THE IMPACT OF THE GLASS CEILING ON EXPATRIATE WOWEN'S SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS: A RESEARCH IN UAE

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the impact the impact of glass ceiling barriers on the subjective career success of expatriate women in the United Arab Emirates. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 464 expatriate women working in professional roles across various industries through an online survey. The research examined how perceived barriers related to family responsibilities, discriminatory promotion practices, employee relations, organizational support, gender stereotypes, and training opportunities influence career success dimensions including recognition, quality work, meaningful work, influence, authenticity, personal life integration, growth and development, and career satisfaction.

The findings reveal that glass ceiling barriers significantly affect expatriate women's subjective career success. Discriminatory promotion practices emerged as the most powerful predictor across multiple career success dimensions. Employee relations demonstrated positive relations with career outcomes, while lack of organizational support showed negative relationships. Contrary to expectations, family responsibilities had weaker effects than anticipated, suggesting organizational and social barriers may be more prominent for the research sample. The study extends glass ceiling literature to expatriate contexts and demonstrates that career experiences are shaped more by organizational factors than individual characteristics.

The study extends glass ceiling literature to expatriate contexts and demonstrates that career experiences are shaped more by organizational factors than individual characteristics. The research provides evidence that structural barriers persist in international business contexts despite progress in women's workforce participation. Based on the research findings, organizations should develop transparent promotion processes, invest in inclusive workplace cultures, and provide adequate support for women's advancement.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Subjective Career Success, Expatriate Women, UAE

ÖZET

CAM TAVANIN YABANCI UYRUKLU KADINLARIN ÖZNEL KARİYER BAŞARILARI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ: BAE'DE BİR UYGULAMA

AKYÜREK, CEREN
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Bu çalışma, Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri'nde çalışan yabancı uyruklu kadınlar üzerinde cam tavan engellerinin öznel kariyer başarısına etkisini incelemektedir. Nicel araştırma deseni kullanılarak, çevrimiçi anket yoluyla çeşitli sektörlerde profesyonel pozisyonlarda çalışan 464 yabancı uyruklu kadından veri toplanmıştır. Araştırma, aile sorumlulukları, ayrımcı terfi uygulamaları, çalışan ilişkileri, örgütsel destek, toplumsal cinsiyet kalıp yargıları ve eğitim fırsatlarına ilişkin algılanan engellerin; tanınma, kaliteli iş, anlamlı iş, etki, özgünlük, kişisel yaşam entegrasyonu, büyüme ve gelişim ile kariyer tatmini gibi kariyer başarısı boyutlarını nasıl etkilediğini incelemiştir.

Bulgular, cam tavan engellerinin yabancı uyruklu kadınların öznel kariyer başarılarını önemli ölçüde etkilediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrımcı terfi uygulamaları, birçok kariyer başarısı boyutu üzerinde en güçlü değişken olarak öne çıkmıştır. Çalışan ilişkileri kariyer çıktılarıyla olumlu ilişkiler gösterirken, örgütsel destek eksikliği olumsuz ilişkiler sergilemiştir. Beklentilerin aksine, aile sorumluluklarının etkileri beklenenden daha zayıf bulunmuştur; bu durum araştırma örneklemi için örgütsel ve sosyal engellerin daha belirgin olabileceğini düşündürmektedir. Çalışma, cam tavan literatürünü yabancı uyruklu kadın bağlamında genişletmekte ve kariyer deneyimlerinin bireysel özelliklerden çok örgütsel faktörler tarafından şekillendirildiğini göstermektedir.

Araştırma, kadınların işgücüne katılımında kaydedilen ilerlemelere rağmen uluslararası iş bağlamlarında yapısal engellerin varlığını sürdürdüğüne dair kanıtlar sunmaktadır. Araştırma bulgularına istinaden, örgütlerin şeffaf terfi süreçleri geliştirmesi, kapsayıcı işyeri kültürlerine yatırım yapması ve kadınların ilerlemesi için yeterli destek sağlaması gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cam Tavan, Öznel Kariyer Başarısı, Yabancı Uyruklu Kadın Çalışan, BAE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved father, Mehmet Zeki Bingöl, whose heart is full of love for people and whose life has been devoted to building a better world. Your quiet courage, steady guidance, and endless patience have been my anchor. Thank you for standing by me in every season, for your unwavering support, and for the love and compassion you have always given me. Your faith in me lit the way through this journey. This work is for you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ILO	:International Labor Organization
OECD	:Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
MNC	:Multinational Companies
IMS	:International Migrant Stock
IHRM	:International Human Resource Management
ICFTU	:International Confederation of Free Trade Unions of the World
SCA	:Securities and Commodities Authority
PJSC	:Public Joint-Stock Company
UNDP	:United Nations Development Programme
GCC	:The Gulf Cooperation Council
UAE	:United Arab Emirates
AE	:Assigned Expatriate
SIE	:Self-Initiated Expatriate
SCS	:Subjective Career Success
WEF	:World Economic Forum
MOHRE	:Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization
EOSB	:End of Service Benefits
GII	:Gender Inequality Index

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the historical process, the social status of women and their place in working life have constantly developed and changed in the context of economic freedom. One of the most important achievements of the industrial revolution in social life is the active participation of women in working life. Women have an undeniable place in business life as well as in society. However, both the role of women due to traditional perception and the emergence of inequalities of opportunity with this role cause women to face obstacles in business life and women are more exposed to such obstacles, especially at the managerial level.

The inequality between women and men in participation in working life becomes more apparent as women move up to managerial levels. Glass Ceiling Syndrome, which represents an invisible barrier preventing minorities from rising to senior positions, is a concept that has entered our lives because women in working life cannot take top management positions even though they deserve it. It is the prevention of women's promotion by ignoring their competencies and achievements in working life and keeping women away from top management positions only because of their gender. Women, who were previously prevented from entering the labor market, have to struggle to advance in their careers in our age. The glass ceiling concept, which is the subject of this study, is used to describe this situation.

Contemporary statistics reveal that while the share of women in the labor market is increasing, they are progressing slowly in proportional terms. The obstacles caused by prejudiced behaviors and attitudes in the working environment discourage women and prevent them from rising to higher positions. Despite the increase in the number of working women and the increasing rate of women in the business world, the number of women among senior managers and leaders is not at the desired level (Karcıoğlu and Leblebici 2014: 3-4).

It is revealed that career barriers, which are explained as glass ceiling syndrome and formed by the combination of many factors, are divided under three headings as individual barriers, organizational barriers and social barriers. Individual barriers are discussed under the topics of assuming multiple roles, personal preferences, and perceptions of women. Organizational barriers are classified as organizational culture, organizational policies, lack of mentors, inability to participate in informal communication networks, reasons arising from male managers and female managers. Social barriers are classified as occupational segregation, and stereotypes (stereotypical prejudices associated with gender).

The problems faced by women in working life have been the subject of discussion for many years. Whether it is a man or a woman, it has been seen that the obstacles in business life have revealed many negative situations. Although there seems to be a gender difference for experiencing these problems, it can be indicated that it is not only for women. However, the research reveal that women in business life are under much more negative influence than men. The problems of women in the social and sociological field and inequality between men and women have also worked against women in business life when women started to be involved in business life. Inequality between women and men has frequently been on the agenda even after women have entered the labor market. This shows that factors such as the current social structure of the country, the role that society assigns to women, the economic level of the country, the level of education and beliefs also affect the pursuit of women in business life.

While these challenges affect women universally, expatriate women, those working outside their home countries, face additional layers of complexity. Beyond the gender-based barriers common to all working women, they must also navigate cultural adaptation, organizational biases about women's suitability for international roles, and limited professional networks in host countries.

Expatriate women represent a distinct population facing compounded career barriers in international work contexts. Working outside their home countries, they encounter both universal glass ceiling obstacles and challenges unique to their expatriate status (Adler 1984; Linehan and Scullion 2001). Research shows that despite increasing numbers of women in international assignments, they remain significantly underrepresented in senior expatriate positions and experience what scholars term a "double glass ceiling" effect—barriers based not only on gender but

also on cultural stereotypes in host countries (Hutchings 2005; Caligiuri and Colakoglu 2007). Cultural adaptation requires limited professional networks in host countries, and organizational biases about women's suitability for international roles create additional layers of complexity (Shortland 2009; Hutchings 2012). The intersection of gender and expatriate status intensifies career advancement challenges, making this population particularly important to study in understanding contemporary workplace barriers and their impact on subjective career success (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010; McNulty and Hutchings 2016).

The United Arab Emirates provides a compelling context to examine these dynamics. With expatriates comprising approximately 88% of the total population and women representing over half of the expatriate workforce, the UAE hosts one of the world's most diverse international labor markets (UN DESA 2024). Despite recent legal reforms promoting gender equity, including equal pay mandates and board representation requirements, expatriate women's career advancement remains constrained by organizational practices and cultural expectations. This gap between progressive policy frameworks and persistent workplace barriers makes the UAE an ideal setting to investigate how glass ceiling factors shape expatriate women's career success.

Based on the above discussions, the objective of this study is to explore the impact of the glass ceiling on expatriate women career success in the UAE, which has a rapidly growing economy. In UAE even though expatriate women represent more than half of the expat population, their labor force participation rate is less than expatriate men. Men’s participation in the labor force is twice as women. In recent years women and gender issues have become a major area of concern. All over the world to discuss women issues and women advancement in all spheres of life, still exists as the barriers for women career development. This study will be entirely designed by centering the focal problem of impact of glass ceiling on expatriate women career success.

Despite growing global awareness of gender inequality and increasing participation of women in the labor force, expatriate women continue to encounter distinct and persistent career barriers —particularly in emerging economies like the UAE. Although extensive literature exists on the glass ceiling phenomenon in Western contexts, relatively limited research has examined how these invisible barriers intersect with expatriate identity and influence subjective perceptions of

career success. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing specifically on self-initiated expatriate women in the UAE, exploring how organizational and societal factors shape their career trajectories and internal evaluations of success.

To address this research gap, this study employs a quantitative approach, surveying 464 expatriate women professionals across diverse industries in the UAE. Chapter II establishes the theoretical foundations, reviewing literature on glass ceiling barriers, expatriate career challenges, and subjective career success frameworks. Chapter III presents the research design, measurement instruments, and empirical findings from regression and comparative analyses. Chapter IV discusses the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, acknowledges study limitations, and provides evidence-based recommendations for organizations seeking to support expatriate women's career advancement in the UAE and similar contexts.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding how glass ceiling barriers affect expatriate women's career success requires establishing theoretical foundations across three interconnected domains: the nature and characteristics of expatriate populations, the specific dimensions and manifestations of glass ceiling phenomena, and frameworks for measuring subjective career success. This chapter synthesizes relevant literature to build a comprehensive conceptual model that guides the empirical investigation presented in Chapter III.

The chapter is organized into three main sections. Section 2.1 examines expatriates and women in international contexts, defining key concepts (skilled immigrants, self-initiated expatriates), exploring challenges faced by expatriate women, and contextualizing these dynamics within the UAE labor market. Section 2.2 analyzes problems encountered by women in working life, with particular focus on glass ceiling barriers arising from individual, organizational, and societal factors, as well as strategies to overcome these obstacles. Section 2.3 addresses career development constructions, reviewing women's career pathways and trajectories before introducing subjective career success as the primary framework for this study.

2.1. EXPATRIATES AND WOMEN

2.1.1. The Immigration Process

Immigration is the movement of people between countries to enhance their economic and social standing (Douglas et al. 2019: 11). Immigration is initiated by an immigrant that has settled in a host country, leaving behind his native country. Conversely, someone who leaves their native territory is called an emigrant (Douglas et al. 2019: 25). Connell and Burgess (2009: 65) argue that migration is now a stable feature of both national and international economies. People tend to relocate from less prosperous settings to more dynamic ones for multiple reasons seeking better

living standards, higher wages, wider job prospects, freedom from oppression, tax-free salaries, or simply a change in life circumstances.

Over the past years, sizable movements have been recorded from South and Central America to the United States and Canada, from Eastern to Western Europe, and from Asia to the Middle East. According to the World Migration Report 2024 (IOM 2024a), the global stock of international migrants increased from approximately 272 million in 2019 (3.5% of the world's population) to 281 million in 2020 and further to 304 million by mid-2024 (3.7% of the world's population). Women represented 48.1% of all migrants in 2020, totaling 146 million female migrants compared to 135 million male migrants. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reported 169 million international migrant workers in 2019, with men constituting 58.5 percent and women 41.5 percent (ILO 2021). According to the latest ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers (2024a), this number decreased slightly to 167.7 million in 2022, with men representing 61.3 percent (102.7 million) and women 38.7 percent (64.9 million).

International migrant workers span the full skills spectrum from low to highly skilled and include expatriates on international assignments. Military personnel, border workers, and consular staff are typically excluded from the international-migrant definition. Of the 167.7 million migrants in the labor force in 2022, 155.6 million were employed, while 12.1 million were unemployed, with the majority concentrated in high-income countries which accounted for 68.4 percent of the total (114.7 million people).

In the United States, immigrants made up 15.8% of the population in January 2025, totaling over 53.3 million out of 337 million residents. As of 2023, there were 47.8 million immigrants residing in the United States according to the American Community Survey, confirming that the United States continues to host the largest absolute number of immigrants globally. According to the United Nations International Migrant Stock 2024 dataset, comparable shares of immigrant population were approximately 30.4% in Australia (8.1 million), 22.2% in Canada (8.8 million), 17.1% in the United Kingdom (11.8 million), 19.8% in Germany (16.8 million), and 40.3% in Saudi Arabia (13.7 million) as of mid-2024 (UN DESA 2025).

United Arab Emirates and the wider Middle East represent a major destination for international migration, particularly for expatriate workers. The Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC), comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, constitutes one of the world's largest migration corridors. As of mid-2024, the GCC countries together hosted approximately 36.6 million international migrants, with non-nationals forming a substantial proportion of the resident population in most member states (UN DESA 2024).

2.1.2. Distinguishing High Skilled Immigrants from Other Global Workers

The literature lacks a single settled definition for migrant/immigrant, expatriate, or highly skilled migrant; authors often use overlapping concepts and criteria. In this study, "migrant" refers to people living outside their country of birth; "migrant worker" refers to migrants who are employed; and "highly skilled immigrant" refers to migrants who possess tertiary education (bachelor's degree or higher) and/or work in high-skill occupations such as managerial, professional, or technical roles.

The number of migrant workers was about 169 million in 2019 (ILO 2021), which increased to 167.7 million in 2022 (ILO 2024), as shown in Figure 1.

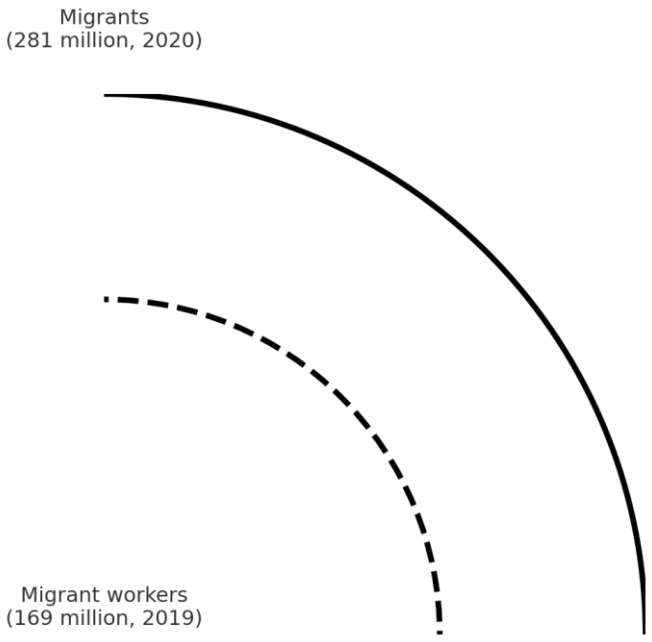

Figure 1: Global population of international migrants (2020) and migrant workers (2019). (UN DESA IMS 2020 and ILO 2021)

By gender, men accounted for about 58.5% and women accounted for 41.5% of migrant workers in 2019 as shown in Figure 2 (ILO 2021). Totals refer to different reference years (migrants: 2020; migrant workers: 2019).

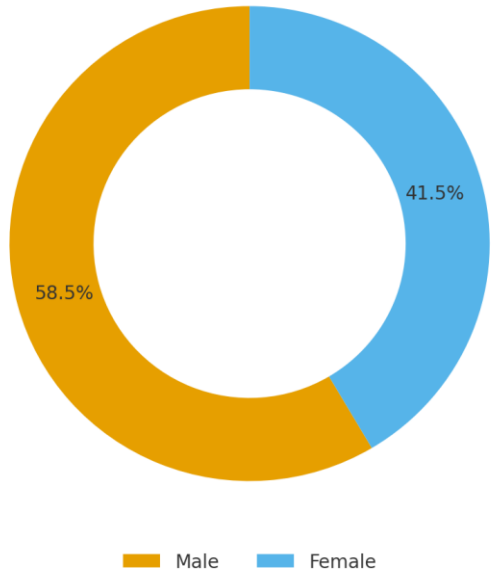

Figure 2: Global distribution of migrant workers, by gender, 2019.
(ILO 2021)

Several authors have attempted to distinguish between highly skilled immigrants and corporate expatriates, as well as between a migrant and a highly skilled immigrant, but the criteria applied vary widely (Al Ariss and Syed 2011: 300; Baruch et al. 2013: 2370). Synthesizing 136 articles, Andresen et al. (2014: 2296) propose clearer boundaries among these categories. In their framework, the term "migrant" is used as an umbrella concept for individuals living outside their country of birth, while more specific concepts are applied to describe the worker type and mobility mode.

Skilled immigrants are frequently portrayed as central to the global talent pool and as contributors to firms' competitive advantage and host-country growth within the international "war for talent" (Sidani and Al Ariss 2014: 216). Although most studies emphasize the economic contribution of highly skilled immigrants to firm-level competitiveness, demographic research also demonstrates that this group significantly shapes host-country population structures and mobility trends (Lerch and Wanner 2025). Their share in the global workforce has been linked to growth in educational attainment, professional experience, and portable skills (Iredale 2005:

155). Although Al Ariss and Syed (2011: 301) broadly define skilled immigrants as highly educated with extensive experience, motives for cross-border mobility remain diverse. For the purposes of this study, highly skilled immigrants are defined as foreign born individuals who hold at least a college degree (tertiary education) typically obtained outside the host country and who migrate with the intention to reside for a defined period (Van den Bergh and Du Plessis 2012: 143). This perspective differentiates corporate expatriates from highly skilled immigrants primarily by the employment arrangement: corporate expatriates generally hold time-limited, employer-assigned international postings, whereas highly skilled immigrants relocate on their own account or through standard labor-market channels (Doherty 2013: 448).

Forced migration (e.g., refugees, stateless persons, expellees, and the internally or internationally displaced) is outside the scope of this study. The focus is on highly educated, government-independent movers who seek improved opportunities. Individuals who self-initiate their moves (self-initiated expatriates, SIEs) are included as a sub-category of highly skilled immigrants where relevant (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010: 265). Self-initiated movers face recurring challenges, and employers likewise navigate complexities in managing diverse global talent. Legal and administrative constraints including credential recognition issues, licensing, and immigration formalities can limit the effective use of skills and shape career trajectories in host labor markets (Vaiman et al. 2015: 286; Purkayastha 2005: 183; Kunczer et al., 2019: 366). Given the scope of this study, detailed visa/work-permit procedures are not examined; instead, the analysis concentrates on post-employment experiences and outcomes.

Despite these systemic barriers, skilled immigrants continue to pursue international opportunities driven by various motivations and circumstances. Skilled immigrants have a college degree as well as a lot of professional experience, they choose to move to a country with better opportunities for employment and seek out a new home (Crowley-Henry et al. 2018: 376). Multinational corporations are always in pursuit of skilled immigrants that can fill up the gaps in skills (Wright and Clibborn 2019: 170). When political and economic pressures, such as conflict, unemployment and insecurity, intensify, highly skilled and educated individuals may switch career path and move to another country with career and integration considerations playing a central role (Cerdin et al. 2014: 160). Many individuals seek

to enhance their living standards in developed countries and utilize their abilities to create a more positive impact for themselves and their families, both in regard to lifestyle and educational opportunities (Van Riemsdijk et al. 2016: 25; Zikic et al. 2010: 670).

Comprehensive research and study on the topic have consistently demonstrated that skilled immigrants have a number of economic contributions to their countries of residence (OECD 2014). These individuals have a superior education and experience in their field that easily accommodates the demands of the industry for skilled workers. Their presence is beneficial to the native population's annual income by increasing economic growth (Commander et al. 2008: 187; Oreopoulos 2011: 170). Additionally, many highly skilled immigrants establish new companies in host countries, contributing to job creation and local economic dynamism (Szarucki et al. 2016: 599). Additionally, highly skilled immigrants can be of great importance to countries that host them if their skills are complementary to the right job opportunities, which will make them an asset to the host countries in the long run (Wright and Cullinan 2017: 11).

Ironically, for the majority of high-skilled immigrants, the greatest obstacle is finding the appropriate employment opportunity that will compensate for their qualifications and their degree of expertise (Bauder 2014: 91; OECD 2014; Syed 2008: 30). A highly skilled individual will have a significant impact on the game, and will be revered in the host countries, their attempt to find a job that matches their skills is often impeded. They often have to surmount one obstacle after another in order to become a part of the country they cannot control and have to work harder (Syed 2008: 33: 287). As a result, finding a job that aligns with their expertise is a common theme for many highly skilled immigrants that seek to have a successful career in countries that are different than their home country (Al Ariss and Syed 2011: 288). Add to the pandemic and a switch in the global order of things, and the dilemma becomes more severe for the international population, especially women, this is why this particular review is important.

Although international migration is a long-standing process that shapes many economies, the term "migrant" is an umbrella: it includes people moving by choice for work or study as well as those moving by necessity (e.g., refugees and asylum seekers). As illustrated in Figure 3, international migrants include people moving by choice for work, career, study, or family reasons (voluntary mobility), as well as

those moving by necessity such as refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons (forced migration). Using the ILO's most recent global estimates, in 2019 there were 272 million international migrants worldwide, of whom 245 million were working age (15+). Within this group, about 169 million were migrant workers, that is, 69.0% of working-age migrants were in the labor force. Among migrant workers, 58.5% were men and 41.5% were women. (Note: UN DESA's international-migrant stock includes refugees and asylum-seekers.)

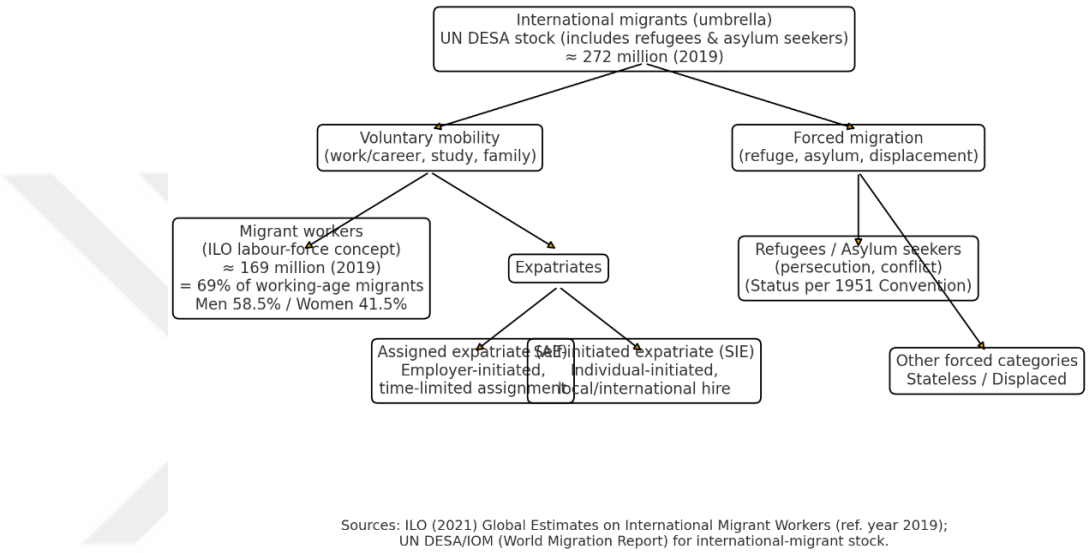

Figure 3: Taxonomy of International Mobility

Under international law, a **refugee** is a person outside their country of nationality (or habitual residence) who is unable or unwilling to return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion; this definition is set out in Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, which also codify states' duties and refugees' rights (non-refoulement, minimum standards, etc.) (CRSR/PRSR 1951/1967; UN 1951).

Migrant is a broad, non-legal umbrella term covering movements within a state or across borders, for any duration and for diverse reasons (e.g., work, family, education). In this inclusive usage, a migrant is simply someone who has moved away from their usual residence—temporarily or permanently, internally or internationally (IOM, 2019). By contrast, **immigrant** is used from the destination-country perspective to denote a person who has moved into another country and is

usually associated with longer-term or permanent settlement in policy/statistical usage (IOM/EC glossaries).

In International Human Resource Management (IHRM), an **expatriate** commonly refers to a professional living and working outside their country of citizenship, typically in relation to employment abroad. The literature distinguishes two sub-types: **Assigned Expatriates (AEs)** are employees sent abroad by their employer on a time-bound assignment; and **Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs)** are individuals who themselves initiate and arrange work abroad without being posted by a home employer (Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010: 266; Suutari and Brewster 2000). Key differentiators between AEs and SIEs include who initiates the move, the presence/absence of home-organization contractual ties, and the expected duration/repatriation arrangements (Doherty et al. 2013; Andresen 2020).

While these terms share conceptual overlaps, they differ fundamentally in their legal basis, who initiates movement, and the nature of employment ties. Table 1 systematically compares refugees, migrants, immigrants, AEs, and SIEs across these critical dimensions.

