Exploring the Pygmalion Phenomenon in a Male-Centric Industry and Developing a Model of Female Career Progression

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between the Pygmalion Effect and female career progression. The data was collected from sales representatives in the real estate sector in Pakistan through semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed using Quirkos 2.5.3. The results of thematic analysis revealed that male employees received preferential treatment due to their perceived self-efficacy, leading managers to invest more in their development, which can be linked to the Pygmalion Effect. In contrast, female employees did not receive the same treatment within the real estate sector. The findings recommend that top management in the real estate sector should maintain similar interactions with all employees, regardless of their gender, to avoid sub-group formation. Conducting exit interviews with female employees can help identify underlying issues that contribute to their departure from organizations. This paper fills a gap in the existing literature by developing a model for understanding the role of the Pygmalion Effect in female career progression.

INTRODUCTION

Women have been recognized for their domestic roles but tremendously disregarded for their economic roles. Countries around the globe present an alarming situation regarding the career progression of women, especially Pakistan. As per the Global Gender Gap Report 2022 of the World Economic Forum, the global index for industries such as Technology, Real Estate, Supply Chain and Transportation, and Financial Services has a 24%, 29%, 21%, and 30%, presence of women in leadership roles, respectively (Hausmann et al., 2022). It is also to be noted that women's presence in leadership roles has not even attained 50% presence in any of the industries per World Economic Forum (Hausmann et al., 2022). Furthermore, the South Asian region has been ranked the lowest amongst the eight regions covered in the report where the economic participation and opportunity for
women remains at 35.7% (Hausmann et al., 2022). Amongst the nine South Asian countries, Pakistan has been ranked 8th in the Global Gender Gap Report 2022 while globally Pakistan has been ranked the second lowest to close the gender gap i.e., 56.4% and to achieve 100% gender parity across the world, it will take another 132 years and for South Asia it will take 197 years, as reported by the World Economic Forum (Hausmann et al., 2022).

Recent statistics have highlighted the persistently low representation of women in many industries. According to Hausmann et al. (2022), while there has been an increase in women occupying leadership roles (from 33.3% in 2016 to 36.9% in 2022), these positions are predominantly concentrated in industries that already have a relatively higher number of women, such as education (46%) and personal services or well-being (45%) (Hausmann et al., 2022). However, industries like manufacturing and infrastructure continue to have a significantly low proportion of women in leadership positions, with only 19% and 16%, respectively (Hausmann et al., 2022). In addition, a study by Laidlaw et al. (2023) examined 5400 companies to assess the presence of women as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). The findings revealed that a mere 4.4% of women held CEO positions, and less than 2% of females were CEOs in the real estate sector. Specifically, only 16 out of every 1000 CEOs were female in the real estate sector (Laidlaw et al., 2023). Moreover, a survey conducted on 547 listed companies regarding female representation in leadership positions revealed a lack of female directors in 29% of companies at the Pakistan Business Council and 41% at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (The Express Tribune, 2020). Similarly, Catalyst (2022) reported that, as of 2021, women held only 4% of managerial positions in Pakistan. Overall, these statistics demonstrate the persistent underrepresentation of women in various industries and leadership roles, indicating the need for concerted efforts to address this issue.

This paper explores the relationship between the Pygmalion Effect and female career progression, specifically within male-centric industry, such as real estate. Past studies primarily conducted investigated the relationship of Pygmalion Effect with other variables such as Passion Pygmalion Effect (Wang et al., 2022), Work Engagement (Veestraeten et al., 2021), Employee Performance (Khan et al., 2022), and Intrapreneurial Behavior (Farrukh et al., 2022). In achieving this purpose, the present study contributes to literature in numerous ways. First, earlier research have analyzed employees' behavior in response to the Pygmalion Effect where the term employee is generalized i.e. it encompasses male and female employees within an organization (Veestraeten et al., 2021; Sabat et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). Research that focuses on the Pygmalion Effect in relation to career progression is lacking in general and study regarding female career progression is lacking in particular. The present study fills this gap.

Additionally, past research on Pygmalion Effect is conducted on industries such as banks (Khan et al., 2022), pharmaceutical, chemical, engineering and manufacturing (Farrukh et al., 2022). Furthermore, extensive research has been conducted on career progresses in the fields of healthcare (de Boer et al., 2022), veterinary surgeons (Teanor & Marlow, 2021), and government agencies (D’Agostino &
Levine, 2010). Evidently, the real estate sector has rarely been considered to explore Pygmalion Effect and female career progression. This research fills this void.

