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## What prevents women from reaching the highest strategic management positions?

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### Abstract

This research examines the underrepresentation of women in corporate leadership positions, noting that despite inclusion initiatives, progress has been modest due to gender stereotypes and the tendency of many women to abandon their careers after motherhood. In Peru, for instance, only 9.59 % of executive positions are held by women, not withstanding governmental efforts. Through a systematic review of 16 studies, the proportion of women in leadership roles, the obstacles they face, and strategies to overcome them were analyzed. Results suggest that a 33 % female presence in managerial roles improves the work environment and performance. The main barriers identified include machismo, gender stereotypes, lack of self-confidence, impostor syndrome, sexualization, and inequality in family responsibilities. To counter these limitations, proposed strategies include fostering sociability, maintaining a resilient attitude, creating support networks among women, implementing gender equity policies, and participating in mentoring and professional development programs. The relevance of these findings lies in their potential to promote greater inclusion in the business sphere and demonstrate that, despite persistent machista ideology, it is feasible to overcome the glass ceiling that restricts women's access to leadership positions.

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### Introduction

#### Contextualization

The persistent gender gap in senior management positions is a global phenomenon that has been widely documented. Despite advances in gender equality, women continue to face significant barriers to career advancement. The concept of the “glass ceiling” (Powell & Butterfield, 2015) <sup>[30]</sup>, which describes an invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching the highest levels of leadership, remains a reality. Recent data from McKinsey & Company (2023) <sup>[27]</sup> confirms this disparity, revealing a gap in promotion rates between men and women.

The underlying causes of this inequality are multifaceted and deeply rooted in organizational and social structures. Acker (2006) <sup>[1]</sup> argues that “regimes of inequality” within organizations perpetuate gender disparities. Eagly and Carli (2007) <sup>[10]</sup> describe a “labyrinth” of challenges that women must navigate, including prejudice, resistance to female leadership, and lack of access to power networks. Furthermore, the “glass cliff” phenomenon (Ryan & Haslam, 2007) <sup>[33]</sup> suggests that women are often chosen to lead in crisis situations, which may limit their long-term opportunities. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2023) <sup>[15]</sup> offers a bleak global outlook, indicating that gender parity is still far from being achieved. To address this problem, Kossek *et al.* (2017) <sup>[26]</sup> propose a comprehensive approach that considers both the organizational and broader social and cultural factors that influence women's careers.

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### Gap Identification

The literature review on the barriers that women face in accessing top management positions reveals the need for more in-depth and diversified research.

First, there is a lack of intersectional studies that examine how the combination of multiple identities influences female leadership opportunities in various global contexts. Furthermore, most research focuses on Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these barriers vary in different cultures and economies. Secondly, there is a clear need for longitudinal studies that analyze the evolution of these barriers over time and the long-term impact of interventions to promote female leadership. Greater understanding is also required of how digital transformation and new ways of working are affecting women's leadership opportunities at the highest levels. Third, a lack of research is identified on the specific mechanisms that allow some women to overcome these barriers and reach the highest positions. Although Kossek *et al.* (2017) <sup>[26]</sup> highlight the importance of an integrated approach, there is a lack of studies that systematically evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies. Additionally, there is a gap in understanding how emerging organizational structures affect female leadership opportunities compared to traditional hierarchies. Finally, the lack of consensus on the metrics used to measure progress makes comparisons between studies and over time difficult. In summary, more diverse, longitudinal, and contextualized research is needed to understand and effectively address the factors that prevent women from reaching top strategic management positions.

### Objective of the systematic review

The main objective of this systematic review is to determine

the optimal proportion of female participation in management positions in an organization. The underlying motivation for this research lies in the need to understand the obstacles that impede the advancement of women in these roles and to evaluate the current state of the barriers that limit their progress. By identifying these barriers, we seek to explore possible strategies to drive change and promote greater gender equality in work environments.

### Methodology

#### Eligibility criteria

In this research, rigorous inclusion criteria were established to ensure the quality and relevance of the selected studies. Only articles that addressed female leadership in business were included, with a particular focus on strategies to increase the participation of women in management positions. Priority was given to works that presented empirical findings on companies' initiatives to promote gender equality and that explored the perspectives of women at a global level, considering cultural and regional particularities. Likewise, studies that demonstrated the benefits of gender diversity in decision-making and organizational leadership were valued.