Table 1: Concise distinctions among Refugees, Migrants, Immigrants, Assigned Expatriates (AEs), and Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs)

Category	**Core trigger for movement**	**Legal/status basis**	**Who initiates?**	**Typical employment link**	**Expected duration**
Refugee	Persecution, conflict, or serious harm; need for international protection	Defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention & 1967 Protocol: protection-focused status	Individual flees; recognition by authorities grants status	May or may not be employed; status is about protection, not work	Open-ended until a durable solution (e.g., voluntary repatriation, resettlement, or local integration)
Migrant (umbrella)	Any reason (work, study, family, etc.); simply a move from usual residence	Descriptive/administrative umbrella term; not a single legal category	Individual or household	Varies widely (employment may or may not be involved)	Temporary OR permanent (unspecified by the term itself)

Table 1 Continued

Immigrant	Longer-term move into a destination country with intent to settle	Administrative/statistical category used in policy and demography	Individual (and family)	Often integrates into the domestic labor market and society	Usually long-term or permanent
Assigned Expatriate (AE)	Employees send employees abroad on a defined assignment	Employment /contractual basis with home-organization	Employer initiates: employee accepts assignment	Strong home-organization tie; packages, training, planned repatriation	Predetermined and temporary (assignment-bound)
Self-Initiated Expatriate (SIE)	Individually chosen international move for career/life opportunities	Employment basis in host market; not deployed by a home employer	Individual initiates and self-arranges	Weak/no tie to home-organization; job/visa secured independently	Not predetermined; varies by person and opportunity

2.1.3. High Skilled Immigrants as Self-Initiated Expatriates

For the purposes of this study, highly skilled immigrants are conceptualized primarily as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)—individuals who independently organize their cross-border moves for work without employer assignment (Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010; Andresen et al. 2014). While various definitions exist across the literature, this research adopts Iredale's (2005: 165) framework, defining highly skilled immigrants as tertiary-educated workers who relocate internationally for defined periods, bringing substantial formal education and professional experience.

This study explicitly excludes corporate assigned expatriates (AEs) — employer-sponsored, time-limited assignees— from the highly skilled immigrant category, focusing instead on self-directed movers who navigate pre-migration logistics, job search, and settlement independently (Al Ariss and Syed 2011). As detailed in Section 2.1.4 and Table 2, the distinction between SIEs and AEs has important implications for career experiences: SIEs typically lack organizational support packages, pre-secured employment, and structured repatriation plans available to assigned expatriates, resulting in different career trajectories and advancement challenges (Doherty 2013; Vaiman et al. 2015).

The focus on SIEs as the primary population of interest reflects the reality that most highly skilled women in the UAE labor market are self-initiated movers

who must proactively manage credential recognition, visa processes, and career development without the institutional scaffolding provided to corporate assignees (Shortland, 2009; Hutchings, 2012).

Table 2: Overview of Differences Between SEIs and Employees AEs

Dimension	**Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)**	**Corporate expatriates (assigned/AEs)**	**Source(s)**
Initiation	Individual/self-driven	Employer-driven assignment	(Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010: 270)
Pre-departure preparation	Mostly self-managed (visas, housing, travel)	Company-organized support	(Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010: 270); (Peterson et al. 1996)
Time perspective	Open-ended/unknown	Fixed, time-limited	(Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010: 270)
Job secured before move	Maybe (often not)	Yes (contracted)	(Al Ariss and Syed 2011: 304); (Doherty, 2013)
Compensation package	Typically, none at entry	Expatriate package + payroll continuity	(Doherty 2013); (Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010)
Non-work support (family, schooling, etc.)	Mainly self-arranged	Employer-provided/organized	(Peterson et al. 1996); Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010)

While it's obvious that migration, as well as skilled migration, is common in many large economies, this is not considered in literature on the subject. Even less attention is devoted to gender perspective in this context. Here, it's important to recognize that immigrants have the concept of international travel with others as a shared attribute between themselves and other immigrants, they cannot be considered a collective entity because of their cultural diversity, education, ethnicity and employment history. As they are composed of different groups, they can be categorized into different organizations and countries that host gender as one of their properties (Doherty 2013: 460). The percentage of migrant women employees is lower than that of men, according to the ILO (2024). Among the 167.7 million international migrant workers globally in 2022, men represented 61.3% (102.7 million) while women constituted 38.7% (64.9 million). We can deduce that women are perhaps migrating due to other reasons besides working. It may involve providing support for the spouse or family. However, high skilled female immigrants are those women that have a college degree and are interested in working in their current residence. Liversage (2009: 130) explained that highly skilled women might migrate

for the purpose of spouse migration or family, or to seek better employment opportunities and socio-economic mobility, as reflected in recent trends showing increasing numbers of female migrants within working age relocating for economic reasons (UN DESA 2024).

2.1.4. Challenges Faced by Skilled Immigrants

Skilled immigrants often confront multi-layered adjustment demands when entering a new country and organization. Prior work groups these demands into four interrelated domains: (i) rebuilding social networks, (ii) disruptions to roles, routines, and social order, (iii) individual coping and adaptation, and (iv) work and the workplace (Van Tonder and Soontiens 2014: 1043). Among these, the workplace domain is typically pivotal—covering job search and entry, adaptation to different work practices, workplace concerns, employer support, career re-establishment, partner employment, and environmental constraints—often cascading into the other domains (Van Tonder and Soontiens 2014: 1044).

The first challenge is glass-ceiling barriers, defined as Limited access to senior roles, opaque promotion and pay practices, and implicit biases can depress subjective career success (SCS) for immigrant women. Such barriers may also erode self-efficacy confidence in one's capability to perform and progress, thereby indirectly weakening performance and advancement expectations (Berry 1997; 2001). In the Gulf context, firm level and institutional practices matter; inclusive HR policies and mentoring opportunities can help counteract these constraints (Sidani and Al Ariss 2014).

Another challenge is Career-pathway perceptions. Perceived clarity, accessibility, and predictability of internal career routes are central to SCS. Transparent promotion criteria, recognition of prior credentials, clear role definitions, and actionable feedback strengthen self-efficacy and support progression (Iredale 2005; Kunczer et al. 2019). Where credential recognition and information flows are weak, pathways appear narrower, dampening SCS.

Workplace acculturation is also an important challenge. Early cross-border employment often entails culture shock and uncertainty that can temporarily suppress productivity. Acculturation involves learning organizational norms, work processes, and social expectations, and it can be bidirectional, with changes in both newcomer and host setting (Redfield et al. 1936: 150–155; Berry 2001). In multinational

corporations (MNCs), structured onboarding, language/culture training, and inclusive leadership are associated with faster recovery and better outcomes (Van Tonder and Soontiens 2014; Berry 2001). Practical issues salient UAE visa sponsorship, dual-career considerations, schooling/childcare also shape women's self-efficacy and SCS; targeted organizational supports can mitigate these frictions (Sidani and Al Ariss 2014; Van Tonder and Soontiens 2014).

2.1.5. Challenges Faced By High Skilled Female Immigrants/SIEs

Ressia et al. (2017: 377) mentions that although skilled immigrants, both men and women have difficulty re-establishing their careers from the core, gender inequality is still a prevalent feature of organizations that employ people. De-skilling and downward mobility are the typical characteristics of immigrants, this is especially true for women, because of gender-based discrimination and the glass ceiling. Fewer opportunities exist for employment of skilled immigrants' women. Even if companies or organizations focus on equal employment opportunities, many high-skilled women have observed gender-based biases in the recruitment process (Fitzsimmons et al. 2020: 1012). The tendency in the corporate culture to favor highly skilled immigrants' women causes them to lack motivation and to perform poorly. This phenomenon is referred to as "brain trash" or "brain exploitation" (Koser and Salt 1997: 286).

The cause of brain waste affects both the employee and the company. Because of this, the company is not utilizing the full potential of the female employee. After Migration, many immigrants, especially women, become unemployed or remain in low-paying jobs or lack the proper guidance in their workplace to utilize their talents.

Colakoglu et al. (2018: 89) conducted research on the difficulties of highly skilled females in the U.S., through interviews that were rich in content, they stated that there is a lack of literature that describes the hardships that highly skilled females have in finding employment compared to their counterparts who have a similar level of education. They conducted in-depth interviews with 14 immigrants, the majority of them were spouses, the other reasons included: not having a job, being unable to find a job, and looking for a better life. In comparison, a few of them had issues dealing with their new cultural culture due to the lack of appropriate acculturation for immigrant women. The authors recommended that local recruiters

should create processes for recruiting and selecting individuals that are free of biases that are implicit or explicit and provide strategies for integrating women into the culture that are appropriate.

Liversage, (2009: 123) studied the causes of skilled immigrants' women to travel. It included seven interviews with women in Denmark; all of them had a master's degree. Despite the causes of Migration, which may include the pursuit of a spouse or family, all of the participants were eager to find employment. They had multiple rejections of jobs, lack of opportunities for employment, a lower salary, or gender-specific jobs, all of which adversely affected their professional and personal lives.

Skilled immigrants have multiple documented challenges that define their career paths. If this skilled immigrant is female, the difficulties become more severe as they attempt to establish careers. However, the obstacles are still present, the procedure that female's immigrants follow to achieve their objectives and establish their careers is still unknown. Muir et al. (2014: 235) mentions that skilled immigrants have a difficult time starting over from the beginning when they create their careers. It often prompted them to choose different career paths; however, women are more susceptible to these difficulties due to the gender-based discrimination that is present in the corporate culture. Ironically, women are only capable of achieving success in the skilled migration category if selective administrative policies are exclusively employed to attract them (Iredale 2005: 165).

2.1.6. Expatriation in the United Arab Emirates

In global staffing, multinational enterprises (MNEs) have moved beyond the dominance of traditional assigned expatriates toward more plural career forms, prominently including self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) who organize their own moves and are typically engaged on local contracts (Doherty 2013; Andresen et al. 2014; McNulty and Brewster 2017). This diversification responds to changing cost–benefit logics in mobility, the search for locally embedded skills, and the increasingly heterogeneous motivations of globally mobile professionals. The shift is especially pronounced in the GCC, where firms and public institutions rely structurally on foreign labour and expertise across sectors (Sidani and Al Ariss, 2014).

Within the GCC, the UAE stands out for the scale and complexity of its expatriate workforce. On UN DESA's most recent international-migrant stock, the

UAE hosted about 8.59 million international migrants in mid-2020, equivalent to approximately 88% of the total population—among the highest migrant shares worldwide. Consistent with regional patterns reported in the World Migration Report 2024, the UAE's migrant communities are drawn predominantly from South and South-East Asia, with large groups from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Egypt, alongside many other origins. Exact nationality shares vary by source and year, and official UAE statistics do not routinely publish a full nationality breakdown; therefore, thesis reporting should reference country-of-origin categories rather than broad labels such as "Westerners."

The UAE context presents distinctive institutional features for global staffing. First, the country has built a dense ecosystem of free zones (e.g., DIFC, DMCC, Dubai Internet City, JAFZA) that host finance, logistics, technology, media, and professional-services firms. These zones streamline licensing and labor procedures and facilitate rapid scaling of international operations, thereby increasing demand for both assigned expatriates (for start-ups, transfer of headquarters practices, and control roles) and SIEs (for market-specific, client-facing, and technical roles). Second, visa and sponsorship rules historically tied residence to employer sponsorship; in recent years the framework has become more differentiated (e.g., longer-term "golden" or "green" visas for selected categories), improving retention prospects for highly skilled professionals. Third, Emiratization policies aimed at increasing Emirati participation in the private sector shape hiring, promotion, and training portfolios, while the private sector remains predominantly staffed by expatriates. Together, these features create a labor market where global and local logics intersect and where career pathways for expatriates are heavily organizations specific.

For firms, this demographic and institutional configuration has two broad implications. First, expatriates both assigned and self-initiated constitute critical talent pipelines across finance, healthcare, aviation, logistics, construction/real estate, hospitality, and an expanding tech/professional-services base. Second, because a sizable share of highly skilled movers arrives as SIEs, organizations compete on the quality of onboarding, credential recognition, mentoring/sponsorship, and dual-career support, practices repeatedly linked in the IHRM literature to smoother integration and stronger performance (Doherty 2013; Sidani and Al Ariss 2014). These practices are also directly relevant to the self-efficacy of expatriate women:

clear role definitions, transparent promotion criteria, and visible role models provide mastery experiences and social persuasion that bolster confidence and persistence.

At the same time, the UAE environment presents challenges that are salient for women's careers. Research on acculturation and migrant careers highlights the importance of workplace entry, credential recognition, and informal networks for progressing beyond initial roles (Berry 2001; Iredale 2005; Kunczer et al. 2019). In sectors where senior roles are concentrated in small, relationship-intensive clusters, glass-ceiling dynamics can emerge through opaque promotion processes or limited access to high visibility assignments. These barriers depress subjective career success (SCS) and can undermine self-efficacy, particularly during the first employment cycle in the host country. Conversely, well-designed HR systems structured onboarding, mentoring and sponsorship, internal job-posting transparency, fair pay/evaluation practices, and support for dual-career/childcare needs are associated with higher SCS and stronger retention of expatriate women (Sidani and Al Ariss 2014; Doherty 2013).

From a staffing perspective, UAE employers typically mix assigned expatriates and SIEs. Assigned expatriates are used where corporate control, global coordination, or proprietary knowledge transfer is paramount; they often hold time-limited contracts and receive expatriate packages. SIEs frequently hired on local terms bring region specific human and social capital, language abilities, and client networks; their careers depend more on internal mobility systems and the visibility of career routes within the firm (Andresen et al. 2014; McNulty and Brewster 2017). For women SIEs, targeted practices (e.g., credential evaluation support, sponsorship/allyship programs, participation in professional networks within the free zones) can counteract initial disadvantages and increase perceived career-pathway clarity, which in turn strengthens self-efficacy and SCS.

The UAE's expatriate population is characterized not only by its size but also by its remarkable diversity of origins. As Table 3 illustrates, while South Asian countries—particularly India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan—constitute the largest source of migrants to the UAE, the expatriate community includes nationals from over 190 countries, reflecting the truly global nature of the UAE labor market. In sum, expatriation in the UAE is characterized by very high migrant density, diverse origins, and a rapidly evolving policy and business environment. These conditions create abundant opportunities for globally mobile professionals while placing a

premium on organizational practices that make career pathways transparent, minimize glass-ceiling frictions, and build self-efficacy. For the purposes of this thesis, the UAE provides an appropriate setting in which to test how perceived glass-ceiling barriers and career-pathway clarity shape subjective career success among foreign women and whether self-efficacy mediates these relationships.

Table 3: International migrants in the UAE by main origins (mid-2020)

Country of origin (UN DESA category)	**Illustrative share of migrant stock (%)**
India	≈ 38
Bangladesh	≈ 10
Pakistan	≈ 9
Egypt	≈ 10
Philippines	≈ 6
Other origins (190+ countries)	≈ 27

Shares are illustrative, based on UN DESA International Migrant Stock 2020 patterns; replace with exact figures from the UN DESA UAE origin table used in this thesis. Percentages may not come to 100 due to rounding. The scale of international migration to the UAE is best understood through population composition data. As shown in Table 4, international migrants constitute nearly 88% of the country's residents, making the UAE one of the highest migrant-proportion countries globally.

Table 4: UAE Population and international migrant stock (UN DESA)

Indicator	Value (mid-2020)
Total population (UAE)	≈ 9.99 million
International migrants (stock)	≈ 8.59 million
Migrants as % of population	≈ 87.9%

Source: UN DESA, International Migrant Stock 2020 (2021 release). Statistics represent mid-year estimates.

Immigration is used from the destination, country perspective to describe longer-term residence and labor-market participation in the UAE through residence visas (e.g., employment residence, the 5-year Green Visa, or the 10-year Golden Visa). These routes confer permission to live and work but do not by themselves

imply a path to citizenship in the UAE, where naturalization is tightly regulated (UAE Government, 2024.

Expatriation is an international human resource management (IHRM) and career concept describing professional work abroad. In the UAE, it typically appears as Assigned Expatriates (AEs) on employer-sponsored postings and Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) who relocate on their own and later hold employer- or self-sponsored residence. The distinction focuses on who initiates the move and the contractual ties, not on nationality status (Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010; Doherty et al. 2013; Andresen 2020).

Regarding residency arrangements in the UAE, employer-sponsored work residence (via Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization permits) is typical for AEs, while SIEs may transition to self-sponsored residence such as the Green Visa or qualify for Golden Visa categories (MOHRE 2025; UAE Government 2024). It is important to note that long-term residence in the UAE, including Golden Visa does not automatically lead to Emirati citizenship; naturalization is exceptional and strictly governed (UAE Government 2024). Regarding the terminology: “Expat/expatriate” is widely used socially in the Gulf Region but is not a legal category in UAE law; for academic clarity, HRM definitions (AE vs. SIE) are applied and then the residence route is specified (IOM 2019; UAE Government 2024).

While the terms "immigration" and "expatriation" are often used interchangeably in public discourse, they represent distinct conceptual frameworks in the UAE context. Table 5 clarifies the key differences between these two perspectives, comparing them across five dimensions: the primary analytical lens, typical visa basis, sponsorship arrangements, duration expectations, and citizenship pathways.

Table 5: Immigration vs. Expatriation in the UAE

Dimension	**Immigration (UAE)**	**Expatriation (UAE)**
Primary lens	Destination-country residence & integration (multi-year residence permission)	Career/IHRM process (how/why the move happened; AE vs. SIE)

Table 5 Continued

Typical visa basis	Employment residence: GreenVisa (self-sponsored): Golden Visa (long-term)	Employer-sponsored work residence (AEs); SIEs may later hold Green/Golden
Sponsorship	Employer or self (for Green/Golden categories)	Usually employer (AEs); self/host-employer for SIEs
Duration expectation	Multi-year, renewable	Time-bound (AEs) or open-ended (SIEs)
Citizenship pathway	No automatic path from residence; naturalization is exceptional	Same as immigration expatriation is not a legal route to nationality

2.1.7. Female Expatriates in the United Arab Emirates

The UAE's expatriate population exhibits a marked gender imbalance. Among international migrants specifically, women accounted for 26.3% in mid-2020, while men represented 73.7% (UN DESA 2021; Table 6). This composition reflects sectoral labor demand that channels large inflows into male-dominated occupations such as construction and logistics.

Table 6: International migrants (expatriates) in the UAE by gender

Gender	Share of international-migrant stock (%)	Reference year / source
Female	26.3	Mid-2020 (UN DESA International Migrant Stock)
Male	73.7	Mid-2020 (UN DESA International Migrant Stock)

It is important to distinguish this migrant composition from the overall resident population. Official UAE statistics show approximately 35.9% female and 64.1% male among all residents (citizens and non-citizens combined) in 2022 (UAE FCSC 2023; Table 7). The difference between these figures —26.3% women among international migrants versus 35.9% women in the total resident population— reflects the higher proportion of Emirati women in the national population compared to the expatriate population.

Against this backdrop, female expatriates increasingly occupy roles in services, healthcare, education, finance, and professional services. International human resource management research highlights firm-level practices credential

recognition, transparent promotion criteria, structured onboarding, mentoring/sponsorship, and dual career support as associated with better retention and advancement outcomes for women in the Gulf (Sidani and Al Ariss 2014). These mechanisms are directly relevant to this thesis: by clarifying career pathways and reducing glass-ceiling frictions, they help build self-efficacy and, in turn, support higher subjective career success among expatriate women in UAE.

Table 7: UAE resident population by gender (all residents, 2022)

Gender	Count (2022)	Share of resident population (%)	Reference / scope
Female	3,693,254	35.9	UAE FCSC, resident population (all nationalities)
Male	6,595,692	64.1	UAE FCSC, resident population (all nationalities)
Total	10,288,946	100.0	UAE FCSC

Note. These counts are for the resident population (citizens and non-citizens combined) and are not limited to international migrants.

2.1.8. Workplace Inequality and Discrimination Against Women

The gender-related problems experienced by women in their working lives can be classified into five main groups: injustice in the education process, injustice in the career ladder, injustice in salary increases, inequalities in social rights, and sexual harassment and abuse.

There is a positive relationship between women's level of education and their labor force participation. The increase in women's education levels shows an increase in their labor force participation rates. However, the increase in women's education levels does not mean that women are not subjected to injustice in the workplace. It is seen that there is an injustice against women (KSSGM 1998: 110). In the world, men benefit from more capital and educational opportunities than women. The fact that women do not benefit from educational opportunities brings to the agenda the problems faced by women in the workplace. The injustices against women in the field of education are that their level of education is not sufficient, women are not benefited from skill-developing trainings, and the developmental trainings provided at workplaces are kept at a low level.

Gendered inequalities in employment emerge from interacting supply-side, demand-side, and institutional mechanisms rather than from a single cause. On the

supply side, women carry a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, which compresses available hours for paid employment and limits the continuity of work histories. Global evidence collated by the International Labor Organization (ILO) shows that women perform most of the unpaid care work worldwide, a pattern closely associated with lower labor-force participation, shorter working hours, and reduced access to full-time roles (Addati et al. 2018). Career interruptions and part-time spells around childbirth further compound later outcomes via human-capital depreciation and loss of seniority (ILO 2015; Kleven 2019). On the demand side, occupational segregation, statistical discrimination about expected tenure or flexibility, and the wage-setting structure of many firms generate persistent pay and promotion gaps. Classic decompositions and recent reviews find that a sizable share of the gender wage gap remains unexplained by education or experience alone and is consistent with firm-side practices and job design (Blau and Kahn 2017; ILO 2018). A key channel is the premium paid for long, inflexible hours and uninterrupted tenure in certain occupations—conditions under which women, on average, are less likely to compete because of care responsibilities (Goldin 2014). These dynamics contribute both to "glass ceilings"—lower transition rates into senior and higher-paying roles—and to "sticky floors," whereby women are concentrated in lower-wage rungs with limited internal mobility (Ciminelli et al. 2021).

Institutional environments amplify or mitigate these gaps. Where affordable childcare is scarce, parental leave is unevenly shared, or legal frameworks restrict women's economic choices, female labour-force participation and progression are systematically lower (OECD 2023; World Bank 2024). Conversely, family-friendly working-time arrangements, pay-gap transparency and auditing, structured and bias-resistant promotion processes, and credential recognition for mobile workers are associated with higher female retention and advancement without harming productivity (ILO 2018; OECD 2023). At the leadership level, global monitoring indicates gradual progress but continuing under-representation of women in senior roles, underscoring the need for deliberate sponsorship, mentoring, and clear internal career pathways (WEF 2024). Taken together, these discussions suggest that gender inequality in employment is sustained by a triangle of constraints: time (care), task (job design and pay premium for inflexibility), and institutional rules (policies and norms). Effective remedies therefore bundle care infrastructure, flexible yet high-quality roles, and transparent, criteria-based advancement systems, complemented by

targeted supports (e.g., return-to-work programs) that limit scarring from career breaks.

Another major problem for women in work-life is injustice in salaries. Women have benefited much less from education, vocational training and employment opportunities than men and have had to receive low wages for their work. In some countries, the wage gap is up to half. Half of the world's population is made up of women, and two thirds of the world's work is done by women. Despite this, it is still the case that most women in the world are paid less than their male counterparts. In many workplaces, the philosophy of 'equal pay for equal work' is not applied, which has driven women away from business life. Another factor causing inequality is the industrial growth patterns and the strength of trade unions and collective bargaining practices in countries. Most importantly, differences in social values and judgments have laid the foundation for this inequality (Yiğit and Topkaya 2017: 30).

Inequality in the utilization of social rights forms another major problem. In labor research, core social rights comprise social security and income protection across life cycle risks such as sickness, maternity, old age, disability and unemployment, and the freedoms of association, collective bargaining, and strike that enable workers to claim and enforce workplace rights. These are recognized by the International Labor Organization (ILO) instruments (e.g., Conventions Nos. 87 and 98). In practice, women's effective utilization of these rights is shaped by system design and financing, legal recognition and enforcement, and gendered constraints on time, mobility and voice (ILO 1948; 1949). Global social protection has expanded, yet significant gender gaps persist. The ILO's most recent World Social Protection Report documents incomplete coverage by at least one cash benefit and highlights persistent shortfalls in maternity protection, especially where eligibility relies on continuous, formal employment, which many women lack due to care-related interruptions or part-time work (ILO 2024). Coverage problems are particularly acute in occupations where women are overrepresented, including domestic work; in many countries, most domestic workers remain legally or effectively excluded from social security schemes (ILO 2016). Complementary reviews by UN Women link under-investment in family-friendly policies (e.g., childcare, paid leave) to lower take-up of social protection among women, notably in low-income and migrant households (UN Women 2019).

While freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike are formally recognized in many national legal frameworks and international instruments, women's effective access to these rights remains limited and uneven in practice. ILO briefs on gender and freedom of association identify practical barriers, meeting times incompatible with care schedules, male-dominated cultures, and stereotypes that deter participation—that reduce women's union membership, leadership and bargaining leverage (ILO 2019; 2024). At the global level, the International Trade Union Confederation's Global Rights Index regularly reports extensive restrictions on freedom of association and collective bargaining, signaling enforcement deficits that disproportionately affect workers with the least bargaining power, including many women (ITUC 2024).

In the UAE and broader Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, the legal framework governing labor rights presents distinct challenges that are particularly relevant for understanding women expatriates' access to social rights. In Gulf labor markets where expatriates form most of the workforce, union and strike rights are often legally restricted or not extended to migrant workers. In the UAE, recent country reporting notes that law does not provide for trade unions or collective bargaining, and strikes are constrained in several sectors—conditions that limit women workers' ability to use collective voice mechanisms even when formally employed (U.S. Department of State 2023). These institutional constraints interact with the gendered sectoral composition of employment (e.g., domestic work, care, services) to depress women's utilization of social rights compared with men.

Inequality in the utilization of social rights is not merely a matter of individual preference; it is produced by eligibility rules and contribution designs that penalize discontinuous careers, legal exclusions by sector or contract type (including migrant status), and organizational practices that make voice structures less accessible to women. Evidence-based levers include extending legal social insurance coverage to excluded categories (e.g., domestic and informal workers) with subsidized contributions; ensuring maternity and parental leave is paid and job-protected, with shared entitlements that encourage take-up by men; and removing restrictions on freedom of association and collective bargaining while redesigning participation (meeting times, childcare, leadership pipelines) to fit women's time budgets. International experience links these measures to higher benefit take-up and more equal bargaining outcomes for women (ILO 2024; ITUC 2024).

In the UAE, access to social rights for private-sector expatriate women operates within a distinctive labor regime. Independent trade unions are not recognized in the private sector; instead, collective labor disputes are channeled through the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization (MOHRE), which investigates and can issue enforceable decisions that may be appealed to the labor courts. This framework reduces opportunities for union-based representation and collective bargaining compared with many OECD systems, though state-managed dispute mechanisms are available. With respect to social protection, expatriate employees are not covered by the national pension schemes reserved for UAE nationals; rather, they accrue end-of-service benefits (EOSB) based on tenure and basic pay, with a new optional savings scheme introduced in 2023 for employers who opt in. These arrangements shape expatriate women's long-term financial security and portability of benefits, particularly during career interruptions related to childbirth or caregiving. Anti-discrimination provisions prohibit unequal treatment on grounds including sex and gender identity in employment. The Labor Law also recognizes MOHRE-supervised parental leave (5 paid days for either parent), paid maternity leave (60 days: 45 full pay + 15 half-pay), and paid nursing breaks for six months post-birth. These statutory rights constitute the core of social-rights utilization for private-sector women, complementing employer policies in large multinationals operating in the UAE.