The subsequent sections will present a summarized version of the preceding literature followed by the methodology that used to accomplish the objectives of this study in an organized manner. The last section of this study has set forth the implications it may have for the leaders and by extension the organization.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Pygmalion Effect**

Ancient mythology follows a legend of a man named Pygmalion who was prominent for his mastery in sculpting (Alroe, 2022). Legend has it that he carved an ivory statue of a woman named Galatea who was so astonishingly beautiful that Pygmalion fell in love with his own creation. He started praying incessantly to Goddess Aphrodite to bring the figurine to life and his prayers were eventually answered (Alroe, 2022). Pygmalion Effect is a phenomenon wherein a target functions consistent with a leaders' expectations (Kierein & Gold, 2000; Sabat et al., 2021). Pygmalion Effect was initially developed for the education literature, however, it has been evolved since and has been used in other contexts such as organizations, court rooms, health care providers, and business executives (Kierein & Gold, 2000; McNatt, 2000; Wang et al., 2022). The model originated for the education sector mainly to evaluate the expectations of the instructor from distinct students which elicit a favorable treatment from the teacher and the outcome of which was the success of the student in the assigned courses (Darley & Fazio, 1980; Brophy & Good, 1974; Rosenthal et al., 1974; Sabat et al., 2021). The research conducted in the education literature carries the potential for generalizability thereby making it possible to apply it in organizations as well (Sabat et al., 2021).

Often leaders are inclined to certain employees in the workplace and their expectations direct the behavior of the employee in a manner to satisfy the pre-conceived notion of the former. The leader may display his expectations by asking for input from the employee regarding essential matters or the leader may assign work that is outside the job description of the subordinate. This enables the employees to be more engaged, committed, and productive; hence the leader believes to have predicted the outcome of the employee, but it is in-fact a self-fulfilling prophecy called the Pygmalion Effect (Eden, 1992).

It is evident from prior research that the Pygmalion Effect can enhance the employee's performance within an organization (Khan et al., 2022). For instance, the Pygmalion Effect can positively influence the relationship between a leader and subordinate which will permit employee to embark on high-risk ventures along with an encouraging and supportive environment. Hence, that leads to an innovation-oriented behavior (Farrukh et al., 2022). Literature also states that Pygmalion Effect can result in managers' perceived efficacy of employees which can even lead to a bias for people from different geographical regions or genders (Pell, 1996). As one of the studies highlighted, that managers believed
non-whites to be less efficient and effective compared to white employees (Sabat et al., 2021). Studies have theorized that passionate employees tend to receive positive feedback, more trainings, and promotions which results in a positive emotional reaction (Wang et al., 2022). That leads to better performance outcomes. Hence, the authors confirm that an enthusiastic employee, who captures the attention of the supervisor, will perform exceptionally. It then follows due recognition and success within organization (Wang et al., 2022).

**Career Progression**

Career progression is all about to climbing the corporate ladder i.e., being promoted to more strategic positions (Weerarathna & Hapurugala, 2019). Research indicates the barricades women encounter regarding their career in numerous industries. Even the industries with a higher presence of women are not an exception to the progression of women career. For instance, de Boer et al., (2022) outlines that in academia women not only publish few articles as first authors but these articles have fewer citations (Chatterjee & Werner, 2021; Filardo et al., 2016). Research also reveals that women receive less funding for their proposed study where gender is deemed partially responsible for decisions relating to awarding of grants.

Women have repeatedly been subjected to prejudices such as being technically incompetent and more suited for domestic roles (Bradley, 2013). Progression for females has been problematic in a plethora of fields such as law (Bolton & Muzio, 2008; Treanor & Marlow, 2021), finance (Baker & Kelan, 2019; Treanor & Marlow, 2021), engineering (Fernando et al., 2019; Treanor & Marlow, 2021), and science (Treanor & Marlow, 2021; Whittington, 2011). When viewed from the lens of women presence within organizations, the structures are often hierarchical in nature with a preference for male figure at the top. For instance, family led businesses prefer the presence of men at the top of the pyramid to preserve the seat for future generations (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Treanor & Marlow, 2021). A recent study highlighted that women face discrimination not just for their gender but also for their outlook/appearance i.e., women with a better appearance is given more preference over experienced and learned women (Nasir et al., 2020).

