

# SHATTERING THE GLASS CEILING: FRAMING LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

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**Abstract:** The ever-increasing market demand for women's empowerment and policies regarding gender equality practices encourages the organisation to improve policy diversity and opportunity, especially in the Malaysian context. This study examines the mechanism that influences the phenomenon of women's rising dominance in organisations of family responsibilities, mentoring, and support from the educational level. This study extracts its sample population from the Refinitiv DataStream for the fiscal year 2021 and 2022 as the endemic COVID-19 (recovery process) among 345 Malaysian Public Listed Companies (PLCs). The control variables of this study comprise firm size, profitability, and leverage. This study contributes to the theoretical and practical concept of championship gender equality and minimising gaps between counterparts. This study complements the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs on Sustainable Development (SDG-5), focusing on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls globally.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Women, Glass ceiling, Leadership, Gender equality

## 1. Introduction

The proportion of women in leadership roles across a range of organisations and industries has significantly increased in recent years. The shift towards more gender diversity in leadership positions can be linked to several factors, including shifting societal norms and ideals on gender roles and equality. It is now more socially acceptable for women to strive for higher positions since more women have entered the workforce and established their values. According to research conducted by Deloitte and the 30% Club, Malaysia has more female Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) than any other Asian country studied: 34.9 percent vs. 15.7 percent on average globally (Berita Nasional Malaysia, 2022). Moreover, the efforts of advocacy groups and government initiatives to advance gender diversity and inclusion are contributing factors in the rise of women in leadership roles in organisations. Gender equality is listed as the 5th goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to end discrimination against women and girls, build a sustainable future, and support economic growth and development (García-Sánchez et al., 2023). These objectives necessitate the collaborative efforts of every nation across the globe.

Subsequently, the organisations are starting to understand the importance of diversity in leadership and the advantages it can provide, like boosted creativity, enhanced decision-making, and higher employee engagement and happiness. Consequently, the organisation has implemented diversity and inclusion initiatives aimed at overcoming barriers that hinder women from advancing to higher leadership roles (Maha Balakrishnan, 2023). In the 2023 Bloomberg Ltd Partnership Gender-Equality Index (GEI), Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad participated as one of the organisation actively supporting the development of women's empowerment. Investigating gender equality in Malaysian corporate boards, empirical findings show higher female representation among GEI members at 38 percent compared to the global average of 32 percent (Poon, 2023).

Significant strides in gender diversity and inclusion have been achieved through the combined efforts of advocacy groups, government initiatives, and organisation. This concerted activity has aided in the removal of barriers and the creation of possibilities for women to grow in executive positions, benefiting not only the person but also the organisation (Adler & Izraeli, 1994). Looking ahead, it is imperative to maintain this momentum by cultivating a culture of inclusivity, and equality. This entails empowering women and providing them with equitable opportunities to leverage their distinct perspectives and talents for organisational triumph. Therefore, this study attempts to reveal the mechanisms that contribute to the phenomenon of women's rising dominance in organisations.

## 2. Literature Review

This paper examines the ongoing obstacles faced by women in their professional advancement within organisations. It highlights the prevalent issues of the glass ceiling effect and gender biases in hiring and promotion practices, which continue to impede women's progress. The glass ceiling effect refers to the systemic discrimination and gender biases that hinder women from reaching top leadership positions. To shed light on the current state, the article cites a report by the Australian Government Workplace Gender Equality Agency in 2022, revealing that around 22.3 percent of boards and governing bodies lack female directors. The report calls for a collective effort to address these challenges and create a more inclusive environment that empowers women to contribute their talents and perspectives to organisational success (Cortis et al., 2022).

One significant manifestation of these biases is the unconscious assumption that women may lack the same level of commitment or capability as their male counterparts, resulting in their exclusion from promotions and opportunities (Hillman et al., 2002). To effectively address these obstacles, organisations need to implement comprehensive policies and programmes that promote diversity and inclusivity. When aspiring to leadership positions, women often encounter bias manifested through both subtle and overt scepticism regarding their ability to handle high-pressure situations, make tough decisions, and lead effectively. Gender stereotypes play a prominent role in this context, primarily encompassing two major groups: communality and agency. Research has extensively examined the influence of these stereotypes on assessments of female leaders. Women tend to be perceived as less

agentic, characterised by qualities such as aggression, ambition, and independence, while being perceived as more communal, displaying warmth, kindness, and nurturing tendencies (Brescoll, 2016). Consequently, women may encounter labels such as "bossy" or "emotional" for actions that would be perceived as "assertive" or "confident" by their male counterparts.