To narrow down the search, three exclusion criteria were defined. First, those studies that did not identify the specific barriers that hinder the advancement of women in leadership positions were discarded. Secondly, the search was limited to articles published in the last twelve months to ensure the timeliness of the information, considering the dynamic nature of gender equality policies and labor market trends. Finally, only articles published in English or Spanish were included to guarantee the quality of the translation and the accessibility of the results.

**Table 1:** Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion Criteria
They should be articles that talk about female leadership within the business industry.	Studies that do not present data on the barriers that limit female advancement within business leadership
These articles should provide solutions to increase female participation in leadership positions.	Research articles that are not older than one year.
They must be articles that show the interest of companies in wanting to change the minority percentage of female participation within their organizations.	Research articles published in languages other than English or Spanish.
Regarding the demographic area to be evaluated, there will be no wall to collect data on the reality of millions of women around the world.	
Articles that demonstrate the effectiveness of having a woman in charge of a work team, both in decision-making and the leadership they exercise.	

### Sources of Information

In order to ensure the rigor and timeliness of the data used in this research, two specialized databases were used. First, Scopus was selected, a platform recognized for indexing peer-reviewed scientific articles, which guarantees the quality and reliability of the information collected. Second, Google Scholar was used, an academic search engine that offers extensive and up-to-date access to a variety of scientific literature, including articles, theses and books. The combination of these two sources allowed us to obtain a representative and updated sample of data, fundamental for the development and conclusions of this study.

### Search Strategies

The present research employed a comprehensive search

strategy to identify relevant studies on the barriers women face in management. Ten search strategies were designed, focusing on key terms such as "women", "managers", "barriers" and "equality", combined with supporting terms such as "gender", "changes" and "strategies". These terms were carefully selected to ensure broad and accurate coverage of the topic.

To refine the search, the Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" were used in combination with specific filters in the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. In Scopus, articles published in the last year, with open access and within the thematic area of Business, Management and Accounting, were prioritized. In Google Scholar, the search was limited to articles published between 2023 and 2024. This search strategy allowed us to identify a sample of studies that

comprehensively address gender issues in the management field.

**Table 2:** Search strategies in Scopus and Google Scholar databases

I	women AND managers AND gender AND equality	34	17800
II	women AND managers AND barriers	76	18700
III	women AND managers AND barriers AND business	9	16400
IV	women AND managements AND barriers AND world	35	17100
V	women AND managers OR women AND executives AND barriers OR obstacles	11	9820
VI	<b>women AND executives OR women AND management AND strategies</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>18900</b>
VII	women AND management AND changes	27	6170
VIII	women AND managers AND barriers AND companies	1	14400
XI	women AND managers AND obstacle	4	13400
X	women AND managers AND obstacle OR barriers	11	17600

### Study Selection Process

Rigorous eligibility criteria were applied to select the studies, focusing on research that addressed female leadership in the business field. Priority was given to those works that explored strategies to increase female representation in management positions, as well as those that realistically and achievable quantified gender diversity objectives in organizations. Likewise, studies were included that analyzed the barriers and obstacles that prevent the promotion of women in companies. In order to guarantee the quality of the evidence, exclusively scientific journals indexed in Scopus were consulted. The search results were subjected to an exhaustive screening process to ensure the relevance and relevance of the selected studies.

### Data Extraction Process

With the aim of identifying relevant research on the barriers that women face in accessing management positions, an exhaustive search was carried out in the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. Synonymous and Boolean search terms (eg, "executive OR manage OR direct") were used to expand thematic coverage. Additionally, the terms "barriers" and "obstacles" were included to refine the search. The results were limited to open access publications from 2023 and 2024. For data extraction, the CSV format was used, compatible with subsequent analysis tools. In Scopus, the following fields were exported: author, title, year, original title, DOI, and link. In Google Scholar, similar fields were exported, although without DOI or original link.

The extracted data were organized and refined in an Excel spreadsheet. Duplicates were removed and an initial review of titles and abstracts was performed to assess their relevance to the inclusion criteria. A tripartite classification (yes, maybe, no) was used to categorize the articles according to their relevance.

