WORK, INDUSTRIAL & ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mindfulness: An emotional aid to the glass ceiling experiences

R R Soumya¹* and Anuradha Sathiyaseelan²

Abstract: We have progressed to a phase where there is very little difference between men and women, but the reality in many countries is that women are looked down as the inferior gender and not given career opportunities to explore. They are not let into the decision-making roles at the organization even when they have an equal qualification, experience and skill. They are placed low in the hierarchy which allows them to witness the functions at the higher level of the organization but restricts them from participating in them. There are a lot of factors like cultural, socio-demographic factors and society itself that influence this disparity in the organization. These contributory factors create the glass ceiling phenomenon at the workplace, thereby generating emotional and psychological imbalances in women employees. This is a conceptual paper aiming to explore the concept and impact of mindfulness, and various concepts of mindfulness could be used as an emotional aid to treat the psychological effects of the glass ceiling. It further explains some of the mindful concepts like mindful walking, mindful life and mindfulness-based stress reduction technique in treating some of the psychological and emotional issues like depression, anxiety, frustration, traumatic experiences, adjustment issues, addiction, stress, low self-esteem, low self-confidence and

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The authors aim to create awareness through learning and education than just the “literacy status” to strike a better balance in the society. A balanced society should treat, uphold and offer opportunities to every individual equally irrespective of socio-demographic identities. The contributions of women add value to the National GDP which helps in footing the country at a higher ranking in the Global economy. Hence, the present paper aims to understand the problem of glass ceiling and offers a holistic solution. The aim was to understand glass ceiling at workplace – one that does not allow women to grow up the ladder just for the fact that she is “female” and the solution is to adopt the holistic way to overcome the psychological consequences of glass ceiling. Understanding and coping with glass ceiling helps in empowering women psychologically which instills an internal drive to overcome obstacles and achieve bigger in their careers, become more independent, empowered and bold to take on the responsibilities in the society.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Women are an integral part of the society. Though there is much talk about equality and empowerment, barriers to stop women from growing into better positions still exist. Such gender discrimination at workplace is called ‘glass ceiling’, and the severity of the same can lead to various mental health imbalances. Every aspiring woman aims to have a great career life that is well balanced and enriching. When such opportunities are blocked in the career of women, they tend to adopt different behaviours to face the situations. They either fight the situation or move away to avoid such situations. This conceptual paper aims to explore how ‘mindfulness’ can help such warrior women to cope well and fight well to meet their endeavours.
aggression. It also elucidates adopting mindfulness techniques in real organizational scenarios where women are constantly discriminated because of their gender and opportunities are taken away.

Subjects: Positive Psychology; Mental Health; Organizational Behaviour; Human Resources

Keywords: emotional aid; mindfulness; gender disparity; psychological impact; glass ceiling; inequality; mental health; well-being

1. Introduction

Once you start messing with psychological well-being, we get more and more messed up. (Marley, n.d.)

Lifestyles have changed over a period of time, and the stress associated with it has changed accordingly. During the Stone Age, the stress was all about the survival or making a living. But today, man has evolved to be mature in all aspects that expose multiple stressors in the path of life. An old saying, “Happy employee is a Productive employee” (Wright et al., 2007), has proved to be true with the help of scientific studies which are discussed further. The current market scenario is virtually connected and works globally around the clock. To meet the different targets and deadlines of different geographical clients, employees often stretch their work hours or spill official work over their personal life. They work with different time zones which in turn affects their biological rhythms, further leading to health issues (Smith, 2018). Such habits induce high stress and provide less time to socialize with family and friends (Smith, 2018). Apart from work spill over, stress and other health issues, the never-ending threat of recession and competition keeps the employees on toes constantly. To survive and sustain the same, the employees are forced to drag themselves into the hours and roles that are not assigned to them. Such situations often induce stress. Hence, it is important to keep the employees happy and calm psychologically that helps in increasing or balancing their abilities despite the stress they undergo. The stress or the challenges vary with gender; women employees face different obstacles and stressors than male employees that makes a woman’s career path more difficult to travel.

Sexism is one such reason of work stress for women (Batty, 2016). According to Gina Masequesmay in Britannica, prejudice shown or discrimination of a person based on their gender is called sexism (Masequesmay, n.d.). Sexism at workplace often leads to glass ceiling that withdraws women from better opportunities/senior positions unlike men (Batty, 2016). According to the definition of glass ceiling by Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia and Vanneman, glass ceiling is an unseen barrier that obstructs women from growing into higher echelons of the organization despite having equal qualifications, experience and skills like the counterpart (2001). These experiences overload women with higher stress as they need to prove themselves on a regular basis (Batty, 2016). Mindfulness practice is a technique that helps in controlling the emotions and helping in set straight focus. It is taken from the Eastern philosophy and adapted to the needs of the current generation.

2. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the modern version of the ‘Anapanasati’ or ‘Vipasana’ that was propagated by Gouthama Buddha in India between 4th and 6th century BC (Lomas, 2016). This is one of the major teaching of Buddha among his Eight Fold Paths (O’Brien, 2019). Today, the technique is adapted to suit the needs in various fields to reduce stress levels and enhance mental capacities (Gordon et al., 2015). It aims to teach the person to lead a life ‘mindful’ rather than ‘mind-full’. Mindfulness-based techniques are used in the corporate world today to keep the employees focussed on task and manage job stress well. It also aids in treating some of the psychological disorders like mood-spectrum disorders, substance-use disorders, schizophrenia, OCD and stress (Shonin et al., 2014). Mindfulness has five aspects, and these five aspects train parallel to live a life of mindfulness.
Observing, describing, non-judging of inner experience, acting with awareness and non-reactivity to inner experience are the different aspects of mindfulness (O’Brien, 2019).

