

A Thematic Analysis on Glass Ceiling Phenomenon and Career Development of Women in the
Bureaucracy of Nepal

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Abstract

Glass ceiling has been the emerging issue from the past in the organizations of Nepal. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that contribute to the glass ceiling phenomenon in the existing bureaucracy of Nepal. This study also attempts to explore how this this phenomenon affects women to reach in leadership position and identify the contributor that has been helping to the break this phenomenon. Explorative qualitative study was conducted via semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with the female employees of civil service and public institutions. We interviewed 13 employees and had focus group discussion with 2 groups. The analysis of this study indicates that casual sexism, informal relationships, societal perception and judgement, family responsibilities and age are the factors that generates glass ceiling in bureaucracy of Nepal. These factors limit the career growth as well as the mobility of a working women. The study found out that the supportive spouse and the inclusive policy of an organization has played a vital role in breaking the glass ceiling in present context in Nepalese bureaucracy. The respondents agreed that the glass ceiling exists in their organization in either way, however, the situation is being improved.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The challenges women face within the organization, particularly concerning gender issues, have been a significant concern and the focus has increased from the standpoint of career advancement (Alvesson & Billing, 2010). Throughout history, the most significant labor market indicators have consistently demonstrated a bias in favor of men, regardless of location (Oppong & Kendie, 2017).

Women today are equally trained, educated, and skilled as their male counterparts. However, despite increasing participation in the labor market, men still dominate the highest decision-making positions in organizations. This raises the question of whether individuals are selected for these top roles based on their education, abilities, and experience, or if other factors are influencing the selection process.

Behavioral discrimination, wage and benefit disparities, internal politics, unfair promotion and development opportunities, and unwritten societal norms that limit female participation exists in an organization (Begum & Sarker, 2018). This situation is called a "ceiling" because it hinders advancement, and "glass" because the barrier is not immediately visible, often being an unwritten and informal rule. (Afza & Newaz, 2008). As per the Central Bureau of Statistics (2009), Nepali women in the formal employment sector are increasing however, less effort has been done in exploring the career progression of women employees of Nepal. The major barriers that were identified by the study of Mahat (2022) were organizational and social factors. These factors directly contribute to the glass ceiling creates obstacles for women, making it challenging for them to progress in their careers and preventing them from working in male-dominated or highly regulated environments. (Tiwari, Mathur, & Awasthi, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the topic of women's leadership has garnered increasing attention in both academic research and business practices. Numerous studies have explored the impact of gender diversity in leadership roles on organizational performance, particularly in terms of profitability and innovation. Alvesson and Billing (2010) highlighted that women's employment has received

heightened attention, especially in relation to career advancement. This focus is understandable given the growing presence of women in the workforce, yet only a small percentage occupy top-level positions in business and public administration. Several studies have noted that over the past two decades, there has been a rise in the proportion of women in entry-level and middle-management positions. This progress can largely be attributed to the efforts of the women's movement, political system policies, and corporate equal opportunity initiatives. However, as of 2018, only 26.5 percent of executive and senior management positions in S&P 500 companies were held by women, with just 11.0 percent of top earners and a mere 5.2 percent of chief executives being women (Catalyst, 2019).

When considering the context of Nepal, the situation is similarly challenging, if not more so. Despite the implementation of a quota system for women in the civil service and the increasing number of Nepali women entering the formal employment sector (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009), there remains a significant underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Currently, less than 20% of new civil servant cohorts are women. Furthermore, in mandatory in-service training for civil and public servants, which is essential for career progression, not more than 5% trainees are women (NASC, 2023). This underrepresentation underscores the persistent barriers to women's career and leadership advancement within the civil and public service sectors. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate the existing glass ceiling phenomenon within the bureaucracy, and this study aims to explore the factors contributing to this issue.

Research question

- 1 What are the perceived factors that generate “glass ceiling” phenomenon in the bureaucracy of Nepal?
- 2 How does this phenomenon affect women to reach in leadership position?
- 3 What are the perceived contributors that has been breaking this phenomenon?

Research Objective

- 1 To identify the factors that contribute to the glass ceiling phenomenon in the existing bureaucracy of Nepal
- 2 To explore how this this phenomenon affects women to reach in leadership position
- 3 To identify the contributor that has been helping to the break this phenomenon

Significance of the Study

Despite numerous policies implemented by both the company and the government, female representation in top-level positions remains minimal. Therefore, it is imperative to thoroughly examine women's participation in the workplace, their professional development, and the effectiveness of organizational strategies aimed at enhancing their promotion prospects. Additionally, it is crucial to highlight the representation of female executives across different levels of the organizational hierarchy, as well as to explore the opportunities and constraints that impact women's advancement within the organization. Organizational initiatives designed to foster inclusivity and mitigate perceived barriers, both internal and external, that hinder women's professional growth must also be emphasized. The concept of the "glass ceiling" plays a significant role in this context, as it encapsulates the invisible barriers that women often encounter, preventing them from reaching senior leadership roles and the study results is important in this sense as it helps to find out the factors that contribute in this phenomenon.

Delimitations of the Study

The study focused on a qualitative approach, as the majority of research on the glass ceiling and career development has utilized quantitative methods with validated scales. Instead of examining the relationship between these two variables, our study explores the underlying factors. Another delimitation of our study is that our respondents are exclusively female, even though males are also significantly involved in Nepal's public service workforce. Additionally, our third delimitation is, we employed purposive sampling, as random sampling may not be as effective for conducting in-depth interviews.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Review

The existing theories are explored to have a deeper understanding on the glass ceiling. These reviewed literatures have helped us to critically analyzes, compares, and synthesizes the theories related to women leadership development glass ceiling that have been developed and applied in previous studies.

Glass Ceiling

The term "glass ceiling" is a metaphor for an invisible barrier that poses a major challenge for women as they advance through an organization's hierarchy, ultimately preventing them from attaining the highest leadership roles (Malhotra, Malhotra & Jolly, 2022). This phenomenon is deeply embedded in organizational culture, where entrenched practices, implicit biases, and gendered expectations conspire to restrict women's professional advancement (Cotter et al., 2001). The concept of the glass ceiling not only reflects concrete structural obstacles but also underscores pervasive psychological and cultural impediments that hinder access to leadership positions. Feminist theoretical frameworks, including social role theory and role incongruity theory, offer critical insights by demonstrating how traditional gender roles and societal expectations shape perceptions of leadership and influence the evaluation of individuals' competencies (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). According to these theories, leadership qualities are frequently associated with masculine traits, creating a misalignment between the societal image of what constitutes a leader and the qualities commonly attributed to women. Bullard et al. (1993) described the glass ceiling as a phenomenon where female employees have the opportunity to attain high-ranking positions within an organization, but are unable to achieve them due to reasons unrelated to their qualifications. The working women at all levels experiences the frustration when their goals are hindered by an invisible barrier (Mavin, 2000). Despite of attaining the high levels of education and professional skills, many women are hindered from getting the same leadership roles and responsibilities as their male counterparts which shows the invisible barriers for the women to reach the leadership role in an organization. (Yagüe et al., 2021). These integration of feminist theories and organizational perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of how subtle cultural and structural biases sustain the

glass ceiling, offering valuable insights into the systemic challenges that impede women's progression into leadership despite their evident qualifications and capabilities.