### Assessment of Risk of Bias of Studies

In this study, we used the Cochrane collaboration tool to rigorously assess the risk of bias in the selected studies. Cochrane allows us to carry out an exhaustive systematic review, minimizing the influence of biases that could distort the results. We focus on three key domains of risk of bias: selection, performance, and detection, corresponding to design, procedure, and data collection biases, respectively. Each study was classified into one of three levels of risk of bias: low, unclear, or high. This classification allowed us to

identify those studies with the highest methodological quality, thus guaranteeing the solidity of our systematic review. By critically evaluating the quality of included studies, we ensure that our research conclusions are reliable and generalizable.

### Synthesis Methods

In order to guarantee the scientific rigor of this study, a meticulous selection and analysis of the existing literature was carried out. Initially, an exhaustive purification of the database was carried out, discarding those articles that did not meet the established relevance and quality criteria. The information extracted from the selected articles was carefully evaluated based on its thematic relevance and its ability to contribute to the research objectives. In order to systematize this process, a selection matrix was developed that made it possible to transparently record the criteria used and the decisions made at each stage. Methodological rigor was maintained throughout the entire process, from the initial selection of articles to data extraction and analysis. This last step consisted of a detailed comparison of the extracted information, which made it possible to identify both coincidences and divergences between the different sources and, ultimately, to build a coherent and solid synthesis of existing knowledge in the field.

### Publication Bias Assessment

Once the article selection phase was completed, in which those that met the established inclusion criteria were prioritized, an assessment of the risk of publication bias was carried out using a funnel-shaped analysis. This method allows a progressive assessment of the studies, from a general perspective to a more specific one, as the successive stages of selection progress. This ensures that only studies that meet the most rigorous and relevant criteria are included in the final analysis.

### Evaluation of the Certainty of the Evidence

In order to achieve a high degree of certainty in our findings, the selection of articles focused on those closely linked to the topic of our research and that, in turn, contributed to meeting the stated objectives. Methodological quality was prioritized, ensuring a rigorous search process. However, it is necessary to recognize certain limitations inherent to this study. On the one hand, the GRADE tool, although valuable, does not allow for exhaustive evaluation of the risk of bias in the results. On

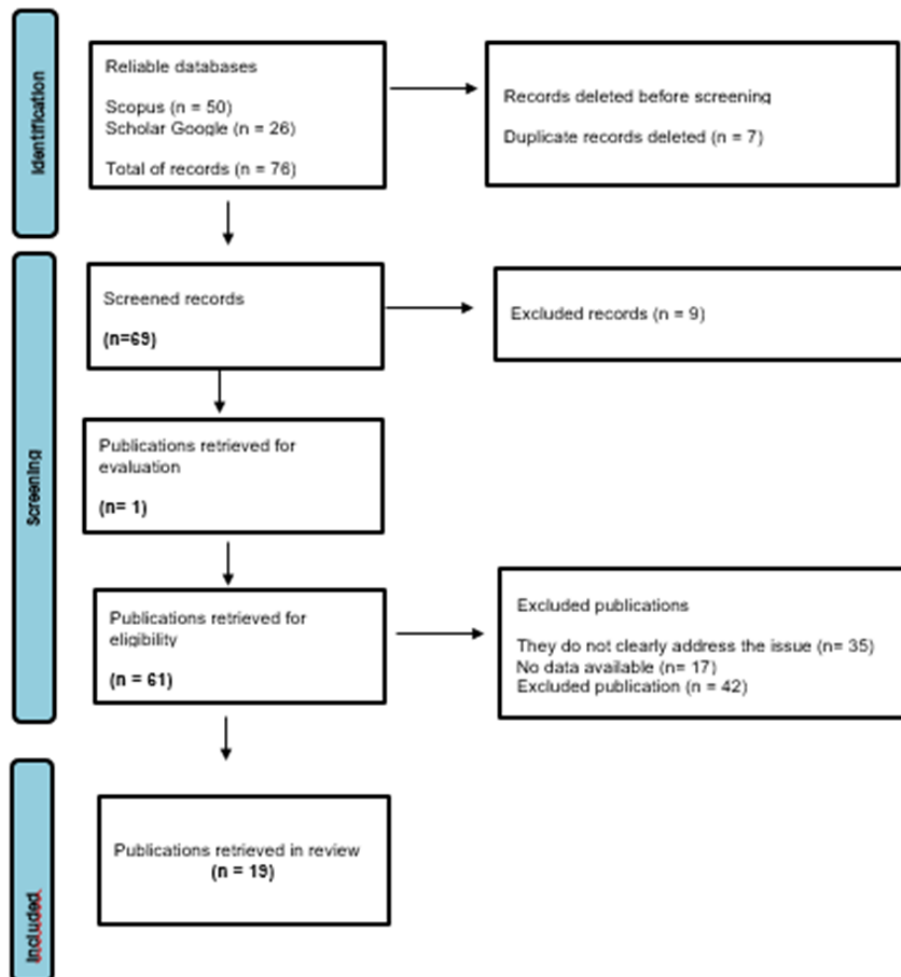
the other hand, the researchers' experience in evaluating the risk of bias, being an incipient research team, represents an aspect to be strengthened in future research.