Observing, as the word means, is to pay attention towards something. According to mindfulness, observing refers to noticing stimuli that are both internal and external. To lead a mindful life, one needs to be alert and be aware of what is happening within and outside. Internal stimuli could be breathing, sweating, heart palpitations, etc., while, external stimuli could be from the situations and people around (Baer, 2007). The first step to lead a mindful life is to be being observant within and outside self.

The second aspect of mindfulness is ‘describing’. Describing is nothing but labelling and expressing the observed through words (Baer, 2007). It is the ability to use the right words to describe a particular situation/event/person or an experience without any bias, judging, over-exaggerating or using inappropriate words. It demands to be expressed in neutral tone or words that make it easier for the listener to interpret it in his own way (Padilla, 2010). Describing is highly important as it lets the person describe in the most unbiased way and the listener to interpret in his/her own terms.

‘Acting with awareness’ is the third aspect of mindfulness that expects a person to live in the moment and act accordingly. It is to ‘act with awareness’. Being absent-minded or lost into another world does not help a person to solve the current problem, hence it is important for a person to be alert and wakeful to be mindful. Being aware of the situation gives the complete reality of what is happening and, hence, helps in making a decision or managing stress easy (Baer, 2007).

The fourth is a very important aspect in using mindfulness as an aid to emotional imbalance through glass ceiling. ‘Non-judging of inner experience’ refers to ‘refraining from evaluation of one’s sensations, cognitions, and emotions’ (Baer, 2007). As human beings we are often trained to think what others might judge about us or constantly try to match the social standards and stereotypes. And that is one reason that makes it difficult to make decisions as it mentally bothers. Mindful practice includes non-judging or non-evaluating one’s own internal sensations, cognition and emotions.

The last aspect of mindfulness is ‘non-reactivity to inner experience’. According to this aspect, one should let the thoughts come and go but should make sure he/she is not hung with these thoughts (Baer, 2007). It means that one should not be worried at every thought that crosses their mind but instead should let it free flow without any barriers. This aspect further explains that free flow of thoughts could offer more solutions; when thoughts are frozen and a specific perspective is assumed to solve a problem, it does not pave way for multiple perspectives/solutions to the problem. Hence, to have faster decision-making, non-reactivity to every thought should be avoided.

3. Emotions and emotional aid
Emotions can be referred to as ‘feelings’ in layman’s language. According to the Oxford English dictionary, it is defined as ‘any agitation or disturbance of mind, feeling, passion; any vehement or excited mental state’ (Goleman, 2013). There are more than hundreds of feelings that are a blend, variations and mutation of primary emotions (Goleman, 2013). Emotions are seen from three different perspectives. Some argue that it is a neurological process, while some believe that it is a physiological process and few others believe that it is a cognitive process (Cherry, 2019). Based on this understanding there are various theorists who have given different backgrounds/perspectives to understand emotions. James–Lange theory, established around 1800, propagated that emotions occur as a physiological response to the stimuli from the environment; it is how one interprets the situation. For example, when a person spots a snake, he might tremble and shiver, understanding these physiological responses, he understands that he is experiencing fear (Cherry, 2019). On the contrary, Schachter–Singer theory promoted that, when a person faces a situation, he first needs to understand the situation and label what he/she is feeling to produce
a physiological reaction (Cherry, 2019) (“Theories of Emotion in Psychology,” 2020). Contradicting
physiological and neurological theories, some cognitive theorists of cognitive appraisal theory have
propagated that one needs to understand a situation before experiencing it. The theory further
explains that one needs to understand the stimuli which is followed by interpreting the thoughts
and then the experience of emotions to occur along with the physiological response (Cherry, 2019).

There are various emotions, some are positive and some are negative, and both need to be
balanced well (Goleman, 2013). When positive emotions, such as happiness, content and joy are
high, they lead to pleasure which is enjoyable. But when negative emotions, such as sadness,
irritation, frustration, guilt and anger, are high, they lead to an emotional breakdown that needs
emotional aid to cope with.

A person injured physically is offered an aid to heal the wound. Similarly, when a person goes
through emotional turmoil, he/she needs to be offered emotional aid to help cope/heal better.
Psychological issues are equally important to be taken care of like the physiological health.
Psychological first aid is the first line of help offered by the mental health professionals or first
responders in the times of emotional breakdown, crises or trauma (Snider et al., 2011). This paper
focuses on the emotional imbalance caused by glass ceiling and addresses how mindfulness could
be used as emotional aid to treat the imbalance caused by glass ceiling. Firstly, there are different
ways of emotional aid that need to be understood.

The first way of offering emotional aid is through ‘recognition’ of emotional pain the person is
going through. Some people show it in their words, expressions, gestures and behaviours while
some bottle it inside without even giving a clue about it. Hence, it is critical to understand if they
are in pain and to what extent (Leanza, 2018).

Once the pain is recognized it is important to comfort the person. Hence, they need to addressed
with ‘compassion’ and treated ‘gently’ that makes them feel valued and loved. In a work setting,
this could be shown by giving them moral support, motivational words or with small benefits of
letting them take leave for a day or two to cope well. Their self-esteem should be respected which
could drive them to perform better (Leanza, 2018).