**Leader-member Exchange Theory**

Leader-member exchange theory is defined as “‘Leader-member exchange is (a) a system of components and their relationships (b) involving both members of a dyad (c) involving interdependent patterns of behavior and (d) sharing mutual outcome instrumentalities and (e) producing conceptions of environments, cause maps, and value”(Scandura et al., 1986, p.580). The foundational premise of the LMX theory is that the exchange between each subordinate with their leader is of varying nature, also referred to as the LMX differentiation (Henderson et al., 2009; Liden et al., 2006). LMX differentiation can be further explained as a high quality and low-quality relationship with the leader. Depending upon the quality of relationship with the leader, they can be classified into in-groups and out-groups. In-groups are ones with a high-quality exchange while out-groups are ones with the low-quality exchange (Bakar & McCann, 2018).
In-groups enjoy the perks of such an exchange as their relationship go beyond the contractual agreements (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995). Furthermore, subordinates with high quality relationship are granted mentoring (Scandura, 1994), autonomy (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995), empowerment (Chen et al., 2007; Liden et al., 2000) and they may also exude high employee performance. For instance, a study was conducted wherein they posited that leader-member exchange theory and the Pygmalion Effect have a favorable impact on the employees' performance (Khan et al., 2022). It confirms the notion that if a leader expects his/her subordinates to achieve a certain task outside of the job description; the employee will act per the expectations.

Contrary to this, low quality relationships restrict the interpersonal relationship between an employee and a leader. A relationship is only limited to fulfilling the contractual obligations (Liden & Graen, 1980). Out-groups were viewed under the lens of homogeneity i.e. "They are all alike (Malpass & Kravitz, 1969)." This may eventually lead to poor team communication while simultaneously compromising trust and respect amongst colleagues (Hooper & Martin, 2008; Sias & Jablin, 1995). Considering female career progressions and the LMX theory, which is a topic consistent with this paper, prior research has concluded that leaders may treat employees differently on the bases of gender (Varma & Stroh, 2001). Since real estate is pre-dominantly male-centric as it has only a 29% presence of women (Hausmann et al., 2022) while the remaining 71% is comprised of men, it begs the question regarding how female progress in their careers compared to male.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This paper utilizes a qualitative research approach to develop an in-depth understanding regarding three research objectives i.e., 1) To explore the ways in which Pygmalion Effect plays a role in female career progressions. 2) To draw a comparison of the male employees and female employees as a result of Pygmalion Effect. 3) To explore the possibility of female employees changing their career as a result of the Pygmalion Effect. Prior studies regarding Pygmalion Effect were not conducted in the context of female career progression or in the real estate industry. Since this is an unexplored territory, qualitative approach is a fitting choice. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews with a total of sixteen questions excluding probes. This form of data collection is most common when conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2003). Later, an additional three questions were added as the interviews progressed due to the emergence of a concept not initially planned by this research. A total of four real estate organizations were contacted. The mode of interview was face-to-face but one of the organizations requested that the interviews be taken online.

**Contextual Analysis**

The Express Tribune (2022) highlighted a report by Pakistan Credit Rating Agency (PACRA) stating that the real estate sector is an important contributor to the economy of Pakistan i.e., it accounted for 5.4% of GDP in 2020-2021. It was further outlined by The Express Tribune (2022) that the said sector is worth $3.5 trillion in Pakistan. Despite being a crucial benefactor to the economy, it has been
reported to have a low representation of women in leadership positions. A report generated by State Bank of Pakistan (2023) outlined that Pakistan has the highest gender gap amongst all the countries in South Asia. The report by State Bank of Pakistan (2023) highlighted the distribution of various occupational groups (2022) where female representation in services and sales were less than 5% while for men it was nearly 20%. The percentage of women in managerial positions also remained less than 5%. Additionally, per the World Economic Forum, it was reported that the presence of women in leadership positions in the real estate sector remains at 29% globally (Hausmann et al., 2022). Moreover, the statistics of the report presented South Asia to have the least number of women in its leadership positions while Pakistan was ranked at 145 out of 146 countries to have the lowest percentage of women in its leadership positions (Hausmann et al., 2022). Therefore, the paper aimed to explore the presence of female workforce in leadership positions in the sales occupation of the real estate sector of Pakistan.