## Results

### Selection of Studies

The initial search in Scopus and Google Scholar yielded a total of 76 records, of which 7 duplicates and 9 were excluded

due to access restrictions. After incorporating one additional publication, 61 articles were evaluated for inclusion in the review. The application of the eligibility criteria resulted in the exclusion of 77 articles (35 for not corresponding to the research topic and 42 for lacking the necessary data). Consequently, a total of 19 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the systematic review.



**Fig 1:** Application of the eligibility criteria resulted in the exclusion

### Study Characteristics

The present systematic review included a set of studies selected from an exhaustive search in two academic databases, applying rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria. The corpus of research analyzed was characterized by methodological diversity, with qualitative and quantitative approaches predominating. The qualitative studies, mainly based on interviews, provided valuable data for the construction of the results, while the quantitative studies were supported by the collection and statistical analysis of information.

The sample of studies was made up of research from various countries, including nations in Europe, America, Asia and Oceania, published between 2023 and 2024. All articles were

selected for their thematic relevance and for being available in open access, which facilitated their inclusion in the review. Likewise, it was established as an inclusion criterion that the studies were originally written in English, thus guaranteeing the linguistic homogeneity of the sample.

Regarding the quality of the sources, 93.75% of the studies were indexed in high-impact scientific journals, located mainly in the first quartile (Q1) according to the Scimago Journal Rank index. The remaining 6.25% corresponded to an article published in a journal not yet indexed, but which was considered relevant for the review. This diversity of sources, combined with the methodological rigor of the included studies, gives solidity to the results presented.

**Table 3:** Characteristics of the studies

Code	Year	Author	Qualification	Publication Magazine	Quartiles
AA1	2023	García-Sánchez I.-M.; Aibar-Guzmán C.; Núñez-Torrado M.; Aibar-Guzmán B.	Women leaders and female same-sex groups: The same 2030 Agenda objectives along different roads	Journal of Business Research	Q1
AA2	2023	Slomka-Golebiowska A.; De Masi S.; Paci A.	Board dynamics and board tasks empowered by women on boards: evidence from Italy	Management Research Review	Q1
AA3	2023	Goyal R.; Kakabadse N.; Kakabadse A.; Talbot D.	Female board directors' resilience against gender discrimination	Gender, Work and Organization	Q1
AA4	2024	Otaye-Ebede L.; Shaffakat S.	Breaking the concrete ceiling: Resources and strategies for career success among Black and Asian minority ethnic women leaders	Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	Q1
AA5	2023	Ferrari M.; Déo S.	Gender diversity and firm performance: when diversity at middle management and staff levels matter	International Journal of Human Resource Management	Q1
AA6	2023	Tlaiss HA; Khanin D.	Cultural trespassers or disruptors? Femininity reinvented and the career advancement strategies of Saudi women senior managers	Human Relations	Q1
AA7	2023	Bishop AJ; Mitchell S.	Networking and other important requirements for women leaders in their advancement to senior leadership positions in the National Health Service (NHS): A qualitative study	BMJ Leader	Q2
AA8	2023	Gerged AM; Tran M.; Beddewela EN	Engendering Pro-Sustainable Performance Through a Multi-Layered Gender Diversity Criterion: Evidence From the Hospitality and Tourism Sector	Journal of Travel Research	Q1
AA9	2024	Živković L.; Štrbac D.; Paunović M.	Digitalisation, Growth Vision and Gender Equality Practices in the Machines and Equipment Sector – Does Gender Matter?	Journal of Women's Entrepreneurship and Education	Q2
AA10	2023	Calabrese G.; Bianco R.; Anjomrouz E.	Gender diversity in the workplaces: regulatory framework, public policies, and a possible future scenario	Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review	Q4
AA11	2024	Watanabe KS; Kwarteng AH	Unveiling the glass ceiling phenomenon and mitigating strategies through organizational justice: a conceptual paper	Cogent Business and Management	Q2
AA12	2023	Uma Jogulu, Esmé Franken	The career resilience of senior women managers: A cross-cultural perspective	Gender, Work and Organization	Q1
AA13	2023	Brophy M.; McAdam M.; Clinton E.	Vying for and forgoing visibility: female next gen leaders in family business with male successors	International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship	Q1
AA14	2023	Feenstra S.; Stoker JI; Lammers J.; Garretsen H.	Managerial stereotypes over time: the rise of feminine leadership	Gender in Management	Q1
AA17	2022	Ramos A.; Latorre F.; Thomas I.; Ramos J.	TOP WOMAN: Identifying barriers to women's access to management	European Management Journal	Q1
AA19	2024	Kaya Y.; Tamer G.	The Strategies of Turkish Female Managers to Break Glass Ceiling	Sosyoekonomi	Not applicable