Another important formula is to keep the emotional victims distracted from the incident.
Rumination can become very disturbing and does not let the employee cope easily. Hence, it is
better to keep them away from the situation or incidents that can trigger these painful experiences
again, such negative thoughts should be controlled (Leanza, 2018).

The last step is to redefine failure and to develop the ability to make new ways through loss. One
needs to help to think and redefine ‘failure’. He/she should know to take criticisms in the con-
structive manner and dive into another attempt towards achieving the goal. Also, when one
attempt fails, there are many other ways to look at it. Such emotional support needs to be given
to the emotional victims as an aid that can re-empower them and put them back on the pedestal
to perform better (Leanza, 2018).

4. Glass ceiling
It is important that we realize both genders are of equal capacities. They might be different in their
genetic makeup, but they can be similar to each other in their intellectual capacities (Helgeson, 2009).
We should not forget the lines ‘For the hand that rocks the cradle, Is the hand that rules the world’
from the poem ‘The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world’ by William Ross
Wallace. We live in a ‘modern’ world, where thoughts and actions have become more liberal. Both the
genders speak up for their needs and necessities. Similarities have come a long way and thus there
need not be any gender differences at workplace. Women and men have to be differentiated based on their sex and not on their gender. This does not or rather should not matter at workplace until the organization gets their deliverables on time and intact. It is to be understood that organizations need masculine and feminine characteristics which need to work hand in hand to reach the organization’s goals. Sadhguru, a revered Mystic, quoted that ‘the masculine and the feminine are two aspects of who you are. If you are too identified with one part, you will be half a life’ (Sadhguru, 2019). Similarly, some of the scientific research has proven that gender diversity at workplace improves innovation, novel solutions and creativity (Díaz-García et al., 2014).

4.1. Gender differences and glass ceiling

Though scientifically it is proved that women and men are similar in their abilities when given proper opportunities to explore themselves and contribute to the organization, we still see that women are having a setback when they want to climb up the organizational ladder. There are a lot of stereotypes that are attached with ‘woman’ or ‘Lady’ or ‘girl’. She is expected not to go out after it is dark, she cannot wear what she wants and she should not work just because she is a woman. It is important to stabilize both men and women to equal status and opportunities to have a healthy living. This is a nation, a land where we are always worshipping the feminine. We call the planet Mother Earth, the nation itself is conceptualized as feminine—she is Bharat Mata. There is not a single village in this country where the feminine is not worshipped as Devi or Amman or in some form. At the same time, we are a nation, which is beginning to treat women as second class citizens in many ways—with infanticide, feticide and all these things, almost as an unwanted gender (Sadhguru, 2016). It is time that we look deep into this part where women get equal opportunities to show their talents and skills to move ahead.

In the recent times, women are venturing into male-dominated jobs (Nandy et al., 2014). For example, there is a rise in women doctors and army personnel. They walk their way head strong breaking all the obstacles in their path. She is becoming economically stronger through this way. She expects to be seen as ‘what she is’ and not ‘what she should be’. There are plenty of times they are suppressed from rising above and beyond a certain limit. They experience an unseen barrier while climbing towards the higher levels in management—‘glass ceiling’(Nandy et al., 2014). Glass ceiling has been defined by the U.S. Department of Labour as ‘the artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions’ (Rogelberg, 2007). Though there are a good number of women being employed, finding them at the managerial role is often too less. The gender ratio at workplace is highly imbalanced, and mostly women are seen in lower-level jobs than higher-level jobs (Nandy et al., 2014).

4.2. Theoretical framework of glass ceiling

There are some theories that try to reason out gender differences. If this has to be understood from the evolutionary perspective, the ‘hunter-gatherers’ theory gives an important reason for differences. It was believed that since women gave birth, she knew her offsprings better than the male counterpart. Hence, women were expected to take care of the babies and make every arrangement for their survival while the men went to hunt and feed the family. These habits eventually have grained into the systems that have led to women to show more of nurturing and warm behaviours while men tend to be more aggressive and authoritarian in behaviour (Helgeson, 2009).

The social perspective of gender difference is reasoned by the ‘gender-role socialization’. There are unwritten responsibilities and behaviours written by the society. One needs to adhere to those based on their sex! If the person adheres, he is accepted, if not, they are criticized and looked down (Helgeson, 2009). For example, the wife is looked down or not accepted when she earns more than her husband, and she is always expected to stay lower to him in all aspects.
Social exclusion theory is one other framework which describes how some of the minority or marginalized groups are excluded from the mainstream decision-making. Though there are many entry-level women employees, there are just a few at the boards. Though these women are at the board, they usually experience exclusion during major events like policymaking, decision-making or policy implementation/execution. This mindset snatches away the opportunities from the women who aspire into bigger designations and roles (Love, 2017).

‘Human capital theory’ tries to draw equality between genders at workplace. According to this theory, one needs to be given a role or responsibility based on the skills, education and experience he/she has and nothing else should matter at all. This is basically investing in ‘human beings’ with extensive knowledge and the ability to solve problems rather than going by the biased, stereotypical decisions based on gender. This theory propagates the leaders to have an unbiased view of the gender while reaching the goal (Rogelberg, 2007).