### *2.1 Women Leadership Challenges*

The primary goal of this study is to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the mechanisms contributing to the increasing prominence of women in the workplace. To achieve this, an extensive examination of organisational, cultural, and interpersonal elements that facilitate women's advancement and success is essential. The research delves into various aspects, including organisational policies, cultural transformations, leadership philosophies, mentorship and sponsorship programs, gender biases, and other relevant mechanisms influencing women's progress in professional settings. By exploring these elements, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics driving female empowerment. The findings will inform the development of strategies and interventions to further promote women's advancement and accomplishments in the workplace.

In this scenario, women face significant challenges in building the necessary networks and relationships for career advancement due to the limited availability of mentorship, and sponsorship programs (Neal, 2023). A Forbes report in 2021 highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected working women, emphasising the crucial role of mentorship programs in improving the promotion and retention rates of women and minority groups. Studies have shown that such programs can increase promotion and retention rates by 15 percent to 38 percent (Bruce, 2021). Despite decades of increased focus on gender equality, progress has either slowed or come to a standstill globally. The objective of examining the growing prominence of women in organisation is to tackle the ongoing gap between research, and practical implementation of solutions for achieving positive change and advancing women's professional equality (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). While the workplace gender structure showed only a moderate correlation with the gender gap in claims, a significant association was observed with the formalisation of human resource practices (Wilcox et al., 2022).

### *2.2 Glass Ceiling hindrance women career ladder*

The term glass ceiling symbolises the presence of discriminatory practices, often rooted in gender or racial biases, that impede the upward mobility of qualified individuals within an organisational hierarchy, thereby halting their progression at lower levels (Tripathi et al., 2021). It is a socio-political metaphor that captures the visible yet intangible barrier obstructing capable women from ascending to the upper echelons of the corporate hierarchy (Dowling, 2017). A woman's path to a successful career has been riddled with numerous obstacles. Although there has been a rise in women's participation in qualifications, employment, and professional dedication, opportunities for them to progress to senior positions remain limited. Even those who managed to reach leadership positions encountered challenges in their professional growth (Jogulu & Franken, 2023).

Several leading studies have suggested that the increasing women leadership contributes to sustainability reporting and practices (Cicchiello *et al.*, 2021), and better corporate governance (Whittingham *et al.*, 2023; Issa *et al.*, 2022). There have been numerous obstacles that women have had to overcome for their careers to be successful. Despite an increase in women's participation in qualifications, employment, and professional commitment, there are still fewer prospects for women to advance to senior positions. Women who rose to positions of leadership faced obstacles in their professional development. While women have the same abilities and expertise as men, they are expected to work harder and perform better to get into executive roles (Jyoti Chauhan *et al.*, 2022; Duchek *et al.*, 2022).

### 2.3 Research Gap

For a better understanding of the mechanisms that contribute to the phenomenon of women's rising dominance in organisations, the following research questions (RQ) were developed, RQ1: How do family responsibilities influence women's rise in organisation? RQ2: What is the impact of mentoring and support on women rising in organisation? RQ3: How much does education level influence women rise in organisation? These research objectives are explained in 2.4 to 2.6 to support hypothesis development in this study. Meanwhile, the problem of the glass ceiling involving women leadership has been raised in Malaysia since Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's regime (Ting, 2007). Among the women leadership obstacle involved lack of gender equality supports (Ahmad-Zaluki, 2012) support system (Siti Raba'ah Hamzah *et al.*, 2016; Nurul Azwa Mohamed Khadri *et al.*, 2021), diversity management practices (Hye *et al.*, 2015; Julizaerma & Zulkarnain, 2012; Zainal *et al.*, 2013), career advancement (Rahman, 2013; Noraini M. Noor & Nor Diana Mohd Mahudin, 2016), and political influence (Cheong, 2022).

The perspective of the gendered organisation also recognises the significance of organisational logic, inequality regimes, intersectionality, and gender subtext in establishing and perpetuating the gendered nature of institutions (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012). Table 1 provides a compilation of the glass ceiling involving women's leadership globally. The literature review was extracted based on the testing variable (women leadership) with experimental variables worldwide from 2005 to 2023. From past studies, among the related theories regarding women's leadership such as the pluralist theoretical approach, mentoring theory, rhizomatic approach, institutional theory, leadership theories, glass cliff theory, and inductive approach commonly used by the researchers either qualitative or quantitative techniques. Hence, it should be a huge step forward to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the career trajectory of a large, and historically disadvantaged, group of women employees. In this regard, all parties must move away from a relative evaluation of women in comparison to men, which can sometimes detract attention from the important question being addressed, which is how to help women strive more in working positions (Ashworth *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, the objective of this research is to explore the link between gender equity and the Sustainable Development Goals, and the role of corporate mechanisms in driving the growing influence of women in organisations.