Research Philosophy

This study is based on the constructivist approach i.e., it is a subjective approach for viewing the world (Creswell, 2003). The study involves the role of Pygmalion Effect which is roughly defined as the leaders’ expectations of subordinates and how that guides their behavior into giving them preferential treatment which aids in their career. To explore the objectives of this study, the research approach adopted is phenomenology. In this approach, experiences of the participants are studied, and themes are derived from those findings (Hayllar & Griffin, 2005). This approach was used to get an insight into the experiences of the male and female employees within the real estate sector. The knowledge acquired from this study is inductive in nature (Saunders et al., 2019).

Participants & Data Collection

The study chose its participants using the purposive sampling technique which is utilized for choosing a very specific sample relevant to the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2019). The aim was to find participants from the sales department of a real estate organization. This study used an equal representation of males and females i.e., 5 males and 5 female employees of the sales department in real estate organizations. There interviews were conducted till it reached saturation point (Saunders et al., 2019) i.e., no more interviews were needed as the answers received were redundant. As a rule of thumb, it has been deemed sufficient by Dukes (1984) to interview 3-10 individuals for a phenomenological study. Similarly, Parse (1990) has recommended 2-10 individuals to be sufficient to reach saturation point. This justifies the number of participants in this study as this research is phenomenological in nature.

Prior to visiting the organizations, emails were sent to inform them regarding the objectives of the study. The organizations were also notified that the interviews will be recorded. After access was granted and permission was obtained to record the interviews, the interviews were conducted for the duration of 15-20 minutes. Urdu and English were the medium of communication; it changed per the preference of the interviewee. As the researcher is also bilingual, the interviews in Urdu were
translated with minimum errors. For this study, a total of four real estate organizations were contacted. It was agreed upon to keep the identities of the organizations and participants anonymous. The interview guide was divided into three sections where the first section had questions regarding the Pygmalion effect playing a role in female career progression. The second section had questions relevant to the second research objective which was to draw comparison between the male and female career progression as a result of the Pygmalion Effect. The final section included questions regarding whether or not females were willing to change their careers as a result of the Pygmalion effect.

**Data Analysis Strategy**

Thematic analysis was used by following the six steps prescribed by Braun & Clarke (2006). Per the first step the data collected through interactive means was transcribed and read repeatedly to develop familiarity with the basic concept. Secondly, the interviews, after being thoroughly scrutinized, were assigned initial codes. Each meaningful set of dialogue was coded separately within the transcripts leading to 318 codes. Data were analyzed using Quirkos 2.5.3, one of the best applications for qualitative data analysis (Turner et al., 2022). Thirdly, four themes were identified consistent with the research objectives of the paper. Following that, themes were named reflective of the research aims. These themes were further categorized into sub-themes and the findings were presented. Finally, the findings were analyzed, which were backed by literature and discussed in detail.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Role of Pygmalion effect in female career progression**

The interviews were reflective of the statistics presented by the World Economic Forum which were discussed earlier in this paper. Based on the results from this study, women in leadership positions are scarce within the real estate industry. There was an overall consensus from all the interviewees in regard to the ratio of women being either less or non-existent within the sales department of real estate industries. To be more precise, there were 50% iterations suggesting no women present in the leadership position throughout the sales department while another the 50% percent of the interviewees suggested that the women in leadership positions were at a minimal. To explore further into the matter from the outlook of Pygmalion Effect, the interview questions were designed consistent with the research questions. The first research objective is aimed to explore whether Pygmalion Effect plays a role in female career progressions.

The findings highlighted that male employees are given twice as much autonomy over their clients. They are granted the liberty to interact and deal with the investors as they see fit. From the responses, it can be deduced that only 20% of the male employees seek assistance or are required to seek permission for every decision. As opposed to the male employees, analysis of the interviews depicts that 40% female employees do not have complete autonomy over their clients. The participants vocalized that their job was often restricted to calling the clients and once the client arrived, it would
be dealt by the manager. In the case of taking them on a site visit, it was necessary to seek permission from the leader/manager.