Glass ceiling phenomenon in bureaucracy

Bureaucratic organizations are characterized by the rigid organizational structures and compositions and formal rules which have always been male-dominated. Gender roles and stereotypes have shaped these structures, frequently marginalizing women from reaching senior positions. (Weber, 1922; Acker, 1990). Public organizations sustain gender biases through their cultural norms and practices. Women may encounter subtle forms of discrimination and find themselves excluded from informal networks that are essential for career progression (Kanter, 1977). Women in bureaucratic settings often face stereotypes that questions their potentiality and capability for leadership roles. Studies have shown that women working in Nepal's bureaucratic structure experience an entrenched patriarchal culture and gendered expectations that associate leadership with masculinity (Sharma & Pant, 2020; Acharya, 2014). A further explanation is provided by Eagly and Karau's (2002) role incongruity theory, which suggests that women in leadership may be considered as violating traditional expectations of gender, consequently impacting the perception of their competence very negatively. Additionally, women working in the bureaucracy of Nepal are often faced with complications due to the clash between societal expectations and professional responsibilities. Powell (1999) described conflict arising when women try to resolve both leadership responsibilities and traditional roles of caregivers. Such conflict in Nepal is extremely valid with respect to cultural expectations from family and motherhood, which impinge on women's time, mobility, and their supposed commitment to careers (Bhatta, 2013; Paudel, 2019).

In the public service, policy reform measures such as gender quotas are now in place to promote inclusiveness. The Civil Service Act of Nepal and its endeavor for gender equality enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal (2015) have reinforced the increasing recruitment of women in the bureaucracy. However, these reforms are not enough to challenge the deep-seated cultural and institutional biases against women that obstruct their upward mobility (Giri, 2009; Bhattarai, 2022). Ely and Meyerson (2000) posit that structural change must be accompanied by cultural change for the real contestation of the glass ceiling.

The intersection between global and local studies demonstrates that the glass ceiling in bureaucracy is not an exclusively institutional design issue, but very much dependent on resistant

societal mentality and organizational culture. In Nepal, women are still confronting unseen barriers to their advancement toward leadership positions despite legal reforms and increased awareness about such barriers, giving evidence to the fact of the persistence of gender-based inequalities in bureaucratic systems.

Theoretical Lens for Interview Design

The framing of the interview guide was grounded in both empirical literature on the glass ceiling and theoretical perspectives, particularly Role Theory and Role Incongruity Theory. Role Theory posits that individuals occupy specific social roles that come with normative expectations; when women take on leadership roles, which are often aligned with traditionally masculine traits (e.g., assertiveness, decisiveness), they may experience tension or backlash for violating gender norms (Biddle, 1986). Building on this, Role Incongruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) argues that prejudice arises when there is a mismatch between the perceived characteristics of women and the stereotypical expectations of leadership roles. These theoretical lenses were instrumental in identifying key dimensions for inquiry, such as organizational expectations, leadership identity, work-life conflict, and perceived competence. By integrating these dimensions, the study sought to capture how women professionals navigate role-based tensions and how these dynamics contribute to the persistence of the glass ceiling in organizational contexts.

Self-Reflection and Career Planning

With regard to self-reflection in career planning, interview was more regarding the willingness to go on outstation work versus family prioritization are dealt with in the theory of self-determination and career construction. Deci and Ryan (2000) state that self-determined people realize their goals through internal values, thereby developing persistence and success. Interestingly enough, Savickas (2005) has noted that career construction makes people plan intentionally and reflect on their actions so as to respond to the changes within the working environment. As Hall and Chandler (2005) pointed out, those who engage in meaningful career planning function much better in overcoming obstacles enroute there to leadership opportunities. Another crucial foundation for reflection embraced by the questionnaire is Clark's (2000) boundary theory, which asserts that work-life balance is a key determinant of career satisfaction, especially for women traversing multiple roles in life. In the South Asian context again, work-

life balance has been recognized as one of the major reasons why so many women give up promotions or opt for less challenging employment (ADB, 2013; World Bank, 2018). Thus, the questionnaire comprises of self-reflection question and preferences to explore the women perception on career planning and work life balance.

Demographic and Structural Influences

Factors such as marital status, family type, age, education level and job level have a great impact on a woman's career development. The questionnaire aimed at capturing these variables within the context of Nepal's public service system. Extensive literature shows that women's family responsibilities and caregiving roles adversely affect their career trajectories.

In South Asia in general, and Nepal in particular, gendered expectations in joint and extended families frequently stunt the mobility and transferability of women in jobs (Acharya & Bennett, 1983; Tamang, 2009). Family responsibility of the women is a big hurdle in any professional movement. Research suggest that women family responsibilities and caregiving roles hamper their career paths.

It is established that educational attainment is an indicator of advancement in one's profession (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2010). Higher levels of education give qualifications and self-assurance to women to step forward and function in leadership. In practice, however, educational qualifications do not always result in promotion because of bias in the institution or lack of attention (Post, 2015). Otherwise, age and seniority may work against the other in some cases-while experience is generally helpful, older women may suffer a greater degree of discrimination as a result of stereotypes or ageism.

Organizational and Societal Influences

The influence of organizational culture, leadership structures, and workplace environments is extensively documented in the literature on women's leadership. The questionnaire pertained to the relevance of these factors. According to Ely and Meyerson (2000), organizations must critically assess their internal policies and practices for dismantling gendered barriers to advancement. Flexibility at the workplace, presence of women at the top, and criteria for promotion create an environment in which these will hugely affect women's careers (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004). In addition to organizational issues, societal and cultural expectations—especially in patriarchal societies like Nepal—play a decisive role. Shrestha (2013) and Pandey

(2016) highlight that societal perceptions about gender roles often discourage women from pursuing or being considered for senior leadership roles. Cultural norms that prioritize domestic responsibilities over professional ambition serve as a systemic barrier to career advancement for women.