This study contributes to the literature in several aspects. First, we concentrate on the main mechanisms and insights about the women rising dominant in organisation in the Malaysian context. Secondly, we provide a literature review and supporting data from Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad for the fiscal 2021 and 2022 about policy diversity and opportunity. Lastly, as preliminary study, we focus on a sectorial and year-by-year analysis to ascertain further the relationship between mechanisms that shatter the glass ceiling in the Malaysian organisation context. The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents the study’s literature review on women’s leadership globally. Section 3 shows the theoretical framework and development of the hypotheses. Section 4 on data and methodology used. Finally, Section 5 discusses the preliminary expectations and the conclusions for future research.

**Table 1.** Literature review on women’s leadership globally

Article Title	Year	Objective	Dependent variable	Experimental variables	Theories related	Methodology	Sample Size	Results
Rising to the Gender Challenge in Scotland: Women’s Embodiment of the Disposition to be Mountaineers	2022	This paper seeks to contribute insights into women and mountaineering	Women Rising	Managing Constraints	Pluralist theoretical approach	Qualitative study	10 women, aged range 38 to 80	The paper demonstrates that various societal and mountaineering-related structural shifts have empowered women to embrace a mountaineering identity.  However, despite these changes, the field still remains influenced by narratives of exclusion.
Does Mentor Support Increase Women’s Career Advancement More than Men’s? The Differential Effects of Career and Psychosocial Support	2005	This study examined whether mentor career support helped women’s career advancement more than it did men’s, and more than psychosocial (emotional) support did	Women Career Advancement	1.Mentor Support	Mentoring theory	Respondents and Data Collection	3220 Australians	The findings indicate that despite advancements in career opportunities for women within UK hospitality organisations.
Career Advancement for Women in the British Hospitality Industry: The Enabling Factors	2021	This research aims to gain insight into the factors enabling women to access senior positions in the UK hospitality industry	Women Career Advancement	1.Family-Friendly Practices 2. Proactive and Transparent Gender Equality Measures 3.Support Network and Mentors 4.Personal Development Plans 5.Personal Attributes 6.Operational Divide.	Gendered organisations perspective	Qualitative approach and data (semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews).	10 interviews	The findings reveal that despite improvements in career opportunities for women within the UK hospitality organisations.

Careers advancement of women: Applying a multi-level relational perspective in the context of Turkish banking organisations	2022	This article investigates the question of why women remain underrepresented in management positions despite their increasing presence in the Turkish banking sector context.	Women Rising	1.Organisational Culture 2.Promotion 3.Career Development Policies.	Institutional theory (integrative framework)	Qualitative case-study research design	49 female professionals	The findings demonstrate that the limited representation of women at managerial levels is a result of the complex interaction between macro, meso, and micro-level issues.
Women in public cultural organisations and their professional paths strategies: A rhizomatic approach	2023	The aim of this article is to explore the rhizomatic nature of the professional development strategies used by the female workforce of public cultural organisations.	Women Rising	1.Work culture 2.Support 3. Communities	Rhizomatic approach	Qualitative (in-depth interviews)	20 female managers	The research results exemplify how the pervasive gendered nature of work in cultural organisations significantly affects the professional development of women within this sector.
Right time to join? Organisational imprinting and women's careers in public service organisations	2023	This study evaluates the impact of organisational munificence at appointment on subsequent financial career benefits for women in Danish public services.	Women Career Advancement	1.Organisational Munificence	Theories of imprint-organisatio n fit	Qualitative	Non managerial women employees hired into public sector organisations between 1990 and 1995	The results suggest that resource scarcity during the time of appointment is associated with improved career outcomes.
Women's career equality and leadership in organisations: Creating an evidence-based positive change	2018	The goal of this special issue is to address the persistent research-to-practice gap in developing and implementing practical solutions for a positive change to advance women's career equality	Women Career Advancement	1.Gender 2.Percentage of women in workplace 3.Network Interlinks	Leadership theories	Multimethod	245 women engineers	The findings indicate that gender diversity has a positive correlation with various business and equity practices, such as diversity, corporate governance, product strengths, and community engagement.
Breaking the glass ceiling, but facing a glass cliff?The role of organisational decline in women's representation in leadership positions in Dutch civil service organisations	2019	This article speaks to the debate on how organisational context, more specifically organisational decline, may influence gender representation in such leadership positions	Women Rising	1.Turbulence 2.Position 3.Total number of employees	Congruity theory & Glass Cliff theory	Quantitative method	121 Organisational Units	The findings suggest that during a period of excessive growth, organisations with a lower proportion of women in senior management tend to appoint more women to top management positions.
Enabling factors that contribute to women reaching leadership positions in business organisations: The case of management accountants	2017	The purpose of this paper is to identify factors that support the advancement of those female executives who have reached a leadership position.	Women Rising	1.Gender 2.Family 3.Education	Inductive approach	Qualitative method	Female Austrian Executives (more than 250 employees)	The study's results indicate that for most women, their social skills and professional expertise were identified as key factors that played crucial roles in their successful career advancement.