4.3. Literature review

The literature on glass ceiling has explored studies from various countries around the world and proves that it exists everywhere but in different intensities. Even a developed economy like the United States has the existence of glass ceiling that curbs the women employees from reaching the top positions. A study was conducted on women employees of the federal government to understand if the internal or the external factors influenced and caused glass ceiling. It was found that glass ceiling was influenced by the internal labour market rather than sex segregation or gender inequality. It was also observed that women got lesser opportunities for progress when compared to men (Yamagata et al., 1997). Another study aimed to understand if education and experience influenced or played a role in glass ceiling. From the obtained data, it was understood that experience and education only played a partial role while it was the cultural factor that influenced the glass ceiling more. The companies also questioned the potential and commitment of women to perform certain jobs (Naff, 1994). Men assumed more opportunities compared to women even if they were in the pipeline. This was studied on women employees of the U.S. federal government. Though there is an increase in the women force, access to opportunities or situations to prove themselves are not given importance (Henry, 1994). Another study shows that women often lose chances of being mentored or coached just because of the fact that they are women and are sidelined. Women in the top positions of the U.S. federal government were sampled to conclude that they seldom have opportunities to get mentoring or coaching that helps them climb the career ladder better (Laschley, 2013). The Canadian governments’ women employees have opined that they do go through glass ceiling and its effects. They have expressed it as a painful experience and are expected to fit to the ‘social roles’ and are not allowed to move beyond a certain timeline. They also go through negative and stereotypical criticism if they do not adhere to the social roles (O’Brien, 2019).

A study in a private company has revealed that glass ceiling is invisible. Though one cannot see the barrier, it can be strongly felt. The glass ceiling gets tougher as the employees move higher in their career ladder. The same study also reveals that, though there are women who climb up the ladder, it is just 4% of women who make it to the boards in Canada and North America (Morrison et al., 1992). A multinational study has observed that countries which had better representation of women experienced less glass ceiling while nations that had lower representation had more glass ceiling. A similar rule was applied even for the equal pay opportunities (Terjesen & Singh, 2008). The conclusion of this study reveals that the better the exposure to women, the better is her growth. Secondary data of an Indian study on glass ceiling shows that women are still chosen for selective jobs and not all avenues are kept open. This is highly influenced by the culture and the societal norms. The authors also suggest that this scenario should be changed and only the modernization of thought process of the management of organizations can change it with the help of positive societal changes. Every organization should prioritize talents over anything else for the growth of themselves.
which in turn, helps the society to grow. Every organization should focus on “human resource” rather than “man resource” or “woman resource” separately (Nandy et al., 2014).

The vast literature on glass ceiling and gender disparity at workplace shows that inequalities exist in every country. The extent of it depends on various factors that are social, educational and cultural in nature. The present scenario of glass ceiling is that it is highly researched in some countries, while in few others, it is not explored much. In countries like India, it is the cultural bond that pulls down a girl’s education and career growth. It is one of the societies that predominantly have female gods to worship. While they glorify the ‘Adishakthi’ on hand, they fail to motivate women in their homes. Women, on the other hand, do not question such disparities with the fear of inviting loss or losing their job (Nandy et al., 2014). According to the report in Business Today, there has been a fall in women workforce in 2018 when compared to 2005. It has dipped to 26% from 36.7%, and the article also suggests that girl’s education should be strengthened with STEM and other educative models for better empowerment (BusinessToday, 2019). India recently passed a bill that there should be at least one woman in the board, whether government or non-government. The Ernst and Young report shows that this has helped the number of women on the boards to increase from 5% to 12% in 2018. It has also reserved 33% of the seats in Lok Sabha and all the state legislative assemblies for women (Verma, 2018). The government is taking initiatives to empower and encourage women.

Glass ceiling as a concept seems simple, but the core of it is hard to digest. It stems from ‘sexism’ and eventually leads to the culture that effortlessly discriminates women on every ground possible. It leads to various psychological issues from as small as irritation to severe forms of clinical issues that are further discussed. The impact of glass ceiling is primarily psychological in nature, which further leads to physiological issues. Some of the psychological issues are anxiety, stress, apprehensions, frustration, depression, traumatic experiences, adjustment issues, self-doubting, poor self-worth, self-pity, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, anger and addiction.

5. Mindfulness as an aid
Mindfulness is about controlling body and mind by being aware of every sensation, perception, movement, environment and thoughts through gentle ways that nurture personal growth in the most holistic way possible (Staff, 2014). There are different concepts of mindfulness like mindful eating, mindful walking, mindful living, mindful meditation and many more that help in tackling different emotional and psychological issues.

Anxiety and stress are one of the primary outcomes of glass ceiling issues. It is an elevated negative emotion that is accompanied by various physiological changes. According to the American Psychological Association, which has adapted from Encyclopaedia, ‘It is an over whelmed state of a person that causes tension, nervousness and uneasiness in certain environment that leads to high blood pressure due to potential changes in their lives. It is triggered by people or environments that a person is constantly exposed to demanding and unrealistic expectations’ (Taylor, 2006). Some of the basic physiological symptoms are dizziness, increased heart palpitations, sweating and shivering. These tensions further lead to stress. Stress is as well an elevated state of emotions which is caused by intense emotional experience that could be both positive or negative. Stress, according to Baum 1990, is a negative emotional experience where the person experiences predictable physiological changes like the heart-beat, biochemical, cognitive and behavioural changes (Taylor, 2006). Victims of glass ceiling often experience stress due to the tensions that exist in the work culture or because of the person they are reporting to. Constant stress could further lead to acute or chronic stress, whereas anxiety can become a disorder by itself or lead to phobias and compulsions. A study has shown that women are the most prone to stress-related disorders due to their multitasking responsibilities. Work and family pose equal stressors because of which they become the target for mental issues than in men (Baruch, Biener, & Barnett, 1987).
Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) technique is an effective technique that helps in reducing anxiety and stress. MBSR is a set of techniques that helps in changing the mindset and perception of stimulus that is encountered. It mostly trains to work on space between stimulus and response (Baum, 2010). MBSR involves certain exercises that are a combination of meditation and yoga. It trains on focusing and being aware and further shifting from focusing to awareness, the mindful exercises also included mindful eating, stretching and walking. These exercises seem very common, but they are done with awareness and focus (Ackerman, 2020). Mindful eating is where one chooses what, why and how much to eat (Hanh & Cheung, 2011). Mindful stretching is where one realizes which part of the body is tensed and which is loose, what needs to be targeted while exercising (Ackerman, 2020). Mindful walking is one other form of MBSR where a person is aware of each step they are going to take, the pressure and the speed that is maintained along with the breath (Ackerman, 2020). The studies have shown that MBSR has shown progressive results in reducing anxiety and stress when compared with many other methods (Teleki, 2008), (Arch & Ayers, 2013), (Janssen et al., 2018). A meta-analysis of various studies have shown that MBSR improves the mental health better of the people undergoing anxiety and stress than MBCT (Fjorback et al., 2011).