Sexual harassment and abuse constitute the final category of problems facing working women. Sexual harassment is defined as an undesirable condition affecting an employee's employment or work-related opportunities due to gender-based conduct. Women are generally the victims. Sexual harassment is one of the most common problems faced by women in the workplace worldwide. The Women's Committee of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) defines sexual harassment as any repeated and unwanted verbal, physical, or gestural sexual advances, sexually explicit derogatory statements, or sexually discriminatory remarks made by someone in the workplace that are offensive to the worker involved, cause the worker to feel threatened, humiliated, patronized, or harassed, or interfere with job performance, undermine job security, or create a threatening or intimidating work environment (as cited in ILO 1992: 275). However, despite its prevalence, strong policies to prevent sexual harassment have not yet been widely implemented. These unwanted behaviors affect women's participation in the labor

force. Women who are subjected to sexual harassment are hesitant to report the situation for fear of being blamed. The fact that institutions or employers do not give adequate importance to these problems and do not provide necessary support is an obstacle to addressing this issue.

Sexual harassment in the world of work is increasingly framed within the broader concept of violence and harassment under the International Labor Organization's Convention No. 190 (C190). C190 defines violence and harassment as a range of unacceptable behaviors and practices—or threats thereof—likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and recognizes gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) as including sexual harassment (ILO 2019). Despite the prevalence of such behaviors, disclosure rates remain concerningly low. The ILO–Lloyd's Register Foundation–Gallup global survey indicates that more than one in five workers worldwide—about 23 percent—have experienced at least one form of violence or harassment at work during their working lives. Under-reporting is substantial; nearly half of those affected did not tell anyone, with common reasons including perceptions that reporting would be a waste of time or uncertainty about procedures (ILO, Lloyd's Register Foundation and Gallup 2022). Exposure varies across regions and groups; people who report discrimination based on personal characteristics (e.g., gender, migration status, disability) exhibit higher rates of workplace violence and harassment. These dynamics intersect with occupational segregation and power imbalances, which can amplify risks for women in precarious, client-facing, or isolated roles (ILO 2023; Lloyd's Register Foundation and Gallup 2022).

International guidance focuses on a system-level approach that combines clear, zero-tolerance policies that explicitly cover sexual harassment; multiple, confidential reporting channels with protections against retaliation; trauma-informed investigations and proportionate sanctions; prevention measures such as leadership accountability, worker training and bystander intervention; and integration with broader equality and occupational safety and health systems aligned with C190 and Recommendation No. 206 (ILO 2019; UN Women 2021; UN Women 2019; OECD 2024). Global diagnostics link stronger legal frameworks and employer policies to better participation and productivity outcomes for women, while gaps in safety and enforcement undermine labor market equality. Comparative legal datasets (e.g., Women, Business, and the Law) show uneven adoption and implementation of laws

addressing sexual harassment, reinforcing the need for robust employer-level prevention and remedy mechanisms (World Bank 2024).

In the UAE, the Labor Law expressly prohibits sexual harassment, bullying and any form of verbal, physical or psychological violence at the workplace, and protects employees who refuse to work in unsafe environments. An employee subjected to harassment may resign without notice while preserving end-of-service rights if resignation is due to employer breach. These legal safeguards are anchored in Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 and its Executive Regulations. MOHRE administers complaints and enforcement procedures that can culminate in binding decisions, underscoring the importance of prevention systems, grievance channels and bystander training in addition to statutory rules.

2.1.9. Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on sex or gender that has the effect or purpose of impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in the world of work. In contemporary scholarship and policy, it is commonly observed through unequal pay for work of equal value, occupational segregation (horizontal and vertical), and under representation in decision making roles often described collectively as “glass-ceiling” barriers (ILO 2023; WEF 2024). At the global level, progress is measurable yet uneven. The World Economic Forum’s 2024 Global Gender Gap Report estimates that 68.5 percent of the overall gap is closed worldwide, implying that at current rates full parity remains more than a century away (WEF 2024).

Gender discrimination dates to the Bible in Western societies. The biblical perspective of ‘man is superior to woman’ was reflected in English laws. Those who used and interpreted the old English laws stated that the basis of this point of view was the Bible and that their decision was unquestionable. It is believed that the laws of the ancient Roman Empire had an influence on the origins of Christianity. In Roman law, women were considered equal to children. In other words, women were not seen as adults. In Christianity, however, the status of women has been slightly improved. In John, it is recognized that everyone is valuable and that men and women are equal. For this reason, many women became saints at that time. The patriarchal structure, which was very evident in the Jewish tradition, was softened in

Christianity with the constraints of the period and it was stated that women were also valuable as human beings (Mayatürk 2006: 51-91).

Women were also used in the labor market as a reserve force in essential situations such as periods of war. Women were used as labor force during the 20th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, women were admitted to some jobs in occupations that required low wages, little labor and vocational training. Women had to prefer jobs that they could do without disrupting housework and in areas close to home. Therefore, they accepted low wages due to these limitations and perceived them as low wages. Cultural roles have been observed to feed gender discrimination in the workplace. Women are evaluated with the prejudice that they are not worth investing in the workplace, anyway, they will leave the job due to marriage and childbirth. These judgments not only prevented women's career steps but also caused them to move away from their jobs. Women were considered to have low self-confidence and emotionally volatile structures compared to men. This social perspective towards women feeds the foundations of gender discrimination (Heilman et al. 1989: 935-942).

A central manifestation of discrimination is the gender pay gap. While measurement approaches vary, the ILO's analysis indicates a persistent global average gap on the order of ~20%, even after decades of reform, an imbalance that widened for some groups during the COVID-19 and inflation shocks (ILO 2023). Closing this gap requires pay equity law (equal pay for work of equal value), pay-transparency mechanisms, and stronger enforcement and data reporting across sectors (ILO 2023).

Leadership representation provides another widely tracked benchmark. In large company C-suites, women remain a minority despite recent gains. In the U.S. Fortune 500, women led 37 companies in 2020 (7.4%), 41 in 2021 (8.1%), and about 10.4% in 2024 a record, but still a small share of top roles (Hincliffe 2020; 2021; 2024). These figures underscore the endurance of vertical segregation and the "glass ceiling," even in advanced economies with extensive corporate governance reform.

The United Arab Emirates has introduced important legal and governance changes aligned with international norms to reduce gender-based discrimination at work. In terms of anti-discrimination and equal pay provisions in law, Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 prohibits discrimination in employment (including on the basis of sex) and guarantees equal pay for women and men performing the same

work or work of equal value; the UAE's official portal reiterates these protections and the state's commitment to gender balance in leadership (UAE Govt. 2021-2024). Regarding corporate leadership and board representation, for listed public joint-stock companies, the UAE Securities and Commodities Authority has required at least one woman on the board, with authorities reporting a sharp increase in women's board representation in recent years; similar requirements have been extended to private joint-stock companies from 2025 (ACCA 2025). These rules target vertical segregation by widening pathways to decision-making roles. With respect to political representation, since 2019, the UAE has mandated 50% women's representation in the Federal National Council, an institutional signal that broader leadership parity is a policy priority (UAE Govt./WAM; Inter-Parliamentary Union).

Measured outcomes mirror these reforms. The UAE ranks as a regional leader in gender parity in WEF assessments and has also placed 7th globally on UNDP's Gender Inequality Index in 2024—a marked improvement over the last decade (WEF, 2024; UNDP, 2024). While precise ranks in WEF's composite vary by edition and indicator, the direction of travel is consistent with increased women's participation in education, the public sector, and leadership roles (WEF 2024). Even where laws are in place, implementation gaps can sustain discriminatory outcomes. International evidence points to: segregation by sector and occupation, with women over-represented in support and care roles and underrepresented in higher-paying technical and leadership tracks; penalties associated with career breaks (e.g., maternity or caregiving), which depress advancement and lifetime earnings; and under resourced anti-harassment systems, which can deter participation and progression (ILO, 2022–23; PwC Middle East 2024). In the MENA region (including the UAE), employer perceptions of career breaks and limited flexible work options remain salient barriers areas where targeted HR policy, mentoring, and return-to-work programs are shown to improve retention and advancement (PwC Middle East, 2024).

Taking together, the global and UAE evidence suggests that gender discrimination is increasingly shaped less by formal legal prohibitions and more by organizational practices pay-setting, promotion pipelines, board nomination processes, and supportive measures around caregiving and safe workplaces. For Dubai-based multinationals and large local employers, best practice now includes pay equity audits, transparent promotion criteria, targeted sponsorship/mentoring,

and compliance with UAE equal-pay and board-diversity rules, alongside alignment with international standards such as the ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention, C190 (ILO 2019).

2.1.9.1. Injustice in Wage Distribution

Gender-based injustice in wage distribution remains one of the most persistent forms of inequality in the world of work. Globally, the International Labor Organization (ILO) continues to find a substantial gender pay gap even after decades of reform. Its most recent comprehensive analysis indicates that average gaps of around 20% have proved stubborn, and that recent economic shocks did not materially narrow the difference across the countries for which comparable data exist. These gaps reflect a mix of unequal pay for work of equal value, occupational segregation, seniority penalties, and motherhood or caregiving penalties that depress lifetime earnings for women (ILO 2023).

Benchmarking studies align with this diagnosis. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024 shows that, while overall gender parity has improved slowly to 68.5% closed, disparities in economic participation and opportunity—including wage equality for similar work—remain significant in many economies. WEF's measure of "wage equality for similar work" is perception-based, drawn from large executive surveys, but it is widely used to compare countries' progress on fair pay (WEF 2024). Gender discrimination remains one of the world's persistent workplace challenges that transcends national boundaries. Ridgeway (2011) argues that widely held cultural beliefs and perceptions that define women as second-class citizens play a critical role in legitimizing and sustaining gender discrimination across various social and organizational contexts.

The UAE has codified equal-pay principles in law and policy. Since 2020, equal wages for women and men have been explicitly required in the private sector, and the comprehensive Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 (Labor Relations) now guarantees equal pay for the same work or for work of equal value, while prohibiting sex-based discrimination in employment. Official guidance on the UAE Government portal reiterates these guarantees and positions equal pay as a national priority (WAM 2024; UAE 2021). On legal readiness, the World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law "Pay" indicator assigns the UAE a full score, reflecting statutory provisions that prohibit sex-based pay discrimination and enshrine equal

remuneration principles (World Bank WBL 2023). However, official, economy-wide gender pay-gap statistics for the UAE are limited, so researchers and employers often rely on international indices (e.g., WEF's wage-equality indicator) and firm-level audits to assess remaining disparities and target interventions (World Bank 2024; WEF 2024).

In the United Arab Emirates, women's economic participation has increased markedly over the past three decades, yet measurable disparities remain. The female labor force participation rate reached about 54.1% in 2024 (vs. 89.6% for men), while women account for ~18% of the total labor force a composition shaped by the UAE's male-skewed expatriate workforce. These figures indicate progress in participation alongside a persistent gap in relative engagement. Sectoral patterns and career interruptions help explain the differences observed. Women remain under-represented in some higher-paying technical and leadership tracks and may face penalties associated with career breaks for caregiving. Evidence from the region suggests that targeted return-to-work programs, mentoring/sponsorship, flexible work options, and pay-equity audits improve retention and advancement, complementing the UAE's legal guarantees on equal treatment and equal pay.

2.1.9.2. Theoretical Framework of Gender Discrimination

It is observed that many theories have been developed to define gender discrimination, which are Investment in human theory, dual role theory, statistical discrimination, feminist, gender and role theories. One of the most important problems of women is that they cannot balance work-life and home-life. Women have to delay their own development. Therefore, women's progress in career steps is more limited than men. The judgment that women will leave their jobs when they get married or give birth is seen as one of the important bases. Instead of investing in women, male-dominated workplaces find it appropriate to invest in men. Dual role theory explains how women's simultaneous responsibilities for paid work and unpaid domestic labor constrain their labor market options and bargaining power. Research demonstrates that because women's labor supply is less elastic than men's due to family care obligations that limit their job mobility, employers can engage in "strategic discrimination" by offering women lower wages, recognizing that women are more likely to accept these lower offers (Folbre 2021).

Some women do not expect to be paid as much as their male colleagues. The reason for this is generally related to women's aim of earning money. Especially women are in the direction of earning enough money for their children and spending more time at home. This theory shows that women do not care about their career progression and their jobs as much as men (Metz 2001: 312-342). Gibelman's (2020) study states that women living in America have shorter working lives. Women are more likely to quit their jobs than men. Emulti (1993) achieved similar results in her study. It was found that male managers generally think that women are not suitable for the job. This perspective causes glass ceiling or gender discrimination (Emulti 1993: 19-22). It is emphasized that women's roles according to their gender are linked to their gender. Socially, the role can be said to be appropriately assigned. People react and wait for answers in terms of whether to determine their behavior according to gender. There are dilemmas created by gender-related roles. It is seen that the judgments that bring gender discrimination affect women negatively in business life.

Without investigating gender discrimination and feminist theory, these two concepts should not be confused with each other. Feminist theory is an awareness movement dating back to the 18th century. The theory is the beginning of an organized movement in Europe and America in the 19th century because of the unequal treatment of women. Socialist Charles Fourier called this movement 'Feminism'. In 1808, Fourier argued that more comprehensive rights for women were important for social progress. John Stuart Mill, author of The Subjection of Women, emphasized that one of the greatest obstacles to human progress was the power of one sex over the other. In general, feminism can be explained as an independent movement emphasizing economic, political and social justice between the sexes (Donovan 2001: 406). On the basis of Marxist feminist theory, it is advocated that women should become conscious and organized and become better aware of their rights. The idea of materialist determinism is that the roots of society are based on economic conditions.

Socialist feminist theory emphasizes the similarities between the working class and women, arguing that men are unconsciously served while women are exploited. This perspective suggests that the only path forward is for women to become conscious and claim their rights against men. According to Gatens (1991), Marxist feminist theory argues that a connection must be established between value

and women's labor, and that women's labor should be included in the production process. This perspective asserts that the development of class consciousness and a classless society are the basic conditions for the solution of the women's problem. In general terms, feminist theory is based on gender discrimination. It explains that it was not created but processed with a male biased perception sexualized by theorists such as Rousseau and Freud. It redefines existing socio-political theories by purifying them from judgmental explanations involving discrimination (Gatens 1991: 168).

2.1.10. Women Managers in Working Life

The participation of women in managerial positions has increased substantially over the past several decades, yet significant disparities persist in their representation at senior leadership levels and in their experiences navigating organizational hierarchies. Understanding women's managerial careers requires examining not only their pathways to leadership but also the organizational cultures, leadership expectations, and gender-based perceptions that shape their advancement opportunities and effectiveness. This section explores the evolution of women in management roles, their experiences and challenges in different contexts including the UAE, the distinctive characteristics attributed to female managers, and the leadership qualities they demonstrate in executive positions.

2.1.10.1. Women and Management

In the early 1970s, research on issues related to women in management began. In the research conducted, it is seen that the answer to the question "Can women be managers?" is sought. During this period, working life and social life intertwined. Women became secretaries, office management and men became managers. In the half of the period, it was seen that the question 'did the changes between male and female managers have an effect on behavior? It was addressed whether men and women have different attitudes and behaviors in management positions. Studies conducted since 1980 have focused on 'why women are not able to reach top management positions. This study focused on the lack of women in top management positions and discussed how to increase this rate (Karaoğlan 2016: 126-127). Despite the high proportion of women in Turkey and in the world, it is seen that women are not represented in business life and economic activities at the same

rate as men. A male-dominated structure has been experienced in the 20th century. It has been observed that the number of female employees in the management staff in the workplaces, especially in senior positions, is limited compared to men. Advances in the economic and technological legal formations of society, changes in the demographic structure of the labor force have caused some differences in the management process. In line with the differences in personal work values and career behaviors, the effort to include women has gained momentum with a delayed formation.

Beyond the acceptance of women in the labor force, the promotion of women to managerial positions was primarily the result of social, cultural, political and economic progress. Women generally want to take place in the management world next to men. However, women's environment has a negative approach to this issue. Women generally think that they should take care of their children and housework at home. With a traditional mindset, the idea that they should stay behind the man still persists. This mindset is mostly seen in undeveloped and underdeveloped societies. Since women do not have a certain place in the social sphere and business life, they are limited to management positions.

Although statistical data show that the proportion of women in managerial positions is increasing, this progress is slow. Judgments and attitudes towards women in the workplace hinder women's progress in the workplace (Wirth 2004: 13).

2.1.10.2. Female Managers in UAE

Perhaps the biggest revolution that the business world has experienced in the last twenty years has been the intensive entry of women into business life. Due to their education and appropriate competences, women have taken over many of the new professions created by the information age (Barutçugil 2002: 13).

Many women in the UAE describe their careers as a steady climb up well-built ladders only to find the top rungs harder to reach than expected. The day-to-day work is there; the competence is there. Yet promotion conversations, stretch assignments, and boardroom invitations still arrive less predictably. This is the lived face of the glass ceiling: not a single dramatic barrier, but a sequence of small, patterned slowdowns that compound over time (see also World Bank, 2025; UAE Government, 2024).

For expatriate women, the picture often includes a second layer: the mechanics of living abroad. Visas, sponsorships, and assignment timelines shape what feels possible. Assigned expatriates commonly benefit from structured corporate support—relocation packages, defined roles, and repatriation plans while self-initiated expatriates rely more on their own networks and initiative (Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010; Doherty et al. 2013; Andresen 2020). The result is that career momentum is not only about performance; it is also about how mobility was arranged in the first place.

At the same time, the UAE's policy landscape has opened new doors. Longer-term residence options (e.g., Green and Golden Visas) and board-diversity initiatives signal an expectation that women will participate in leadership and decision-making (UAE Government 2024). These measures do not erase structural headwinds, but they do change the horizon line. For some women, the shift from a short assignment to multi-year residence converts "making it work for now" into "building a leadership path here" (World Bank 2025; UAE Government 2024).

Workplace culture remains quite variable. Mentorship, role models, and the everyday choices of managers who nominate for a client meeting, who to send on the next high stakes pitch still matter as much as formal policy. When these micro-decisions lean consistently toward inclusion, expatriate women report stronger professional identities, higher confidence in advancement, and more satisfying careers; when they do not, even talented managers can find their progress stalling despite excellent results (IOM 2019; Doherty et al. 2013).

Ultimately, subjective career success for expatriate women in the UAE is shaped by three moving parts: the policy context (what the country enables), the organizational context (what the company practices), and the mobility context (how and why the person moved). Where these align—clear pathways, fair opportunities, and stable residence—women's leadership narratives tend to accelerate. Where they pull apart, the glass ceiling becomes visible again, not as a single wall, but as a pattern that slows the climb (Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010; Andresen 2020).

2.1.10.3. Characteristics of Female Managers

Various studies have been conducted on the characteristics of women managers. When the literature is analyzed, different results have been found. In 1977, there were studies to determine the difference between male and female

managers. In the studies conducted by L. Moore and U. Rickel, age, organization and education factors were not taken into consideration. For male managers, long-term goals, earning and being effective in decision-making, and the opportunity for advancement were prioritized. For women in managerial positions, working styles, environment, working with subordinates and opportunities for promotion were prioritized. In another study, it was found that executive men gave more importance to their salaries, while executive women gave maximum points to promotion opportunities. In a study conducted by Dobbins and Platz in 1986, it was determined that women managers had to work more than male managers to be successful, that they lagged behind men in getting their subordinates to accept them, and that their emotionality was higher in men. As a result of these various studies, it was seen that men and women have positive and negative sides (Barutçugil 2002: 13).

The negative aspects of women managers are low self-confidence, showing emotional states, and prioritizing other people. Positive aspects are, sincere behavior, being clear and understandable, equal behavior, and being active.

According to Kabasakal's research, 'Profile of Top-Level Women Managers in Turkey', the common characteristics of women managers are listed below.

- Not being at the forefront
- Conscious controlled behavior
- Not being a feminist
- Developing socially
- Solid character
- Perfectionism
- Maintaining the family environment

Generally, female managers are middle class and single, although there are differences across countries. Women managers are generally involved in active fields such as service sector and human resources. They are less concentrated at general management level and more concentrated in specialized positions. Women are paid less than their male counterparts. They are less involved in senior management (Goffee 1994: 80).

2.1.10.4. Managerial and Leadership Qualities of Executive Women

There are ideas that there is no managerial difference between men and women. In a process where people's behaviors and relationships are managed, it is

expected to be reflected in the management decisions between men and women. According to the research, leadership styles of men and women are differentiated. In general, women managers exhibit 'transformational' leadership style, while men managers choose transactional style (Certo 2000: 346-347). Transformational female managers generally transform the interests of lower-level employees into the interests of the team. They mostly use their charisma and communication skills.

Business male managers, on the other hand, use their position in the organization (Toker 2007: 95). In another study, it was found that women have qualities specific to 'transformational' leadership. The principles of this type of leadership, which Rosener also calls 'interactive leadership', are listed as: (Rosene 2006: 187-199).

- Being encouraging
- Sharing information
- Improving the self-esteem of others
- Energy addition

The fact that women leaders take a more supportive and sensitive attitude towards their subordinates is shown to be due to traditional gender role stereotypes (Ely 1988: 69). Managerial men have a competitive and controlling attitude and have an unemotional leadership style, while managerial women are co-operative (Colwil 1995: 32). Research has explained that executive women show an assertive style that shows themselves more. On the other hand, leader men are more self-confident, disciplined and prescriptive.

2.2. GLASS CEILING AS A PROBLEM ENCOUNTERED BY WOMEN IN WORKING LIFE

Women in working life encounter multiple, interconnected challenges that limit their career advancement despite having equivalent qualifications and performance as their male counterparts. Among these challenges, the glass ceiling phenomenon has emerged as a central concept describing the invisible yet persistent barriers that prevent women from ascending to senior leadership roles (Morrison et al. 1987; Karcıoğlu and Leblebici 2014).

The glass ceiling represents obstacles that limit women's development regardless of their achievements and are characterized as transparent yet insurmountable barriers to senior management positions. Originally defined to

describe problems faced by women at managerial levels, this concept has since expanded to encompass the experiences of minorities and, in some contexts, men facing similar structural barriers (Dreher 2003). These barriers arise from the complex interplay of individual, organizational, and societal factors, each contributing uniquely to the persistence of gender-based career limitations.

2.2.1. Career of Women Managers

2.2.1.1. Career Processes of Female Managers

Recently, it has been observed that women's education levels have increased in our country and in the world and their active participation in business life has increased. Previously, women took part in working life due to the inadequacy of family income. Today, women want to take part in business life to fulfil the requirements of their education (Aytaç 2011: 229). Women's early 30s are known as the most well-known career transition stage. Women want to establish their careers before marriage. This period is followed by decisions to become a mother, to take leave or to give up having children.

In the research, it has been observed that some women regret not having children in the transition stages after their 30s. Women who had children in their 30s were found to experience family and career conflict at this stage. It has been observed that women in the transition process also face a series of factors that are characterized as glass ceiling and prevent them from rising to senior levels. Therefore, women may change organizations or make spiral movements (White et al. 1992: 126).

2.2.1.2. Theories Based on Women's Careers

Several theoretical frameworks have been developed to explain the unique patterns and challenges characterizing women's career trajectories, recognizing that women's career development differs fundamentally from traditional, male-centered career models.

Bardwick (1980) proposed the "seasons in a woman's life" framework, which acknowledges that women's career decisions are deeply intertwined with life-stage considerations and biological timing. Unlike male career models that emphasize linear progression and organizational advancement, Bardwick's theory suggests that women's career choices between ages 17-28 are often shaped by decisions regarding

relationships and family formation. The theory posits that women's fertility timeline creates distinctive age-related pressures that influence career planning and commitment, a consideration largely absent from men's career development models where professional establishment typically occurs between ages 36-40. While this framework has been critiqued for potentially reinforcing traditional gender roles, it nevertheless highlights the reality that many women must navigate career decisions within the context of competing family and biological timelines (Bardwick 1980).

Gattiker and Larwood (1986) developed a more comprehensive framework emphasizing that career progression patterns for women and men are fundamentally different due to varying expectations, opportunities, and constraints. Their research demonstrated that women and men hold different expectations about job suitability, leading to divergent occupational choices and career paths. A central tenet of their theory is that women's multiple roles, particularly as mothers and primary caregivers, require significantly more time and effort than men's parenting roles, creating asymmetrical career progression patterns. This role differentiation results in women facing more workplace obstacles, including career interruptions, limited access to mentoring, and restricted opportunities for advancement (Gattiker and Larwood, 1986; Bacacı-Varoğlu, 2001).

Research consistently shows that women face distinctive obstacles in the workplace due to gender-based expectations and structural barriers (Ataay, 1998). Even when women and men possess equivalent qualifications and follow similar career processes, women's experiences diverge due to discriminatory practices, stereotyping, and organizational cultures that privilege male career patterns. Ataay (1998) demonstrated that education and self-confidence serve as critical factors in women's career advancement, with higher educational attainment correlating with increased career progression opportunities. However, the relationship between education and advancement is mediated by organizational support, mentoring access, and the dismantling of glass ceiling barriers that disproportionately affect women (Ataay 1998).

These theoretical perspectives collectively underscore that women's career development cannot be understood through traditional, gender-neutral frameworks. Instead, comprehensive models must account for the intersection of biological timing, family responsibilities, gendered organizational structures, and differential access to developmental opportunities that shape women's unique career trajectories.

2.2.2. Dimensions of Glass Ceiling Barriers

The concept of the glass ceiling was first popularized in the 1980s to describe invisible, systemic barriers embedded in organizational cultures, stereotypes, and informal networks that privilege male leadership norms (Morrison et al. 1987). Eagly and Carli (2007) further conceptualized the phenomenon as a "labyrinth," arguing that women encounter a series of complex, cumulative obstacles throughout their careers. In the context of expatriate work, the glass ceiling often intersects with cultural biases, legal constraints, and limited access to high-visibility assignments, exacerbating gendered career limitations (Linehan and Scullion 2001; Hutchings et al. 2012). These factors produce what scholars refer to as a "double bind" or "double glass ceiling," where gender and expatriate status combine to hinder upward mobility (Caligiuri and Colakoglu 2007).

