

Glass Ceilings, Invisible Obstacles

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It is a fact that women leaders and managers are much more common nowadays compared to the past - even as far as 20 years ago. Women's participation rate in business life is increasing day by day due to factors such as the development of the intellectual and socio-cultural structure of our age, the increase in women's level of education, the creation of trade union rights that support their employment and the emergence of new fields of work. However, despite all these positive developments, the large majority of women are still struggling with inequality and injustice in business life as well as social life. Even though the number of women actively participating in the business world is increasing, they still face many obstacles in advancing to higher executive positions.

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Undoubtedly, the reason behind all this is a false public perception imposing the belief that women should only work in lower-level managerial positions; in other words, a discriminatory view towards women. Women holding positions that require a strong personality such as management are not considered rational by some circles. At the root of this mentality are stereotypical sentiments claiming that women are more sensitive and weaker than men and that their sentimentality outweighs their rationality in their spiritual disposition. This misconception makes it very difficult for women to advance in their careers.

The popular term "glass ceiling" explains the "invisible" obstacles that prevent women from advancing in business life and reaching top executive positions. These are "invisible" obstacles, because this limitation is never explicitly talked about. While expecting a promotion, female executive candidates who want to reach senior positions are faced with a virtual glass ceiling without knowing why. This time it is the "glass ceiling" that prevents female executives' rise in the business world, even though the law clearly

simulates the principle of equal treatment for women and men and establishes measures against discrimination in the workplace with the prohibition of gender discrimination.

The term "glass ceiling" was first introduced in the 1990s to describe prejudices that prevented women from reaching senior management positions in the United States and was articulated in a news report by the Wall Street Journal in 1986.

Professor Virginia K. Schein, who has long been working for the establishment of social and economic equality, is among those who draw attention to the mistaken public perception which claims that a strong, entrepreneurial, confident manager who doesn't give up or falter in the face of difficulties - that is an ideal manager - must be male as put forth with the expression: "think manager, think male" and the glass ceiling syndrome.

Today, only a few women can overcome these obstacles that make their presence felt. Moreover, the situation is the same in any part of the world. Even in the most well-developed countries - of the 500 companies listed in Standard and Poor's 500 index for instance, only 5.2% of their CEOs are female. This shows us that the unfair view stipulating that women cannot have equal rights and values with men is silently accepted all over the world.

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Indeed, women are weaker in terms of physical power than men. However, the fact that they are physically weaker than men cannot be associated with their intelligence and capabilities, and in no way indicates that they should be valued less in a society.

It must be recognized that keeping women away from business life is greatly detrimental to a society's future. As a matter of fact, women who are removed from pursuing a working life often don't participate in other fields of social life either and this hinders the overall advancement of society. The development and advancement of societies is directly proportional to women's active participation in the social division of labor and their feeling free and appreciated. It is entirely possible to understand how civilized a society is by looking at whether or not women are able to enjoy their rights and freedoms in that society. In order to become an advanced, intellectual and civilized society, it is imperative that women take center stage in that society.

Societies advance and strengthen in proportion to the value they attach to women. It cannot be expected that a country in which women are ignored, not treasured, oppressed and pushed into the background would be strong; in fact, such

a country would almost invariably be quite weak. Therefore, it is one of the most urgent social needs to reintegrate women into society and to establish the necessary means to benefit from their superior and abilities.

In this context, women should have equal - as a matter of fact, even more - rights and freedoms; the belief that men are somehow inherently superior to women should be eliminated altogether. The mentality that falsely claims that women lack intelligence must be urgently defeated. Women should be given priority in all areas of social life, the business world, education and politics, and they should be shown the respect and esteem they deserve.

At this point, women also have important responsibilities. Women should resist with patience and vigilance the impositions of a male-dominated society, oppose negative prejudices against them and aspire to undertake proactive tasks that will fundamentally shake these prejudices and bring out their superior qualities. On the other hand, they should always be willing to improve themselves, encourage each other in this regard, and form a united front, as they need to strive together in order to overcome this wrongful mentality. Indeed, it is important for the rest of society to assume an attitude supporting these demands of women. It should not be forgotten that a solid, bright future depends on women's determination and resolve.

- The author is a prominent Turkish writer and activist. He blogs at: www.harunyahya.com

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Adnan Oktar's piece in Kashmir Reader (India) :

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