Women and Career Advancement

Issues regarding low representation of women in higher administration and leadership continues to draw both academic and policy interests across the globe. The issue of the glass ceiling-notional but real barriers that impede women from getting into these senior positions- has been widely studied and validated (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). In particular, women in bureaucratic and public institutions often face structures, cultures, and even interpersonal hindrances to their advancement even if they have the same qualifications and experiences (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013).

The questionnaire focuses on experience sharing that defines the impediments to the career growth of women and correlates with major themes in the literature: personal, societal, ideological, and organizational. Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011) charge that women have their organization-built norms rewarding the masculinity of leadership behaviors, devoid of mentorship opportunities and implicit biases of gender. Catalyst (2020) talked that women underrepresent in leadership positions because of the structures and institutional inertia. In this way, personal experience and perception of barriers to advancement correspond to understanding.

Thus, considering the context of the study, the questionnaire draws largely from literature on gender, career advancement, and organizational dynamics. The questions incorporated various influences on women's career experiences, from individual self-awareness and planning to socio-cultural and institutional factors. Past studies have shown that demographic characteristics, family structures, societal expectations, and workplace cultures affect women gaining leadership roles. On the other hand, drawing from literature suggests the knowledge attitude that this study must acquire relevant insights into the barriers and enablers of women's career advancement in the context of Nepal's public sector and bureaucratic institutions. This notion portrays the project is significantly contributing to the academics and active implementations in trying to eradicate the glass ceiling.

Empirical Review

Scholars around the world have explored toward the glass ceiling situation and its persistence in the corporate and bureaucratic cultural environments. According to Konrad et al. (2013), in male-dominated environments or under male supervision, women report higher levels of gender harassment, diminished organizational support, and elevated gender discrimination. This usually leads to role conflict and emotional stress, as women candidates for leadership positions are constantly undermined, considered less competent than their male counterparts. Where women exhibit like leadership behavior, they are judged even more negatively. Kaftandzieva and Nakov (2021), while exploring the connotations of 130 employees at a financial institution, avowed that, rather ingrained gender stereotypes and societal expectations create the glass ceiling effect. Their conception is that the real problem is not that women lack ambition or competence but rather that there exist some societal biases, a lack of institutional commitment, and gross neglect of the required organizational support for providing gender-inclusive leadership pathways.

Khair (2019) found in an empirical analysis in the Bangladesh Civil Service that, in South Asia, the glass ceiling is created, inter alia, by captivating negative stereotypes with regard to women's abilities in the professions and male-dominated bureaucratic structures that hinder women's upward mobility. Structural prejudice coupled with an apparent lack of genuine commitment from the policymakers further adds to the unresolved issue of institutional inertia in realizing gender parity within the South Asian context. The same dynamics hold within the Nepali context. Empirical studies in Nepal Civil Service institutions indicated that women's representation in senior leadership positions remains grossly disproportionate despite constitutional and policy-level commitments to gender equality (Dhakal, 2018; Sharma & K.C., 2020). Gender norms, political patronage, and male-centric institutional cultures keep restricting women's access to decision-making positions. In addition, women, in most bureaucratic systems, bear a double burden of work and home responsibilities that limit their ability to pursue career-advancing opportunities (Ghimire & Samuels, 2014).

Thus, all these findings testify to the multifaceted nature of the glass ceiling phenomenon, which, if overcome, may demand policymakers' interventions as well as an entire

restructuring of organizational cultures and societal norms, specifically in patriarchal environments like South Asia.

Research Gap

Scholars have studied the glass ceiling and its effect on women's career and leadership development across the world. Within the context of Nepal, Mahat's recent mixed-method research study (2023) is one of the initial attempts to understand the glass ceiling in the public and civil employment sector of the country. However, a significant gap still exists concerning literature that addresses the operationalization of these barriers along the civil and public institutions of Nepal, where bureaucratic hierarchies, political patronage, and socio-cultural norms come into play. Despite progressive policy instruments like the Civil Service Act and the gender inclusion provisions in the constitution, the number of women occupying senior decision-making positions remains extremely low in disproportionation to their actual workforce participation. Such a disparity persists even among women who've been differently qualified and experienced as their male counterparts.

Women's access to leadership opportunities is also limited by Nepal's socio-cultural expectations with respect to caregiving roles, mobility restrictions, and adherence to prioritizing family over individual ambition. The rigid structure of government institutions, alongside informal power networks, age-based seniority systems, and poor mentoring mechanisms, create additional barriers for women. The literature to date has poorly theorized the way these institutional and cultural barriers reinforce one another to maintain the glass ceiling, particularly here at the provincial and local levels of government—a space where patriarchal gatekeeping can appear in its most rigid form.

A more concentrated qualitative study within the Nepali bureaucratic structure, therefore, needs to fill this critical gap. Such a study would offer fresh evidence and provide an in-depth examination of the intersections and workings of gender, caste, family structure, and institutional inertia in relation to the glass ceiling. In recovering and critically examining the lived experiences of women in civil service positions, this research intends to expose the structural and psychological dimensions of gendered career stagnation. Ultimately, this study contributes context-specific and nuanced understanding of the glass ceiling in Nepal capable of informing gender-responsive policy interventions and organizational reforms in the public sector.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The study is guided by qualitative approach following the case study research methods. Qualitative research has an influential nature where the researcher explores the meanings and insights of the data rather than the numerical and analytical data (Mohajan, 2017). The choice of case study as a method is a response to a desire to gain holistic and meaningful insights into a complex social phenomenon (Yin, 2009). This study is an explorative qualitative study that was conducted via semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with the female employees of civil service and public institutions.

Study Population, Sample Size and Sampling

The study population are the female employees of Government of Nepal. We have used the database of planning, monitoring and evaluation committee (PMEC) of Nepal Administrative Staff College to develop a sampling frame. The sampling frame included total number of women who participated in the in-service training of NASC in the last 3 years. Altogether 13 respondents were selected through purposive sampling considering different ministries and institutions.

Tools and Techniques of Data Collection

Data collection for the study was begin after selecting the key respondents from the chosen sample frame. Once approval accepted from the respondents, participants were informed with consent documents. Following the submission of the informed consent documents, data collection was accomplished through the conduction of semi-structured interviews utilizing an interview guide followed by focused group discussions. The researchers used a semi-structured interview schedule as the main instrument for data collection. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to seek a deeper understanding of the human experience (Bearman, 2019) as it allows the opportunity to develop personalized open-ended questions based on participants' response (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Interviews with each participant was conducted face-to face. The questions for interview were developed based on the literatures on the factors considered in the conceptual framework.

Analysis of Data

This study uses thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) in an open-ended way to investigate the factors contributing in the glass ceiling phenomenon. All the interviews were transcribed and the transcribed documents were used to generate codes for further thematic analysis.