Research has consistently identified three primary dimensions through which glass ceiling barriers operate: individual factors (such as multiple role expectations and personal career choices), organizational factors (including discriminatory policies, lack of mentoring, and exclusion from informal networks), and social factors (encompassing occupational segregation and gender stereotypes). Understanding how these dimensions interact is essential for developing effective strategies to support women's career advancement, particularly in international contexts where expatriate women face compounded challenges.

The consequences of glass ceiling barriers extend beyond individual careers. Women managers who perceive that they are prevented from reaching senior positions due to their gender experience diminished aspirations and motivation. The perception that high achievement and hard work cannot be adequately rewarded reduces productivity at all organizational levels (Dreher 2003). Moreover, gender-based barriers prevent organizations from fully utilizing the skills and resources of their workforce, undermining competitive advantage. Empirical evidence supports the pervasiveness of these barriers: studies in the USA found that women held only 16.9 percent of management positions in 1000 large companies and 6.2 percent of board positions, with representation at top executive levels remaining below 3 percent. Similar patterns emerge in other contexts; research in Turkey's insurance and banking sectors revealed that while women comprised 43 percent of employees and 26 percent of mid-level managers, only 3 percent reached senior management positions.

The following subsections examine each dimension of glass ceiling barriers in detail, analyzing how individual, organizational, and social factors create and reinforce obstacles to women's career advancement.

2.2.2.1. Individual-Level Barriers

Individual-level barriers stem from women's personal circumstances, role expectations, and internalized beliefs about career advancement. While often framed as personal choices, these factors are deeply shaped by societal norms, cultural expectations, and organizational contexts that differentially affect women's career trajectories. Research demonstrates that women face unique pressures to balance professional ambitions with family responsibilities, often resulting in career interruptions, reduced work hours, or self-imposed limitations on advancement opportunities (Bardwick 1980; Gattiker and Larwood 1986). Additionally, women may internalize gender stereotypes that lead to lower career aspirations, reduced confidence in leadership abilities, or reluctance to pursue senior positions perceived as incompatible with feminine roles. Understanding these individual-level dynamics is essential, as they interact with organizational and societal barriers to create compounded obstacles for women's career success. Key individual-level barriers include family responsibilities and multiple role management, personal career choices and self-limiting behaviors, and gendered perceptions of career suitability.

In studies conducted in different countries and at different times, it has been determined that family and home responsibilities do not change for working women. Women take on the role of being a mother and the responsibilities it brings and continue their working life tempo. For this reason, women who have children are more likely to quit their jobs or prefer to work in part-time jobs. (KSSGM 2000: 19). The multiple roles of working women as mothers and wives may cause women to experience three types of tension and conflict.

- Stress due to time pressure
- Tension resulting from conflicting roles
- The tension created by each role and different behavior

Working women are stressed under time pressure due to the fact that they have to rush to all their jobs to be a good wife, a good mother and a housewife. Because of this situation, women may miss the status and promotion opportunities in the workplace. Or it causes a delay in their promotion in their workplaces. In the face

of the tension between family and work roles, professional women either take on the responsibilities completely or risk withdrawing from their family roles completely. One of these options means refusing to marry. In any society it is not embraced. The second role, being a superwoman, involves psychological and physical compensation by women. Research generally shows that role-playing conflicts have a significant impact on women's careers. In much research, it has been determined that women's business life and career are interrupted by marriage and having children. The limitation of women's ability to advance in their professions is the concept of glass ceiling in many organizations today (Kocacık 2005: 197).

As a result, the fact that women have families and children has negative effects on their working lives and prevents them from reaching managerial positions. Therefore, single women are seen as women who can start a family and have children at any time. For this reason, most of the women who have advanced in their profession and come to management positions are single or childless or have few children or have separated from their spouses and have successfully targeted their economic needs. As a result, the fact that women take on many roles prevents and restricts them from taking part in management positions. It shows that women experience conflicts in terms of career and have problems in their planning during the day. For this reason, glass ceiling barrier arising from individual factors occurs.

Another factor limiting women's access to managerial positions is their individual decisions. In the study conducted by TAVRIS on 'managerial behaviors' of women and men managers, women stated that they should look for the problem in themselves among the reasons for their failure. This rate was found to be 48 per cent and 45 per cent believed that women could overcome gender discrimination by proving their abilities. In another study, it was found that women themselves are among the reasons that hinder women's careers.

The limits that women individually set for themselves are given below.

- Attitudes and behaviors related to gender
- To internalize social values,
- Lack of self-confidence,
- Don't change yourself
- Supporting the system
- Being career orientated

- Not taking the requirements and obligations of career advancement into consideration.

In their study, Deemer and Fredericks (2006: 89) explained that there are four mental behaviors that restrict career advancement of executive women. In the studies conducted, at the end of the socialization process based on gender-based roles, women perceive themselves as different from men. In the studies, women limit their career structure due to their personal preferences such as not being able to work for a long time and not travelling due to their positioning. Most women generally desire to rise at the management level. They are concerned about the polemics and political conflicts brought about by the position, as well as the concern that their family life may be damaged. For these reasons, women often think that their personal talents and skills are not suitable for the place where they work (Meriçelli 2017: 65). Women see themselves as emotional beings and fail to realize their own power. It has been observed that with the effect of 'learned helplessness' and the decrease in self-confidence, they take an attitude towards being managed rather than being managed (Bayrak and Yücel 2000: 125-142). Some women do not consider themselves suitable for managerial positions. The reason for this may be that women think that they will lose their 'sexual personality' and be labelled as 'women like men'. As a result, it is seen that some of the characteristics of executive women related to their gender-based roles affect their careers negatively (Barutçugil 2002: 13).

2.2.2.2. Organizational-Level Barriers

Organizational-level barriers represent structural and cultural practices within workplaces that systematically disadvantage women's career advancement regardless of individual qualifications or performance. These barriers are embedded in organizational policies, informal norms, and managerial practices that privilege male career patterns and leadership styles (Kanter 1977; Morrison et al. 1987). Unlike individual-level factors that focus on women's personal circumstances, organizational barriers reflect institutional decisions about promotion criteria, resource allocation, mentoring access, and network inclusion that disproportionately limit women's opportunities. Research consistently shows that even in organizations with formal equal opportunity policies, subtle discriminatory practices persist through biased performance evaluations, limited access to high-visibility

assignments, exclusion from informal decision-making networks, and inadequate support for work-life integration (Dreher 2003; Tharenou 2015). For expatriate women, these organizational barriers may be compounded by cultural assumptions about women's suitability for international assignments, limited access to host-country networks, and insufficient organizational support for dual-career coordination or family adaptation. The following subsections examine how organizational climate and culture, discriminatory promotion practices, lack of mentoring and sponsorship, and exclusion from informal networks create persistent obstacles to women's career progression.

a) Organizational Climate:

Women's career prospects vary according to the organizational culture. Therefore, women make a serious effort to show themselves by working more in organizations. In organizations that adopt hierarchical leadership styles, i.e. top-down communication style and 'male-oriented' organizational culture, it affects women's progress and development. This situation causes women to move up the ranks. Performance power distance because of women's advancement in the organization is related to practices based on gender equality (Ergeneli and Akçamete 2004: 89). The reasons for the existence of a 'male-dominated' structure in a Snavely workplace are stated below.

- The stereotypical place of women in history
- Women's informal communication problems with male colleagues
- The limited allocation of managerial positions in the organization to women
- Women's dissatisfaction with their work

Silvia Gherardi studied the status of women in male-dominated organizations on a model with metaphors. Men's hostile and friendly approaches to women are divided into two. The positioning of women in the organization is classified as accepted and accepted (Bacacı-Varoğlu 2001: 12). In organizations with a male-dominated structure, executive women are not considered suitable for some tasks. As a result, it creates a glass ceiling that restricts the career development of executive women.

b) Organizational Policies:

Organizational policies are one of the factors that directly affect women's careers. While organizational policies provide opportunities for women to advance their careers, they can also cause obstacles. Women face obstacles in the selection

and placement process due to social judgements. Women are subjected to different conditions compared to male candidates (Ataay 1998: 240-241).

Although most of the organizational policies have been eliminated, it is seen that unequal behaviors and practices still continue. It has been observed that performance evaluations of organizations affect women's careers. While the success of women in organizations is described as luck, in the case of men, it is explained as the success of men. For this reason, it reveals the belief that working women have low potential for the future in terms of achieving their jobs (KSSGM 2000: 17). The different practices applied in wage management for women in organizations and specialized standards are other important factors. It has been found that women managers in the USA and Europe are paid less than their male counterparts. Therefore, it is explained that women should work in jobs that are mostly characterized as women's jobs. The fact that executive women are paid less than men may cause them to be exposed to inequality. With the increase in the number of women in the organization, managers provide different terms and conditions for women. Business trips in the organization are also demanded for men. Long and short-term assignments mostly consist of male employees (Aytaç 2011: 229).

On the other hand, robust, official statistics quantifying a gender pay gap among managers in the UAE are not publicly available. The UAE's labour law mandates equal pay for equal value (2020 reform), and perception-based indices (e.g., WEF) indicate relatively high wage equality. However, ILO evidence for the wider Arab States region suggests gender wage gaps persist, and GCC workforce surveys report perceived disparities. Therefore, while regional and survey evidence indicates ongoing risks of pay inequality, definitive UAE managerial pay-gap estimates remain scarce.

High-visibility "stretch" assignments especially line/P&L roles—are widely recognized springboards to senior leadership. Yet evidence shows women are steered into these opportunities less often and, instead, take on a greater share of low-promotability work, which slows progression to upper management. Supervisory data link challenging job experiences to higher promotability ratings, but access to such assignments is uneven by gender; promotion criteria also tighten for women in line vs. staff roles. Together, these dynamics reduce the likelihood that women will make the crucial leap into senior positions.

c) Lack of Mentoring

A mentor counsellor is defined as a trusted teacher or guide with the duties and responsibilities of a mentor. Mentoring is defined as one-to-one coaching training between an experienced member and an inexperienced member of the organization, aiming at personal and professional development. It takes place between experienced managers in the organization and young people who have just started their careers. Those who provide mentor training make career planning suggestions for inexperienced employees in the organization. They give advice on work-related or personal problems. They teach social, technical and managerial skills.

Research shows that having a mentor influences people's careers and success (U.S. FGCC, 1993). It has been observed that women managers gain self-confidence in the mentoring relationship and their level of utilizing their skills increases. Mentoring has a serious effect on women's reaching the upper levels (Ataay 1998: 240-241). Research shows that women also cause various obstacles in developing mentoring relationships. The fact that women are very few in management positions is also a factor in the formation of mentoring relationships. As a result, this situation negatively affects the careers of women in management (Ataay 1998: 240-241).

d) Exclusion from Informal Communication Networks:

Thanks to the communication networks in the organization, employees in the organization learn what will be useful, which projects will be the focus of attention, which positions are vacant and which people are candidates. To be a successful employee, it is necessary to be a part of the organization inside and outside the organization. This can only be achieved by joining a network (Palmer and Hyman 1993: 19-20). Men utilize the network to make progress in their careers. Networking is the main basis for career progression. Women, on the other hand, do not benefit from networks because they think that networks are based on unrealistic emotions (Deemer 2006: 89). In organizations, there are informal relationships 'old boy network' established by men within themselves. This network still exists in most organizations. It is seen that women are excluded from this network (Cooper 2001: 30-41).

The fact that women are kept away from this network reveals a situation related to the glass ceiling in the organizational literature. When women are excluded by their male colleagues and superiors in the organization, they encounter less

opportunities for development in the organization. Therefore, women have difficulty in entering networks dominated by men. They cannot be informed about the opportunities and policies at the management level (Ataay 1998: 240-241).

Women have difficulty in entering networks and have to be deprived of power, privilege and information support, which have an important place in their success (Burke and Mickeen 1994: 74). Kanter (1977) explored the concept of 'shared socialization of men' in response to women's lack of participation in networks. Interpersonal communication is very important for the organization. Generally, managers spend most of their time communicating with other people. Men need to communicate in order to create a common history or culture among themselves. Since it is difficult for managerial men to communicate with women who come from a different society, they do not want women working as managers (KSSGM 1999: 31-33).

2.2.2.3. Societal-Level Barriers

Societal-level barriers emerge from deeply embedded cultural norms, gender role expectations, and institutional structures that shape perceptions of women's appropriate place in the workforce and their suitability for leadership positions. These barriers operate at a macro level, influencing both individual career choices and organizational practices through widely shared beliefs about gender differences, occupational segregation patterns, and stereotypical associations between leadership and masculinity (Ridgeway 2011). Unlike individual or organizational factors that can be addressed through personal development or workplace policy reform, societal barriers require broader cultural shifts and institutional changes to dismantle. Historical patterns of occupational segregation have channeled women into certain sectors and roles (such as education, nursing, and administrative support) while limiting their representation in high-status, high-earning professions and executive leadership (ILO 2023; WEF 2024).

Gender stereotypes persist across cultures, associating effective leadership with traits traditionally coded as masculine, such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and decisiveness, while undervaluing or penalizing communal traits associated with femininity (Eagly and Carli 2007). These societal expectations create a double bind for women leaders, who face criticism for being either "too soft" or "too aggressive" (Heilman et al. 1989). For expatriate women working in contexts like the UAE,

societal barriers may be further intensified by cultural norms regarding gender roles, visibility of women in public spheres, and differential treatment based on nationality or ethnicity. The following subsections examine how occupational segregation and gender stereotypes function as societal-level barriers that constrain women's career opportunities and advancement prospects.

a) Gender Based Occupational Segregation

At the beginning of the determining factors in determining the profession, it is realized in line with the person's desire and ability. In this regard, there are some established rules in the family or society. In this case, it has been observed that it affects the career choices of men or women (Keskin 2006). In society, it is thought that men should have masculine, and women should have feminine orientation. It is stated that women have more understanding and soft characteristics than men, while men are more free, self-confident and aggressive than women. Society expects people to assume different roles from themselves in terms of gender. These expectations, defined as gender, also determine the distribution of the tasks undertaken by individuals between genders (Eyüpoğlu 1999: 33). Genders are divided into two as vertical and horizontal. Some occupations are determined as women's and some as men's occupations horizontally. This distinction is seen in the workplaces where men and women are employed according to the divisions. Vertical segregation, on the other hand, is the fact that men and women working in the workplace are faced with evaluations of the attitudes and behaviors of working women with almost the same quality. Vertical segregation leads to the conclusion that working women work harder than men to develop in their professions (KSSGM 2000: 19).

In horizontal segregation, men's jobs are categorized as general manager, mechanic, etc., while women's jobs such as secretarial, librarianship, nursing, etc. are considered appropriate. As can be seen, women are not preferred in jobs such as engineering and management (Eyüpoğlu 1999: 33). Traditionally, women are involved in the fields of human resources, corporate communication, marketing and public relations in private sectors. The reason for this is that career opportunities are not created for women at top management levels (Aytaç 1997: 222).

The fact that women are not included in career paths and top management candidate pool causes women to lose their managerial careers from the beginning. Due to this situation, women generally enter the career plateau due to the decrease in

horizontal and vertical progression opportunities, and they must continue their jobs in the same position.

b) Stereotypes about Gender

Stereotypes are a set of prejudices, beliefs and actions. Stereotypes exist in the cultures of societies and are transmitted from generation to generation through communication tools and stories. Research shows that stereotypes remain the same in every culture and do not change.

Stereotypes are expressed as categories of general characteristics of a person according to past experiences (Barutçugil 2002: 13). Men and women to whom stereotypes are attributed are different from each other. In general, men are thought to be objective, active, independent, competitive and in control of their emotions. Women are seen as emotional, dependent, warm and elegant.

Izraeli et al. (1980) explained that one of the factors preventing executive women from being placed in senior positions is gender-related and stereotypical judgements. They stated that men are rational and more ambitious, while women are dependent, passive and emotional. These stereotyped judgements in society include gender segregation in occupational perceptions, where stereotypical associations exist between gender and specific professions (e.g., management roles for men, caregiving roles for women). Such perceptions prevent the formation of executive women models and contribute to labelling women's working life. Another reason for the existence of stereotypes and glass ceiling barriers is that men see the progress of women as a danger and fear losing their competitive advantage. For this reason, men exhibit judgmental attitudes and behaviors towards women. Some judgements of managerial men against women are given below.

- They avoid working
- Not as committed to their careers as men
- They can’t be as tough as men
- They do not want to work long hours
- They do not want to change the city or country where they work,
- They find it difficult to make decisions
- They cannot control their emotions

Research reveals that not only men but also women are prejudiced. In a study conducted in the USA in 1990, it was found that 58 percent of women and 43 percent of men did not want to work with women managers (Akoğlan 2001: 20). Generally,

this situation reveals the ‘Queen Bee Syndrome’. Managerial women do not support the promotion of other women at the point where they rise. The reason for this is that they want to be the only one (Ergeneli and Akçamete 2004: 89). It seems quite difficult to change these prejudices about women. There is still a view that men are more suitable for the management profession because women will have difficulties in senior management, they cannot make logical decisions, and they cannot give orders to men working in subordinate positions.

2.2.3. Strategies to Break Glass Ceiling Problems

Breaking through glass ceiling barriers require multifaceted approaches that address both individual capability development and organizational structural changes. Women seeking career advancement must navigate a complex landscape of formal requirements and informal obstacles, necessitating deliberate strategies across several dimensions. Research identifies key areas where targeted interventions can help mitigate glass ceiling effects, including acquiring vocational training, social relationship development, maintaining high performance standards, implementing positive discrimination policies, and getting help from mentors. Each of these strategies addresses specific barriers while contributing to overall career advancement.

2.2.3.1. Acquiring Vocational Training

In general, trainings should continue in order to change prejudices and attitudes towards women in order to eliminate the male dominance of women in the business world caused by inequality. When evaluated in terms of wages, higher education includes high wages and skills. In the research conducted, it is seen that education levels are seriously important in the development of women’s careers. Compared to the past, women today play a more active role in business life and have the opportunity to work in better jobs. However, researchers do not consider these developments sufficient (Bilican Gökkaya 2015: 235). In 2004, Lockwood explained in a study that glass ceiling syndrome should first be broken by human resources. Supporting the inclusion of working women in trainings and it envisages the implementation of projects for the development of managerial skills (Lockwood 2004: 1-49).

2.2.3.2. Social Relationship Development

Female employees need to develop more social relationships than men to navigate workplace dynamics effectively. Women must understand gender-based barriers and communicate accordingly to overcome structural obstacles. The social distance between women and male employees often serves as an additional barrier to integration and advancement. To address problems that may arise both inside and outside the organization and to clarify expectations, developing intra- and extra-organizational networks alongside consistent information sharing proves beneficial.
Beyond networking, evidence spanning executive surveys, performance review studies, and field experiments suggests that women who aim for advancement often need to sustain a higher and more consistent performance record than comparable men. CEO and senior manager surveys report that women feel compelled to outperform peers before comparable recognition or promotion materializes (Ragins et al. 1998). Research on upper-level evaluations finds stricter standards and narrower notions of "fit" applied to women, effectively raising the bar for promotion (Lyness and Heilman 2006). Experimental and organizational studies also show women are disproportionately routed into low-visibility, non-promotable tasks such as committee work, coordination, and support duties that consume time yet yield little credit toward advancement, which in turn requires additional effort to reach the same milestones (Babcock et al. 2017; Babcock et al. 2022). Senior women who break through typically describe a strategy of consistently exceeding targets, investing in continual skill renewal, and curating visible, results-bearing assignments to counter these frictions (Williams and Dempsey 2014). In this study, therefore, "high performance" is treated not merely as meeting goals but as maintaining an extended record of impact, capability growth, and selective refusal of non-promotable work.

2.2.3.3. Positive Discrimination

Positive-looking discrimination strategy includes policies and practices that ensure equal treatment of people. It is defined as providing and improving rights and priorities according to the factors that cause exclusion and exclusion within the organization (Yalım 2005: 275). To increase the number of women who want to be included in business life, procedures related to recruitment and promotion can be prepared by businesses. As a result, women who want to work can utilize the

opportunities offered in their desire for promotion. At the same time, the problems arising from their inability to enter network networks are eliminated.

2.2.3.4. Getting Help from a Mentor

To ensure that the relations between the employees and the people in charge proceed in line with the objectives, the employees at the management level provide guidance. It is to help female employees to show themselves, to show their talents and to utilize special opportunities. In the research, it has been determined that people who have men to achieve their goals successfully and quickly. It is important that employees should be provided with adequate men tor services and that there should be no gender discrimination. Men tor helps the motivation and individual development of the people working in the organization. It is seen that women who receive men to support continue to experience some glass ceiling syndrome. It has been observed that some women cannot overcome these obstacles. The concept of glass ceiling in the workplace explains the problems that employees face in the workplace. In addition to these problems, it also includes inequality in the distribution of supervision and control in the workplace. As a result, the conclusion of the research is that women always have to work more if there is a male-dominated structure in organizations. In the opposite case, it is stated that male employees are preferred instead of women (Perçin 2008: 113-128).

2.3. CAREER SUCCESS AND WOMEN'S CAREER TRAJECTORIES

Understanding how glass ceiling barriers affect women's career experiences requires a framework for measuring career outcomes beyond traditional objective indicators such as salary and hierarchical position. Contemporary career theory increasingly recognizes that career success is a subjective, multidimensional construct shaped by individual values, organizational contexts, and life circumstances (Hall and Chandler 2005; Arthur et al. 1989). This perspective is particularly relevant for expatriate women, whose career trajectories often diverge from linear, organizationally bounded pathways due to international mobility, dual-career considerations, and cross-cultural adaptation challenges.

This section establishes the theoretical foundations for understanding career success in the context of expatriate women's experiences. It begins by examining women's career pathways and the emergence of non-traditional, boundaryless career

patterns that characterize international work. Building on this foundation, Section 2.3.4 introduces subjective career success as a comprehensive framework for evaluating career outcomes, exploring its dimensions, antecedents, and particular relevance for understanding expatriate women's career experiences in contexts shaped by glass ceiling barriers.

2.3.1. Career Programming

Career programming encompasses the strategies and processes through which individuals plan, manage, and navigate their professional trajectories within organizational contexts. For working women, career programming involves not only traditional advancement strategies but also the integration of multiple life roles and adaptation to organizational constraints. This section examines two key aspects of career programming particularly relevant to women's career experiences: dual career dynamics and career management practices.

It is seen that if women continue their responsibilities in business life as well as their responsibilities in their private spheres, the number of women in **dual career** working life increases. The fact that women have dual careers develops a concept against their family and workplace responsibilities. Women’s understanding of having a career affects their behavior and changes their way of thinking about what they want (Barutçugil 2002: 13). It is important for them to establish a balance in their family and work lives in their career steps. Studies show that women fulfill housework duties as well as their professions. For women to be effective and productive in their professional lives and to establish a balance, it is necessary to provide the necessary flexibility in the workplaces and support for their families. Since many women’s primary role is to take care of their children, they may experience problems in adapting to the workplace. Therefore, they want to take time off from work or leave work early. If the work is flexible, the freedom to perform the work in the home environment or a few hours of leave while working full time can be among the working conditions of women.

Career management is one of the methods that can be useful for the professional development of individuals or provide progress in terms of promotion (Şakar and Okakın 2013). Career management defines the programs prepared to reveal the talents of the person (Ertürk 2011: 214); recent empirical evidence also links career-management practices to perceived employability and individual

outcome variables (Soares and Mosquera, 2021). Career management is related to the steps of self-development. Self-development of the person in terms of profession, skills, training and personality is related to the improvement in their characteristics. It describes planning for professional life. Career management for organizations is important for the development of individuals. Career management is important for the progress of the individual or the organization. It has an effective role in the process of maintaining the bond between the individual and the organization.

Since the future-oriented goals of individuals will be seen more clearly in career management, productivity and commitment in the organization increases (Fındıkçı 2003: 244). Progressing vertically in career management is not as easy as it is thought. Upward progress in career management is not as simple as it is thought. The elements that determine vertical mobility are the development of people in the professional field, their knowledge and skills, and personal characteristics.

Vertical steps are listed below.

- Analyzing individual and environmental factors,
- Identifying the individual's career goals,
- Identify the problems they experience at work,
- Receiving training for the realization of the objectives,

Career plans of individuals are prepared within the scope of the education process. The existence of different factors affecting career paths cannot be ignored. Due to their family roles, women continue their careers from where they left off after a career break (Cemaloğlu 2005: 249-274). Negative developments will occur in the structure of the organization in the absence of promotion opportunities, professional development and motivating elements in the organization.

2.3.2. Career Pathways of Women

Women's career trajectories are significantly shaped by the complex interplay of socio-cultural dynamics, organizational structures, and individual factors, creating experiences that often differ substantially from those of their male counterparts. Traditional career models, characterized by hierarchical advancement within a single organization (Nicholson 1996; Hall 1976), fail to capture women's career realities, where career interruptions, sector switches, and horizontal movements are common (O'Neil and Bilimoria 2005). Empirical studies show that women's career trajectories

are less linear and are often influenced by life events such as childbearing and caregiving (Stone 2007; Blair-Loy 2003), leading to alternative career strategies including entrepreneurship and portfolio careers (Brush et al. 2009). These alternative pathways reflect women's adaptability and resilience in the face of systemic barriers and highlight the need for organizations to rethink and redesign career support structures to accommodate diverse career journeys better. Organizations must implement inclusive policies that recognize and value women's diverse career experiences and contributions. Essential policy components include flexible work arrangements, structured mentoring programs, and targeted professional development opportunities that enable women to advance in their chosen career paths.

Furthermore, organizations must actively engage in the continuous evaluation of these policies to ensure they effectively address the evolving challenges faced by women in the workplace. This ongoing commitment to inclusivity benefits women and enhances overall organizational performance by fostering a diverse talent pool that drives innovation and growth. By understanding and addressing the unique career pathways of women, companies can create a more equitable workplace that supports the advancement of all employees. The gendered division of labor, organizational biases, and work-life balance challenges remain persistent factors influencing women's career pathways (Eagly and Carli 2007; Hewlett 2002; Ely et al. 2011).