## 2.4 Family Responsibility

Family responsibility is a factor that influences an individual's motivation and capacity to work since it entails deciding whether to commit time and energy to the family or employment. Women must balance their roles as employees and responsible family members or careers. As a result, juggling home and work becomes challenging. Studies on women's leadership in the Malaysian context are still relatively limited due to mixed findings (Kwee et al., 2019; Nurul Azwa Mohamed Khadri et al., 2021; Mgammal, 2022). Thus, we intend to highlight and identify which mechanisms that influence women's rising domination in organisation. Generally, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs on Sustainable Development (SDG-5) focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women, and girls globally by 2030. Thus, this study focuses on each mechanism that contributes on women rising dominant in organisation.

The women in the family bear the primary responsibility for household activities or childcare, and they must devote a significant amount of time to their family regardless of their employment status to fulfil their societal obligations and avoid social rejection as stated by Jyoti Chauhan et al. (2022), and Ugwu et al. (2018). Women prefer non-transferable positions and occasionally turn down promotion possibilities to integrate their personal lives with work-life and family duties (Sanghamitra Buddhapriya, 2009). About this concept of the study, women's leadership challenges could be from internal, and external surroundings. Undeniably, mostly female leadership in work success is affected by the emotional state of family members (Aycan, 2004). Even though women play a central role in family responsibilities and juggling work alongside other duties, this double burden does not indicate that women cannot perform well in boardroom leadership. For instance, the necessity for career pauses due to pregnancy and the subsequent caregiving responsibilities for children places women at a distinct disadvantage compared to men when it comes to progressing in the workplace (Campbell & Bohdanowicz, 2016). However, in Indian organisation, family duties and careers affect the succession of female leadership (Goel, 2003).

## 2.5 Mentoring and Support

Mentors can help women navigate their professions by defining goals, helping them acquire essential skills, and helping them spot possibilities for development. Mentoring is supposed to help both men and women develop in their careers, but it is thought to be more beneficial for women because they may face greater obstacles than males in doing so (Tharenou, 2005; Romila Singh et al., 2009). Past literature had debates on women rising and the factors affected by it (Cimirotić et al., 2017; Tulle, 2022; Góral, 2023). Therefore, some researchers have studied the past as instances of social capital that women have shown to be therapeutic and to assist women in becoming more empowered (Tharenou, 2005). Hence, we assume the relationship occurs between mentorship and the women rising dominant in organisation based on the ground that mentoring and support are necessary for the career ladder (Geetha Subramaniam et al., 2016; Nurul Azwa Mohamed Khadri et al., 2021). According to Abalkhail and Allan (2015), there seems to be a stronger connection between mentor career support and career development compared to psychosocial support. This

observation aligns with the assertions put forth in the mentoring literature by Tharenou (2005) and Feenstra et al. (2022).

In contrast, Gabaldon et al. (2016) discuss the importance of mentoring and support from the supply and demand side. Accordingly, past studies had observed the relationship between specific attitudes and behaviours of female directorship toward women rising dominant in organisations, hence, no conclusive evidence exists that supports the inter-relationship. However, pre-conception assumes that work-family conflicts hinder women from reaching leadership positions. From the supply side, with the policy changes due to the recent developments, mentoring and support as some of the mechanisms that lead to the phenomenon of women's rising dominance in organisation. Thus family support and senior leadership influence women rise to the higher position. For instance, a recent Malaysian report that women held more than 30 percent of board composition in the top 100 PLCs and overall, 25 percent of seats for all PLCs on Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad, according to 30% Club Malaysia. Compared to 2012 when the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance (MCCG 2012) recommends 30 percent appointment of women at the decision-making levels that seems questionable (Malaysia, 2015), a recent report indicated that Malaysia is aligned with SDG-5 (Dello Strologo et al., 2023).

In terms of the demand side, as research is still expanding looking for more comprehensive and concrete evidence to support the arguments between mentoring and support towards women's rising dominance in organisation, one of the key considerations was in term pseudo-quotas at the national level to enforce current policy. Therefore, the voluntary versus mandatory policies on gender equality must be further analysed (Hillman et al., 2002; Gabaldon et al., 2016). To understand further on the situation, this study must be carried out to break the barriers and provide alternative solutions to the problem given.

