hinder their career path.

"I mean, such things occurred; for example, men expected to be promoted to my position. But I was brought to their top position, and I was brought from outside my institution. Of course, they tried to find fault in what I did; they conveyed this to the bosses, they tried to make me look unsuccessful at work, and they tried to undermine the trust of my customers with statements like "she can't do this, her team is insufficient in number", but somehow I overcame them all." (Interviewee 6, 50)

"…..I saw this behaviour very seriously in one or two of my counterparts… I had a lot of joint projects with them. They don't get you involved. You agree to do the project together, and your manager will allow you to do it together. The man does not include you in it. He says," Okay, I will explain," but later, he does not. He repeats this three times five times but still does not explain it

to you. You see what he is doing from your back. If your administrator can't solve it, the problem will not be resolved. Yes, I have experienced these, so I was very unhappy there." (Interviewee 8, 40)

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Although the number of women in the business world has increased in recent years compared to the past, women still face disadvantages in professional business life and managerial positions. Women who struggle to survive in business and reach management positions try to break the glass ceiling, an invisible obstacle. As a result of this study, which aims to inspire women who are struggling to break the glass ceiling by identifying the strategies applied by women who have achieved this, it was revealed that female managers who reached senior management positions implemented strategy in three main areas which are ensuring work-life and family balance, dealing with various situations in business life and advancing their career path.

The results of the analysis showed that women faced problems such as extra burdens created by gender roles in the business world, the obligation to overwork and endeavour more, gendered judgments, gender-based discrimination, gender-based exclusions, being stigmatised due to gender-based disadvantages, and sexual harassment. In the study by Metz and Tharenou (2001), women stated that they most frequently faced the barrier of gender discrimination at every management level. We can say that these problems stem from the reflections of the opinion on women and their roles that prevail in most of society. These findings are similar to those of the study conducted by Näsman and *Hyvönen (2016).* They also stated in their research that women's chances of reaching top management positions are very low due to the understanding of women's family responsibilities, caring and mothering duties and the necessity of obedience to men, and they explained the reason for this as Brazilian society's being characterised by conservative approach and machismo. Considering that Turkish society is characterised similarly, it seems usual for female administrators to encounter similar problems. Although the families of the women managers and their husbands who participated in this research do not have such an understanding, the fact that individuals brought up in the prevailing view of society carry this understanding of the business environment causes women managers to encounter these problems.

To deal with discrimination, gender stereotypes and inhibitions at the workplace, it was observed that women implemented strategies such as common and open communication, overwork and being lawless, discreet communication, patience and unresponsiveness, self-limitation for appearance, avoidance of conflict, developing a hobby for joining the group and respect to the privacy and family life. These results support the results stated by Johnson et al. (2008). They have said that women leaders/managers must be warm, sensitive, and caring to handle stereotypes associated with their gender roles. These results are also similar to the results of the study conducted by İşeri and Çalık (2019). İşeri and Çalık (2019) revealed that female school administrators develop solutions such as trying to promote themselves with their attitudes and behaviours, showing generosity, proving that

they are successful and ignoring some situations to eliminate the problems they experience regarding their social acceptance in the school. While the solutions in question are reactive responses to pacify the emerging situation, we can state that the strategies identified in this study are proactive strategies that will change the course of the problem.

Descriptive gender stereotypes are important for people's perceptions of men and women. They enable one to gain impressions about others quickly and easily. Research has shown that some individual qualities of women, such as physical attractiveness and motherhood, cause them to be evaluated more negatively than their male counterparts and women who do not have these qualities (Colella & King, 2018). Therefore, in order not to trigger gender discrimination, women can be advised to avoid clothing styles and make-up that will reveal physical attractiveness and to avoid sharing information about private life, such as marital status and motherhood, until they are recognised in the workplace just like the female managers participating in the current research did. According to the research findings, communication is essential to cope with gender stereotypes. For this reason, physically attractive women, especially, may be advised to emphasise that they respect their private lives and establish respectful communication to network with their male colleagues. In addition, being warm, sensitive, and caring in their communication with everyone in the work environment can stifle negative evaluations arising from gender stereotypes and enable them to be accepted. These suggestions for women are to combat gender discrimination stereotypes in the short term individually, and they are not sufficient. It should be supported by organisational policies and new social values created by the state.