Ethical Consideration

The research team pre – informed and emailed the respondents of the study about the study objective and purpose followed by the consent letter. In addition to this, the research team mentioned about the professional treatment of the insights and information shared by respondents ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. This allowed respondents to open up and freely share their valuable experiences and feelings during the interview sessions.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of individual themes was considered to determine whether the themes accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the course of this phase, inadequacies in the initial coding and themes were revealed (King, 2004). The need for recoding from the data set were done as coding is an ongoing organic process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Reliability relates to the consistency of a measure of a concept (Bryman, 2016). Individual interviews with respondents and focused discussed group within the women of respondents' institution and ministries were used for data collection. The thematic analysis carried out based on semi-structured interviews identified similar and contradictory themes between the case studies. Reliability was tested using inter rater reliability where the consistency of the opinion and key terms related to glass ceiling and career development were be checked.

To further ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted following the individual interviews. This approach of using methodological triangulation by combining multiple data collection methods—enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Flick, 2018). The FGDs served as a validation tool, allowing the researcher to explore emerging themes and clarify any ambiguities identified during the interviews. By engaging participants in group

discussions, the research not only corroborated individual accounts but also highlighted collective experiences of barriers in leadership roles, such as casual sexism, informal networks, and societal expectations. The use of FGDs, in conjunction with interviews, ensured that the findings were grounded in both personal narratives and shared group perspectives, reinforcing the reliability of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, this process contributed to a more holistic understanding of the glass ceiling phenomenon within the bureaucratic context of Nepal and South Asia.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The chapter includes the results of research questions: 1) What are the factors that generate “glass ceiling” phenomenon in the bureaucracy of Nepal? 2) How does this phenomenon affect women to reach in leadership position? And 3) Before starting a data analysis, the collected data in the form of interview and recordings were first transcribed and individual cases (stories) were analyzed to generate code and then after theme upon the experienced shared by the respondents. The respondent profile and the generated themes has been presented in table 1 and table 2 respectively.

Table 1

Respondents Profile

Respondents	Organization	Position	Experience (Years)	Qualification	Age
1	Pokhara Metropolitan City	Officer 6 th Level	20	Bachelor Completed	50 above
2	Provincial Center for Good Governance, Bagmati Province	Officer 8 th level	12	Master’s in Information Technology	41
3	Ministry of Energy, Water Resource and Irrigation	Engineer	5	Master’s in Engineering	31
4	Provincial Center for Good Governance, Janakpur Province	GEST Expert	15	Master’s in Education, LLB	36
5	Lalitpur Metropolitan City	Officer 8 th level	33	Master in Rural Developmen t	56

6	Bharatpur Metropolitan City	Officer 6 th level	24	MSc IT	50
7	Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies	Class I Officer	18	M.Phil	47
8	Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies	Class II Officer	16	Masters	38
9	Pokhara Metropolitan City	Class III officer	27	MBA and LLB	54
10	Retired	Class I Officer	32	M.Phil	58
11	Directorate of Livestock and Fishery Development	Class I	16	Masters in Veterinary	40
12	Directorate of Livestock and Fishery Development	Class III Officer	7	MBSce in Medicine	33
13	Office of the Chief Minister and Council of Minister	Class II Officer	12	Master	38

Table 1 provides the background information of the respondents. While the names of the respondents have been kept anonymous and are represented by numerical identifiers, other relevant demographic and professional details have been included. The participants come from a diverse range of professional backgrounds, with work experience varying from 5 to 30 years. The sample includes officials serving at different hierarchical levels—Officers, Under Secretaries, and Joint Secretaries—and represents all three tiers of government: federal, provincial, and local.

This diversity in designation, experience, and institutional representation was intentionally ensured to enrich the findings and enhance the credibility and comprehensiveness of the study. The age and experience profile of the respondents in this study offers valuable

insight into how the glass ceiling phenomenon operates within Nepal's bureaucratic structure. With an average age of approximately 44 years and an average of over 18 years of professional experience, the participants represent a mature and seasoned segment of the civil service. Their long tenure suggests that they have navigated the bureaucratic system long enough to witness and personally experience institutional barriers such as casual sexism, societal judgment, and limited mobility due to age-related biases. The presence of senior women officers with more than two decades of service but still encountering leadership challenges underscores the persistent impact of the glass ceiling over time. Respondent 9 said that ‘When I started my career, I didn’t get any support from my family or husband. I had to manage everything on my own, and it was very difficult, especially when my children were small. Even now, at this age, I still face casual sexism in the organization. They never inform us about opportunities—unless we go and raise our voice, they won’t even consider telling us. It’s like they just assume that women can’t handle additional responsibilities because of our dual roles at home and work’.

Additionally, younger respondents with 5 to 10 years of experience with the average age of 34 reflect how early-career professionals are also affected by informal networks and traditional perceptions. However, the diversity in experience also reveals a shift: some mid-career and senior women have begun to break through these barriers, often attributing their advancement to supportive husband and inclusive institutional policies. Respondent 3 said that “Whatever I’ve been able to achieve in my career is only because of my husband’s support. He helps with the household work and also takes care of our baby. Without his support, I don’t think I could have come this far”. Thus, both age and experience play a dual role in this study—highlighting how the glass ceiling is both a long-standing structural issue and a gradually shifting reality in Nepal’s bureaucracy.

Table 2

Research Questions and Theme

Research Questions	Themes
1. What are the factors that generate “glass ceiling” phenomenon in the bureaucracy of Nepal?	Casual Sexism Informal Relationship Societal Perception and Judgement Family Responsibilities Aging and Wellness
2. How does this phenomenon affect women to reach in leadership position?	Limited Career Growth and Mobility Low Morale and Women Passivity
3. What are the perceived contributors that has been breaking this phenomenon?	Supportive Spouse Inclusive Policy

There were questions provided to obtain the information for the both the research questions. The questions were related to demographic factors of respondent and how it affected their career advancement, self-reflection and perception on personal choices, and general barriers that they face and observe in their workplaces. Each of the participants were asked the same questions to begin the interviews. After transcribing all those interviews, through the thematic analysis process we generated themes mentioned in table 2 for research question 1, 2 and 3. The focus group discussion were conducted in two institutions: Bharatpur Municipality and Gandaki Province Office to ensure the triangulation the findings as well. The findings related to this theme are shared below.