## *2.6 Educational Level*

Following human capital theories, when women attain higher levels of education, their skills enhance, leading to wage increases and ultimately driving higher participation in the labour market, therefore, increased education enhances productivity, consequently raising potential earnings (Góral, 2023). This creates a stronger motivation to enter the workforce and replace leisure or domestic tasks with employment. Generally, women's labour force involvement rises in most developed nations as education levels rise (Apostu et al., 2023; Dello Strologo et al., 2023). Therefore, for women who have limited education, securing well-compensated, high-quality employment is challenging. However, pursuing tertiary education opens up access to more desirable occupations. This, in turn, leads to increased rewards for engaging in higher-quality work, accompanied by an elevation in social standing, which drives greater labour force participation. Conversely, educated women tend to avoid positions that are perceived as falling beneath their educational attainment, as it could negatively impact their social status.

Meanwhile, the Gender Inequality Index assesses the disparity between males and females by evaluating three crucial dimensions of human development which consists of reproductive health (such as maternal mortality ratio), empowerment (including secondary education), and economic position (encompassing labour market participation) (Permanyer,



2013). This index is based on the United Nations Development Programme's framework as proposed by Cimirotić et al. (2017) and Thaller et al. (2023). Additionally, the importance of women's involvement in the boardroom cannot be denied, thus they tend to show interest in multiple stakeholders and influence the board's decision-making (Hillman et al., 2007). In addition, Hillman et al. (2002) also indicate that women with academic qualifications perform better compared to their male counterparts (Hillman et al., 2002; Endrikat et al., 2021; Zattoni et al., 2022; Beji et al., 2021) in performing the roles as board members. Jakubson and Psacharopoulos (1992) discover that education has a tiny but beneficial effect on women's labour force involvement similar to Esha Chatterjee and Reeve D. Vanneman (2022).

As a result, women's labour force participation has traditionally been higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Few women have been employed in the modern economy, where educational credentials are more significant. These studies emphasise the importance of the type of jobs available as a key moderating impact on the relationship between education and women's labour market participation. Generally, for women to succeed in their jobs and significantly contribute to the success of their organisations, educational level is crucial. Education gives women the knowledge and abilities they need to excel in the workforce. Moreover, a higher level of education offers doors to more leadership roles and employment options (Sun & Li, 2017; Feng & Fang, 2022). Despite this, with more knowledge, women are better able to compete for leadership jobs and take on demanding roles within businesses. The relationship of women's education correlates with their labour force participation.

### *2.7 Theoretical Framework and hypothesis development*

Figure 1 shows the mechanisms that lead to the phenomenon of women's rising dominance in an organisation. In this study, the phenomenon of women rising dominant in organisation (WOMEN) is used as the dependent variable. WOMEN are determined using Policy Diversity and Opportunity extracted from the Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad data set for fiscal years 2021 and 2022 of Malaysian PLCs. The dichotomous indicator is measured to represent the number of female directors in the boardroom. Meanwhile, independent variables of this study consist of family responsibilities (FAMILY), mentoring and support (MENTOR), and educational level (EDUCATION) that lead to the relationship toward shattering the glass ceiling. Among these variables, FAMILY and MENTOR are still rarely used in research related to female directorship in boardrooms via secondary data. Furthermore, asset size (FSIZE) is also important as control variables for the study as widely used by prior researchers (Kamilah Kamaludin et al., 2022). FSIZE can be measured based on a natural log of the organisation's total assets. Profitability based-return on assets (ROA) is measured by organisation's net income divided by the value of total assets (Jizi, 2017). Leverage (LEV) is measured by an organisation's total debt divided by total shareholders' equity as proposed by Herda et al. (2012). Higher leverage indicates an organisation facing a higher cost of capital as debt leads to higher risk.