Any achievement at workplace is expected to be acknowledged and appreciated. Sometimes, lack of these simple motivators can build in apprehensions and frustrations. Women employees tend to start getting apprehensive of their own capacities, and when they know they have done a fair job and are not complimented for it, they are hurt, which in turn leads to lack of interest. Other issues that can cause apprehensions and frustrations is the exhibition of disparity in terms of pay and promotions. A study has revealed that mid-management employees are more frustrated and apprehensive than the lower-level employees as they are answerable to both—higher- and lower-level employees (Goodson, Dudley, & Weeks, 2006).

Apprehensions and frustrations are interlinked and can be changed in the way they are perceived. The PERMA model by Martin Seligman helps elucidate on how it can be used to handle better mental health and well-being. It is basically a happiness model which trains on guided happiness. It helps in enjoying life to the fullest possible (Pascha, 2020). PERMA is the abbreviation of Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishments. Positive emotion is nothing but optimism; it is the ability to stay positive irrespective of the person’s past or the present. Though women go through the effects of glass ceiling, it is important that they stay positive of the many more outcomes in the near future; regardless of this, there are scientific studies that have shown positive impact through optimism (Pascha, 2020). It helps to stay in the reality and decreases overthinking by helping us develop constructive perspective of the problem area. Engagement is about being occupied in the activities one loves to do or triggers positive hormones within the body (Pascha, 2020). It helps in diverting negative emotions to the positive, thereby instilling more energy to work better. Women who face glass ceiling should sideline the problems and focus on something that gives them happiness. This enhances their capacity to look into the matter later and find solutions in a better way (Pascha, 2020). Relationships are very crucial for a meaningful life. A person’s mental health is many times influenced by the type of people he/she is surrounded by and at the same time, when there is an emotional or psychological imbalance, it is again the people who should be taking care. This becomes very important at the workplace, where most people in the workplace aim towards their own integrity and success rather than moving as a team. It becomes highly difficult if these relationships are strained. Hence, one needs to be cautious of whom a person is relying on and what is being shared. At the workplace, if the lady has enough relationships that would stand by her, she could share the discrimination with them or it could also result in a work culture where both genders are respected equally. Meaning is the next factor in PERMA that needs close and gentle attention. For every action, one needs to understand what is the real meaning of the situation and why is it important to fight for or let go. Many of the workplace issues arise in clusters with many people involved in it. Hence, it is important to understand if it is worth fighting for and if it is right to do so.
This is further enhanced by the core of existence—‘meaning of life’. When these questions are understood and reacted in the right way, it solves half the problems (Pascha, 2020). Accomplishments is the last factor of PERMA. Life with no goals or aims is worthless. Hence, one needs to aim bigger and higher; it is these accomplishments that add life to life (Pascha, 2020). Women who face glass ceiling usually reserve themselves in a small boundary; they should be able to get beyond that boundary to aim and engage better with positive emotions and meaningful relationships to sustain the competition and discrimination at the workplace.

The World Health Organization has reported that India is one of the most depressed countries consisting of about 9% of the total population to be experiencing mind depression and about 36% experiencing major depression. The report also concluded that an average person experiences depression at least once in his/her lifetime (Patwardhan, 2016). An American statistics has shown that women are more prone to depression due to multiple roles that demand multiple responsibilities and around the age of 36 years (Lieber, 2018).

Traumatic experiences are painful feelings triggered by a severe loss, which is characterized by the loss of strength in enduring a threat, integrity or sanity (Giller, 1999). Loss of the breadwinning job, abuse or lack of highly required promotions/hikes, heated discussion with higher officials and pink slip are some of the situations that could trigger traumatic experiences. Such experiences further lead to depression, loss of self-esteem, morale and motivation to pursue better into their roles.

Adjustment though seems as a very small thing to put up with; in the long run, it becomes a major issue. Most of the adjustment issues arise out of conflicting cultural background of the employee with the office culture, conflicting temperaments of the manager and employee, unrealistic deadlines, etc. These smaller issues further lead to adjustment disorders that involve severe levels of stress and threatening demands. The inability to cope with the stressful changes triggers psychological symptoms like feeling of hopelessness, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, low self-confidence, negative thinking and rebellious behaviours (Cirino, 2018).

An organization runs majorly on the factor of ‘trust’ between different people at different levels of employment. However, self-trust is very important that keeps the goals realistic and set practical deadlines. When a person is in doubt with his/her own self, the goal is thwarted. No goal or solution could be confident enough if there is no trust. Self-doubting is very injurious and can lead to low self-worth, low self-pity, low self-confidence and low self-esteem (R.r & Sathiyaseelan, 2019).