Factors that generate “glass ceiling” phenomenon in the bureaucracy of Nepal

The first research question was to identify the factors that generate glass ceiling phenomenon in the bureaucracy of Nepal and based on the interview and focused group discussions. The factors were then identified as a theme with the help of the findings. The findings related to themes are shared below:

Casual Sexism

This theme captures participants' experiences of everyday sexism in the workplace. These incidents were often described as minor or subtle, not stemming from personal conflicts, but rather as part of the routine work environment—either current or past. They included general hostility toward women's contributions and creative work, as well as gender-specific micro-aggressions, such as isolated sexist or patronizing remarks which was noted by Respondent 11 *"When I passed the Joint Secretary exam and went to the Lok Sewa, few of their officials said, 'Your name must be under the women's quota.' That made me feel very uncomfortable. I had actually been selected under the open category, but I realized that this is the first assumption people make. May be this what glass ceiling is".* Similarly, being a mother also gave an excuse to prevail the casual perception of women not being able to work outstation which was noted by Respondent 13 *"I did not prefer out station work after having my baby and because of this they thought that I will also not be willing to grab the international opportunities that will have a significant impact on my career. The cases are different yet people put everything in one basket and thought that she is not doing this because she is a mother so she might not do this as well. The priorities changes based on the context but we are judged in same way for everything just because now we are a mother".*

Contrary to this, casual sexism does not only create glass ceiling but sometimes makes it easy for women to work as one of the respondents mentions that just because she was woman, she was given priority and transfer in one of the duties assigned as respondent 6 shared *"Earlier, while I was working in the Social Development Section, I was transferred to the Sanitation Section. Even that didn't go well. Being in that section required me to come early in the morning and do tasks that didn't align with my nature. Coming in early meant I couldn't give time to my family in the morning. I couldn't work effectively in that section because it didn't suit my nature, it wasn't my field of interest, so eventually, I was transferred again because they understand my nature and my problem."*

The reporting of these incidents is significant. Although participants did not report any incidents of overt sexual harassment in the workplace, studies have found that low-frequency discriminatory acts—often manifested as casual sexism—can be extremely harmful to the mental health of workers (Genat, Sojo, & Wood, 2016). Some of these experiences were closely tied to gendered expectations regarding workplace behavior, particularly the notion that women should

be subtle, soft, agreeable, and often passive—traits that reflect stereotypical perceptions of femininity.

The voice of focus group discussion also emphasized on the daily basis judgement that people built upon women specially after getting married and having children. Participants who were mothers shared they always have to face unheard questions with the assumption that they would be less devoted or available to handle demanding roles. Many women mentioned being denied promotions or key assignments, even when they had proved themselves competent, on the premise that their priorities now lay in family life. Others voiced the notion that their assertiveness was interpreted as aggression, while the same behavior in male counterparts had been rewarded as confidence and leadership. This brought back themes identified in earlier interviews to show how subtle gender biases are not isolated incidents, but systemic patterns that chip away at women's confidence and inhibit their careers. Thus, the focus group narratives reveal intersecting institutional and societal expectations to form a culture of quiet exclusion, strongly supporting the glass ceiling from several fronts.

Informal Relationship

This theme includes experiences and comments shared by respondents where they mentioned about informal relationship and network that male colleagues have in which women never will or would like to participate on. According to the participants these relationship and networks are built upon the basis of after office gathering, coffee and tea talks or similar kinds of informal meetings. The following extracts are of Respondents where they share their experiences that justify this theme. Respondent 7 quoted *“A guy’s work is visible, but a female has to prove that she did the work. Guys have access, they go out, they stay outside, so they get to be in open spaces, have tea chats, build informal relationships — so it looks like they’re working, and they’re trusted. That doesn’t work for females.”* Furthermore, respondent 5 shared *“Our CAO is a female and all of us are supporting her. Now, imagine if the CAO was male, he would have so many informal networks by now. Chatting late into the evening, drinking together, and so on. But when it comes to a woman, our ethics get in the way. And when the informal connections are limited, it becomes difficult for women. Even Kamala Harris lost—it’s hard for women to keep proving themselves again and again. Trump was criticized so much, but*

in the end, he won. This informal network and all these challenges make women not even want to go there—like, why even take that stress?"

Respondent 8 also quoted *"Of course there is a glass ceiling in the bureaucracy. At the basic level, women can reach positions based on their capacity. But to move beyond that, informal networking is also necessary. And women have very limited access to informal networks. Even when they have the capacity, they miss out because of the lack of networking opportunities"*

Similarly, the focus group discussion also went on to show how societal perceptions and expectations from the moral point limited the entry of women into these informal spaces. Most often, women who attempted informal networking were judged much more severely—for moral scrutiny and social backlash—while the men, who participated in the networking, were regarded as dedicated and proactive. For instance, one of the participants in FGD shared – “I am unmarried and I live alone so I can as much time as I can in my office and career so I stay till late in my office but again I am judged for not being a standard woman that our society has been expecting.” This gendered double standard serves to exclude people from power networks thus limiting the leadership mobility of women—not just because of the structural constraints but because of the deep-rooted attitudes in society. These patterns demonstrate how the invisible nature of informal power structures contributes deeply to sustaining the glass ceiling in Nepal's bureaucratic and organizational systems.

Societal Perception and Judgement

Societal expectations and judgments continue to shape and constrain women's professional growth, especially in leadership roles. The persistence of traditional gender roles places women as primary caregivers, limiting their access to opportunities for professional development and higher positions. As one of the respondents (Shanta) noted that *"Women are expected to come home and do household work. Because of that, there's no room left for growth in other areas."* This reflects how the burden of domestic responsibilities restricts women's ability to invest in their careers.

The influence of early socialization was also highlighted by respondent 2 *"From a young age, we were taught to be more family-oriented and that is our priorities towards family over career subconsciously happens."* Many women mentioned how societal scrutiny discourages

them from pursuing opportunities that involve mobility or visibility. Respondent 2 further shared *"There are too many societal expectations—people talk a lot, especially relatives. If we travel at night, it becomes a topic of gossip, so I try to avoid it."* Family dynamics and lack of support were also seen as limiting factors: Respondent 4 give a generalize thought *"The reason women are not in higher positions could be due to the lack of family encouragement or the absence of capacity development programs."* Respondent 12 also emphasized the structural nature of the issue: *"The structure of our society makes it difficult for women to reach higher positions. We are still stuck in old mindsets—why aren't household duties seen as men's responsibility?"*

The psychological and emotional toll of entering male-dominated leadership spaces was mentioned as well. Respondent 3 shared *"Once you reach a leadership position, there are many responsibilities at the decision-making level. You can't even comfortably hold a glass of champagne in a room full of ten men—you feel uncomfortable being the only woman there."* These reflections point to the systemic and cultural barriers that continue to hinder women's progress. The combination of societal judgment, family expectations, lack of informal networks, and discomfort in male-dominated spaces collectively creates a discouraging environment, making many women hesitant to pursue leadership roles altogether.