An interesting finding was kinship between manager and the female employee. Although, the phenomenon of kinship was absent in its entirety when analyzing the exchanges between male employees and leader/manager but as the interviews progressed a much clearer picture was painted. One may credit this attribute to the culture within which the real estate industry operates which is a significant aspect due to which women are treated with leniency per the interviewees. Additionally, a female participant highlighted that they are given more support because of the cultural restraints. A male participant made a similar observation, and he also expressed that support is extended by the organization but within the lines of it being a trend.

In-groups are the employees who share a high-quality exchange with their leader/manager. The general outline of the interviews, in terms of relationship with the leader/manager, portrays camaraderie. However, the distinction arises when the relationship transcends the contractual obligations and surpasses the office premise which was more evident from the interviews with the male employees. Upon further scrutiny of the recorded conversations, it was apparent that the exchanges between male employees and leaders/managers were based on trust, collaboration, and reciprocity. These elements were not articulated by female interviewees. A few of these excerpts relevant to this theme are presented below:

R4-Male: I have the leads of my managers as well; their potential leads whatever they have assigned or whatever. Basically its, uh, a favor, there is nothing big or small about it, just, uh, a game of words.

D2-Female: In sales, there is no girl at the upper level, not as a sales manager, not as a sales director, not on those positions.

Contrast of male employees vs. female employees as a result of Pygmalion Effect

The second research question corresponds to the contrasting attributes between male and female employees as result of the Pygmalion Effect. The most prominent sub-theme that has emerged is self-efficacy. The difference between a male and female employee in regard to this question has been strikingly different. Male participants have explained using examples how they were more self-efficacious compared to the female participants as they reported to have instances of doubt. Male employees responded with a 100% self-efficacy. Contrastingly, female employees gave varying statements ranging from being self-efficacious to self-inefficacious.

As one of the male employees have reported:

R4-Male: I am very confident of this thing that I have closed all clients myself and no one was involved.
He further added.

*I have closed many deals for myself and my team mates as well. This thing is there that yes you are good closer like this person can close the deal within the office or somewhere outside. I have done many things, many deals that I closed myself. Many such clients remained in the pipeline of people, but they were unable to close them even though the clients were interested. I have closed them too.*

When interviewing the team lead in one of the organizations, he elucidated that women are often apprehensive where risk-taking is involved. He also mentioned that female employees display a lower self-esteem. More specifically he said:

*S1-Male: The thing I have noticed is that in sales the females here hesitate; they get scared that they will lose the client and there are some who are scared of coming to the managerial positions and I have observed as well that many have willingly passed on the opportunity of being promoted.*

**Possibility of switching career**

The third theme is reflective of the final research question whose aim is to explore whether female employees intend to change their careers as a result of the Pygmalion Effect. Upon conversing and then analyzing the dialogue, it was concluded that 80% of the female participants aspire to change their careers. Alternatively, all the male participants have reported that they want their career to progress in the real estate industry either by being in the same sector or starting their own business within the same sector. Furthermore, the ratio of male achievements is reported to be more compared to females. Male participants have highlighted that in addition to maturing deals; they have received salary advancements and recognition from the upper management. However, the female employees have not reported going an extra mile apart from doing the specified work in the job description. One of the male participants reported.

*R4-Male: I was stallion on the first month of my job, like, in our organization stallion is when you bring 10 million or plus revenue within a month and I have closed my first deal, net cash, 10 million and I was the stallion of my team and all over the company.*

The interview questions also inquired about the attitude employees had towards doing the tasks. Yet again, the responses received were of a mixed nature. The male participants responded that they have a positive attitude towards doing the work even in the face of difficulty. The same question was posed to female participant and one of the responses is as follows:
**R2-Female: Anxious, makes me anxious**, she elaborated by saying, "there is too much pressure here. I mean, there is not much comfort here. There is a target and apart from that when people bother you, it is too much. Other than that, you have your personal life also, so it gets overwhelming at times.

It was also reported by male employees that female tend to display an unprofessional behavior which results in negative points during the appraisal times. They pointed out that women leave the organization by saying that they are meeting clients but then they do not show up to the office for hours. Additionally, it was also highlighted that women display an undesirable behavior such as sending out emails when their seating arrangements are changed. Per the interviews with male participants, they believe that it impacts their promotion chances. As one of the employees who have been in the organization for 6 months described that he is soon to be promoted even though there is a potential female candidate but since she participates in unprofessional acts, the management has decided to promote me instead.