To cope with other difficulties encountered in business life, it was found that female managers sometimes implement strategies such as exhibiting female-specific reactions, stifling female-specific reactions, withdrawing from work/self-stoppage, directing potential to different areas and resilience. Among these strategies, it is remarkable that female managers use female-specific responses according to the situation. Even though it was stated in some earlier studies that women need to act like men to be taken seriously and succeed (Gilderhus, 1987; Mani, 1997), some companies adopted the approach of educating female employees to act like men and take on tough tasks (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000), today's female managers who participated in our research stated that they considered female specific reactions as particularly useful and did not care about how others understood them. They indicated that they did not feel obliged to succeed by acting like men and that they deliberately gave female-specific reactions. For this reason, it may be recommended that women analyse their situation at work and display female-specific reactions or stifle feminine reactions as appropriate.

It has been revealed that women emphasise family culture, childcare, and social support, as well as their work-life balance and family efforts. It is understood that they can balance work-life and family life by combining family culture with the opportunities offered by childcare, social support, and individual effort. It has been understood that moral support, role sharing, and encouragers for careers within the family significantly impact women's career paths. Despite role sharing and encouragers for career, it was concluded that women

may have to assume more responsibilities within the family to balance work-life and family life due to gender roles.

Regarding childcare, one of the essential elements of work-life and family balance, female administrators stated that the state support and the leave provided for women were insufficient. They expressed the need to extend the period of maternity leave, to offer options to work from home and/or to work part-time after giving birth, and to give fathers, in particular, the right to take leave with their newborn baby as much as women. While the support of family and caregivers in childcare is of great importance for female managers, it has been observed that the support of companies and managers is at a level that cannot be ignored. Today, many companies understand the importance of keeping the female employees they invest in. For this reason, they carry out various studies to ensure that professional women stay in business. For example, IBM grants female employees the right to be on leave for one year and work part-time for two years when they become mothers (Butler, 2006). In that case, companies can make positive discrimination practices such as whole-home or part-time home office work and longer leave rights for female employees with children, forming a policy about them. Also, the state can legislate for these practices and childcare leave for men with children.

As a result of the analysis, it was concluded that based on their efforts and characteristics, women managers could advance in their career journey by benefiting from the institution's support for promoting women and struggling with the adverse effects of other managers. It can be said that personal characteristics and efforts such as power of expertise, personality traits, analytic intelligence, discipline and diligence, holistic approach, detailer, solution-oriented, relationship-oriented, emotional intelligence and training impact women managers' promotion. It is understood that in favour of the superiority created by these personal characteristics and efforts, they apply the strategies of using the understanding that supports the promotion of women and managing the adverse effects of other managers. In that case, women can be suggested to improve their characteristics and efforts to be appropriate for a job. It has been determined that to regulate their relations with other managers who perceive them as a danger, female managers apply strategies such as convincing them that they are not a threat to them, keeping their distance and focusing on their work. These results support the approach of Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), whose early study examined how women advance to leadership positions. They revealed the advancement factors for women managers at four levels: individual, interpersonal, organisational, and social systems. The personal level focuses on individual resources; the interpersonal level focuses on relationships with subordinates, peers, and, in particular, supervisors; the organisational level states selection and promotion practices in the organisation. The social systems level focuses on gender stereotypes stemming from society. In addition to the advice above that women can improve their personal characteristics and personal efforts to be appropriate for a job, women can be suggested that they should positively communicate with subordinate, peer and their managers and select to work in organisations that provide convenience for them. Also, they should follow the advantages of organisation for promotion.

The strategies revealed in the study are inspiring strategies that women at all levels of management can benefit from to advance in their career journey. The strategy the organisation can support will also be a guide for human resources management practitioners, managers and leaders, and organisational structure and culture designers. Female leaders and managers should be brought forward to lead others toward a better future (Akkaya & Üstgörül, 2020).

In future academic studies, factors affecting women's ability to implement these strategies can be determined, scales can be developed, or the relationship and effect levels between other variables related to these strategies can be examined.

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