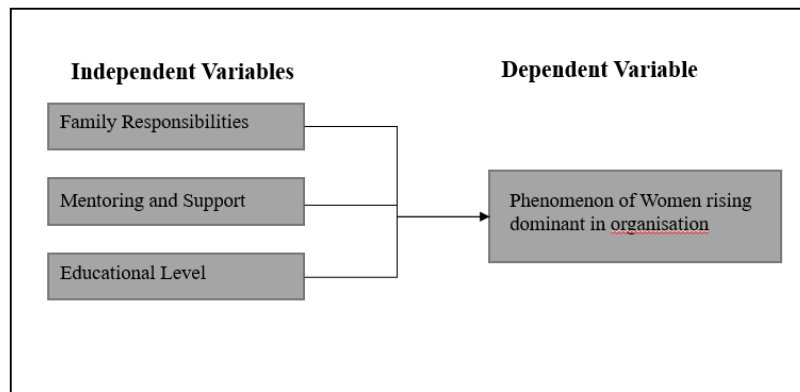


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of Women Dominance

Furthermore, after reviewing the relevant theories as presented in Table 1, we found that the institutional approach has been widely applied across various social science fields, such as sociology, political science, and economics (Taser-Erdogan, 2022). Institutional theory primarily focuses on how institutions achieve legitimacy and continuity by adapting to legislative, social, and cultural forces from their external environment. In a comprehensive framework, Salas et al. (2012) incorporated key institutional perspectives, synthesising the essential regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements previously recognised as foundational to institutions. Scott further characterised institutions as encompassing these three pillars, along with associated activities and resources, to provide stability and meaning to social life (Salas et al., 2012; Taser-Erdogan, 2022). Therefore, we adopt institutional theory as our foundation to explain the relationship between family responsibilities, mentoring support, and educational level in advancing women's progression within organisations.

### ***Hypothesis 1: Family Responsibilities***

Generally, various mechanisms impact women's choices in leadership, with their ability to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between personal and professional spheres being a significant consideration. Most likely, they assert that their job choices are not solely driven by financial compensation and other forms of professional acknowledgment (Tulle, 2022). Researchers are interested in exploring the roles of family responsibility towards glass ceiling impact. State-level gender legislation, the institutionalisation of progressive gender-related regulations, and the influence of female directors on board decision-making are some of these variables (Thams et al., 2018). Hence, the participation of women on boards can contribute to improved business reputation, fewer financial restatements, and fewer governance-related problems (Post & Byron, 2015). Thus, in hypothesis 1 (H1), we interpret that there appears a relationship between family responsibility and women's rising dominance in the organisation.

### ***Hypothesis 2: Mentoring and Support***

Mentors play a crucial role in guiding women, especially in career development, acquiring vital skills, and identifying avenues for growth. Females are more likely to face obstacles in leadership positions because it is believed that women hold heightened challenges to compete with men (Tharenou, 2005). Working women often carry the primary

responsibility for raising and caring for their children, and sharing household duties with partners or other family members. According to human capital theory, and gender discrimination theory, family responsibilities can significantly impact women's professional performance (Luekemann & Abendroth, 2018). Women's career decisions are shaped by various factors, including their ability to balance personal and professional lives, rather than being solely driven by income or external job recognition. This balance between work and family life is thus a critical consideration in women's career choices. Additionally, in hypothesis 2 (H2), we interpret that there appears the relationship between mentorship and support toward women's rising dominant in the organisation.

### ***Hypothesis 3: Educational Level***

Esha Chatterjee and Reeve D. Vanneman (2022) claims that education boosts women performance through better knowledge, and skills for the professional realm. They also believed that attaining a higher level of education opens pathways to increased opportunity for leadership roles and a broader array of employment possibilities. Previous studies also found that education gives women the knowledge and abilities they need to excel in the workforce (Chirantan Chatterjee & Swapnika Ramu 2018). These abilities are necessary for women to succeed in their positions and significantly contribute to the success of their organisations. Based on the foregoing discussion, for hypothesis 3 (H3), we can interpret that there is a significant relationship between educational level and the women rising dominant in organisation.

## **3. Methodology**

### ***3.1 Sampling***

This study aims to gather data from all companies listed on Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad to enable a thorough examination of the issue under investigation. To capture an accurate representation of the population, all relevant individuals within these companies are carefully selected as data sources, providing a foundation for the research. Selecting appropriate respondents is essential to obtain meaningful insights into the factors contributing to the increased representation of women in organisational contexts. By incorporating participants from PLCs on Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad, this research seeks a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms supporting the rise of women in organisational leadership.

A non-probability sampling approach is employed, recognising the inherent uncertainty in determining selection probability, which may introduce selection bias. The target population consists of employees of PLCs. Therefore, only individuals employed in these companies are included. A purposive sampling is applied to deliberately target individuals meeting specific criteria relevant to the study. Given the limited number of 345 PLCs, the inclusion of purposive sampling is deemed suitable. The primary purpose of employing purposive sampling in this research is to concentrate on characteristics within the population of interest.

Refinitiv DataStream (formerly known as Thomson Reuters Eikon) is the most reliable and comprehensive international financial and accounting data (Refinitiv Eikon DataStream, 2023). We collected data for fiscal years 2021 and 2022 because the information was fully available. Refinitiv DataStream is used for financial information such as sample, dependent variables and control variables, meanwhile, independent data are hand-collected for each firm from the annual governance report.

