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Factors Restraining Women in the South African Public Sector from Breaking through the ‘Glass Ceiling’

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2012-01-20
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/11130

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ABSTRACT

Historically, South African society and the workplace have been characterised by a patriarchal culture which saw women not being afforded equal status as men in the home and in the workplace. With the introduction of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which advocates equality for all citizens, and the subsequent legislation aimed at empowering women in all spheres of life, it is important to ascertain whether women still experience challenges in their workplaces that pose a threat to their career success.

Literature suggests that an artificial barrier, the glass ceiling, persists in organisations across industries internationally. It is created by two types of barriers, namely externally and internally driven factors.

Structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with a stratified sample of 6 black and 6 white women who are employed in various levels of management in the South African public sector.

Although it is evident that public sector organisations are making concerted efforts to empowering women, the onus remains with women who need to have the confidence and the drive to seize the opportunities afforded to them.

However, the journey of women to the highest echelons of the public sector will not be without challenges posed by the patriarchal attitudes of male colleagues who might want to exclude them from their networks or might still see them fit for certain types of jobs and spouses or partners who will not share in family responsibilities and assist career women to be able to achieve a balance in their lives.

In spite of the challenges that women face that might attempt to limit their career growth, in order to succeed, they need to take proactive steps and devise their own strategies for growth.