In international contexts, expatriate women face compounded barriers due to cultural expectations and organizational preferences for male expatriates (Linehan and Scullion 2001; Hutchings 2005). These complexities necessitate a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of gender, culture, and professional expectations, particularly in regions where traditional norms heavily influence workplace dynamics. These dynamics necessitate flexible and personalized career strategies that diverge significantly from traditional career scripts (O'Neil et.al. 2011; Caligiuri and Colakoglu 2007). Such strategies must also consider the impact of social capital, as networking opportunities and mentorship can be crucial for women's career advancement. Moreover, organizations should foster environments that challenge prevailing stereotypes and promote gender equity to leverage the potential of their female workforce fully.

2.3.3. Traditional vs Non-Traditional Career Trajectories

Traditional career trajectories are typically characterized by predictable, hierarchical progression within one or a few organizations over a lifetime, following a "career ladder" model (Arthur et al. 1989). Such pathways historically assumed an uninterrupted, full-time work commitment that aligns poorly with the career patterns of many women, who experience career interruptions and non-linear progressions due to familial or societal expectations (Gunz et. al. 2000; Sullivan and Baruch 2009). In contrast, unconventional career paths frequently include a variety of experiences such as part-time employment, job sharing, and entrepreneurial ventures, enabling women to harmonize their professional goals with personal obligations. Unconventional paths, which involve lateral transitions, temporary departures, and entrepreneurship, have become more common among women, providing increased flexibility yet also posing challenges for acknowledgment and career progression (Valcour and Ladge 2008; Cuddy et.al. 2015). These non-traditional trajectories highlight the importance of recognizing diverse career experiences and validating the skills developed through them. Organizations that embrace these varied pathways can not only support women's career advancement but also enhance their overall talent management strategies. This flexibility can facilitate a more fulfilling career path that aligns with their individual life circumstances and priorities, ultimately reshaping the narrative surrounding women's roles in the workforce. This shift in perspective not only empowers women but also encourages organizations to cultivate a culture that values diverse experiences, ultimately leading to a more dynamic and innovative workforce.

While empowering women and promoting diverse experiences can be beneficial, it is essential to recognize that focusing solely on gender diversity may overlook other critical factors that contribute to a dynamic and innovative workforce. Organizations should prioritize meritocracy and skills over demographic characteristics to ensure that the most qualified individuals are leading and contributing to innovation. Additionally, an overemphasis on diversity initiatives can lead to resentment among employees who may feel that hiring and promotion decisions are being made based on gender rather than qualifications. Ultimately, a balanced approach that values all forms of diversity, including but not limited to gender, while prioritizing competence and experience, is crucial for fostering true innovation and effectiveness in the workplace. Studies emphasize that organizational

structures continue to privilege traditional trajectories, disadvantaging women whose career patterns diverge (Abele and Spurk 2009; Eagly and Carli 2007). Furthermore, non-traditional trajectories have been associated with greater career satisfaction among women who prioritize work-life integration, even if they encounter slower or less predictable promotions (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005; Greenhaus and Powell 2006). This highlights the need for organizations to develop supportive frameworks that recognize and accommodate these diverse career patterns while promoting equitable opportunities for advancement. Such frameworks should include transparent evaluation criteria that recognize the value of diverse experiences and contributions, ensuring that all employees have equal access to advancement opportunities.

2.3.3.1. Boundaryless and Protean Careers

Boundaryless careers, as conceptualized by Arthur and Rousseau (1996), refer to careers that transcend organizational boundaries, enabling individuals to seek career advancement through varied employers, roles, and industries. As defined by Hall (1976; 2004), Protean careers prioritize individual values, self-directed career management, and psychological success over organizational loyalty. Both models are particularly relevant to women's career experiences, offering frameworks that legitimize non-linear, self-driven career paths (Briscoe and Hall 2006; Sullivan and Arthur 2006). These models encourage women to embrace their unique career journeys, fostering a sense of agency that can lead to greater fulfillment and success in their professional lives. Empirical research shows that women often navigate organizational constraints through boundaryless strategies, such as moving across firms or sectors to achieve advancement and avoid gendered barriers within single organizations (DeFillippi and Arthur 1994; Clarke 2013). This adaptability allows women to leverage diverse experiences and skills, ultimately enhancing their employability and career satisfaction. Moreover, organizations that recognize and support boundaryless and protean career models can benefit from a more engaged and innovative workforce. Protean career orientations are also prevalent among women who must balance professional ambitions with personal responsibilities, finding meaning and achievement outside traditional corporate metrics (Baruch 2006; Dries 2011). Despite these models offering flexibility and empowerment, boundaryless and protean careerists often face precarious employment conditions,

exacerbating economic inequalities (King 2004; Sullivan 1999). This precariousness underscores the necessity for systemic changes that provide stability and support for women navigating these non-traditional career paths.

2.3.3.2. Career Pathways in International Contexts

In international contexts, women's career pathways encounter unique complexities, including cultural biases, organizational reluctance to assign women to expatriate roles, and work-life balance challenges exacerbated by relocation (Adler 1984). These factors hinder women's professional growth and limit organizations' ability to leverage diverse talent in a globalized economy fully. Expatriate women often experience a "double glass ceiling" — barriers not only based on gender but also on cultural stereotypes in host countries (Hutchings 2005). Research highlights that despite comparable competencies, women are less likely to be selected for international assignments, which are critical for leadership development (Caligiuri and Colakoglu 2007). Furthermore, expatriate women rely heavily on boundaryless career strategies, crafting opportunities across organizations and countries to bypass institutional barriers (Shortland 2009). This reliance on boundaryless strategies underscores the importance of organizational support systems that can facilitate women's mobility and success in international assignments. In regions like the Middle East, including the UAE, cultural norms around gender roles intensify challenges for expatriate women, although UAE’s cosmopolitan environment provides more opportunities than other Gulf countries (Hutchings 2012).

Nevertheless, mentoring, networking, and organizational support remain crucial factors influencing expatriate women's success and career advancement globally (Linehan 2000). Moreover, the intersection of gender and culture in these contexts necessitates a deeper understanding of how expatriate women navigate their unique challenges, often requiring them to develop resilience and adaptability in their career strategies. These insights are vital for organizations aiming to create inclusive environments that support the professional growth of women across diverse cultural landscapes.

2.3.4. Subjective Career Success

Traditional career models have long emphasized hierarchical advancement within organizational boundaries, often using objective indicators such as salary, job

title, and tenure to assess career success. However, contemporary research in career development increasingly highlights the importance of subjective experiences, individual agency, and organizational context in shaping how individuals define and evaluate their careers.

One of the most influential paradigms in this shift is the Boundaryless Career Theory, introduced by Arthur et al. (1989). This theory suggests that modern careers are no longer confined within the internal structures of a single organization. Instead, they are shaped by personal networks, inter-organizational mobility, and self-directed strategies. Arthur et al. (1989) also introduced the distinction between objective and subjective career success, emphasizing that the latter is shaped by personal experiences and psychological factors, including self-efficacy and perceived control. Particularly for expatriate professionals, career paths often cross national and institutional boundaries, requiring them to rely on external relationships and organizational systems rather than rigid internal ladders. This framework provides a useful lens for understanding how expatriate women navigate structural barriers such as the glass ceiling while leveraging interpersonal and institutional resources to advance their careers.

In parallel, scholars have argued that career success should not be assessed solely through external achievements. The Subjective Career Success (SCS) Framework, as formulated by Shockley et al. (2015; 2016), offers a multidimensional model that includes psychological indicators such as recognition, authenticity, influence, quality work, and personal life integration. This perspective reflects protean career values (Hall and Chandler 2005), where individuals prioritize meaning, self-alignment, and growth over traditional metrics. In the case of women—and particularly expatriate women—subjective evaluations become more significant, as structural barriers like the glass ceiling often limit access to external indicators of success. Consequently, SCS can serve as a more inclusive and context-sensitive measure of career outcomes, especially in diverse international labor markets such as the UAE (Ng and Feldman 2014; Hall 2004).

These theories are especially relevant for examining the career experiences of expatriate women in complex sociocultural and organizational environments such as the UAE. While boundaryless careers highlight the need for institutional support and mobility, the subjective career success approach emphasizes how individuals interpret their own advancement within these settings. Together, these models offer a

nuanced understanding of how glass ceiling barriers interact with both organizational structures and personal perceptions, shaping career outcomes beyond conventional definitions of success.

While existing theories offer insights into the structural and psychological factors shaping women's career trajectories, they often rely on traditional success indicators. In response, researchers have proposed a shift toward more individualized, subjective interpretations of career success—especially relevant for understanding women's career outcomes in diverse and constrained environments.

Subjective career success (SCS) has become a central construct in career research, especially as traditional, objective indicators—salary, grade, and hierarchical position—have been critiqued for capturing only a narrow part of what "success" means (Ng et al. 2005). SCS emphasizes how individuals evaluate their own careers in light of their values, goals, and life circumstances, asking not only what has been achieved but what it means (Heslin 2005; Dries 2011). In other words, SCS recognizes that careers are lived experiences, not only CV lines: alignment with personal aims, perceived progress, meaningful work, and workable work–life balance all matter (Hall and Chandler 2005; Shockley et al. 2016). This perspective is particularly relevant for women whose values and roles can vary across life stages and for expatriates whose opportunities are shaped by mobility arrangements and local context (Akkermans and Kubasch 2017).

Contemporary definitions therefore integrate several perceptions: career and job satisfaction, perceived progress and employability, and work–life alignment (Shockley et al. 2016; Spurk et al. 2019). For many women, these subjective markers explain why two managers with similar titles can feel very different about their careers: one may feel "stalled" despite promotion, while another feels successful after gaining autonomy, visibility, or a schedule that sustains family life. In expatriate settings, SCS is also a lens on career resilience—how people sustain momentum and meaning despite non-linear paths, assignment clocks, or visa constraints (Kraimer et al. 2016; Shaffer, Kraimer et al. 2012).

Protean and boundaryless career perspectives help explain why SCS is so predictive: when people navigate across organizational and national boundaries, self-direction, values fit, learning, and adaptability become core to the feeling of success (Hall and Chandler 2005; Briscoe and Hall 2006). Empirically, SCS is associated with higher engagement, well-being, and lower turnover intentions, making it a

practically important outcome for organizations as well as a theoretically meaningful one (Ng and Feldman 2014; Spurk et al. 2019). For expatriate women in particular, SCS offers a framework that acknowledges both the barriers they face (glass ceilings, cultural constraints) and the agency they exercise in crafting meaningful professional lives.

2.3.4.1. Definitions and Dimensions

At its core, SCS reflects individuals' evaluations of their career achievements relative to their own goals and expectations (Gattiker and Larwood 1986; Heslin 2005). Most studies adopt a multidimensional view. Commonly used dimensions and measures include: (a) career satisfaction (e.g., Greenhaus et al. 1990), (b) meaning/fit with one's identity or calling (Hall and Chandler 2005), (c) work–life balance satisfaction (Shockley et al., 2016), and (d) perceived progress and employability internally and externally (Spurk et al. 2019).

Analytically, SCS is frequently modeled either as a second-order latent factor with career satisfaction, meaning/fit, and balance as first-order factors or as a profile of correlated dimensions reported side-by-side (Spurk et al. 2019). For expatriate samples, measurement invariance across subgroups (e.g., assigned vs. self-initiated expatriates; different nationalities; host-tenure groups) is important to ensure fair comparisons (Akkermans and Kubasch 2017). Because expatriate careers often involve language and cultural variation, back-translation and cognitive pre-testing are advisable prior to confirmatory factor analysis.

Finally, career adaptability concerns, control, curiosity, and confidence is a consistent personal resource that feeds into SCS: people who perceive more agency and flexibility tend to feel more successful in fluid contexts (Hirschi 2012). As contemporary values evolve, complementary facets such as authenticity and perceived social impact are increasingly included when theoretically justified (Hall and Chandler 2005; Spurk et al. 2019).

2.3.4.2. Perceived Career Success among Female Expatriates

Compared with male expatriates, female expatriates' SCS has distinct antecedents and outcomes and remains relatively underexplored (Shortland 2014). Qualitative and survey evidence shows that many expatriate women define success holistically combining advancement with skill growth, cultural learning, and credible

visibility (access to consequential clients/projects) and the ability to integrate work and non-work roles (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010; McNulty and Hutchings 2016). In practice, this means that sponsorship and access to high-stakes assignments can lift SCS even before a formal title changes.

Psychological capital hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism also matter. It buffers stressors associated with relocation and new organizational cultures, helping sustain a sense of progress despite obstacles (Selmer and Lauring 2013). At the organizational level, inclusive climates, mentoring/sponsorship, and flexible development pathways are repeatedly linked to higher SCS among women abroad (McNulty and Brewster 2017; Tharenou 2015). Conversely, subtle barriers stereotypes, restricted informal networks, "wait one more cycle" messages accumulate into patterned delays that depress SCS even when objective performance is strong (Tharenou 2015).

A human way to state the same point is this: two women may hold the same role, but the one who is seen, stretched, and supported tends to describe a rising career narrative; the other excluded from informal opportunities—often reports a sense of stalled momentum. SCS is the instrument that captures this difference.

2.3.4.3. Relationship of Perceived Career Success with Organizational and Personal Factors

The evidence is robust that SCS reflects the intersection of organizational enablers and personal resources (Ng and Feldman 2014; Spurk et al. 2019). On the organizational side, perceived support, justice/fairness, inclusive leadership, mentoring/sponsorship, and access to challenging, visible assignments are reliable antecedents (Zacher et al. 2019; Tharenou 2015). On the personal side, proactive personality, self-efficacy, career adaptability, and career competencies (reflection, networking, career control) consistently predict higher SCS (Hirschi,2012; Akkermans et al. 2013; Akkermans et al. 2015; Akkermans 2018).

Mechanistically, supportive and fair contexts build perceived control and efficacy, which in turn elevate SCS; mentoring/sponsorship serve as a conversion mechanism translating capability into opportunity (Ng and Feldman 2014; Zacher et al. 2019). Boundary conditions also matter for expatriates: dual-career coordination, partner/family support, assignment type (assigned vs. self-initiated), and host-tenure

shape access to networks and stretch roles, altering the slope of the SCS trajectory (Shaffer et al. 2012; Kraimer et al. 2016).

Given a glass-ceiling focus, the expected pattern is clear: stronger perceived barriers are associated with lower career satisfaction, perceived progress, and work–life alignment therefore lower SCS; by contrast, career adaptability and inclusive leadership should buffer moderate this negative association (Hirschi 2012; Tharenou 2015; Zacher et al. 2019). From a methods standpoint, if the design is cross-sectional, inference can be strengthened by reducing common-method bias procedural remedies and a marker variable and by specifying theoretically grounded controls parsimoniously (Podsakoff et al. 2003; Ng and Feldman 2014).

2.3.4.4. Dynamics Trajectories of Subjective Career Success

SCS is not static; it ebbs and flows as people encounter career events, opportunities, and constraints over time. Longitudinal research shows that perceived success reflects both cumulative advantage (e.g., early access to sponsors and stretch roles) and cumulative disadvantage (e.g., repeated micro-exclusions), producing diverging trajectories even among equally capable professionals (Ng and Feldman 2014; Spurk et al. 2019). Recent scholarship conceptualizes such discontinuities as "career shocks," that is, unexpected events organizational changes, family transitions, sudden opportunities—that prompt reassessment and redirect effort (Akkermans et al. 2018). In expatriate settings, assignment endings, visa shifts, or a partner's career move can operate as shocks that alter perceived progress and future fit.

Humanized, the logic is simple: people feel successful when the next chapter makes sense. A timely sponsor, a role crafted for autonomy, or a policy change that stabilizes residence can lift SCS suddenly; conversely, a missed posting or a reorg that sidelines visibility can trigger a dip. Adaptive career behaviors networking, seeking feedback, crafting tasks help translate shocks into growth rather than stagnation (Akkermans et al. 2015; Seibert et al. 2001). Thus, a time-sensitive lens is essential: SCS tracks not only what has happened but whether the current moment still feels connected to an attainable, meaningful future.

2.3.4.5. Work–Family Interface, Identity Work, and Outcomes of Subjective Career Success

SCS is tightly connected to how work relates to the rest of life. Work–family scholarship indicates that conflict drains satisfaction and progress perceptions, whereas enrichment skills, moods, and resources flowing between roles enhances them (Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Allen et al. 2012). For expatriate women, the calculus is often practical: does this role permit credible performance and a viable life in the host country? When the answer is yes, SCS rises even before formal advancement occurs (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010).

Identity processes matter as well. Seeing one's work as aligned with values or as a calling predicts stronger meaning and satisfaction key components of SCS (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997; Duffy et al. 2013). In practice, women report feeling most successful when they can do work that fits their strengths, is recognized by significant others, and remains compatible with family roles. These subjective gains, in turn, forecast important outcomes: higher engagement, lower turnover intentions, and better well-being (Ng and Feldman 2014; Spurk et al. 2019). In short, organizations that reduce conflict, design flexible roles, and support identity-consistent growth do not just improve morale; they create conditions under which subjective success becomes sustainable and predictive of objective results.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework established in Chapter II identifies glass ceiling barriers as multidimensional obstacles arising from individual, organizational, and societal factors, and positions subjective career success as a comprehensive measure of women's career experiences beyond traditional objective indicators. This chapter translates these conceptual foundations into an empirical research design, specifying how glass ceiling perceptions and career success outcomes are measured, how data were collected from expatriate women in the UAE, and how the hypothesized relationships are tested. The methodology is designed to ensure that the research objectives are met through a structured and systematic approach. It includes research design and model, target population and sampling methods, data collection process, measurement instruments, and the techniques used for data analysis. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations considered during the research process. By presenting a clear and replicable methodology, this chapter aims to ensure the reliability, validity, and scientific rigor of the study.

3.1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUAL JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Women’s integration into the labor market has progressed considerably over the past century, yet gender inequality persists globally, particularly in managerial and leadership positions. The concept of the glass ceiling emerged to describe the invisible yet powerful barriers that prevent women from reaching top-level roles, despite having the necessary qualifications. These barriers are especially pronounced in male-dominated organizational cultures and are often reinforced by stereotypes, limited mentorship opportunities, and institutional bias.

In international assignments, these obstacles are further compounded by expatriate status, creating what scholars refer to as a “double glass ceiling.”

Expatriate women often face dual discrimination—both as women and as foreigners—within unfamiliar cultural and legal environments (Linehan and Scullion 2001; Hutching, 2012). This is particularly salient in countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where the labor market is highly globalized, yet traditional gender norms and restricted pathways to leadership for non-nationals remain pervasive. According to UN DESA (2024), international migrants make up nearly 88% of the UAE's population, with expatriate women accounting for only 26.3% of this demographic. Despite their significant presence, their career advancement is often constrained by organizational opacity, limited networks, and inadequate institutional support.

Moreover, while much research has focused on objective career success such as promotions or salary increases, there is a growing recognition of the need to examine subjective career success (SCS), particularly in underrepresented groups. SCS refers to individuals' internal assessments of their career satisfaction, meaningfulness, growth, and alignment with personal values (Heslin 2005; Dries 2011). In contexts where structural barriers limit objective advancement, SCS becomes a more inclusive and relevant measure of career progress. For self-initiated expatriate (SIE) women—those who move abroad independently rather than via corporate assignment—this is especially true, as they often lack organizational sponsorship and must navigate foreign labor markets with fewer resources and less institutional scaffolding.

The UAE provides a unique context to explore these dynamics. On the one hand, it has undertaken significant policy reforms aimed at increasing gender equality in leadership and workforce participation. On the other hand, practical challenges such as opaque promotion criteria, limited work-life balance infrastructure, and cultural expectations around gender roles continue to shape women's career experiences. This duality makes the UAE an ideal environment to investigate how expatriate women perceive and negotiate career success under the constraints of the glass ceiling.

While a substantial body of literature has examined the glass ceiling in corporate settings and the career progression of women in general, limited attention has been given to expatriate women particularly those who are self-initiated and working in the Middle East. Most studies on gendered career barriers have focused on Western or home-country contexts, often overlooking the intersectional

challenges faced by women navigating both foreign cultures and organizational hierarchies. Moreover, the majority of career success research has centered on objective measures such as income and promotions, with relatively little focus on subjective evaluations, which are arguably more meaningful in constrained environments. To date, few studies have investigated how perceived glass ceiling barriers influence subjective career success among expatriate women in the UAE. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the unique career experiences and perceptions of SIE women operating in a culturally distinct, globalized labor market.

This study therefore addresses a critical gap in the literature by investigating how perceived glass ceiling barriers affect the subjective career success of expatriate women in the UAE. By focusing on SIEs, it contributes both to the expatriation literature and to broader discussions on gender, globalization, and career development in international contexts.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND MODEL

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design based on survey data to investigate the impact of glass ceiling barriers on the subjective career success of expatriate women in the UAE. The research is both descriptive and correlational in nature. It aims to explore not only the perceived presence of glass ceiling barriers but also how these perceptions relate to different dimensions of career success. Furthermore, the study compares these perceptions and outcomes across various demographic and job-related groups.

To guide the research process, the following research question has been formulated:

How do perceived glass ceiling barriers influence the subjective career success of expatriate women in the UAE, and do these perceptions and outcomes vary across different demographic and job-related characteristics?

The research is grounded in theoretical perspectives on gender inequality and career development, with a focus on how individual, organizational, and social barriers contribute to career limitations for women in expatriate settings. The study assumes that these glass ceiling factors negatively influence subjective experiences of career success, regarding its dimensions defined as authenticity, influence, recognition, and personal satisfaction.

A conceptual model was developed to illustrate the assumed relationships between variables. In this model, glass ceiling barriers (individual, organizational, and social) are independent variables, while subjective career success is the dependent variable, measured through multiple dimensions. Demographic and professional variables (e.g., education level, age, marital status, expat type) are treated as moderators or grouping variables to examine potential differences in perception.

Based on the research model, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

H1: Perceived glass ceiling significantly and negatively affects expatriate women's subjective career success.

H1a: Glass ceiling factors negatively affect recognition.

H1b: Glass ceiling factors negatively affect quality work.

H1c: Glass ceiling factors negatively affect meaningful work.

H1d: Glass ceiling factors negatively affect influence.

H1e: Glass ceiling factors negatively affect authenticity.

H1f: Glass ceiling factors negatively affect personal life integration.

H1g: Glass ceiling factors negatively affect growth and development.

H1h: Glass ceiling factors negatively affect career satisfaction.

H2: Perceived glass ceiling significantly differs across demographic and job-related variables among expatriate women.

H2a: Perceived glass ceiling significantly differs across educational level.

H2b: Perceived glass ceiling significantly differs across expat types.

H2c: Perceived glass ceiling significantly differs across marital status.

H2d: Perceived glass ceiling significantly differs across age groups.

H3: Perceived subjective career success significantly differs across demographic and job-related variables among expatriate women.

H3a: Subjective career success significantly differs across educational level.

H3b: Subjective career success significantly differs across expat types.

H3c: Subjective career success significantly differs across marital status.

H3d: Subjective career success significantly differs across age groups.

3.3. POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The target population of this study comprises expatriate women professionals working in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE has a highly diverse workforce, with expatriates making up nearly 88% of the total population, and women representing a significant portion of the foreign labor force, particularly in urban centers such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah. Although the exact number of expatriate women professionals is not publicly available, existing reports (ILO 2024; UN DESA 2025; World Bank 2024) indicate that women's labor force participation remains notably lower than that of men, especially in leadership and decision-making roles. This study specifically targets non-Emirati women employed in white-collar, professional, or managerial roles across various industries, including finance, education, healthcare, administration, and corporate services.

3.3.1. Sampling Method

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who meet the inclusion criteria relevant to the study's objectives. Additionally, snowball sampling was utilized to expand the participant pool by leveraging professional networks and referrals, which is particularly useful when studying niche populations such as expatriate women professionals.

A total of 521 responses were collected via an online survey distributed through email, LinkedIn, and professional networks. After a data cleaning process to remove incomplete or inconsistent responses, 464 valid responses remained and were used in the final analysis. The minimum required sample size was estimated based on a confidence level of 95%, a margin of error of 5%, and an assumed population proportion (p) of 0.5, which is commonly used when the population size is unknown. Using this approach, a minimum of approximately 384 participants was considered statistically acceptable for meaningful inference. Therefore, the final sample of 464 participants exceeds this threshold and is adequate for conducting the planned statistical analyses, including hypothesis testing and subgroup comparisons.

Participants were eligible for inclusion in the sample if they met the following criteria:

- Identified as female.
- Held expatriate status (non-citizen of the UAE).
- Currently living and working in the UAE.

- Employed in a professional, white-collar, or managerial role.
- Had at least one year of work experience in the UAE.

Although the sample may not be fully representative of the entire expatriate female population in the UAE, its diversity in terms of age, education, marital status, and professional background enables robust group comparisons and generalizable insights.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study were collected through a self-administered online questionnaire, designed to gather information on participants' demographic backgrounds, perceptions of glass ceiling barriers, and evaluations of their own career success. The survey was developed using an online platform and was distributed via email, LinkedIn, professional WhatsApp groups, and other online networks targeting expatriate women professionals in the UAE.

The data collection process was conducted over a period of six weeks, during which multiple reminders were sent to encourage participation. The survey was anonymous, and participation was completely voluntary. A brief introduction at the beginning of the questionnaire explained the purpose of the research, the expected time to complete the survey (approximately 8–10 minutes), and participants' rights regarding privacy and data confidentiality.

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and no personally identifiable information was collected. The study posed no physical or psychological risks to participants.

All data were used solely for academic research purposes. Ethical approval was obtained from Çankaya University Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee, under the protocol number E-90705970-050.99-177210, prior to conducting the study.

To ensure content validity, the survey questions were adapted from validated scales used in previous studies (detailed in Section 3.4), and a pilot test was conducted with a small group of expatriate women (n = 30). Based on the feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve clarity and comprehension. To protect participants' privacy, no identifying personal information (e.g., names, email

addresses) was collected. Data were stored securely in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researcher.

3.5. MEASUREMENT SCALES

In this study, the questionnaire consisted of three main parts: personal data, glass ceiling barriers, and subjective career success. All scale items were measured using standardized instruments adapted from previous validated research to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Except for the personal data, all scale items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The scales were reviewed by academic experts and pilot-tested before full deployment.

The following subsections explain each part of the measurement tool in detail.