Women who experience disparity often go through an imbalanced state. They are not sure of seeking help and doubt who could render such help. In such situations, they tend to think low of themselves and lose confidence of their own worth. When they are not comfortable seeking help, they pity themselves for all that has happened. Hence, poor self-worth and self-pity are interlinked and cause an emotional imbalance (R.r & Sathiyaseelan, 2019).

Glass ceiling experiences lower one’s motivation and interest as they donot recognize the calibre of women employees and underestimate their worth. This eventually leads to lack of confidence and lowers their self-esteem that makes them feel insecure which influences the productivity negatively. Low self-esteem lowers self-confidence that in turn leads to self-doubting and self-pity. This moves in a vicious cycle influencing each other (R.r & Sathiyaseelan, 2019).

The most dangerous and harmful emotion is anger. It can be manifested physically and verbally. An angry person can either inflict the self or the environment (Williams, 2017). Frustration and traumatic experiences lead to anger/aggression. Some forms of aggression are passive while some
are active. Passive aggression is where a person bottles up everything and does not show it outwardly and, on the other hand, in active aggression, anger is directed straight on to the person or the environment that has triggered the particular situation (Oade, 2015). Glass ceiling often triggers anger through frustration. But many women do not speak about it in the fear of losing their job or intending a threat over them (Nandy et al., 2014).

Another outcome of glass ceiling is that, to resort away from the issues, the women who have experienced glass ceiling get into various addictions like addiction to illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco, games, social media, etc. An irresistible urge or compulsion to perform a certain activity repeatedly is called addiction. It leads to many consequences related to physical and mental health (Parekh, 2017). Some of the drugs help a person to enjoy momentary pleasure and stay away from the issues; this motivates the addicts to do it repeatedly (Parekh, 2017). Over a period of time, constant abuse builds up tolerance which gives way to abusing larger quantities (Parekh, 2017). Addiction can further come in the way of daily activities. Women who abuse drugs or addicted to social media can be asked to leave the organization as their performance can drop down. Some of these drugs can have strong after-effects that spoil the routine of the employee. These can be treated using the mindfulness techniques. Mindfulness-based relapse prevention technique educates the person on how bad these addictions are and why and how one needs to come out of it to lead a healthy life. The mindfulness technique works on changing the thinking pattern which first works on making the trainee accept the facts and then imbibe the changes, and it trains them to resist the cravings. Hence, the relapse rates are expected to be lesser with mindfulness-based relapse prevention technique (Vadivale et al., 2019).

Many of these psychological and emotional issues can be dealt with mindful concepts. As discussed before, anxiety and stress can be treated with MBSR while apprehensions and frustration can be reduced through PERMA techniques. The rest of the issue can be treated with other concepts that yield better results when used together. The first of the mindful concepts is the mindful meditation. Mindful meditation is a type of meditation that requires traditional meditation pose but mentally trying to bring back the focus. After assuming the first step of attaining a pose, focus needs to be kept on breath, but it inevitably moves away after a while towards every sound and sensation within and around us (Mineo, 2018). The next step of meditation is bringing back the focus while it gets lost in the thoughts trying to understand the every stimulus (Staff, 2019). Mindful meditation helps in reducing depression, poor self-worth, low self-confidence, self-doubting, anxiety and stress that is triggered by glass ceiling as it gives the space and time to think and then elucidate the solutions.

Mindful walking is another type of movement meditation. It is nothing but mindful movement. The major technique of this type of mindful meditation is to focus on the breath, bodily movements and bring awareness to every activity that is performed. It can be practiced anywhere from walking in the city roads to walking in the woods (Bertin, 2017). Since this practice can be done anywhere, it can be used for many emotional and psychological issues of glass ceiling. It can be used in anger management techniques and adjustment issues.

Mindful living is the way of life one wakes up to being satisfied and accepting the way it is. It is viewing life positively and being optimistic in managing relations or in thinking patterns. Mindful living helps to come out of autopilot functioning and makes us aware of surroundings and changes within us. It brings us closer to the inner experiences and tunes us to the raw emotions and feelings. Mindful meditation, mindful movements/stretching/walking and mindful eating are the core combinations of mindful living (Hanh & Cheung, 2011). Mindful living helps in engaging in positive activities, building constructive relationships, finding the sole meaning of life, being non-judgemental and non-reactive to situations (Sathiyaseelan & Sathiyaseelan, 2014). This helps in understanding the space between the stimuli and response and aids in responding in the right way (Hanh & Cheung, 2011). Mindful living helps in reducing stress, anxiety, anger, depression,
addiction, frustration, adjustment issues and apprehension while helps in enhancing self-worth and confidence.

6. Conclusion

The ever-evolving communities and the Internet exposure have led to a revolutionary change in the way genders are perceived. However, some of the basic boundaries that differentiate men and women are highly culturally influenced. The culture in the home and society is what walks into the doors of an organization and, hence, it needs to be constantly under check and updated with the requirements of the day. These beliefs should be left behind and made sure the women are given equality on par with men. This was proved by the Indian Supreme Court by giving the women officers a permanent commission like the men in the army, which shows that they have broken historical barriers to protect the interests of women in the army (Choudhary, 2020). Women need to have some support while they strive to get better in their roles but, when this thriving is not supported, it creates tension and imbalance which they cannot sustain for long, creating an imbalance in their psychological and emotional health. To tackle this imbalanced state, mindfulness can be used as an aid. Mindfulness is a holistic technique that addresses from the root level by letting the person change from within by using some of the Buddhist teachings adapted to the modern requirements. Since the changes are imbibed to make it a habit and then into a lifestyle, the relapse rates are comparatively lesser and allow it to be used in advanced levels of disturbed mental health. Hence, mindfulness should be made as lifestyle rather than part of life for the victims of glass ceiling.

Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

Author details

R R Soumya
E-mail: sonaravishtanker@gmail.com
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3808-8725
Anuradha Sathiyaseelan
1 Department of Psychology, Doctoral Research Scholar, Career Point University, Rajasthan, India.
2 CHRIST (Deemed to Be University), Bengaluru, India.

Citation information

Cite this article as: Mindfulness: An emotional aid to the glass ceiling experiences, R R Soumya & Anuradha Sathiyaseelan, Cogent Psychology (2021), 8: 1907911.

References

Ackerman, E. (2020, February 4). MBSR: 25 mindfulness-based stress reduction exercises and courses. https://positivepsychotherapy.com/https://positivepsychotherapy.com/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction-mbsr
Arch, J. J., & Ayers, C. R. (2013). Which treatment worked better for whom? Moderators of group cognitive behavioral therapy versus adapted mindfulness based stress reduction for anxiety disorders. In Behavior research and therapy (pp. 434–442).
Boer, J. C. (2007). Relationships between mindfulness practice and levels of mindfulness, medical and psychological symptoms and well-being in a mindfulness-based stress reduction program. Journal of Behavioral Medicine. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-007-9130-7
Baruch, G. K., Biener, L., & Barnett, R. C. (1987). Women and gender in research on work and family stress. American Psychologist, 130–136.
Batty, D. (2016, December 30). Women suffer much more work stress than men, says psychiatrist. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/dec/30/women-suffer much-more-work-stress-than-men-says-psychiatrist
Baum, W. (2010, March 18). Mindfulness-based stress reduction: What it is, how it helps. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/crisis knocks/201003/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction-what-it-is-how-it-helps
Bertin, M. (2017, July 17). A daily mindful walking practice. Mindful. https://www.mindful.org/https://www.mindful.org/daily-mindful-walking-practice/

BusinessToday. (2019, March 8). Women’s day 2019: Female labour force participation fall from 36.7% in 2005 to 26% in 2018. Business Today. https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/womens-day-2019-female-labour-force-participation-fall-from-36-in-2005-to-26-in-2018-report/story/325690.html
Cherry, K. (2019, September 9). Overview of the 6 major theories of emotion. verywellmind. https://www.verywellmind.com/https://www.verywellmind.com/theories-of-emotion-2795717
Choudhary, A. A. (2020, February 17). Supreme court to govt: Grant permanent commission in army to women officers who opt for it. Times of India.

Cirino, E. (2018). Adjustment Disorder. Retrieved from https://www.healthline.com/https://www.healthline.com/health/adjustment-disorder
Díaz-Garcia, C., González-Moreno, A., & Sáez-Martínez, F. J. (2014). Gender diversity within R&Dteams: Its impact on radicalness of innovation. Innovation: Management Practice and Policy, 15(2), 149–160. https://doi.org/10.5172/impp.2013.15.2.149
Fjorback, L. O., Arendt, M., Ørnøel, E., Fink, P., & Wolch, H. (2011). Mindfulness-Based stress reduction and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy – A systematic review of randomized controlled trials. Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 124(2), 102–119. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0447.2011.01704.x
Giller, E. (1999, May) What is psychological trauma? Maryland Mental Hygiene Administration.
Goleman, D. (2013). Emotional Intelligence. Bloomsbury.

Goodson, S. L., Dudley, G. W., & Weeks, W. A. (2006). Women Managers: Self-Imposed Barriers to Career. Dallas.

Gordon, W. V., Shanin, E., Griffiths, M. D., & Singh, N. N. (2015). There is only one mindfulness: Why science and Buddhism need to work together. Mindfulness, 6 (1), 49–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0379-y

Hanp, T. N., & Cheung, L. (2011). Mindful eating, mindful life. Hay House.

Helgeson, V. S. (2009). Psychology of Gender. Pearson Education.

Henry, L. J. (1994). Women archivists in the federal government: A glass ceiling? Archival Issues, 19(2), 95–106. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4110883

Jansen, M., Heerken, Y., Kuijer, W., Van Der Heijden, B., & Engels, J. (2018). Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction on employees’ mental health: A systematic review. APA Psych Net, 13(1). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191332

Lashley, T. H. (2013, February). The shattered glass: A phenomenological study of factors influencing career progression of women serving in federal leadership roles.

Leanza, N. (2018, July 8). Emotional first aid. PsychCentral. https://psychcentral.com/blog/emotional-first-aid/

Lieber, A. (2018, November 18). Major depression (unipolar depression). Psycom. https://www.psycom.net:https://www.psycom.net/depression.cen tra.l.gov.

Lomas, T. (2016). Recontextualizing mindfulness: Theravada buddhist perspectives on the ethical and spiritual dimensions of awareness. Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 9(2), 209–219. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000080

Love, J. F. (2017). Investigating the glass ceiling: How women in top media management shattered the glass ceiling. ProQuest Dissertation Publication.

Egove.