#### 4. Data Collection

**Table 2.** Operational Definition for each term

No	Variables	Definition	Operationalisation	Source
1	Family Responsibilities	Familial obligations revolve around supporting and caring for one's family members, as well as contributing to their well-being and maintaining a healthy and supportive family atmosphere.	Hand-collect	Kwee et al., 2019; Nurul Azwa Mohamed Khadri et al., 2021
2	Mentorship and Support	Mentorship is the guidance, encouragement, and help provided by experienced individuals (mentors) to others who are less experienced or seeking guidance (mentees). Support might include emotional support, practical assistance, resources, and encouragement provided to persons confronting problems or pursuing personal or professional goals.	Hand-collect	Tharenou, 2005; Tulle, 2022
3	Education Level	The highest level of education completed by an individual is referred to as their education level. It denotes a person's level of formal education or academic qualifications.	Hand-collect	Góral, 2023
4	Asset Size	Logarithm of organisation's total asset	Refinitiv DataStream	Kamilah Kamaludin et al., 2022
5	Return on Assets	Organisation's net income divided by the value of total assets	Refinitiv DataStream	Jizi, 2017
6	Leverage	Organisation's total debt divided by total shareholders' equity	Refinitiv DataStream	Herda et al., 2012

**Notes:** The full explanation on the operationalisation can only be given after the full data collection process.

Table 2 provides an operational definition for each term in this study. In this study, the data collection was examined based on archival data (Refinitiv DataStream) and hand-collect information. The sample period consists of 2021 and 2022 incorporating the recent Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance (MCCG 2021), released in April 2021 that recommend the board composition of at least 30 percent women directors. In addition, the board discloses the organisation's policy on gender diversity and senior management in its annual report (Guizani & Abdalkrim, 2022; Fayad et al., 2022). Data for this study will be collected using Refinitiv DataStream, which will facilitate the statistical analysis required to meet the research objectives. Data collection and analysis are conducted annually, allowing the study to track changes, trends, and developments in companies listed on Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad over time. The acquired data will be examined statistically to satisfy the research objectives.

Table 3 shows the sampling size of the data collection. For this study, the initial population was gathered through archival data consisting of 1,006 organisations. In this study,

organisation comprised PLCs under Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad. The researchers narrowed down the fiscal year from 2021 and 2022 after the pandemic Covid-19 because the organisations are in the recovery process. Next, the researchers also removed those organisations without sectoral information (36 organisations with no sector information) and 618 organisations with no Policy Diversity and Opportunity information from the Refinitiv DataStream. Finally, only 345 organisations that meet the criterion requirements comprising 101 organisations based in the fiscal year 2021 and 244 organisations based in the fiscal year 2022. The details are reported in the table given.

Table 3. Sampling of the Study

Description	Number	Number
Population, N	1006	
Remove: No Sectors Information	(36)	
Remove: Did not indicate Policy Diversity and Opportunity	(618)	
Initial Sample	352	
Remove:		
Non Fiscal Year for 2021 and 2022	(7)	
Final Sample, n	345	
Fiscal Year 2021		101
Fiscal Year 2022		244
<b>Sample</b>		<b>345</b>

Meanwhile, we also produce the Bursa Malaysia sectoral categories as shown in Table 4. We observed that our samples comprise eleven different sectors. From the Table, the majority of the organisations were under Industrials with 106 organisations (60.3 percent) between 29 organisations in fiscal year 2021 and 77 organisations in fiscal year 2022 respectively. The Table also indicates that Consumer Discretionary and Consumer Staples as the second-highest organisation with Policy Diversity and Opportunity information. Out of 29 Consumer Discretionary organisations, only one organisation in fiscal year 2021 and an increase to 28 organisations in the fiscal year 2022 provide the information. The same information appears for Consumer Staples respectively. The least organisation with Policy Diversity and Opportunity information is the telecommunication sector with 7 organisations in total. Out of 7 organisations, only three organisations are in fiscal year 2021. The variation of the sector indicates that this study is valuable for further analysis.