3.5.1. Personal Data

The first section of the questionnaire collected demographic and job-related information from the participants to allow for subgroup analysis. The following variables were included:

- Age group (e.g., 25–34, 35–44, etc.)
- Marital status (e.g., Single, Married, Divorced)
- Education level (e.g., Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate)
- Nationality/Region (e.g., South Asia, Europe, MENA, etc.)
- Expatriate type (Self-initiated or Company-assigned)
- Sector of employment (e.g., Education, Healthcare, Finance)
- Position level (e.g., Entry-level, Mid-level, Senior/Managerial)
- Years of experience in the UAE

These variables were used to test hypotheses related to group differences in perceived glass ceiling barriers and career success.

3.5.2. Glass Ceiling Barriers Scale

To measure the perceived glass ceiling barriers experienced by expatriate women in the UAE, this study adapted the Glass Ceiling Scale developed and validated by Shaji et al. (2025). Originally designed for women employees in the

Indian banking sector, the scale demonstrates strong psychometric properties and is considered applicable across service sectors due to its multidimensional structure and universal relevance of the glass ceiling phenomenon.

The original scale consists of seven dimensions (Family Responsibilities, Discriminatory Promotion Practices, Employee Relations, Personality Traits, Lack of Organizational Support, Gender Stereotypes, Lack of Training), each capturing a unique aspect of the glass ceiling. For the purposes of this study, the items were slightly modified to reflect the cultural and professional context of expatriate women in the UAE, while preserving the core meanings and structure of the original scale.

A total of 27 items were used to measure the glass ceiling construct. Sample items include:

"Breaks due to childcare obstruct the career advancement of women." (family responsibilities)

"My co-workers treat me with respect." (employee relations)

"My current job performance is below the required standard." (personality traits)

"Women lack the enthusiasm in taking on challenging assignments." (gender stereotypes)

The original study by Shaji et al. (2025) reported high internal consistency for each subscale (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.624 to 0.899) and satisfactory construct validity confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis. Given its comprehensive structure and empirical support, the adapted version of the scale was deemed appropriate for assessing glass ceiling barriers among expatriate women in the UAE context.

3.5.3. Subjective Career Success Scale

To assess participants' perceptions of their own career success, this study employed the Subjective Career Success Scale (SCSS) developed by Shockley et al. (2015). Unlike traditional measures that rely solely on objective career outcomes (e.g., salary, promotions), the SCSS captures an individual's personal evaluation of their career progress and achievements across multiple dimensions.

The scale is grounded in the recognition that career success is multifaceted and subjective and should therefore reflect the values and experiences most meaningful to the individual. Shockley et al. (2015) developed the SCSS through

extensive qualitative and quantitative research, ensuring high content validity and cross-dimensional consistency.

The original SCSS includes eight dimensions, each represented by three items, for a total of 24 items'

- Authenticity – feeling true to oneself in one's career.
- Growth and Development – feeling of ongoing personal and professional growth.
- Influence – ability to impact others and one's organization.
- Meaningful Work – perceiving one's work as purposeful.
- Personal Life Integration – alignment between career and personal life.
- Quality Work – delivering high-standard work.
- Recognition – being acknowledged for one's contributions.
- Career Satisfaction – overall satisfaction with career trajectory

Sample items include:

"My career is consistent with my values." (Authenticity)

"I have opportunities to grow and develop in my career." (Growth and Development)

"I am recognized for the work that I do." (Recognition)

The original validation study demonstrated excellent psychometric properties. Cronbach's alpha values for the subscales ranged from 0.637 to 0.871, and factor analyses supported the eight-dimensional structure. The scale was deemed appropriate for use with an expatriate professional population in the UAE, given its generalizability across cultures and industries.

3.6. DATA ALAYSIS & FINDINGS

This section presents the procedures followed for data analysis and the findings obtained from the statistical examination of the survey responses. The analysis was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25 and SPSS AMOS version 22. A series of steps were followed to ensure the quality and integrity of the dataset, including data cleaning, coding, and reliability testing. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and to provide an overview of the key variables.

Inferential statistical methods, including correlation analysis, t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis, were applied to test the hypotheses formulated in Section 3.1.

The results are organized under the following sub-sections: data preparation, reliability and validity of the measurement instruments, descriptive statistics, and hypothesis testing.

3.6.1. Data Preparation

Prior to statistical analysis, the collected dataset underwent a rigorous data cleaning process. From the initial 521 responses, a total of 57 cases were excluded due to missing values, inconsistencies, or incomplete survey submissions. This resulted in a final sample of 464 valid responses, which were used for all subsequent analyses.

Reverse-coded items were adjusted accordingly. Variables were labeled, and composite scores were computed for each dimension of the glass ceiling and subjective career success scales.

Missing data were handled through listwise deletion, as the proportion of missing values was minimal and not expected to affect the results significantly. Outliers were checked using boxplots and Z-scores, and no significant outliers were identified that required removal.

Data were then screened for normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity, which are essential assumptions for parametric tests such as ANOVA and regression. Normal distribution of variables was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, as well as visual methods (histograms and Q-Q plots). Most variables were found to meet acceptable thresholds (skewness $< \pm 3$, kurtosis $< \pm 3$). The dataset was thus considered suitable for further statistical analysis.

3.6.2. Reliability

To ensure the internal consistency of the scales used in this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for each subdimension of the Glass Ceiling Barriers Scale and the Subjective Career Success Scale. According to widely accepted criteria, Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 indicates acceptable internal reliability (Field 2013), although values slightly below this threshold may be acceptable in exploratory research. The results are as follows:

For the Glass Ceiling Barriers Scale, Cronbach's Alpha value ranged from 0.624 to 0.899 across its seven dimensions.

- Family Responsibilities: $\alpha = 0.671$
- Discriminatory Promotion Practices: $\alpha = 0.899$
- Employee Relations: $\alpha = 0.752$
- Personality Traits: $\alpha = 0.740$
- Lack of Organizational Support: $\alpha = 0.709$
- Gender Stereotypes: $\alpha = 0.624$
- Lack of Training: $\alpha = 0.786$

These results indicate a generally high level of internal consistency, particularly in the Discriminatory Promotion Practices and Employee Relations subscales. While the Gender Stereotypes dimension had a slightly lower reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.624$), it is still within an acceptable range for social science research.

For the Subjective Career Success Scale, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.637 to 0.871, suggesting strong internal reliability:

- Recognition: $\alpha = 0.871$
- Quality Work: $\alpha = 0.805$
- Meaningful Work: $\alpha = 0.828$
- Influence: $\alpha = 0.858$
- Authenticity: $\alpha = 0.637$
- Personal Life Integration: $\alpha = 0.750$
- Growth and Development: $\alpha = 0.844$
- Career Satisfaction: $\alpha = 0.822$

These results confirm that the scale reliably measures various aspects of subjective career success. The highest internal consistency was observed in the Recognition and Influence dimensions, while Cronbach's Alpha value for Authenticity ($\alpha = 0.637$) fell slightly below the 0.70 threshold but is still acceptable for exploratory purposes. Overall, the results suggest that the measurement instruments used in this study are reliable and suitable for further analysis.

3.6.3. Validity

To evaluate the construct validity of the measurement model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted. The analysis aimed to assess how well the observed variables represented their respective latent constructs within the two primary scales used in this study: the Glass Ceiling Barriers Scale and the Subjective Career Success Scale. The CFA was conducted using AMOS, and model fit was evaluated based on several widely accepted indices.

Initially, the measurement model was tested without any modifications. Following the first round of analysis, the model demonstrated an acceptable but improvable fit. While the modified model shows improvement, the CFI (0.863) and GFI (0.825) remain slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.90, though within tolerable ranges often accepted in social science research with complex models (Hu and Bentler 1999). The RMSEA (0.050) and CMIN/DF (2.141) are within acceptable limits, suggesting adequate fit. Given the large sample size and model complexity, these fit indices are deemed acceptable for proceeding with hypothesis testing, though findings should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

A comparison of the initial and modified CFA models is presented in Table 8 below:

Table 8: CFA Initial and Modified Model Results

Fit Index	Acceptable Threshold	Initial Model	Modified Model
CMIN/DF	≤ 3.00	2.230	2.141
CFI	≥ 0.90 (≥ 0.95 ideal)	0.851	0.863
RMSEA	≤ 0.06 (≤ 0.05 ideal)	0.052	0.050
GFI	≥ 0.90 (≥ 0.80 tolerable)	0.819	0.825
p-value	> 0.05 (non-significant = good fit)*	.000	.000

**Note: While a non-significant p-value is typically preferred, large sample sizes often result in significant χ^2 values even in well-fitting models.*

As shown in the table, the modified model demonstrates a notable improvement across all fit indices. The CMIN/DF ratio decreased from 2.230 to 2.141, remaining well within the acceptable threshold of 3.00 (Kline 1998). CFI and GFI showed slight increases, and RMSEA decreased from 0.052 to 0.050, indicating a better approximation of the model to the population covariance matrix. Although

the p-value remained significant due to the large sample size (n = 464), this result is expected and not uncommon in social science research (Gürbüz and Şahin 2018). Based on these improvements, the final CFA model is considered to demonstrate sufficient construct validity, confirming that the observed variables adequately reflect their respective latent constructs and justifying the use of the model in subsequent hypothesis testing. A visual representation of the final CFA model, including standardized factor loadings and latent constructs, is presented in Figure 4.

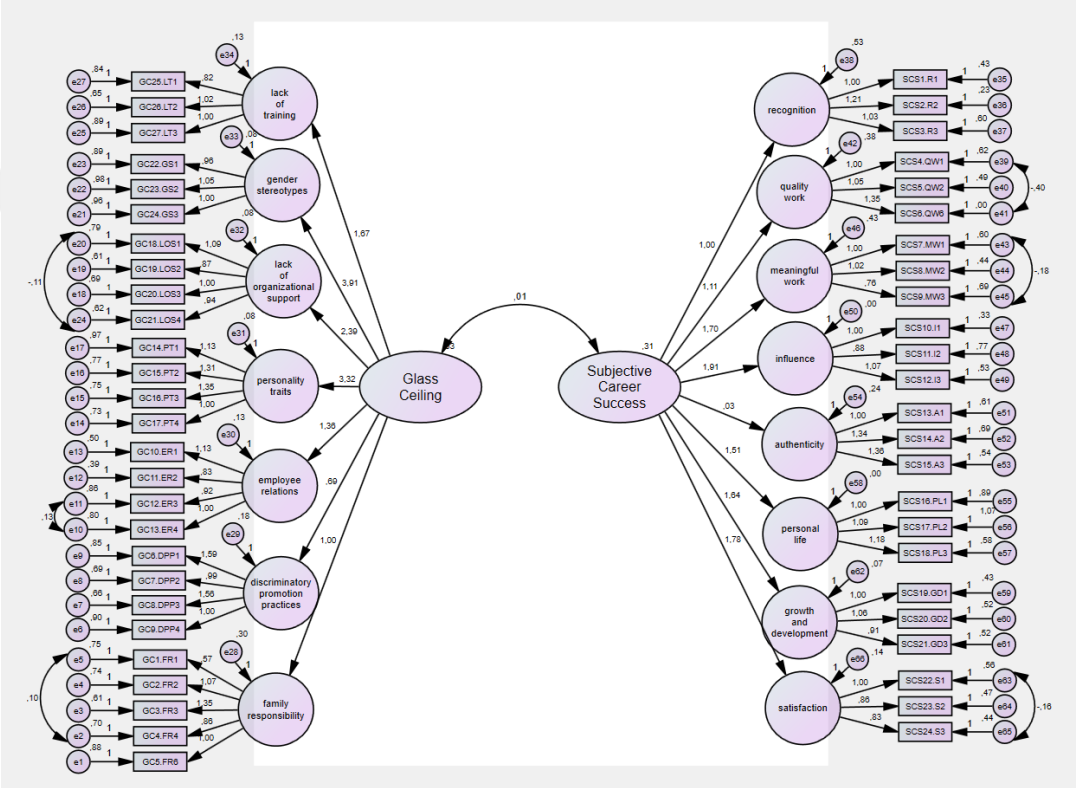

Figure 4: The Final Construct of CFA Model

3.6.4. Descriptive Analysis

This section presents the demographic profile of the participants through descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages.

Understanding the demographic distribution is essential for interpreting the findings within the context of the expatriate women population in the UAE. The analysis includes variables such as age, marital status, number of children, and additional professional characteristics which will be discussed in the following subsections.

Participants were distributed across four age groups. As shown in Table 9, the largest portion of respondents (45.9%) was aged 30–39, followed by 40–49 (24.6%) and 20–29 (23.9%). Only a small percentage (5.6%) was in the 50–59 age group. This indicates that the sample primarily consists of early- to mid-career professionals, which aligns with the age range commonly associated with expatriate mobility and active career development.

In terms of marital status, 58% of the respondents were married, making it the dominant category. This was followed by single participants (28%), and those identifying as partnered (7.3%), divorced (4.3%), and separated (2.4%). The diversity in marital status reflects the range of life situations experienced by expatriate women, which may influence their career experiences and perceptions of workplace barriers.

Nearly half of the participants (47.2%) reported having no children, while 28.2% had one child, 19.4% had two, and 5.2% had three children. These findings suggest that a significant portion of the sample consists of child-free professionals, which is an important consideration when analyzing the relationship between family responsibilities and career advancement.

Table 9: Descriptive Analysis for Age Groups, Marital Status and Number of Child

		Frequency	Percent
Age Groups	20-29	111	23,9
	30-39	213	45,9
	40-49	114	24,6
	50-59	26	5,6
Marital Status	single	130	28
	married	269	58
	separated	11	2,4
	partner	34	7,3
	divorced	20	4,3
Number of Child	none	219	47,20
	1	131	28,2
	2	90	19,4
	3	24	5,2
Total		464	100

In addition to demographic factors, the professional background and educational qualifications of participants were analyzed to provide a more comprehensive profile. These characteristics offer important context for understanding the career trajectories and experiences of expatriate women in the UAE.

As shown in Table 10, most participants (59.9%) identified as Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs), while the remaining 40.1% were Assigned Expatriates (AEs). This distribution indicates that most of the women in the sample independently pursued expatriate employment opportunities, rather than being sent abroad by an employer. This distinction is particularly relevant to the glass ceiling literature, as previous research suggests that SIEs may face different types and levels of career barriers compared to AEs.

A large proportion of respondents (60.1%) held a bachelor's degree, followed by master's degree holders (11.6%) and high school graduates (16.4%). Only a small percentage of participants reported PhD degrees (1.5%), associate degrees (4.3%), or primary school education (6.0%). These results indicate that the sample consists predominantly of well-educated women, with over 70% holding undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, which reflects the professional nature of expatriate roles in the UAE labor market.

Regarding time spent abroad, the majority of respondents (53.7%) reported having lived in the UAE between 1–5 years, followed by 21.8% who had arrived less than a year ago. Meanwhile, 15.9% had between 6–10 years of expatriate experience, and only a small proportion (8.6%) had been expatriates for more than 10 years. This suggests that the sample largely consists of relatively recent expatriates, which may affect their adaptation processes and perceptions of career barriers in the host country.

Table 10: Descriptive Analysis for Expat Type, Education Level and Total Length of Expat

		Frequency	Percent
Expat Type	Self-Initiated	278	59,9
	Assigned	186	40,1
Education	Primary School	28	6,0
	High School	76	16,4
	Associate degree	20	4,3
	Bachelor's Degree	279	60,1
	Master's Degree	54	11,6
	PhD	7	1,5
Total Length of Expat	Less than 1 year	101	21,8
	1-5 years	249	53,7
	6-10 years	74	15,9
	11-15 years	34	7,3
	16-20 years	6	1,3
	Total	464	100

3.6.5. Hypothesis Testing

Before conducting inferential statistical analyses to test the research hypotheses, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the sub-dimensions of glass ceiling barriers and subjective career success.

This preliminary step helps to identify potential associations among variables and assess whether the assumptions for further analyses such as regression are met. The correlation matrix is presented in Table 11, along with the mean scores of each variable. The results show several statistically significant correlations that are consistent with the theoretical framework of the study.

Discriminatory Promotion Practices showed strong, positive correlations with multiple subjective career success indicators, such as Career Satisfaction (r = .759), Growth & Development (r = .722), and Personal Life Integration (r = .719). These positive r-values are due to the directionality of scoring—where higher barrier scores reflect more perceived obstacles. Thus, relationships indicate that as perceived discrimination increases, career success decreases, aligning with theoretical expectations. Lack of Organizational Support and Lack of Training were also

significantly correlated with several career success dimensions, particularly Recognition, Quality Work, and Influence (r values ranging from .29 to .61, $p < .01$). Interestingly, Family Responsibilities showed no significant correlations with most career success outcomes, suggesting that this factor may be less influential for this expatriate sample—possibly due to their higher autonomy or support systems. The Authenticity dimension was largely uncorrelated with both glass ceiling factors and other success indicators, except for a weak relationship with Gender Stereotypes ($r = .113$, $p < .05$), indicating that it may operate as a more independent construct in the model.

Overall, the results of the correlation analysis provide preliminary support for the hypothesized negative relationship between perceived glass ceiling barriers and subjective career success. These relations justify proceeding with regression and group comparison analyses to test the formulated hypotheses in more detail.

Table 11: Correlation Matrix for Variables in Research Model

	M	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1- Family Responsibilities	3,83	1														
2- Discriminatory Promotion Practices	3,03	,011	1													
3- Employee Relations	3,64	-,052	,376**	1												
4- Personality Traits	2,19	,179**	-,095*	-,06	1											
5- Lack of Organizational Support	3,47	-,022	,265**	,85**	-,008	1										
6- Gender Stereotypes	2,34	,163**	-,015	-,003	,634**	,037	1									
7- Lack of Training	3,13	-,030	,304**	,525**	-,007	,612**	,003	1								
8- Recognition	3,56	-,067	-,449**	,723**	-,034	,551**	-,033	,426**	1							
9- Quality Work	3,47	-,118*	-,634**	,641**	-,114*	,464**	-,068	,509**	,768**	1						
10- Meaningful Work	2,97	-,109*	-,660**	,378**	-,086	,217**	-,031	,363**	,437**	,648**	1					
11- Influence	3,22	-,105*	,-746**	,414**	-,141**	,299**	-,068	,380**	,495**	,686**	,740**	1				
12- Authenticity	3,81	-,023	,001	,017	,042	,030	,113*	,032	,016	-,022	,004	,026	1			
13- Personal Life Integration	3,10	-,031	-,719**	,366**	-,090	,262**	-,017	,363**	,454**	,617**	,714**	,806**	,058	1		
14- Growth & Development	3,39	-,062	-,722**	,471**	-,089	,334**	-,012	,366**	,534**	,684**	,647**	,805**	,025	,748**	1	
15- Career Satisfaction	3,35	-,060	-,759**	,391**	-,082	,300**	-,031	,295**	,498**	,630**	,652**	,813**	,057	,765**	,809**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

3.6.5.1. Testing the Relationship Between Glass Ceiling and Subjective Career Success (H1a–H1h)

To examine the impact of glass ceiling barriers on expatriate women's subjective career success, a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted. In the initial phase, all sub-dimensions of the glass ceiling were simultaneously entered into the model. However, variables that were not statistically significant were gradually removed to improve model fitness and clarity. The final regression models retained only those predictors that demonstrated a meaningful contribution to the dependent variable and met multicollinearity assumptions.

Regarding the Recognition dimension of subjective career success (H1a), the final regression model which shown in Table 12 was statistically significant and explained a substantial proportion of the variance ($R^2 = .575$, $F_{(4, 459)} = 155.505$, $p < .001$). Among the predictors, Employee Relations had the strongest positive effect, while Lack of Organizational Support had a significant negative effect. Discriminatory Promotion Practices and Lack of Training were also statistically significant predictors. Negative coefficients for barrier dimensions indicate that higher perceived barriers are associated with lower career success, as theoretically expected. These findings support Hypothesis H1a and indicate that perceived glass ceiling barriers meaningfully influence expatriate women's experience of recognition in the workplace.

Table 12: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for H1a

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.	Tol.	VIF
(Constant)	,166	,154		1,074	,283		
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	-,166	,031	-,178	-5,293	,000	,816	1,225
Employee Relations	1,023	,075	,824	13,563	,000	,251	3,989
Lack of Organizational Support	-,337	,083	-,257	-4,049	,000	,230	4,340
Lack of Training	,109	,044	-,096	2,453	,015	,602	1,661

Dependent Variable: Recognition

R^2= 0,575 $F_{(4,459)}$ =155,505 p=0,000

To test Hypothesis H1b, which posits that glass ceiling barriers negatively affect the quality of work experienced by expatriate women, a multiple regression analysis was performed. Similar to the previous model, all sub-dimensions of the glass ceiling were initially included, and non-significant variables were excluded through a stepwise procedure to improve parsimony and interpretability. The final model shown in Table 13 retained only the significant predictors.

The final regression model predicting quality work was statistically significant ($F_{(5,\ 458)} = 171.159$, $p < .001$), explaining 65.1% of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = .651$). Among the predictors, Employee Relations had a strong positive effect, indicating that better interpersonal relations in the workplace are closely associated with higher perceived quality of work. Discriminatory Promotion Practices and Lack of Training also showed significant negative coefficients, which—due to the directional scoring of the variable suggested that higher perceptions of these barriers are linked to lower perceived quality. In contrast, Lack of Organizational Support significantly and negatively predicted quality of work, further highlighting the detrimental impact of institutional-level obstacles. Finally, Family Responsibilities also had a small but statistically significant negative effect. These results offer robust support for Hypothesis H1b, confirming that glass ceiling factors are meaningful predictors of how expatriate women evaluate the quality of their work experiences.

Table 13: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for H1b

Variables	**B**	**SE**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Tol.**	**VIF**
(Constant)	,820	,205		3,998	,000		
Family Responsibilities	-,130	,040	-,089	-3,225	,001	,993	1,007
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	-,352	,027	-,405	-13,258	,000	,815	1,228
Employee Relations	,759	,064	,654	11,834	,000	,249	4,010
Lack of Organizational Support	-,443	,071	-,361	-6,275	,000	,230	4,352
Lack of Training	,276	,038	,261	7,337	,000	,602	1,662

Dependent Variable: Quality Work

R^2= 0,651 $F_{(5,458)}$ =171,159 p=0,000

To examine the effect of glass ceiling barriers on the meaningfulness of work as perceived by expatriate women, a multiple regression analysis was conducted in line with Hypothesis H1c. As in previous models, all sub-dimensions were initially included, and non-significant variables were removed step by step to construct a final model with statistically significant predictors.

The final regression model shown in Table 14 was significant at a high level ($F_{(5, 458)} = 98.544$, $p < .001$), accounting for 51.8% of the variance in meaningful work ($R^2 = .518$). The Discriminatory Promotion Practices, which had a substantial negative coefficient, indicates that higher perceptions of discriminatory barriers are associated with lower perceived meaningfulness in work. Employee Relations also contributed positively, suggesting that strong interpersonal support increases employees' sense of purpose and value at work. On the other hand, both Family Responsibilities and Lack of Training had statistically significant negative effects, indicating that greater responsibilities outside the workplace and insufficient professional development opportunities diminish the meaningfulness attributed to one's work. These findings support H1c, showing that various facets of the glass ceiling significantly shape how expatriate women experience meaning in their professional roles.

Table 14: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for H1c

Variables	**B**	**SE**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Tol.**	**VIF**
(Constant)	1,118	,278		4,014	,000		
Family Responsibilities	-,163	,055	-,097	-2,978	,003	,993	1,007
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	-,554	,036	-,552	-15,356	,000	,815	1,228
Employee Relations	,512	,087	,382	5,888	,000	,249	4,010
Lack of Training	-,570	,096	-,402	-5,944	,000	,230	4,352

Dependent Variable: Meaningful Work

R^2= 0,518 $F_{(5,458)}$ =98,544 p=0,000

To assess the effect of glass ceiling barriers on the influence dimension of subjective career success, a multiple regression analysis was conducted as part of the H1d hypothesis testing. The model was built by initially including all relevant sub-

dimensions of the glass ceiling and finalizing it after removing non-significant variables.

The final model which shown in Table 15 was statistically significant ($F_{(5, 458)} = 140.202$, $p < .001$) and explained 60.5% of the variance in perceived influence ($R^2 = .605$). Among the predictors, Discriminatory Promotion Practices had the most substantial effect, emerging as a strong negative predictor. This result implies that the more participants perceive discriminatory barriers in promotions, the less influence they feel they have in their careers. Additionally, Family Responsibilities also had a small but statistically significant negative impact, supporting the idea that balancing multiple roles may hinder perceptions of workplace influence.

Further, Lack of Organizational Support negatively predicted influence, suggesting that an absence of institutional support erodes women's ability to feel impactful in their roles. On the other hand, both Employee Relations and Lack of Training were found to be significant positive predictors, indicating that interpersonal relationships and development opportunities are positively associated with a sense of influence. Overall, the findings support Hypothesis H1d, confirming that glass ceiling barriers significantly affect the perceived level of influence among expatriate women in the UAE.

Table 15: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for H1d

Variables	**B**	**SE**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Tol.**	**VIF**
(Constant)	1,006	,250		4,024	,000		
Family Responsibilities	-,168	,049	-,100	-3,408	,001	,993	1,007
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	-,658	,032	-,661	-20,310	,000	,815	1,228
Employee Relations	,274	,078	,206	3,500	,001	,249	4,010
Lack of Organizational Support	-,215	,086	-,153	-2,500	,013	,230	4,352
Lack of Training	,196	,046	,162	4,275	,000	,602	1,662

Dependent Variable: Influence

R^2= 0,605 $F_{(5,458)}$ =140,202 p=0,000

To test Hypothesis H1e, which proposes that glass ceiling factors negatively affect authenticity in career experiences, a simple linear regression analysis was

conducted. In this model, Gender Stereotypes was the only significant predictor retained for the authenticity dimension.

The overall model shown in Table 16 was statistically significant ($F_{(1, 462)} = 5.940$, $p = .015$) but explained a very small portion of the variance ($R^2 = .013$), indicating limited predictive power. The coefficient for Gender Stereotypes was statistically significant ($\beta = .113$, $p = .015$), suggesting a weak but positive association between perceptions of gender stereotypes and authenticity. However, since the explained variance is minimal, this result should be interpreted with caution. Although the model supports H1e at a statistically significant level, the weak explanatory power implies that gender-based perceptions alone are not sufficient to predict authenticity in expatriate women's career experiences.