**Culture**

The final theme of this study was identified as culture. It was an emerging theme of this paper as the interviews progressed. Interviewees highlighted culture as a barrier to female career progression. They pointed out that the cultural norms dictate that real estate is not suitable for women. Even real estate organizations can sometimes be wary of including women as their workforce as of one of the employees stated:

**D1-Male:** Well, it is, uh, since it's an open ended question so I would share my observation, uh that is because wealth is mostly accumulated by men in our society and when we are talking about "men", most of them are either, uh, big land lords and they are like you know khan, nawab and that kind of people and when we are dealing with them, and when mostly are uneducated people, so, uh, that is why, the real estate people or this sector believes that men can communicate with them as they share same experiences or they can you know relate to each other and that is why there are more men in this sector compared to females.

Another view that was put emphasis on was that women are used as mere objects to attract clients and it is this perception that drives a leader/manager decision to hire women but not to promote them. One of the female interviewees drew attention to the presence of female sales staff who were hired to attract clients, she stated:

**D2-Female:** You will only observe women in managerial positions in HR. All those girls are used to welcoming clients.
Culturally, women are not appreciated that they work in real estate sector; they are viewed in a derogatory manner. As one of the female employees reported:

D2-Female: *There are a lot of taboos regarding this industry, in a sense like people think of it in like the girl who work in real estate, the property business, are not really like that respectable or anything. There are a lot of things attached with this industry, attached with the girls that work in this industry.*

**Proposed Model**

The model derived from the thematic analysis is presented in Figure 2. The model is constructed based on four primary themes. The first theme highlights the significance of in-groups and out-groups as major determinants of career progression in relation to the Pygmalion Effect. The second theme is characterized by its sub-theme, namely self-efficacy. Lastly, the final theme encompasses career progression. Additionally, an emergent theme related to cultural influence is also identified and depicted within the model.

**Figure 1: Proposed Model of Pygmalion Effect & Female Career Progression**

*Source: Jehanzeb, Memon & Obaid (2023)*

LMX theory posits that members who have high quality exchanges are usually referred to as the in-groups while the ones with low-quality exchanges are referred to as the out-groups (Bakar & McCann, 2018). Trust, respect, social reciprocity, and inclination towards the employee are some of the common elements a leader may display in his/her exchanges in case of in-groups (Buengeler et al., 2021; Liden
& Maslyn, 1998). A relationship distant in its nature is categorized as out-groups (Buengeler et al., 2021; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). In the findings section of this paper, it was pointed out that the relationship leaders/managers had with male participants were different compared to the ones that they had with the female participants. The male participants implied that they had reciprocity in their relationships with their leader/manager where the leaders/managers supported them and in turn the subordinates made the interactions with upper management a smooth process, "We have this understanding that how he supports me and I am like there to, like, help him answer all the questions that he is being asked from the senior management".

Based on the findings of this study, females are more fitting to be an out-group i.e., a low-quality relationship with the leader/manager which is evident from their responses as one of them stated "In sales, there is no girl at the upper level, not as a sales manager, not as a sales director, not on those positions". In contrast to females, male employees are fitting to be an in-group due to a multitude of reasons such as they share a bond which transcends the office premises while simultaneously the relationship has elements of collaboration, reciprocity, assigning leads which naturally improve the chances of male employees in regard to their career progression. The male participants reported to have more inclination towards pursuing a career in real estate while 80% women wanted to pursue a career elsewhere.

A meaningful relationship with the leader or simply the in-groups enjoy social perks such as a better standing amongst the peers, better opportunities, and increased autonomy (Buengeler et al., 2021; Liden et al., 2006). Evident from the findings, male employees are given more autonomy as the male participants reported to have jurisdiction and control of how they were dealing with the clients. As one of them stated "I have total access over the control over the process, like if I need to pitch to them or I need to take them on a site visit, or if I have to deal with him, so I have like you know authority over it." However, the autonomous powers were not extended to females as they stated that to leave the organization to meet clients, it was pertinent to seek manager's or leader's permission.