### Risk of Bias of Individual Studies

To assess the methodological quality of the studies included in this systematic review, the Cochrane risk of bias assessment tool was used. This instrument allowed us to identify and exclude those studies with a high risk of bias in any of their variables, thus guaranteeing the robustness of the results obtained. Of the initial studies, three were discarded due to the presence of biases that could have compromised the internal validity of their findings. Importantly, bias,

understood as any systematic deviation from the truth, can lead to distorted results and erroneous conclusions. By eliminating studies with a high risk of bias, the potential impact of these errors on the results of the present review was minimized, thus strengthening confidence in the final conclusions. The presence of bias can negatively affect the validity and reliability of research results, which in turn can lead to misinterpretation of data and unfounded conclusions.

**Table 4:** Risk of bias assessment

Code	Variables		
	Design	Procedural	Data collection
A1	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A2	Unclear risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A3	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A4	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A5	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias
A6	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias

A7	Unclear risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A8	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A9	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A10	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A11	Low risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A12	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A13	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A14	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias
A15	High risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias
A16	High risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias	Low risk of bias
A17	Low risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias
A18	Unclear risk of bias	Low risk of bias	High risk of bias
A19	Low risk of bias	Low risk of bias	Unclear risk of bias

### Individual Study Results

The AA10 reports that Italy has 26% female managers, ranking fifth in Europe, with only 3% of large organizations led by women; In the EU, the average is 33%, with Latvia standing out with 46% in management positions (Calabrese *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[7]</sup>. The similar results of AA2, AA5 and AA10 reflect percentages of women in senior management, with minimal differences, while AA7, AA8 and AA9 differ when addressing the percentage of women in jobs.

In strategies, AA3 and AA4 emphasize the importance of support in the work environment and resilience (Goyal *et al.*, 2023; Otake-Ebende and Shaffakat, 2024) <sup>[20, 29]</sup>. AA9 and AA10 highlight gender equality policies and training for women (Živković *et al.*, 2024; Calabrese, *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[40, 7]</sup>. AA3 and AA12 advocate not victimizing oneself and seeking support (Goyal *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[20]</sup>.

Psychological factors such as lack of trust also play a role (Tlaiss and Khanin, 2023; Bishop and Mitchell, 2023) <sup>[35, 5]</sup>.

Family issues represent threats to professional growth, as noted in AA12 and AA19 (Jogulu and Franken, 2023) <sup>[24]</sup>. Finally, even in prestigious environments such as the FTSE, challenges such as gender discrimination and limitations on work freedom are encountered (Goyal *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[20]</sup>.

### Synthesis Results

The systematic review of the literature reveals a persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, despite efforts to promote gender equality in business. Various studies (AA1, AA7, AA11, AA13, AA14, AA17, AA19) indicate that gender prejudices constitute a fundamental barrier that limits the professional advancement of women, who are underestimated and face discrimination despite their skills. Quantitative data corroborate this reality: AA8 reports only 15.02% of women on boards of directors, while AA10 indicates that only 26% of management positions in Italy are occupied by women.