Family Responsibilities

Family responsibilities—especially related to motherhood—play a pivotal role in shaping women's career decisions and trajectories. Participants expressed how caregiving duties often take precedence over professional aspirations, leading to missed opportunities and a slower pace of career growth compared to their male counterparts. Respondent 10 shared, *"My husband and I entered the service at the same level. But after marriage, I couldn't give the same focus to my career."* She recalled how becoming a mother impacted her ability to participate in key training opportunities: *"When my son was born, I was already an officer, but I couldn't attend the BAT training because of him. I even missed the initial introduction training, which meant I didn't get the chance to know my batchmates. That one training gap made me feel weaker—I lacked access to critical information."*

This experience highlights how institutional gaps—like inflexible training systems—and cultural expectations combine to disadvantage women. The internalization of these norms was evident in another statement: Respondent 13 shared *"A woman's dreams are expected to be*

small—just getting a job is enough. We're not even encouraged to think of becoming secretaries."

For many women, the decision to prioritize family is not one of preference but of perceived necessity. As respondent 9 explained, *"I never focused much on career or money—I focused on my children. What's the use of a successful career and good income if your children go down the wrong path?"* Even when prestigious opportunities arose, such as a UN position, the emotional cost of separation from her children led her to decline: *"I was offered a great job at the UN, but I didn't take it because it would mean staying away from my children. Today, I consider myself a successful mother because of that decision."*

These reflections reveal how deeply entrenched familial roles and responsibilities influence women's career choices in the long term. The tension between being a dedicated mother and an ambitious professional often results in women sacrificing advancement for stability at home—an emotional decision shaped by love, duty, and societal expectations.

Aging and Wellness

The narratives of aging women professionals reveal a noticeable shift in priorities from career progression to personal health and wellness as they approach retirement. Respondent 6 shared, *"I have seven years left until retirement, and I no longer have any major career progression plans or expectations. I have been managing diabetes and now simply wish to work comfortably. My current focus is on maintaining my health rather than pursuing career advancement."* This reflects a reorientation of goals influenced by long-term health conditions. Respondent 10 shared that, *"After menopause, I became physically very weak and was unable to attend meetings at the office whenever required. I passed on many opportunities to my colleagues because my health didn't allow me to travel. I also experienced anxiety and, at times, struggled with mental health issues that made me feel like skipping work without any specific reason."* Her experience highlights how physiological and emotional changes in later life stages can directly impact professional engagement and limit participation in career-enhancing opportunities. These accounts illustrate how aging and health-related challenges shape the experiences and decisions of women nearing the end of their professional journeys.

The focus group discussion reiterated this sentiment, with several participants pointing out how aging intersects with gendered expectations of "slowing down", thus endorsing a subtle

withdrawal from active leadership roles. These aging women shared that, after having spent decades proving themselves in the workplace, they are now feeling the urge to shift their priorities to personal well-being rather than career ambition and advancement. These testimonies highlight the multifaceted impact of aging, health, and social perception upon the trajectory of women-public sector involvement and contribute to a nearly invisible exit from competitive arenas.

Affect of Glass Ceiling Phenomenon to reach in Leadership Position

The second research question attempts to explore the effect of this phenomenon in women to progress in leadership position. The effect was further categorized into two themes based on the findings.

Limited Career Growth and Mobility

The study highlights that women in bureaucracy experience limited career growth due to exclusion from informal networks, competing domestic responsibilities, and missed opportunities for professional development. Respondent 8 shared, *“Informal networking plays a significant role in advancing to higher positions... male subordinates tend to gain the trust of their superiors without having to prove their capabilities... women are often overlooked for opportunities simply because they are excluded from these informal networks.”*

Similarly, Respondent 10 recounted an incident where domestic and professional responsibilities collided: *“There was a shraddha ceremony at my home, and on the same day, I had to present a progress briefing at the ministry... I arrived late and couldn’t present effectively. After that, I was never given another opportunity to present.”*

Respondent 7 also observed that caregiving responsibilities limit women’s capacity to seize opportunities, stating, *“Many of my colleagues... try to avoid taking on additional responsibilities because they cannot spend extra hours at the office... they have missed out on long-term training opportunities.”* These accounts reflect how institutional structures fail to accommodate women’s realities, resulting in reduced access to training, promotion, and decision-making roles, thereby constraining their career advancement.

Social norms are deeply entrenched, as highlighted during the FGD, and continue to give priority to women’s domestic roles-a reality that renders it nearly impossible for women to fully partake in opportunities with late hours, travel, or flexi-time. The participants shared experiences

of frustration with having their emotional labor unaccounted for, working mothering acts of balance, and constant job interruptions, which often lead to missed opportunities for leadership and visibility. These accounts highlight the fact that informal exclusion, domestic burden, and institutional rigidity together weigh down women's career mobility in Nepal's bureaucracy.

Low Morale and Women Passivity

The cumulative effect of these structural and socio-cultural challenges contributes to a growing sense of resignation and passivity among women professionals in the later stages of their careers. Respondent 6 remarked, *"I have seven years left until retirement, and I no longer have any major career progression plans or expectations. I have been managing diabetes and now simply wish to work comfortably."* Another respondent echoed similar sentiments: *"After menopause, I became physically very weak... I passed on many opportunities to my colleagues because my health didn't allow me to travel. I also experienced anxiety... that made me feel like skipping work without any specific reason."* These testimonies suggest that repeated experiences of exclusion, lack of recognition, and poor institutional support over time can lead women to disengage from career ambitions. Rather than striving for leadership or higher roles, many choose to maintain their current positions without further aspirations for example respondent 5 remembered *"I couldn't study, maybe because of the family. It used to be a joint family then. It becomes difficult, in-laws have to be taken care of, but they don't help. I feel like I have to do everything, like being a daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, and mother-in-law. As I age, I feel like I fall behind a little, experience alone is not enough, I miss the habit of studying, children get sick, and I have to 'take on all the responsibilities myself and this eventually made me laid back."* Moreover, she added *"maile yeti mai chitta bujaye"* which means she has to settled upon this much only illustrating how the glass ceiling does not only restrict upward mobility but also fosters psychological withdrawal from professional growth.