The findings also suggest that male employees were given more preferential treatment by the leader/manager, and this was evident from a statement made by a male participant saying that the managers would assign his clients to him while no such practice was reported by the female employees. However, this preferential treatment can be attributed to the self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2022) displayed by the male participants as opposed to the female participants. Female participants on numerous occasions pointed out that they were assisted by their managers while the male participants pointed to that they were perfectly capable of handling the clients on their own. Additionally, the male participants also stated that they would help other colleagues in closing their client. Per the Pygmalion effect, self-efficacy creates an impression in the leaders/managers mind (Wang et al., 2022) and they invest more of their time by giving them control and collaboration on matters that goes beyond the contractual agreement as one of the male participant reported "when the new hires join, they are assigned to me and they are asked to seek my advice and they are asked to take me for meetings".
A previous study also highlighted that if there is reciprocity and a degree of trust in a relationship, it has desirable outcomes (Hsu et al., 2019; Kim & Qu, 2020; Meira & Hancer, 2021) and reduces the turnover intentions (Chang & Busser, 2020; Gupta, 2019; Meira & Hancer, 2021). One may conclude that due to a high-quality relationship for male participants, it has bred in positive outcomes with intention of staying in the real estate sector. However, if the same concept is extended to the female employees, one may conclude that due to low quality relationships, women intend to shift their entire career.

This study also points out another interesting phenomenon regarding the relationship between the male participant and the leader/manager. It was pointed out by the interviewees that the management tends to be harsh with male employees if they do not perform well. Studies suggest that this is because the management feels disappointed as they have invested into that particular employee (Carroll et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2022). Simultaneously, it provokes leaders/managers to think that it must be an anomaly. As a result they tend to inquire of what may have gone wrong and provides support to the employees by offering opportunities to revert back (Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Wang et al., 2022). Contrary to the male employees, females are not provided the same kind of support or even a harsh behavior. It was reported by the female employee that their managers are never harsh with females no matter what the situation is. This can also be linked to the Pygmalion Effect i.e.; a leader may only display such a behavior when the leader/manager expects or believes that there is potential in the subordinate which can drive them to invest in the employee.

Female participants reported that they experience the kinship phenomenon; a study by (Luna., 2021) revealed that promoting a family culture within an organization is toxic to the employees. The loyalty they display to the upper management is out of respect, similar to how one's parents are honored. To link this to the earlier findings, one may conclude that because there is kinship within the organization, females tend to be more subservient and therefore cannot voice their opinions and hence they have negative attitude towards their job which drives them to change their careers as a whole.

Finally, from the interviews conducted, a grounded theme emerged which will be referred to as 'the cultural influence'. Perception is the outlook of an individual which shapes his/her attitudes, biases, and behavior (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission., 1995; Galloway, 2012). This concept of perception can be extended to cultural perception that a leader holds which shapes his behavior towards his subordinates. In the context of this paper, Pakistan has been recognized as a patriarchal society which naturally provides more leadership opportunities for men as compared to women (Ali & Rasheed, 2021)"Think Manager, think male" is a common stance within a male-centric industry (Galloway, 2012; Schein, 2001). This was evident from the findings where one of to the interviewees mentioned, "You will only observe women in managerial positions in HR. All those girls are used to welcoming clients."

Additionally, one of the interviewees also pointed out that within Pakistan wealth is primarily accumulated with men where they are recognized by the title of Nawab or Khan and the real estate sector believes that male employees can communicate better with these property owners as they share
similar experiences. This can be linked to prior studies which have also suggested that social practices tend to become a hurdle for women when working within the industry (Begum & Sheikh, 2011; Varghese, 1991). Literature also makes a remark relevant to the finding whose basic crux is that men and women are treated per the dominant social practices (Dewitt et al., 2022; Gupta & Turban, 2012).