Although there is consensus on the existence of structural and cultural barriers, the strategies proposed to overcome them are diverse. Studies such as AA3, AA4, AA6, AA7, AA9, AA10, AA12, AA13 emphasize the importance of developing support networks, implementing gender equality policies and promoting mentoring programs. However, the effectiveness of these strategies may vary depending on specific contexts.

In conclusion, the research shows the complexity of the problem of gender inequality in business leadership. Although barriers have been identified and solutions have been proposed, it is necessary to continue deepening research to develop more effective and sustainable interventions that

allow greater equity in the workplace.

### Publication bias

We evaluated the risk of bias in the selected articles considering the design, procedure, and data collection variables. This evaluation allowed us to determine whether the information provided was clear, concise, and accurate, which was critical to the quality of our research. We identified articles with low, unclear, and high risk of bias. Including studies with a high risk of bias may introduce bias into the results of the meta-analysis, which could lead to erroneous conclusions or underestimation of effects. Therefore, we excluded from our review those articles that presented an unacceptable risk of bias.

To carry out this evaluation, the research team carried out an exhaustive review of each article, paying special attention to the methodology used. In some cases, it was necessary to use translation tools such as Google Translate to facilitate the understanding of articles published in English.

### Certainty of the evidence

The solidity of the results obtained in this research is supported by the rigorous selection and evaluation of the included studies. Using the Cochrane tool, an exhaustive screening process was carried out to assess the risk of bias in each study, considering the design, procedure and data collection variables. This evaluation allowed the studies to be classified into three categories: low, unclear or high risk of bias. By restricting the analysis to those studies with low risk of bias, the quality and reliability of the evidence used to answer the research questions is ensured. This methodological approach minimizes the risk of selection bias and increases certainty in the conclusions obtained. If this systematic evaluation had not been carried out, the results could have been compromised by the inclusion of studies with poor methodologies, which would have limited the validity and generalizability of the findings.

### Discussion

#### Interpretation of Results

The present systematic review sheds light on the barriers that women face in their promotion to management positions, the ideal percentage of female representation in these positions and the strategies to address this problem. The findings reveal that the main obstacles are sexist prejudices and the underestimation of women's professional capabilities, especially during periods of motherhood. It has been determined that female representation in management positions should range between 30 % and 50 % to balance

diversity and business profitability.

This systematic review contributes to providing an updated perspective on this problem, offering valuable information for future research and equality policies in the business environment.

### Meaning of the Findings

This research addresses the problem of female underrepresentation in business management positions, a persistent phenomenon despite efforts to promote inclusion. This situation is mainly attributed to the prevalence of gender stereotypes and the tendency of many women to interrupt their careers after motherhood. The case of Peru illustrates this reality, where, despite government initiatives, only 9.59% of management positions are occupied by women. Through a systematic review of 16 studies, it has been found that a 33% female presence in leadership roles contributes significantly to improving both the work environment and business performance. Among the most significant obstacles identified are machismo, gender stereotypes, lack of self-confidence, impostor syndrome, sexualization and inequality in family responsibilities. To counteract these barriers, strategies are proposed such as promoting support networks among women, implementing gender equity policies and participating in mentoring and professional development programs. The relevance of these findings lies in their potential to promote greater inclusion in the business environment and demonstrate that, despite the persistent sexist ideology, it is feasible to overcome the "glass ceiling" that has historically limited women's access to positions of corporate leadership. This research not only sheds light on the current situation, but also provides a framework for future initiatives aimed at gender equality in the business world.

The results of our research highlight the persistent gender gap in corporate management positions, despite efforts to promote equality. Stereotypical gender roles and the professional decisions that women usually make after motherhood stand as significant barriers to female advancement in these positions. A comprehensive review of existing literature supports the idea that greater female representation at leadership levels correlates with a better work environment and superior organizational performance. In this sense, the study highlights the importance of implementing strategies such as fostering women's networks and adopting strong gender equality policies. In conclusion, our findings reinforce the urgent need to address the structural obstacles that impede greater gender equity in the workplace, thereby contributing to the growing body of evidence advocating for transformative changes in organizations.