Table 4. Demographic of the respondents

Sectors	Fiscal Year 2021		Fiscal Year 2022		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Basic Materials	8	7.9	17	7.0	25	14.9
Consumer Discretionary	1	16.8	28	11.5	29	28.3
Consumer Staples	1	15.8	28	11.5	29	27.3
Energy	6	5.9	12	4.9	18	10.8
Financials	5	5.0	15	6.1	20	11.1
Health Care	3	3.0	10	4.1	13	7.1
Industrials	29	28.7	77	31.6	106	60.3
Real Estate	7	6.9	27	11.1	34	18.0
Technology	4	4.0	19	7.8	23	11.8
Telecommunications	3	3.0	4	1.6	7	4.6
Utilities	3	3.0	7	2.9	10	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>200.0</b>

Table 5 provides additional information for each Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad sector extracted from Refinitiv DataStream. The majority of the data collection consists of Industrial at 30.7 percent, followed by Consumer Discretionary at 13 percent and Consumer Staples at 12.8 percent respectively. Only a few organisations from Telecommunications (2 percent), Utilities (2.9 percent), and Health Care (3.8 percent) respectively. This initial demographic Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad sector provides an overview that these organisations were not ready for the women rising dominant in organisation and therefore, our study is valuable to be carried out.

Table 5. Bursa Malaysia Sector in Percentage

Indicator	Sectors											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Frequency	25	45	44	18	20	13	106	34	23	7	10	345
Percentage	7.2%	13.0%	12.8%	5.2%	5.8%	3.8%	30.7%	9.9%	6.7%	2.0%	2.9%	100.0%

**Notes:** 1-Basic Materials, 2-Consumer Discretionary, 3-Consumer Staples, 4-Energy, 5-Financials, 6-Health Care, 7-Industrials, 8-Real Estate, 9-Technology, 10-Telecommunications, 11-Utilities.

Additionally, Table 6 provides the overall information for the Policy Diversity and Opportunity information as the main intention of the study. Overall, we observe that from 101 organisations in the fiscal year 2021, only 93 organisations support women's rising dominance in organisations compared to 228 organisations that support women's rising dominance in organisations. The samples provide preliminary information that the majority of the organisations are in the transmission process for the women empowerment. The data collection for this study will be completed for further analysis, however this conceptual paper brings an avenue for the consideration of women empowerment among organisations in the Malaysian context.

Table 6. Policy Diversity and Opportunity

Policy Diversity and Opportunity for Fiscal Year 2021	Frequency	Policy Diversity and Opportunity for Fiscal Year 2022	Frequency
No Policy Diversity and Opportunity	8	No Policy Diversity and Opportunity	16
Appear Policy Diversity and Opportunity	93	Appear Policy Diversity and Opportunity	228
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>

Our preliminary findings indicated that from the report by Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), Head of Campaigns, Natasha Dandavati noted that over half of women received questions about their marital status, and one in five had inquiries about their capacity to carry out particular activities because of their gender (Ames, 2020). Moreover, Malaysia ranks ninth in Southeast Asia and 104th globally on the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Index, with significant challenges in political participation (117th), economic involvement (97th), and literacy rates (86th). Juanita Elias notes that the pursuit of women's human rights in Malaysia is deeply influenced by the rise of Islamic conservatism, the demand for domestic legal reforms, and national authoritarianism (Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia [SUHAKAM], 2022).

## 5. Conclusion

This conceptual paper provides an understanding of the corporate information for the policy diversity and opportunity, and mechanisms that can influence women's rising dominance in the organisation. The primary research objective aims to examine the relationship between factors within organisations and the representation of women on corporate boards. The researchers believe that this study can enhance knowledge in terms of theoretical and practical concepts in several ways. Firstly, theoretically, based on the literature review on women's leadership, we observe that few studies focus on the main mechanisms that encourage women to participate in the organisation. Besides, we also found mixed results on the mechanism that leads women's rise in the organisation. This study provides the possible reasons for women rising dominant in organisation besides the policy adopted by the Government. We believe that gender equality in the sustainable development goals paves the way for more women empowerment in the future.

The limitation of the study is that the respondents were restricted for the fiscal year 2021 and 2022 using archival data and required time-consuming hand collection. Changing in the Government policy could also influence data collection and the interpretation outcome of the study, therefore we decided to focus only on fiscal years 2021 and 2022 because we believe the current government is stable and structured. Overall, we intend to provide comprehensive corporate information on women rising dominant in the organisation in the Malaysian context utilising family responsibility, mentoring and support, and educational level as mechanism for the women in the boardroom.

To enhance this study, the research model can be expanded by incorporating additional variables related to organisational strength, social dynamics, or cultural factors that can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing women's growing roles within the organisations. Another key focus is to identify supportive variables that reinforce the study, such as cultural norms within companies, inclusive human resource practices, and external factors like changes in gender equality legislation. Moreover, introducing new perspectives can deepen insights into the increasing presence of women in organisational leadership. By addressing these elements, the study can explore how human rights, diversity, and inclusion foster women's advancement in leadership roles.

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