This withdrawal tendency was shared in focus group discussion that brought to the fact that women's aspirations have been brought down over the years as a result of having to navigate the interplay of structural inequalities, caregiving responsibilities, and limited institutional support. Several women shared that even with earlier dreams in mind, the prolonged series of professional setbacks and health challenges caused them to reallocate their priorities from advancement to stability. The group sounded a tone of undervalue and being overburdened; the

continued need to juggle family and work roles oftentimes led them to abandon plans for further studies, training, or leadership goals. The psychological withdrawal, as participants pointed out, was not due to a feeling of not being capable but from being tired of continuously fighting an unhelpful system. Ultimately, the glass ceiling exists not only as an obstacle to promotion but also as an emotional anchor weighing women down from being able to imagine their place in these higher ranks, thus pushing many toward a quiet acceptance of their situation.

Contributors in Breaking the Glass Ceiling

The third research question was to explore whether the glass ceiling is breaking or not and the factor that contributes in breaking these glass ceiling. The findings suggest two themes that majorly contribute in breaking glass ceiling.

Supportive Spouse

The primary challenges of the most of the respondent was the dual burden of official duties and household responsibilities. They said that the structural reform is not only the way to address the problem of glass ceiling, family support system specially a support from a husband plays the significant role for women's professional growth. When the household chores and child raising responsibilities is shared with the husband, it allows women to have a time to think about their professional life and career growth. This enables women to pursue the role in the leading position with few constraints. Respondent 6 shared *"My husband and I have been working in the same town since we got married. When he had to move to Chitwan for his job, he encouraged me to continue my studies so that I could secure a position in Bharatpur Metropolitan and we could stay together in Chitwan. While raising our two children, my husband has supported me immensely. We have managed everything together, which has allowed me to pursue my career without any major obstacles."* Respondent shared similar experience "I am a mother of twin daughters, and as you can imagine, raising two children at the same time is no easy task. Thankfully, along with the support of my mother, my husband has always been by my side. During my maternity period, he encouraged me to appear for the higher-level examination, assuring me that he would take full responsibility for the children. He adjusted his schedule and made decisions that prioritized my career growth, and for that, I am truly grateful." Respondent 1 shared *"Despite having a child with mental difficulties I am now one of the respected women in my community in terms of my profession but all this success only possible due to my husband."*

Our daughter feels comfortable with his father, he takes care of her even during her menstruation period and he is also a working person but comes to home at time just to take care of our daughter and because of this I was able to focus on my work and career.”

The focus group discussions underscored that spousal support plays a pivotal role in enabling women’s sustained engagement and advancement in the bureaucracy. shared that their ability to pursue demanding careers while managing familial responsibilities was made possible by the consistent encouragement and active participation of their husbands in domestic duties. These narratives highlight a crucial yet often overlooked dimension of women’s professional advancement—the indispensable role of spousal support in navigating the dual responsibilities of work and home. These stories reveal that true gender equity in leadership also depends on shifting traditional household dynamics. When men actively participate in caregiving and domestic responsibilities, it creates the space and emotional bandwidth necessary for women to pursue career growth and leadership opportunities. Therefore, addressing the glass ceiling requires not only institutional change but also a transformation in societal attitudes toward gender roles within the family.

Inclusive Policy

The respondents felt that the inclusive policy has become the positive reinforcement as well as it has promoted merit-based recruitment and leadership development. Respondent 7 shared *“The inclusive policies of the organization have enabled us to access the same opportunities as our male counterparts. Years ago, I witnessed some of my colleagues being overlooked for promotions despite having the capability, simply because they were not favored. However, with the implementation of transparent promotion policies and performance-based evaluations, favoritism and gender-based discrimination have significantly reduced.”*

Respondent 13 quoted *“I am now in Undersecretary position in this organization due to the Women Quota and now effectively leading the section that does most of the important decisions of our organization. This was possible only because there was quota otherwise how could I have even get promoted in this male centric culture so I am proud this kind of inclusive policy is giving women an opportunity to show their capability and shine.”* In align to this, respondent 8 shared *“The quota system has played a significant role in helping women reach leadership positions. I was personally inspired when I saw one of my female superiors promoted to a*

managerial role—it encouraged me to aim higher in my own career. When women see other women in leadership roles, it reinforces their confidence and motivates them to pursue similar paths. In my organization, I’ve noticed a positive shift: women are no longer overlooked for key positions, and their contributions are being recognized more than ever.”

These reflections underscore the transformative impact of inclusive policies, particularly gender quotas, in creating equitable pathways to leadership. The respondents’ experiences illustrate that such policies not only provide women with access to opportunities previously denied but also foster a culture where competence and performance are increasingly valued over favoritism and gender bias. The visibility of women in leadership roles serves as both a symbol and a source of inspiration, encouraging others to aspire toward similar achievements. Ultimately, inclusive policies do more than correct historical imbalances—they actively cultivate a more just and capable workforce by enabling women to lead, contribute, and thrive on equal footing.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS

This study underscores how the glass ceiling phenomenon in Nepal's bureaucracy is profoundly existed in institutional structures and socio-cultural norms of a kind that are replicated across most of South Asia. Nepali women in public service similarly face casual sexism, limited access to informal networks, and a long-standing expectation in society that family responsibilities take precedence over professional identities (Bari, 2005; Subrahmanian, 2004). Experiences as recounted by participants, such as respondent's discomfort at being assumed a beneficiary of the women's quota despite being selected under the open category, demonstrate how women's professional competence is routinely queried. This subtle form of gender bias, often classified as "casual sexism", resonates with worldwide findings that highlight micro-aggressions as accumulated trauma that, while trivial on their own, over time weigh down heavily on women's morale and career growth (Genat, Sojo, & Wood, 2016). Here, patriarchal norms indeed reinforce these biases, relegating women's professional aspirations to secondary status over domestic responsibilities (Naseem & Arfina, 2022).

The theme of informality further emphasizes that male-defined networking, through after-work gatherings, tea-break conversation, and informal mentoring, systematically excludes women—echoing findings of civil services in India and Bangladesh (UN Women, 2015). As one of the participants stated, "men tend to be more visible in their work" since they operate in open environments that are rich in networking possibilities, their contributions are hardly ever brought into question again and again. Such gender exclusion from informal social capital networks emerges into a structural barrier for leadership, especially in bureaucracies where promotion and trust tend to be informally nurtured (Powell & Sang, 2015).