### Limitations of the Study

Subjectivity in data interpretation constitutes another limitation, given that the synthesis and analysis process can be influenced by the individual perspectives of the researchers, especially on complex issues such as the inclusion of women in leadership positions. Finally, the absence of longitudinal data in several studies restricts the possibility of evaluating long-term changes and establishing solid causal relationships between the variables analyzed (Vázquez *et al.*, 2018) <sup>[37]</sup>.

The results of this systematic review should be interpreted with caution due to certain limitations inherent to the

methodology used. Methodological heterogeneity among the included studies and the possible presence of selection bias may restrict the generalizability of the findings. For example, if the sample of studies was concentrated in certain regions or industrial sectors, the conclusions obtained may not be extrapolated to other geographic or economic contexts. Likewise, the subjectivity inherent in the interpretation of qualitative data can influence the way in which results are presented, limiting the possibility of drawing universally valid conclusions. These methodological considerations highlight the need for future research that addresses these limitations and allows for a more robust and generalizable understanding of the phenomenon under study (Vázquez *et al.*, 2018) <sup>[37]</sup>.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this research reveal that women are limited by gender stereotypes and the decision of many to abandon their careers after motherhood. Based on these findings, it is recommended that future research focus on the presence of women in management positions in specific sectors such as mining and fishing, both in Peru and in Latin America. Likewise, it is suggested to explore strategies to empower women to assume leadership roles, overcoming gender stereotypes. It is crucial to investigate methods that encourage women's continued employment after motherhood, addressing their concerns about child care. In addition, it is proposed to study ways to effectively communicate the importance and value of female participation in management positions, with the aim of strengthening their confidence, highlighting their intellectual abilities and demonstrating their potential to improve the work environment. These lines of research could provide valuable insights to promote greater gender equality in senior business positions and foster cultural change in organizations.

After carrying out a systematic review of various articles to investigate the situation of women in management positions, the obstacles they face and the strategies they use to overcome them, areas of opportunity for future research have been identified. Although the studies analyzed were mainly based on systematic reviews, it is recommended that future research on this topic incorporate mixed methodologies to obtain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the problem. In particular, the use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, is suggested to explore the perceptions, experiences and opinions of women in management roles and those who work with them. These approaches would allow for capturing nuances and contexts that might not be evident in purely quantitative data. In parallel, the implementation of quantitative methods, such as large-scale surveys, is advised to collect statistical data on various aspects related to female representation in leadership positions, the specific barriers they face, and the effectiveness of improvement strategies. The combination of these methodological approaches would provide a more complete and robust vision of the current situation, facilitating the formulation of more precise and effective recommendations to promote gender equality in senior business positions.

### Conclusions

The analysis of the studies examined reveals a significant variation in the presence of women in strategic management

positions, with percentages ranging between 12.8% and 46 % in different contexts and countries, with 33 % identified as the optimal percentage. Evidence suggests that the inclusion of women in these roles has a positive impact on organizational performance, task tracking, and the implementation of gender equality policies. However, considerable barriers have been identified that hinder their advancement, including sexist prejudices, the "glass ceiling" phenomenon, lack of organizational support and disproportionate family responsibilities. Among the strategies that have proven effective in overcoming these obstacles are the development of support networks, mentoring programs, the implementation of gender equality policies and the active search for support in the work environment. These findings are of vital importance to understand and address the dynamics that promote greater gender equality in organizations, providing a solid foundation for future research and for the design of more inclusive corporate policies.

This research yields significant conclusions about female participation in strategic management positions, showing that their presence not only optimizes organizational performance, but also fosters a more equitable and diverse work environment. It has been found that the implementation of gender quotas has had a positive impact on female representation in senior positions. However, considerable obstacles remain, such as the "glass ceiling" and sexist prejudices, which continue to limit the professional advancement of women. The study highlights the crucial importance of support networks and mentoring programs as effective strategies for female career advancement, highlighting the need for a profound cultural change in organizational structures. Additionally, the identification of internal barriers, such as lack of confidence and imposter syndrome, suggests that future interventions should consider a comprehensive approach that includes the psychological empowerment of women. These findings contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge, providing a holistic view of the challenges and effective strategies to overcome them. Consequently, this study lays a solid foundation for future research and for the formulation of more effective policies in the area of gender equality in management positions.

### Final Statements

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable

Data Consent Statement: Not applicable

Systematic Review Board Statement: Not required

Conflict of Interest: There was none

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