Marley, Z. (n.d.). https://www.azquotes.com/ https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1509995

Masequesmay, G. (n.d.). Sexism. https://www.britannica.com/topic/sexism#acccor dinarticle-history

Mineo, L. (2018, April 17). With mindfulness, life’s in the moment. The Harvard Gazette. https://news.harvard.edu/article/2018/04/less-stress-clearer-thoughts-with-minfulness-meditation/

Morrison, A. M., White, R. P., & Velsor, E. V. (1992). Breaking the glass ceiling: Can women reach the top of America’s largest corporations? Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Naff, K. C. (1994). Through the glass ceiling: Prospects for the advancement of women in the federal civil service. Public Administration Review, 54(6), 507–514. https://doi.org/10.2307/976669

Nandy, S., Bhaskar, A., & Ghosh, S. (2014). Corporate glass ceiling: An impact on indian women employees. International Journal of Management and International Business Studies, 4, 135–140. https://www.ripublication.com/ijmibs-spl/ijmibs4n2sp_03.pdf

O’Brien, B. (2019, June). Right mindfulness. Learn Religions. http://buddhism.about.com:http://buddhism.about.com/od/thingtofpdithpathway/right-mindfulness.htm

Oda, A. (2015, November 12). The difference between active and passive aggression in workplace bullying. https://lifejobs.psychologies.co.uk:https://lifejobs.psychologies.co.uk/users/6695-aryanne-oade/posts/3730-recongnising-active-and-passive-aggression-in-workplace-bullying

Padilla, A. (2010, May). Mindfulness in therapeutic presence: How mindfulness of therapist impacts treatment outcome.

Poreh, R. (2017, January). Addiction and substance use disorders. American Psychiatric Association. https://www.psychiatry.org:https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/addiction/what-is-addiction

Pascho, M. (2020, February 11). The PERMA model: Your Scientific Theory Of Happiness. https://positivepsychology.com:https://positivepsychology.com/perma-model/

Patwardhan, A. (2016, October 26). Trying to fight depression? Don’t give up, here are 10 organisations you can turn to for help. https://www.thebetterindia.com:https://www.thebetterindia.com/72879/10-organisations-to-find-help-for-depression/

R.R., S., & Sathiyaseelan, A. (2019). Women-workplace mental health. Proceedings of global social work conference on multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary responses to health and well-being (pp. 77–82). Kochi: Bonfiring.

Rogelberg, S. G. (2007). Encyclopedia of industrial and organizational psychology. Sage Publications.

Sadghuru. (2016, December 26). Women and freedom. http://isha.sadhguru.org:http://isha.sadhguru.org/blog/lifestyle/relationships/women-and-freedom/

Sadghuru. (2019, December 9). Sathiyaseelan, A., & Sathiyaseelan, B. (2014). Integrating ‘mindful living’ for a peaceful life. International Journal of Social Science and Management, 4(4), 187–192. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anuradha-Sathiyaseelan/publication/326244054_Integrating_minimumliving%27_for_a_peaceful_life/links/5b4028efa9ddccbf90667139/Integrating-minful-living-for-a-peaceful-life.pdf

Shrin, M. D., Gordon, F. V., & Griffiths, W. (2014). The emerging role of Buddhism in clinical psychology: Toward effective integration. Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 6(2), 123–137. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035859

Smith, R. (2018, February 12). Here’s why working nights could be killing you. World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org:https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/02/working-nights-is-far-worse-for-your-health-than-you-probably-thought/

Snider, L., Ommeren, M. V., & Schafer, A. (2011). Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers. World Health Organization. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44615/9789241548205_eng.pdf;jsessionid=3891B0D28E89690871E52A51C5E7EB78?sequence=1
Staff, M. (2014, October 8). What is mindfulness? https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/
Staff, M. (2019, October 18). Mindfulness: How to do it. https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-how-to-do-it/
Taylor, S. E. (2006). Health psychology. Tata McGraw-Hill Education

Telegi, J. W. (2008). Mindfulness-based stress reduction: A meta-analysis of psychological outcomes. Proquest. https://search.proquest.com/openview/ea6f6693bbccfeee672b422c2d29c2a892917?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y
Terjesen, S., & Singh, V. (2008). Female presence on corporate boards: A multi-country study of environmental context. Journal of Business Ethics, 83(1), 55–63. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-007-9656-1
Theories of emotion in psychology. (2020, January 6). The Psychology Notes HQ. https://www.psychologynoteshq.com/theoriesofemotion/
Vadivale, A. M., Sathiyaseelan, A., & Monacis, L. (2019). Mindfulness-based relapse prevention – A meta-analysis. Cogent Psychology, 6(1), 1567090. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2019.1567090
Verma, P. (2018, November 15). India first developing country to have quota mandating at least one woman director on board of listed companies: Report. Economic Times. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/india-first-developing-country-to-have-quota-mandating-at-least-one-woman-director-on-board-of-listed-companies-report/articleshow/66633533.cms?from=mdr
Williams, R. (2017). Anger as a basic emotion and its role in personality building and pathological growth: The neuroscientific, developmental and clinical perspectives. Front Psychology, 8. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01950
Wright, T. A., Cropanzano, R., & Bonett, D. G. (2007). The moderating role of employee positive well being on the relation between job satisfaction and job performance. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 12(2), 93–104. https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.2.93
Yamagata, H., Yeh, K. S., Stewman, S., & Dodge, H. (1997). Sex segregation and glass ceilings: A comparative statics model of women’s career opportunities in the federal government over a quarter century. The University of Chicago Press Journals, 103(3), 566–632. https://doi.org/10.1086/231251

© 2021 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.
You are free to:
Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format.
Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.
The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.
Under the following terms:
Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
No additional restrictions
You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.