Table 16: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for H1e

Variables	**B**	**SE**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Tol.**	**VIF**
(Constant)	3,596	,096		37,381	,000		
Gender Stereotypes	,093	,038	,113	2,437	,015	1,000	1,000

Dependent Variable: Authenticity

R^2= 0,013 $F_{(1,462)}$ =5,940 p=0,015

To evaluate Hypothesis H1f, which suggests that glass ceiling barriers negatively affect personal life integration, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. After excluding non-significant variables, the final model retained four key predictors: Discriminatory Promotion Practices, Employee Relations, Lack of Organizational Support, and Lack of Training.

The regression model which shown in Table 17 was statistically significant ($F_{(4, 459)} = 138.350$, $p < .001$), accounting for 54.7% of the variance in personal life integration ($R^2 = .547$). Among the predictors, Discriminatory Promotion Practices was the strongest negative predictor, indicating that perceived inequity in promotion processes is closely linked to decreased harmony between professional and personal life domains. Employee Relations and Lack of Training also positively contributed to the model, though to a lesser extent. On the other hand, Lack of Organizational Support had a significant negative effect, suggesting that a lack of institutional

support hinders expatriate women's ability to balance work and personal responsibilities effectively.

These findings support H1f, confirming that perceptions of glass ceiling barriers significantly influence how well expatriate women integrate their professional and personal lives.

Table 17: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for H1f

Variables	**B**	**SE**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Tol.**	**VIF**
(Constant)	,617	,160		3,857	,000		
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	-,603	,033	-,645	-18,550	,000	,816	1,225
Employee Relations	,202	,078	,162	2,584	,010	,251	3,989
Lack of Organizational Support	-,204	,086	-,155	-2,367	,018	,230	4,340
Lack of Training	,200	,046	,176	4,349	,000	,602	1,661

Dependent Variable: Personal Life Integration

R^2= 0,547 $F_{(4,459)}$ =138,350 p=0,000

To test Hypothesis H1g, which states that glass ceiling barriers negatively affect expatriate women's growth and development, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The final model included five predictor variables: Family Responsibilities, Discriminatory Promotion Practices, Employee Relations, Lack of Organizational Support, and Lack of Training.

The model shown in Table 18 was statistically significant ($F_{(5, 458)} = 127.770$, $p < .001$) and explained 58.2% of the variance in growth and development perceptions ($R^2 = .582$). Among the predictors, Discriminatory Promotion Practices had the strongest negative effect, suggesting that perceived unfairness in promotion systems is closely related to limited opportunities for personal and professional growth. Employee Relations also significantly contributed to the outcome, emphasizing the role of workplace relationships in fostering development.

In contrast, Lack of Organizational Support negatively predicted growth and development, indicating that insufficient support mechanisms hinder career advancement. Lack of Training showed a small but meaningful positive effect, likely reflecting its direct relevance to development opportunities.

Family Responsibilities, however, did not reach statistical significance (p = .084), suggesting it has no substantial direct impact within this model. Overall, the results provide strong support for H1g, affirming that key elements of the glass ceiling significantly affect perceptions of growth and development among expatriate women.

Table 18: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for H1g

Variables	**B**	**SE**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**	**Tol.**	**VIF**
(Constant)	,981	,233		4,214	,000		
Family Responsibilities	-,079	,046	-,052	-1,732	,084	,993	1,007
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	-,549	,030	-,609	-18,216	,000	,815	1,228
Employee Relations	,407	,073	,338	5,591	,000	,249	4,010
Lack of Organizational Support	-,239	,080	-,188	-2,984	,003	,230	4,352
Lack of Training	,128	,043	,117	2,998	,003	,602	1,662

Dependent Variable: Growth and development

R^2= 0,582 $F_{(5,458)}$ =127,770 p=0,000

To assess Hypothesis H1h, which posits that glass ceiling barriers negatively affect career satisfaction, a multiple regression analysis was performed. In the final model, three predictors were retained: Family Responsibilities, Discriminatory Promotion Practices, and Employee Relations.

The model was shown in Table 19 statistically significant ($F_{(3, 460)}$ = 222.982, p < .001), explaining 59.3% of the variance in career satisfaction (R^2 = .593). Among the predictors, Discriminatory Promotion Practices was by far the strongest and most significant contributor, indicating that perceived unfairness in promotion is closely and negatively linked to women's satisfaction with their careers. Employee Relations also showed a positive and statistically significant association, suggesting that strong interpersonal dynamics in the workplace enhance satisfaction. On the other hand, Family Responsibilities had a small but significant negative effect, implying that increased domestic responsibilities slightly reduced career satisfaction.

Taken together, these findings provide solid support for H1h, confirming that several dimensions of the glass ceiling significantly impact on the expatriate women's satisfaction with their professional lives.

Table 19: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results for H1h

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.	Tol.	VIF
(Constant)	1,261	,223		5,650	,000		
Family Responsibilities	-,093	,045	-,062	-2,077	,038	,996	1,004
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	-,638	,029	-,715	-22,246	,000	,858	1,166
Employee Relations	,141	,038	,118	3,680	,000	,855	1,169

Dependent Variable: Career Satisfaction

R^2= 0,593 $F_{(3,460)}$ =222,982 p=0,000

Table 20 summarizes the regression results for Hypothesis 1, which examined the impact of glass ceiling barriers on eight dimensions of subjective career success. The findings reveal that Discriminatory Promotion Practices emerged as the most powerful and consistent predictor, negatively affecting all career success dimensions except Authenticity. Employee Relations demonstrated positive associations across most outcomes, indicating that supportive workplace relationships buffer against career barriers. Lack of Organizational Support and Lack of Training also significantly impacted multiple dimensions. Notably, Family Responsibilities showed weaker effects than anticipated, appearing significant in only three models. The Authenticity dimension (H1e) received minimal support, with an R^2 of only .013, suggesting that perceived authenticity operates largely independently from glass ceiling barriers. Overall, seven of the eight hypotheses (H1a–H1d, H1f–H1h) were strongly supported, with variance explained ranging from 51.8% to 65.1%, confirming that glass ceiling barriers substantially shape expatriate women's subjective career success in the UAE.

Table 20: Summary of Regression Analyses Testing H1 (N = 464)

DV	Key Predictors (β)	R^2	F	Result
Recognition (H1a)	ER (.824), DPP (-.178), LOS (-.257), LT (-.096)	.575	155.51	✓
Quality Work (H1b)	FR (-.089), ER (.654), DPP (-.405), LOS (-.361), LT (.261)	.651	171.16	✓
Meaningful Work (H1c)	FR (-.097), DPP (-.552), ER (.382), LT (-.402)	.518	98.54	✓
Influence (H1d)	FR (-.100), DPP (-.661), ER (.206), LOS (-.153), LT (.162)	.605	140.20	✓
Authenticity (H1e)	GS (.113)	.013	5.94	±
Personal Life (H1f)	DPP (-.645), LOS (-.155), LT (.176), ER (.162)	.547	138.35	✓
Growth & Dev. (H1g)	FR (-.052), DPP (-.609), ER (.338), LOS (-.188), LT (.177)	.582	127.77	✓
Career Satisfaction (H1h)	DPP (-.715), ER (.118), FR (-.062)	.593	222.98	✓

Note. DPP = Discriminatory Promotion Practices; ER = Employee Relations; LOS = Lack of Organizational Support; LT = Lack of Training; FR = Family Responsibilities; GS = Gender Stereotypes. ✓ = Supported (full & partially); ± = Minimal support.

3.6.5.2. Differences in Glass Ceiling Perceptions Across Demographic Groups (H2a–H2d)

To examine whether expatriate women's perceptions of the glass ceiling vary across demographic and job-related groups, a series of independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA analyses were conducted. This section specifically tests hypotheses H2a through H2d, which explore differences in perceived glass ceiling barriers based on education level (H2a), expat type (H2b), marital status (H2c), and age group (H2d). The aim is to determine whether structural and perceptual inequalities are experienced differently by women depending on their demographic background. The following subsections present the statistical results and interpretations for each hypothesis.

The results of the one-way ANOVA analysis shown in Table 21 revealed that perceptions regarding certain dimensions of the glass ceiling significantly differed across education levels. Specifically, significant differences were found in three dimensions: Family Responsibilities ($F_{(5, 458)} = 7.499$, $p < .001$), Personality Traits ($F_{(5, 458)} = 2.600$, $p = .025$), and Gender Stereotypes ($F_{(5, 458)} = 3.239$, $p = .007$).

Post-hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD test indicated that for the Family Responsibilities dimension, individuals with a bachelor's degree reported significantly higher perceptions of this barrier compared to those with a primary ($p = .033$) or high school education ($p < .001$). Similarly, for the Personality Traits dimension, master's degree holders reported significantly lower scores compared to bachelor's degree holders ($p = .038$), suggesting that individuals with higher education may perceive personality-based explanations for career barriers as less relevant. Regarding Gender Stereotypes, the analysis revealed that master's degree holders perceived significantly fewer barriers compared to those with a high school ($p = .020$) or bachelor's degree ($p = .005$) background.

In contrast, no statistically significant differences were observed across education levels for the dimensions of Discriminatory Promotion Practices, Employee Relations, Lack of Organizational Support, or Lack of Training, indicating that perceptions on these dimensions appear to be relatively consistent regardless of educational attainment.

Table 21: ANOVA Results for H2a

Variables	**F $_{(5,458)}$**	**Sig.**
Family Responsibilities	7,499	,000
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	,367	,871
Employee Relations	1,113	,353
Personality Traits	2,600	,025
Lack of Organizational Support	,321	,900
Gender Stereotypes	3,239	,007
Lack of Training	1,327	,251

To test Hypothesis H2b, which posits significant differences in glass ceiling perceptions between self-initiated and assigned expatriates, independent samples t-tests were conducted across seven dimensions. The results shown in Table 22 indicate no statistically significant differences in any of the dimensions based on expatriate type. Specifically, perceptions of Family Responsibilities did not differ

between self-initiated and assigned expatriates, t (462) = 0.47, p = .639, nor did perceptions of Discriminatory Promotion Practices, t (462) = 1.26, p = .207.

Similarly, no significant differences were found in Employee Relations, Personality Traits, Lack of Organizational Support, Gender Stereotypes, or Lack of Training (all p > .05). These findings suggest that both self-initiated and assigned expatriate women generally share similar perceptions of glass ceiling barriers in the organizational context assessed.

Table 22: T-test Results for H2b

Dimensions	**t**	**df**	**p**	**Mean Difference**
Family Responsibilities	0.47	462	.639	0.030
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	1.26	462	.207	0.136
Employee Relations	-0.09	462	.925	-0.008
Personality Traits	0.20	462	.845	0.016
Lack of Organizational Support	-0.33	462	.742	-0.025
Gender Stereotypes	0.28	462	.778	0.025
Lack of Training	-0.82	462	.410	-0.073

In order to examine whether perceptions of the glass ceiling differ based on marital status (H2c), a series of one-way ANOVA analyses were conducted for each dimension of the glass ceiling. The results shown in Table 23 indicate that there were no statistically significant differences in perceptions across marital status groups for any of the seven dimensions. Specifically, perceptions related to family responsibilities (p = .967), discriminatory promotion practices (p = .110), employee relations (p = .314), personality traits (p = .140), lack of organizational support (p = .291), gender stereotypes (p = .208), and lack of training (p = .135) did not vary significantly based on whether participants were single, married, separated, partnered, or divorced. Although a few comparisons approached significance—particularly in the dimension of discriminatory promotion practices, post-hoc Tukey tests did not reveal any consistent or statistically meaningful pairwise differences between specific marital status groups. Therefore, the hypothesis suggesting that marital status plays a role in shaping perceptions of the glass ceiling (H2c) was not supported by the data.

Table 23: ANOVA Results for H2c

Variables	$F_{(5,458)}$	Sig.
Family Responsibilities	,148	,967
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	1,899	,110
Employee Relations	1,191	,314
Personality Traits	1,741	,140
Lack of Organizational Support	1,244	,291
Gender Stereotypes	1,478	,208
Lack of Training	1,764	,135

To test Hypothesis H2d, which explored whether perceptions of the glass ceiling differ according to participants' age groups, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for each of the seven glass ceiling dimensions. The analysis shown in Table 24, revealed statistically significant differences across age groups in the dimensions of Family Responsibilities ($F_{(5,458)}$ = 4.863, p = .002), Employee Relations ($F_{(5,458)}$ = 3.307, p = .020), Personality Traits ($F_{(5,458)}$ = 3.235, p = .022), Lack of Organizational Support ($F_{(5,458)}$ = 4.397, p = .005), and Lack of Training ($F_{(5,458)}$ = 3.389, p = .018). However, no significant differences were observed for Discriminatory Promotion Practices (p = .346) or Gender Stereotypes (p = .265).

Post hoc Tukey tests showed that: For Family Responsibilities, participants aged 40–49 reported significantly higher perceptions compared to those aged 20–29 (p = .013) and 30–39 (p = .004). Regarding Lack of Organizational Support, those aged 30–39 perceived significantly higher barriers compared to the 20–29 group (p = .031). Although the omnibus tests for Employee Relations, Personality Traits, and Lack of Training were significant, Tukey post hoc comparisons did not yield statistically significant pairwise differences at the p < .05 level—suggesting that while age-related variation exists, the differences between specific groups were not strong enough to reach significance in pairwise terms. Overall, these findings support H2d, indicating that age group is a differentiating factor in perceptions of certain glass ceiling dimensions, particularly Family Responsibilities and Lack of Organizational Support.

Table 24: ANOVA Results for H2d

Variables	$F_{(5,458)}$	Sig.
Family Responsibilities	4,863	,002
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	1,106	,346
Employee Relations	3,307	,020
Personality Traits	3,235	,022
Lack of Organizational Support	4,397	,005
Gender Stereotypes	1,326	,265
Lack of Training	3,389	,018

3.6.5.3. Differences in Subjective Career Success Across Demographic Groups (H3a–H3d)

To test Hypothesis H3a, which examines whether perceptions of meaningful work outcomes differ by education level, a series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted for each of the dependent variables related to meaningful work outcomes. The results shown in Table 25 revealed that only the perception of "Recognition" significantly differed across education levels ($F_{(5,458)} = 2.438$, $p = .034$). All other dimensions—including Quality Work, Meaningful Work, Influence, Authenticity, Personal Life Integration, Growth & Development, and Career Satisfaction—did not show statistically significant differences across educational groups ($p > .05$ for all). These findings provide partial support for H3a, suggesting that education level may influence how individuals perceive being recognized at work, but do not significantly shape perceptions of other meaningful work outcomes.

Table 25: ANOVA Results for H3a

Variables	$F_{(5,458)}$	Sig.
Recognition	2,438	,034
Quality Work	1,633	,150
Meaningful Work	,778	,566
Influence	,743	,591
Authenticity	,674	,643
Personal Life Integration	1,080	,371
Growth & Development	,845	,518
Career Satisfaction	,553	,736

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in subjective career success outcomes between self-initiated and assigned expatriates. The results shown in Table 26 revealed no statistically significant differences between self-initiated and assigned expatriate participants in any of the outcomes assessed, including Recognition, Quality Work, Meaningful Work, Influence, Authenticity, Personal Life Integration, Growth & Development, and Career Satisfaction (all p-values > .05). These findings do not support Hypothesis H3b, suggesting that perceptions of subjective career success outcomes are not significantly influenced by expatriate type within this sample.

Table 26: T-test Analysis Results for H3b

Variables	t	Df	p	Mean Difference
Recognition	-0.904	462	.366	-0.09071
Quality Work	-0.128	462	.898	-0.01205
Meaningful Work	0.463	462	.644	0.05013
Influence	0.314	462	.754	0.03369
Authenticity	-0.284	462	.777	-0.02041
Personal Life Integration	0.805	462	.421	0.08111
Growth & Development	0.291	462	.771	0.02833
Career Satisfaction	-0.148	462	.882	-0.01429

Under Hypothesis H3c, the goal was to investigate whether individuals' perceptions of meaningful work outcomes varied significantly across different marital status groups. The one-way ANOVA results in Table 27 showed that recognition and quality of work perceptions significantly differed across marital status categories ($p = .007$ and $p = .024$, respectively). No statistically significant differences were found in other meaningful work outcomes such as meaningfulness, influence, authenticity, personal life integration, growth and development, or career satisfaction. To further explore these significant findings, Tukey post hoc tests were conducted. For recognition, a statistically significant difference was observed between married and partnered individuals, where married participants reported higher recognition compared to those in partnerships ($p = .041$). For quality of work, although overall group differences were significant, none of the pairwise comparisons reached statistical significance at the .05 level, with the closest being again between married and partnered individuals ($p = .072$), indicating a marginal trend.

In summary, H3c is partially supported. Recognition clearly varies across marital status, particularly between married and partnered individuals. However, differences in other meaningful work outcomes were either nonsignificant or only suggestive.

Table 27: ANOVA Results for H3c

Variables	**$F_{(5,458)}$**	**Sig.**
Recognition	3,531	,007
Quality Work	2,842	,024
Meaningful Work	1,720	,144
Influence	1,423	,225
Authenticity	,238	,917
Personal Life Integration	,592	,669
Growth & Development	1,081	,365
Career Satisfaction	,910	,458

ANOVA results for H3d shown in Table 28 revealed significant differences across age groups in Recognition ($F_{(5,458)} = 3.649$, $p = .013$) and Quality Work ($F_{(5,458)} = 2.677$, $p = .047$). Tukey post hoc tests showed that Recognition significantly differed between the 40–49 and 50–59 age groups ($p = .026$), with the older group reporting higher recognition. For Quality Work, although ANOVA indicated a significant overall difference, not pairwise comparisons reached significance in the post hoc test, suggesting that the group-level difference was not driven by a specific age comparison.

Thus, only Recognition showed a clear, interpretable difference by age group, partially supporting H3d.

Table 28: ANOVA Results for H3d

Variables	**$F_{(5,458)}$**	**Sig.**
Recognition	3,649	,013
Quality Work	2,677	,047
Meaningful Work	2,083	,102
Influence	2,408	,067
Authenticity	1,986	,115
Personal Life Integration	1,826	,142
Growth & Development	2,036	,108
Career Satisfaction	2,205	,087

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The empirical findings presented in Chapter III provide substantial evidence regarding the relationships between glass ceiling barriers and subjective career success among expatriate women in the UAE. This chapter interprets these findings within the theoretical frameworks established in Chapter II, examining their implications for career development theory, organizational practice, and policy in international contexts. The discussion explores which hypotheses were supported, what patterns emerged across demographic groups, and how these results compare to existing literature on gender barriers and expatriate careers. Following the discussion of findings, the chapter addresses study limitations, proposes directions for future research, outlines practical implications for organizations and policymakers, summarizes the study's contributions to literature, and concludes with reflections on the broader significance of this research for understanding and addressing gender inequality in global labor markets.

4.1. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the impact of glass ceiling barriers on the subjective career success of expatriate women in the United Arab Emirates, a region characterized by rapid economic growth and significant expatriate workforce participation. The research examined how perceived barriers related to family responsibilities, discriminatory promotion practices, employee relations, personality traits, organizational support, gender stereotypes, and training opportunities influence various dimensions of career success among 464 expatriate women professionals.

The findings reveal a complex relationship between glass ceiling barriers and subjective career success, with significant implications for understanding women's career experiences in international contexts. The results demonstrate that glass

ceiling barriers substantially affect expatriate women's career perceptions, with effect sizes ranging from moderate to strong across different dimensions of career success.

4.1.1. The Pervasive Impact of Glass Ceiling Barriers

The study's most significant finding is the substantial negative relationship between perceived glass ceiling barriers and subjective career success dimensions. Seven of eight hypotheses (H1a–H1d, H1f–H1h) received strong support, explaining between 51.8% and 65.1% of variance in recognition, quality work, meaningful work, influence, personal life integration, growth and development, and career satisfaction. The exception was authenticity (H1e), which showed only minimal support ($R^2 = .013$, $p = .015$), suggesting that women's sense of professional self-alignment operates relatively independently of glass ceiling barriers. These findings align with seminal work by Karcıoğlu and Leblebici (2014) and extend the glass ceiling literature to expatriate contexts, demonstrating the universal yet contextually nuanced nature of gender-based career barriers.

Discriminatory promotion practices emerged as the most powerful and consistent predictor across all career success dimensions, appearing significant in all eight regression models with standardized coefficients ranging from $\beta = -.178$ (Recognition) to $\beta = -.715$ (Career Satisfaction). This finding resonates with Dreher's (2003) assertion that gender-based barriers prevent adequate utilization of organizational skills and resources and extends Lyness and Heilman's (2006) work on stricter promotion standards applied to women. The magnitude of these effects aligns with Ragins et al.'s (1998) findings that women must demonstrate consistently higher performance to receive comparable recognition and advancement opportunities. In the expatriate context, discriminatory promotion practices appear to create what Hutchings (2005) termed a "double glass ceiling," where gender-based barriers compound with expatriate status to limit advancement. The particularly strong negative relationship with career satisfaction ($R^2 = .593$, $\beta = -.715$) and influence ($R^2 = .605$, $\beta = -.661$) suggests that perceptions of unfair promotion processes fundamentally undermine expatriate women's sense of professional accomplishment, organizational impact, and future prospects. This finding underscores that promotion equity is not merely a matter of fairness but directly shapes how women experience and evaluate their entire career trajectory.

Lack of organizational support emerged as another significant barrier, negatively predicting recognition (β = -.257), quality work (β = -.361), influence (β = -.153), personal life integration (β = -.155), and growth and development (β = -.188). This consistent negative impact across multiple dimensions underscores the critical role of institutional backing in expatriate women's career experiences, strongly supporting Tharenou's (2015) research on the importance of supportive organizational environments for women's career advancement. The significant negative relationships between lack of organizational support and both recognition and growth highlight how organizational policies and practices can either facilitate or fundamentally hinder women's career progress.

Interestingly, lack of training demonstrated positive coefficients in several models (recognition: β = .096; quality work: β = .261; meaningful work: β = -.402; influence: β = .162; personal life integration: β = .176; growth and development: β = .117), presenting an interpretive puzzle addressed below.

An intriguing and theoretically important pattern emerged regarding employee relations: this dimension demonstrated consistently strong positive associations with career success outcomes, with standardized coefficients ranging from β = .118 (career satisfaction) to β = .824 (recognition). While employee relations was initially conceptualized within the glass ceiling framework as a potential barrier, the empirical results suggest it functions primarily as a facilitating resource rather than an obstacle.

Two complementary explanations merit consideration: First, the directionality of this subscale differs from other glass ceiling dimensions. Items such as "My co-workers treat me with respect" were coded such that higher scores reflect more positive workplace conditions rather than barriers. The Glass Ceiling Scale (Shaji et al. 2025) intentionally includes dimensions capturing both obstacles (discriminatory practices, lack of support) and the absence of supportive conditions (poor employee relations, inadequate training). Thus, employee relations and training opportunities may be more accurately conceptualized as facilitators whose presence enhances success, rather than barriers whose absence impedes it.

Second, and more theoretically significant, this finding aligns with Ng and Feldman's (2014) distinction between hindrance stressors (discriminatory practices, lack of support) that deplete resources and create obstacles, versus challenge resources (positive relationships, development opportunities) that build capacity and

enable growth. The extraordinarily strong effect of employee relations on recognition (β = .824) suggests that interpersonal workplace quality operates as a primary resource for expatriate women, buffering against other barriers and directly enhancing subjective career success.

This finding supports the networking literature emphasizing the importance of informal communication networks for career advancement (Palmer and Hyman, 1993; Kanter 1977) and extends it to expatriate contexts. For expatriate women, who may already face cultural adaptation challenges, linguistic barriers, and limited access to informal networks, positive workplace relationships appear crucial for feeling valued, acknowledged, and integrated into organizational cultures. The prominence of employee relations as a predictor suggests that relationship-building should be understood as a strategic career resource, not merely a social nicety.

The pattern underscores an important methodological and conceptual point: organizational interventions should differentiate between barrier-reduction strategies (addressing discrimination, increasing support) and resource-building strategies (fostering inclusive relationships, providing development opportunities). Both are necessary but operate through different mechanisms, the former removes obstacles, while the latter actively propels advancement.

Contrary to traditional work-family conflict theories, family responsibilities showed surprisingly weak relationships with career success outcomes, appearing significant in only three of eight regression models (quality work: β = -.089; meaningful work: β = -.097; influence: β = -.100; career satisfaction: β = -.062) with small effect sizes. This finding contradicts traditional assumptions about work-family conflict being a primary barrier for women's career advancement (Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Hewlett 2002) and challenges Bardwick's (1980) "seasons in a woman's life" framework, which emphasized biological timing and family formation as central constraints on women's careers.

The relatively weak impact of family responsibilities may reflect several unique characteristics of the expatriate professional population in the UAE:

(a) Financial resources and domestic support: Expatriate professionals in the UAE, particularly those in white-collar and managerial roles, often have substantially higher incomes than comparable domestic workers, enabling them to afford paid domestic help, childcare, and other support services that reduce day-to-day family management burdens (Fischlmayr and Kollinger 2010).

(b) Different family structures: A substantial portion of the expatriate population relocates without partners or children, or their children may be adults, reducing immediate caregiving responsibilities. The sample characteristics (47.2% with no children) supports this interpretation.

(c) Organizational accommodation: Multinational corporations operating in UAE free zones often provide more flexible work arrangements, remote work options, and family-friendly policies than typical domestic employers, partly to attract and retain global talent (Tharenou 2015; McNulty and Brewster 2017).

(d) Self-selection effects: Women who choose international career mobility may have already resolved work-family integration challenges, negotiated supportive arrangements with partners, or prioritized career advancement in ways that minimize family-career conflict (Linehan and Scullion 2001; Shortland 2009). International relocation represents a significant life decision; those who undertake it may be systematically different from women who prioritize proximate family ties.

This finding challenges the universal applicability of work-family conflict theories developed primarily in Western, domestic contexts and suggests that organizational and structural barriers, particularly discriminatory promotion practices (appearing in all eight models) and lack of organizational support (appearing in five models)—are more salient than familial constraints for this expatriate professional population. The findings imply that for highly educated, financially resourced, internationally mobile women, institutional discrimination poses a greater threat to career success than family responsibilities per se. This does not diminish the reality of work-family challenges but situates them within a hierarchy of barriers where organizational equity emerges as paramount.