Further, perceptions in society and gendered socialization play an important role in the reinforcement of the glass ceiling. Participants illustrated how men's performance is controlled early through socialization into caregiving roles as well as through scrutiny by extended family and society. These perceptions are further corroborated by studies in Nepal that document how women's public roles tend to be restrained by socio-cultural expectations and fear of social judgment (UNDP Nepal, 2020). Likewise, the emotional and psychological burden of being "the only woman in the room", as stated by one respondent, speaks to how internalized discomfort

and impostor syndrome could reduce women's aspiration for leadership, a finding that is strengthened by studies from South Asia on gendered work climates (Jayachandran, 2015). Motherhood, along with other family responsibilities, emerged as a second significant impediment to women's mobility and confidence. Various respondents recounted instances when pregnancy, child-rearing, or household responsibilities limited their participation in training, travel, or leadership assignments—activities that often coincided with crucial career milestones. Such tales reaffirm the South Asian literature that recognizes the "double burden" and lack of institutional childcare facilities or flexible work schedules to be obstacles that inhibit women's advancement (ILO, 2018; Ghimire & Samuels, 2014). The case narrated by Menuka concerning caring for her special-needs child alongside her work—with the supportive involvement of her husband—emphasizes how spousal support can assist in overcoming some of the challenges. This resonates with studies establishing a positive correlation between shared domestic responsibilities, emotional support from the household, and women's ambitions for leadership (Desai & Thakkar, 2001).

Health-and-well-being-related issues generally become the bane of women as they grow older, especially after menopause, the duration cited by participants like Shanta and Menuka for limited or reduced professional advancement engagement. These reflections give a life-course view to the glass ceiling debate in Nepal, showing how aging intersects with gender to further hinder leadership trajectories—an uncharted territory in South Asian literature but an important dimension to understanding long-term career dis-engagement among women (Banerjee, 2020). The compounded nature of these barriers leads to dismal morale and professional inertia, especially in the twilight years of women's careers. A phrase that summarizes this is "maile yeti mai chitta bujaye" ("I have settled for this much"), referring to a long-standing acceptance of systemic limitations—a sentiment that dovetails with findings from parallel studies in Sri Lankan and Pakistani bureaucracies, where women often internalize institutional constraints as their limitations (ADB, 2014).

Having supportive spouse, as seen from participants' accounts, totally transforms the shared roles of caregiving responsibilities and emotional support for aspiring careers. These narratives show that family-level gender transformational change dramatically shifts the

trajectory of career, a finding consistent with feminist development frameworks advocating for changes not only at the policy level but at the household structures (Kabeer, 2000).

Inclusion-related policies, such as gender quotas and performance-based promotion, are perceived as enablers rather than entitlements. The likes of respondents stated that it was these policies that gave legitimacy to their accessing leadership and visibility in the eyes of capable women who have always operated in a male-dominated environment. These sentiments are consistent with evidence that affirmative action could impact access as a critical lever for gender equity in public institutions when implemented transparently (Drage, 2001; UN Women Nepal, 2021).

In sum, the crossfire of cultural ideals, institutional constraints, and individual psychological damage creates a formidable glass ceiling in Nepal's bureaucracy. Yet, women's stories reveal paths of resilience and reform-from family support to affirmative policies to changing social norms-that can go a long way toward lifting this invisible barrier. To be pro-gender, Nepal and, in fact, South Asia, would need both top-down policy changes and bottom-up cultural transformation, with women's stories becoming not only evidence but also a roadmap for systemic change.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to examine the current glass ceiling scenario and factors contributing career advancing of women in Nepal. This study has identified the influence of casual sexism, informal relationship, societal perception and judgement, family responsibilities and ageing in generating glass ceiling in the bureaucracy of Nepal. Most of the respondent believed that family responsibilities seemed to be more effective for creating glass ceiling. Respondents believe that working abilities of women are underestimated while the job is being assigned by the management just because they are women and they focus on household chores rather than the professional works. The women are expected to prioritize their family over the work by our society because of which they cannot focus more on their career and their professional mobility is less. Organization has still preoccupied mindset towards the capacity of women. The study found that when women are denied opportunities solely because of their gender, they gradually become passive, and with age, they tend to feel more comfortable avoiding responsibilities, which further reinforces their passivity. This study showed that men's participation in informal gatherings has helped them build trust with their superiors, making their work more visible. In contrast, women's limited involvement in such informal interactions often leads to the perception that they are less capable, resulting in fewer opportunities being offered to them

The study found that factors such as having a supportive spouse and inclusive workplace policies have played a significant role in breaking the glass ceiling. Women who share household responsibilities with their partners tend to be more progressive and career-oriented. This shared approach enables them to dedicate more time to career planning and focus on professional growth. Couples who equally share household chores and child-rearing responsibilities are observed to be more focused on advancing their careers. This study identified that the implementation of inclusion policy in the Nepalese organization has contributed to create an equal opportunity for male and female. It has fostered a culture of recognition and eliminated gender biasness while getting promotion and opportunities.

The findings of this study can be instrumental in advancing women's empowerment across various organizations in Nepal, helping them to redesign their work environments, structures, and policies in ways that address and eliminate gender bias.

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Annex I

Dear Madam,

We are (Chandni Kayastha and Aashma Adhikari) employee of Nepal Administrative Staff College, Jawalakhel, Lalitpur. As a part of internal research of our organization we are undertaking a Research Project in “Glass Ceiling Phenomenon and Career Development of Women in Bureaucracy of Nepal”. We will take your interview which will take 20 minutes and we request you to answer based on your own experiences. Your answers will be of great help in contributing to the research. All answers will be handled anonymously and confidentially. Thank you for volunteering in this survey.

A. Personal Information

Name:

Position:

Office:

Age:

Education Level:

Total Work Experience:

Marital Status:

Children:

Family Types:

B. Self-Reflective Questions

1. Do you prefer balance life more than highly paid job? Why?
2. Which is a more important thing: family or career? Why?
3. How often do you spend your time in planning your career and professional goals?
4. Do you prefer taking outstation work assignments?

C. Demographic Factors:

1. Have you experienced any gender related biasness which has influenced your Career advancement? Please describe.
2. Does your marital status impact your career advancement? (Unmarried/married/Divorce)? Describe
3. Do you think required Education level influences your career advancement? How?
4. Does your Family types (Nuclear/joint) affect your career growth? Explain
5. Do you think level of job position encourage you for making career growth?
6. Do you think age factor play vital role in women's career advancement? How?

D. Barriers that stop women from advancing to higher-level administration roles

1. What are the main factors that influence women's ability to advance to higher-level hierarchy roles?
2. In your opinion, do societal factors hinder your advancement to senior positions? If yes, in what ways?
3. Have you noticed **Personal factors** that stop women for career advancement? Explain
4. Have you ever faced family-related issues that hinder women's career advancement? Explain
5. What is your opinion on **cultural factors**—do they affect your career advancement? How?
6. Do you believe that **Organizational factor** impact on your professional advancement? How?
7. Do you feel that the working environment affects your career advancement? What model do you think would be effective in breaking the glass ceiling.
8. What advice would you give for breaking the glass ceiling to uplift career?