From the findings discussed above, the development of the conceptual framework is grounded in four major themes. The conceptual framework is designed by having self-efficacy as the independent variable as this is the perception an employee has of his/her own abilities while career progression being the dependent variable. The relationship between the independent and dependent variable is mediated by the in-groups and out-groups derived from the LMX theory. However, the independent variable and the mediator are moderated by gender whereas the mediator and the dependent variable are moderated by affectivity. The dotted circle around the model shows the emergence of the fourth theme i.e., cultural influence. Cultural influence moderates the relationship amongst all variables. The relationships in the conceptual framework (Figure 1) are derived from the findings of this qualitative study. The results suggested that male participants were more self-efficacious, therefore they were given more preferential treatment by the leader/manager which results in an in-group or in case of self-inefficacy which were typified as out-groups. The in-groups were given more opportunities such as training new hires, assigning clients, harsh behavior, reciprocity, and bond beyond the premises of the workplace which resulted in the development of a positive attitude (positive affectivity). Hence, they aspire to pursue their careers in real estate. While females, with low self-efficacy were classified as the out-groups which resulted in negative attitude (negative affectivity). Hence, they intend to pursue careers in other fields. Cultural influence is an external force; the presence of which causes women to have turnover intentions and the presence of which increases the career prospects for men.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The main aim of this study was to explore the relationship between Pygmalion Effect and female career progression. The findings consistent with the first research objective of the study suggest that leader/manager is creating gender-based in-groups and out-groups. Leaders/Managers need to be conscious of how they pay attention to male employees and female employees. Therefore, it is suggested that leaders/managers avoid keeping a relationship outside of the office premises that impacts the quality of the exchanges within the workplace. Additionally, leaders/managers should maintain a similar interaction with all the employees and provide opportunities based on merit rather than a preferred group.

The second objective was reflected in the self-efficacy or the lack thereof amongst employees. Leaders/Managers should keep a close eye on the training provided regarding the sales pitch to improve the experiences with the client. Therefore, it is suggested that managers/leaders should arrange effective training programs within real estate organizations to improve sales pitch of all employees to give them an equal advantage to compete with each other. Furthermore,
leaders/managers are advised to encourage their female staff to work in the field and be aware of the contemporary market trends within the real estate sector.

The results of the third objective of this study suggest that women not only tend to leave the organization but also hold intentions to change their career. The real estate industry must be aware of such intentions as it poses problems such as lack of diversity. The turnover may add cost to the real estate organization due to the constant repetition of the recruitment processes. In light of this, top management may address this issue by holding regular one-to-one meetings with their subordinates to address grievances. Exit interviews are advised to know the issues female employees are facing so they can be resolved. The emergent theme of this study suggests that cultural influence also plays a vital role in shaping the decisions of the organization. Within the results, it was highlighted that real estate industry hires women to attract the clients or women role is limited to calling clients while the rest is dealt by the managers. The practice, if exists, should be discouraged and women should be given complete authority over their clients as their male counterparts are given.

Moreover, this paper has several theoretical implications. First, there is a scarcity of recent literature on the Pygmalion Effect, making this paper a valuable contribution to the existing literature. Second, previous studies have not explored the relationship between the Pygmalion Effect and female career progression, which this paper addresses by examining the impact of leader's expectations (Pygmalion Effect) on female career progressions. Third, the paper provides a comprehensive analysis of both male and female employees, highlighting how their careers are influenced by the Pygmalion Effect. This offers valuable insights into the differential effects of this phenomenon on opposite genders. Fourth, while prior research has linked the Pygmalion Effect to the Leader-Member Exchange Theory, its application to explaining female career progression is novel and contributes to the literature. Furthermore, this paper adopts a qualitative approach, in contrast to previous studies that primarily utilized a quantitative approach. This qualitative analysis provides greater depth and understanding of the extent to which individuals are impacted by the Pygmalion Effect. Finally, the study focuses on the real estate industry, which has not been extensively explored in relation to the Pygmalion Effect and female career progression. By presenting contrasting insights from this industry, the paper offers interesting findings that enhance our understanding of how the Pygmalion Effect influences career progressions.

Lastly, while the study provides insights into the role of the Pygmalion Effect in female career progression within real estate organizations, it is not without limitations. The research on this topic has predominantly adopted a constructivist qualitative approach, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. To enhance the study's reliability, it is recommended to consider a larger sample size for data collection. Moreover, this research focuses solely on the real estate industry, necessitating further investigation in other industries to validate the presence or absence of the Pygmalion Effect.

To conclude, this paper addresses the issue of low representation of women in real estate organizations by uncovering the influence of leader's expectations and the formation of sub-groups that hinder women's career progression. The study also highlights the impact of organizational culture on the
hiring decisions of leaders/managers regarding women. Recommendations based on the findings suggest that managers should maintain equitable interactions with all employees, regardless of gender, race, or membership in in-groups or out-groups. This approach promotes equal opportunities for career advancement. The findings of the study may contribute to reducing gender disparities identified by the World Economic Forum and provide practitioners with insights to foster a more inclusive work environment.

REFERENCES


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