4.1.2. The Limited Role of Individual Factors

The research findings indicate that individual-level factors, particularly personality traits and gender stereotypes, showed weaker predictive power compared to organizational factors. The authenticity dimension of career success demonstrated the weakest relationship with glass ceiling barriers ($R^2 = .013$), with only gender stereotypes showing a significant but minimal effect. This finding suggests that expatriate women's sense of being true to themselves in their careers operates relatively independently of perceived barriers, possibly reflecting greater self-determination and agency among this population. This pattern aligns with Hall and

Chandler's (2005) conceptualization of protean careers, where individuals prioritize personal values and psychological success over organizational rewards. The weak relationship between individual factors and career success may indicate that expatriate women develop resilience strategies that protect their core sense of professional identity, even when facing systemic barriers. This finding also resonates with Akkermans and Kubasch's (2017) work on career adaptability, suggesting that expatriate women may possess higher levels of career resilience and self-efficacy that buffer them from identity threats posed by organizational barriers.

This pattern aligns with Baruch's (2006) conceptualization of protean careers, where individuals prioritize personal values and self-directed career management. The weak relationship between individual factors and career success may indicate that expatriate women develop resilience strategies that protect their core sense of professional identity, even when facing systemic barriers.

4.1.3. Organizational Context and Support Systems

The consistent negative impact of lack of organizational support across multiple career success dimensions underscores the critical role of institutional backing in expatriate women's career experiences. This finding strongly supports Tharenou's (2015) research on the importance of supportive organizational environments for women's career advancement. The significant negative relationships between lack of organizational support and recognition, quality work, and growth and development highlight how organizational policies and practices can either facilitate or hinder women's career progress.

The prominence of employee relations as a predictor aligns with Kanter's (1977) research on the importance of interpersonal networks and shared socialization in organizational settings. For expatriate women, who may already face cultural and linguistic barriers, positive workplace relationships appear to serve as a crucial buffer against other forms of discrimination and exclusion. This finding supports Shortland's (2009) argument that expatriate women rely heavily on social capital and informal networks to navigate host-country organizational structures. The strong positive coefficients for employee relations across multiple career success dimensions (ranging from $\beta = .118$ to $\beta = .824$) underscore McNulty and Hutchings' (2016) observation that relational resources are particularly critical for women in

international assignments, where formal mentoring and sponsorship may be less accessible than for assigned expatriates.

4.1.4. Demographic Variations and Contextual Factors

Hypotheses H2 and H3 examined whether glass ceiling perceptions and subjective career success differ across demographic variables, receiving mixed support. Education level (H2a, H3a) and age groups (H2d, H3d) showed partial support with significant effects in selected dimensions, while expatriate type (H2b, H3b) and marital status (H2c, H3c) generally showed no significant differences.

The analysis of demographic differences revealed nuanced patterns that challenge some conventional assumptions. Education levels showed limited impact on both glass ceiling perceptions and career success outcomes, with only recognition, family responsibilities, and gender stereotypes showing significant differences. This finding challenges the common assumption that academic achievement alone is sufficient to overcome institutional barriers and suggests that other factors such as organizational culture or leadership bias may be more decisive in shaping career experiences.

Age-related differences were more pronounced, particularly regarding family responsibilities and organizational support. Women aged 40-49 reported significantly higher perceptions of family-related barriers compared to younger cohorts, which may reflect the intersection of career advancement periods with peak family responsibilities. This finding supports O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) research on life-stage influences on women's career trajectories.

The absence of significant differences between self-initiated and assigned expatriates in glass ceiling perceptions was unexpected, given previous research suggesting different experiences between these groups (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010; Doherty 2013). Interestingly, expatriate type did not significantly differentiate glass ceiling perceptions or career success outcomes, suggesting that structural barriers operate similarly across both groups in the UAE context. This finding may indicate that organizational barriers transcend individual career initiation strategies, affecting all expatriate women regardless of how they entered their international assignments.

4.1.5. Implications for Career Development Theory

These findings contribute to career development literature by demonstrating the applicability of glass ceiling concepts in international contexts while revealing unique patterns among expatriate populations. The strong relationships between organizational factors and career success support boundaryless career theory, suggesting that expatriate women may navigate barriers by leveraging organizational relationships and support systems. As Arthur et al. (1989) emphasize, the modern career is increasingly defined by subjective indicators such as perceived growth, autonomy, and purpose rather than purely objective metrics like income or title. The current study extends this understanding by highlighting how perceived organizational fairness and support directly influence these subjective outcomes.

The research extends Shockley et al.'s (2015) subjective career success framework by demonstrating its relevance in multicultural, expatriate contexts. The varied relationships between glass ceiling barriers and different success dimensions suggest that expatriate women develop complex, multifaceted definitions of career achievement that may differ from traditional linear progression models. The findings reinforce the view that subjective career success among women is not merely a product of individual effort or achievement, but is deeply embedded in organizational structures, interpersonal dynamics, and institutional practices.

4.1.6. Cultural and Regional Context

The UAE context provides unique insights into how glass ceiling barriers operate in rapidly developing, multicultural environments. The prominence of discriminatory promotion practices as a barrier may reflect the intersection of traditional cultural norms with modern business practices in the region. Despite the UAE's progressive policies toward women's participation in the workforce—including mandated board representation for women in listed companies (SCA, 2025) and 50% representation in the Federal National Council—organizational-level discrimination appears to persist at the firm level, consistent with Hutchings' (2012) research on gender challenges in the Middle East. This gap between policy and practice suggests what Sidani and Al Ariss (2014) describe as a "decoupling" phenomenon, where formal institutional frameworks advance gender equality while informal organizational cultures and practices lag. The prominence of discriminatory promotion practices (appearing significant in all eight regression models) despite

legal equal-pay provisions (Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021) underscores the distinction between de jure and de facto equality in the UAE labor market.

The relatively weak impact of gender stereotypes compared to organizational barriers may reflect the cosmopolitan nature of UAE's business environment, particularly within free zones such as DIFC, DMCC, and Dubai Internet City, where international organizations operate with more progressive formal policies (Hutchings, 2012). However, even if implementation remains inconsistent, this finding suggests that explicit bias may be less prominent than systemic organizational practices that inadvertently disadvantage women. The concentration of expatriate women in service sectors (finance, education, healthcare, professional services) rather than traditional industries may also explain lower reported gender stereotyping, as these sectors have higher female participation globally (ILO, 2024).

4.2. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between glass ceiling barriers and career success outcomes. Longitudinal research would provide stronger evidence for the temporal dynamics of these relationships and how they evolve throughout expatriate women's career trajectories.

The sample, while diverse in terms of demographics and professional backgrounds, was collected through purposive and snowball sampling methods, which may introduce selection bias. Women who participated in this study may have characteristics, experiences, or perspectives that differ from the broader expatriate women population in the UAE. Additionally, the research focused specifically on white-collar professionals, limiting generalizability to other occupational categories.

The reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of common method bias, although the use of validated scales and confirmatory factor analysis partially addresses this concern. Future research could benefit from incorporating objective career indicators alongside subjective measures to provide a more comprehensive understanding of career success.

Cultural and linguistic factors may have influenced responses, despite the use of validated instruments. While the scales demonstrated acceptable reliability in this context, subtle cultural differences in interpreting concepts like "authenticity" or "meaningful work" may affect cross-cultural validity.

The study's focus on the UAE, while providing valuable regional insights, limits generalizability to other international contexts with different cultural, economic, and regulatory environments. The unique characteristics of the UAE's expatriate-dominated workforce and rapid economic development may not be representative of other countries with significant expatriate populations.

4.3. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Several avenues for future research emerge from this study's findings. Longitudinal research tracking expatriate women's career experiences over time would provide valuable insights into how glass ceiling perceptions and career success evaluations change throughout different career phases and life stages. Such research could examine critical transition points, such as promotions, job changes, or family events, and their impact on career trajectories.

Comparative studies across different cultural and regional contexts would enhance understanding of how local norms, policies, and business practices influence glass ceiling barriers for expatriate women. Comparing experiences between countries with varying levels of gender equality and cultural attitudes toward women's workforce participation could reveal important contextual factors.

Mixed-methods research incorporating qualitative approaches would provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which glass ceiling barriers affect career experiences. In-depth interviews could explore how expatriate women navigate specific challenges, develop coping strategies, and make career decisions in response to perceived barriers.

Research examining organizational interventions and their effectiveness in reducing glass ceiling barriers would have significant practical value. Studies evaluating mentoring programs, diversity training, flexible work arrangements, and other organizational initiatives could inform evidence-based approaches to supporting expatriate women's career advancement.

Investigation of industry-specific patterns would enhance understanding of how glass ceiling barriers vary across different sectors. Given the UAE's diverse economy, comparing experiences in traditional industries versus emerging sectors could reveal important differences in organizational cultures and practices.

Future research should also explore the intersectionality of various identity factors, examining how nationality, race, religion, and other characteristics interact

with gender to shape expatriate women's career experiences. Such research would provide a more nuanced understanding of the multiple dimensions of workplace inequality.

4.4. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have significant implications for organizations, policymakers, and expatriate women themselves. For multinational corporations and organizations operating in the UAE and similar contexts, the results highlight the critical importance of addressing organizational-level barriers that impede women's career advancement.

Organizations should prioritize developing fair and transparent promotion processes, given the substantial impact of discriminatory promotion practices on multiple aspects of career success. This includes establishing clear criteria for advancement, ensuring diverse representation on promotion committees, and regularly auditing promotion outcomes for gender disparities. Training managers on unconscious bias and implementing structured decision-making processes can help reduce subjective biases that may disadvantage women.

The importance of employee relations suggests that organizations should invest in building inclusive workplace cultures that facilitate positive interpersonal relationships. This could include structured networking opportunities, cross-cultural communication training, and team-building initiatives that help expatriate women integrate into organizational social networks. Mentoring programs pairing expatriate women with senior leaders could provide both professional guidance and social capital development.

Addressing the lack of organizational support requires comprehensive policy review and implementation. Organizations should ensure that policies supporting work-life balance, professional development, and career advancement are not only available but actively promoted and accessible to all employees. This includes providing adequate parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and childcare support that enable women to maintain career momentum while managing family responsibilities.

For expatriate women themselves, the findings suggest several strategic approaches to career management. Building strong workplace relationships emerges as a critical factor for career success, indicating that investment in networking and

relationship-building should be prioritized. Seeking organizations with demonstrated commitments to gender equality and supportive policies can help mitigate exposure to glass ceiling barriers.

The research also highlights the value of developing resilience and maintaining authenticity in career pursuits. While organizational barriers exist, expatriate women can focus on aspects of career success that are less susceptible to external constraints, such as finding meaning in work and maintaining personal values alignment.

Policymakers in the UAE and similar contexts should consider implementing regulations that promote gender equality in workplace practices. This could include requirements for diversity reporting, equal pay auditing, and anti-discrimination enforcement mechanisms. Supporting professional development programs specifically targeting expatriate women could help address training and skill development gaps.

Educational institutions and professional development organizations should consider offering programs that prepare women for international career challenges, including cultural adaptation, networking strategies, and leadership development. Such programs could help women develop the skills and knowledge needed to navigate complex expatriate career environments.

4.5. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research makes several important theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to the understanding of women's career experiences in international contexts.

4.5.1. Theoretical Contributions

First, the study extends glass ceiling theory beyond its traditional domestic organizational context to expatriate populations, demonstrating that gender-based career barriers operate across national boundaries while manifesting in contextually specific ways. While previous research has documented glass ceiling effects in single-country settings (Dreher 2003; Karcıoğlu and Leblebici 2014), this study reveals that discriminatory promotion practices constitute a universal barrier that affects expatriate women regardless of nationality, education level, expatriate type, or marital status. The consistency of this finding (appearing significantly in all eight

regression models) across a highly diverse expatriate sample (representing over 190 countries of origin) provides robust evidence that gender-based promotion discrimination transcends cultural and organizational boundaries.

Second, the research challenges the relative weighting of individual versus organizational barriers in glass ceiling theory. Traditional frameworks often emphasize individual factors—such as family responsibilities, personality traits, and gender role socialization—as primary constraints on women's advancement (Bardwick 1980; Gattiker and Larwood 1986). This study demonstrates that organizational and structural factors (discriminatory promotion practices, lack of organizational support, employee relations) explain substantially more variance in career success outcomes (R^2 = .518 to .651) than individual factors (family responsibilities, personality traits, gender stereotypes). This finding shifts theoretical attention from individual-level "fixing the women" approaches toward institutional-level "fixing the organizations" frameworks, aligning with contemporary structural inequality perspectives (Ely et al. 2011).

Third, the study contributes to career development theory by empirically validating Shockley et al's (2015) Subjective Career Success Scale in a non-Western, expatriate context. The finding that different glass ceiling barriers affect different career success dimensions differently provides nuanced support for multidimensional career success models. For instance, discriminatory promotion practices most strongly predicted career satisfaction (β = -.715) and influence (β = -.661), while employee relations most strongly predicted recognition (β = .824). This differential pattern suggests that subjective career success is not a unitary construct but comprises distinct psychological experiences—feeling satisfied, feeling influential, and feeling recognized—each responsive to different organizational conditions. These finding advances Hall and Chandler's (2005) protean career theory by demonstrating that psychological success is domain-specific and barrier-specific.

Fourth, the research contributes to expatriate career theory by revealing that self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) and assigned expatriates (AEs) experience glass ceiling barriers and career success outcomes similarly (H2b and H3b not supported). These findings challenges prevailing assumptions in international HRM literature that SIEs face distinctly different career challenges than AEs due to differences in organizational support, pre-arrival employment security, and repatriation planning (Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010; Doherty 2013). The null findings suggest that once

women are embedded in host-country organizations, the mode of arrival becomes less relevant than the organizational context itself.

This insight repositions expatriate type as a background characteristic rather than a primary determinant of career experiences, directing theoretical attention toward organizational-level factors as the more proximate causes of career outcomes.

Fifth, the study advances work-family theory by demonstrating contextual boundaries to work-family conflict's predictive power. The weak effects of family responsibilities (appearing in only three of eight models with small coefficients) in a sample where 52.8% of participants have children challenges the universality of work-family conflict as a primary barrier for professional women (Greenhaus and Powell 2006). This finding suggests that work-family conflict theories may be culturally and economically bounded, developed primarily in Western, middle-income contexts where domestic support is less accessible and organizational flexibility is less common. For highly resourced, internationally mobile professional women, institutional discrimination may eclipse family constraints as the binding constraint on career success. This contextual insight enriches work-family theory by specifying boundary conditions under which family responsibilities do and do not significantly impede women's careers.

4.5.2. Contextual and Regional Contributions

The focus on the UAE context contributes to the limited empirical literature on gender and careers in the Middle East, a region characterized by rapid economic development, high gender inequality indices, yet progressive national-level gender policies (WEF 2024; UN Women 2019). The finding that organizational-level discrimination persists despite national legal frameworks mandating equal pay and board representation reveals a critical implementation gap between de jure and de facto equality. This insight is directly relevant to policymakers and organizational leaders throughout the GCC region as they seek to diversify workforces, attract global talent, and enhance international competitiveness.

Moreover, the study's focus on expatriate women—who constitute the majority of professional women in UAE's private sector—addresses a significant population often overlooked in gender and careers research, which tends to focus on either domestic workers or corporate-assigned expatriates. By centering the experiences of self-initiated expatriate women (59.9% of the sample), the research

provides voice to a large, growing, yet under-researched population navigating careers at the intersection of gender, international mobility, and organizational inequality.

4.6. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that glass ceiling barriers significantly affect expatriate women's subjective career success in the UAE, with organizational factors playing a particularly crucial role. The research demonstrates that while expatriate women face multiple barriers to career advancement, the impact of these barriers varies substantially across different dimensions of career success, suggesting complex, differentiated relationships between workplace obstacles and professional fulfillment.

The findings challenge some conventional assumptions about women's career barriers while confirming others. The prominence of discriminatory promotion practices across all career success dimensions and organizational support deficits highlights the continued relevance of structural and institutional factors in shaping women's career experiences, even in cosmopolitan, legally progressive contexts like the UAE. Conversely, the surprisingly weak impact of family responsibilities and minimal role of individual factors suggests that expatriate women may develop unique strategies for managing work-life integration and maintaining professional identity, or alternatively, that organizational barriers so dominate the career landscape that they overshadow traditional work-family concerns.

A critical finding is that employee relations emerged as the strongest facilitator of career success, particularly for recognition, underscoring that career advancement is fundamentally social in nature. This highlights the importance of inclusive workplace cultures that actively integrate expatriate women into professional networks rather than merely removing explicit barriers. The strong relationships between employee relations and multiple career success dimensions suggest that organizations should invest equally in relationship-building and barrier-reduction strategies.

For the UAE and similar international business environments, these findings suggest that realizing the full potential of diverse workforces requires sustained attention to eliminating subtle but persistent forms of gender discrimination, particularly in promotion processes. The absence of significant differences between

self-initiated and assigned expatriates indicates that organizational context transcends individual career pathways, meaning that systemic reforms—not individualized support—are necessary to achieve equity. As organizations compete for global talent, those that successfully create equitable promotion systems, foster inclusive interpersonal cultures, and provide robust organizational support for all employees, including expatriate women, will gain significant competitive advantages.

The study's contribution extends beyond its specific findings to demonstrate the value of systematic, empirically grounded, multidimensional research on gender and careers in international contexts. By validating measurement instruments in a non-Western expatriate setting and revealing differential barrier-outcome relationships, the research provides both theoretical refinement and methodological foundations for future scholarships in understudied regions.

Ultimately, this research reinforces that while significant progress has been made in women's workforce participation globally, achieving true equality requires continued vigilance and active effort to identify and address both obvious and subtle barriers that impede women's career advancement. The experiences of expatriate women in the UAE—where national policies mandate gender equity yet organizational discrimination persists—serve as a powerful reminder that legal frameworks alone are insufficient. Substantive equality requires organizational commitment manifested in transparent promotion practices, inclusive relationship-building, and sustained institutional support. The experiences documented here serve as a valuable lens through which to examine these broader challenges and opportunities for creating more equitable workplaces worldwide.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SURVEY FORM

Expat Type	☐ Self-Initiated ☐ Assigned
Birth Year	
Birth Place	
Marital Status	☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Partner ☐ Separated ☐ Divorced
Number of Children	☐ None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 or more
Education Level	☐ Primary School ☐ High School ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Associate Degree (2 year) ☐ Master's Degree ☐ PhD
Occupation	
Nationality	☐ GCC Countries ☐ Other Arabian Countries ☐ Asian Countries ☐ African Countries ☐ European Countries ☐ American Countries ☐ Oceanic Countries (Australia, New Zealand, Fiji... etc.) ☐ Other
Industry	☐ Oil and Gas ☐ Real Estate / Construction ☐ Tourism and Hospitality ☐ Finance and Banking ☐ Technology ☐ Insurance / Healthcare ☐ Aviation / Logistics ☐ Retail ☐ Education ☐ Manufacturing ☐ Other (……)
Title / Position in your current organization	☐ Senior Executive Level (e.g., General Manager, Assistant General Manager) ☐ Middle Management Level (e.g., Department Manager / Assistant) ☐ Lower Management Level (e.g., Unit Manager) Senior Specialist ☐ Specialist ☐ Assistant Specialist
Length of service in your current organization (in Dubai)	☐ 1- 5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐ 16-20 years

Is your spouse/ partner also an	☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
Total Length of expat experience	☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐ 16 years or above
Does your organization have any policies or practices aimed at promoting gender equality? ☐ Yes ☐ No	
Is there anything else you want to share regarding gender equality and career advancement in your organization?	

Please review each statement in the questionnaire and indicate its relevance to you by marking one of the options next to the statement (X). There are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' answers, please mark your first opinion that comes to your mind after reading the statement. 1=Strongly agree, 2= Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly disagree

Career Pathways

Denial Dimension	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. Women starting careers today will face sexist barriers.					
2. Women and men have to overcome the same problems at the					
3. It will take decades for women to reach equality with men in high level management positions.					
4. Even women with many skills and qualifications fail to be					
5. Women have reached the top in all areas of business and politics.					
6. Women face no barriers to promotions in most organizations.					
7. Women leaders are seldom given full credit for their successes.					
8. Women in senior positions face frequent putdowns of being too soft					
9. Women who have a strong commitment to their careers can go right					
10. Talented women are able to overcome sexist discrimination.					
Resignation Dimension	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
11. Women executives are very uncomfortable when they have to criticize members of their teams.					
12. Women leaders suffer more emotional pain than men when there is a crisis within their teams.					
13. Being in the limelight creates many problems for women.					
14. Women are more likely to be hurt than men when they take big risks necessary for corporate success.					
15. Women believe they have to make too many compromises to gain					
16. Jealousy from co-workers prevents women from seeking					
17. Even very successful women can quickly lose their confidence					

18. Women know that work does not provide the best source of					
19. If women achieve promotions, they might be accused of offering					
20. Smart women avoid careers that involve intense competition with					
Resilience Dimension	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
21. The more women seek senior positions, the easier it will be for					
22. Higher education qualifications will help women overcome					
23. Women have the strength to overcome discrimination.					
24. When women are given opportunities to lead, they do effective jobs.					
25. Daughters of successful mothers are inspired to overcome sexist					
26. Women are capable of making critical leadership decisions.					
27. A supportive spouse/partner or close friend makes it easier for a woman to achieve success in her career.					
28. Successful organizations seek and want to retain talented female					
29. The support of a mentor greatly increases the success of a woman in					
30. Women's nurturing skills help them to be successful leaders.					
31. Networking is a smart way for women to increase the chances of					
Acceptance Dimension	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
32. Women are just as ambitious in their careers as men.					
33. Women have the same desire for power as men do.					
34. Motherhood is more important to most women than career					
35. Women are less concerned about promotions than men are.					
36. Women prefer a balance life more than gaining highly paid careers.					
37. Women reject the need to work incredibly long hours.					
38. Women commonly reject career advancement as they are keener to maintain a role raising children.					

Glass Ceiling

Family Responsibilities	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. To balance family and work–life, women accept a slower rate of					
2. Breaks due to childbirth and childcare obstruct the career					
3. Commitment to family responsibilities affects the career					
4. Working longer hours than the regular office time often creates difficulty in carrying out household duties.					
5. The husband's job/profession acts as an obstacle for the career					
Discriminatory Promotion Practices	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6. Women have fewer career developmental opportunities at the					

7. In the case of promotion, favoritism and hold at the higher levels also count besides efficiency.					
8. Women do not receive the same recognition as their male					
9. Females have to perform better than the men to get promotion.					
Employee Relations	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10. My co-workers treat me with respect.					
11. I have a positive relationship with my co-workers.					
12. Most employees in my organization are supportive of each other despite differences in designation.					
13. My superiors are supportive and protect me in times of crises.					
Personality Traits	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
14. My current job performance is below the required standard.					
15. I do not possess the skills required to do higher-level jobs.					
16. I lack the required educational qualifications to seek higher					
17. I have low self-confidence level.					
Lack of Organizational Support	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
18. The grievance redress system in my organization is satisfactory.					
19. My organization gives due weight to my suggestions and ideas regarding the various aspects of work.					
20. My designation gives me enough authority to discipline my					
21. In my organization, women have the opportunity to develop the requisite skills to reach higher positions.					
Gender Stereotypes	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
22. Women lack the enthusiasm in taking on challenging assignments.					
23. Women are not sufficiently competitive and ambitious in					
24. I lack the experience to take up higher positions.					
Lack of Training	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
25. Women receive equal access to training programs conducted by the					
26. My organization offers different types of training programs for the					
27. Women are given the same work assignments as men.					

Subjective Career Success

Authenticity	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. Considering my career as a whole, I have been able to pursue work that meets my personal needs and preferences					
2. Considering my career as a whole, I have felt as though I am in charge of					
3. Considering my career as a whole, I have chosen my own career path.					
Growth and Development	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4. Considering my career as a whole, I have expanded my skill set to					
5. Considering my career as a whole, I have stayed current with changes in					
6. Considering my career as a whole, I have continuously improved by					
Influence	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7. Considering my career as a whole, decisions that I have made have impacted my organization.					
8. Considering my career as a whole, the organizations I have worked for have considered my opinion regarding important issues.					
9. Considering my career as a whole, others have taken my advice into account when making important decisions.					
Meaningful Work	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10. Considering my career as a whole, I think my work has been meaningful.					
11. Considering my career as a whole, I believe my work has made a					
12. Considering my career as a whole, the work I have done has contributed					
Quality Work	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13. Considering my career as a whole, I am proud of the quality of the					
14. Considering my career as a whole, I have met the highest standards of					
15. Considering my career as a whole, I have been known for the high quality of my work					
Personal Life	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
16. Considering my career as a whole, I have been able to spend the amount of time I want with my friends and family.					
17. Considering my career as a whole, I have been able to have a satisfying life outside of work.					
18. Considering my career as a whole, I have been able to be a good employee while maintaining quality non-work relationships.					
Recognition	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
19. Considering my career as a whole, my supervisors have told me I do a					

20. Considering my career as a whole, the organizations I worked for have recognized me as a good performer.					
21. Considering my career as a whole, I have been recognized for my					
Satisfaction	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
22. Considering my career as a whole, my career is personally satisfying.					
23. Considering my career as a whole, I am enthusiastic about my career.					
24. Considering my career as a whole, I have found my career quite					

Self-Efficacy

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. I can remain calm when facing difficulties in my job because I can rely					
2. When I am confronted with a problem in my job, I can usually find					
3. Whatever comes my way in my job, I can usually handle it.					
4. My past experiences in my job have prepared me well for my					
5. I meet the goals that I set for myself in my job.					
6. I feel prepared for most of the demands in my job.					

APPENDIX 2: VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION FORM

Dear Participant,

This survey is part of a scientific research study examining the impact of the glass ceiling on the career development of expatriate women living in Dubai. Completing the survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes. I sincerely appreciate your valuable contributions. The findings obtained from this study are expected to shed light on the factors influencing the career journeys of expatriate women in Dubai.

Your responses will be strictly confidential and will not be shared with any individual or institution. Since the data collected will be used solely for scientific purposes, no personal identification is required. Therefore, you are not asked to disclose your identity or provide any information that could indirectly reveal it. The information you provide will be used exclusively for research purposes and will be securely stored anonymously.

We kindly request that you answer all questions without leaving any blank responses. Thank you in advance for your participation.

If you require further information about the study, please feel free to contact us using the details provided below.

Ceren AKYÜREK Assoc. Prof. Dr. İrge ŞENER

If you choose to participate in the study, this document will be prepared in two copies. One copy will be given to you, while the other will be kept by the researchers to facilitate further contact with you if necessary.

If you would like to contribute to our study, please write your full name and the date in the space provided below and sign the document.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I consent to the use of the information I provide in scientific publications.

Name, Surname Signature

____/____/2025

Thank you very much for your participation and support.