

## Women Journalists in Lebanon: The Broken Ladder

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### Abstract

Despite making up a majority and being active in the media field, Lebanese women journalists are still excluded from top management positions. This paper studies the factors that hinder Lebanese women journalists from climbing the ladder to top levels. It examines the status of women journalists in leadership positions in the media field, studies the obstacles and the barriers, and explores the glass ceiling they face. It is a blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches, as we looked for consistency among knowledgeable informants, to ensure comprehensive explanations and in-depth understanding of the related issues. The findings of the paper investigate media journalists' points-of-view in terms of gender diversity and gender discrimination. They shed the light on the main obstacles, women and men journalists interviewees felt about women lack of progress as well as their inability to assume a place in decision making positions. However, this study is not without its limitations; therefore, it recommends further research in order to explicitly explore strategies that promote active participation of women in decision making structures in media in Lebanon. It creates value not only for the media sector but benefits as well the Lebanese society at large.

**Keywords:** Women journalists; Leadership; Diversity; Glass-ceiling

### Introduction

A close look at the different studies conducted in the field in terms of the women's status in the news industry around the world, presume that 73% of the top management positions are held by men compared to 27% occupied by women [1]. Same report alleges that in Lebanon, the percentage of women in governance levels attains 14.8% while it reaches 21.9% in top-level positions; which represents a severe under-representation of women who have no meaningful involvement in the policy-setting and decision making. To Byerly [2,3], journalism programs in Lebanon have always enrolled more women than men; yet, strong obstacles like gender discrimination and sexual harassment [2] prevent women from occupying high level positions [3]. According to Melki Lebanese journalism programs enroll on average four female students for every male, whilst this number disappears at the upper-management levels. Despite making up a majority and being active in the media field, Lebanese women journalists are still excluded from top management positions. More, they are not allowed to take decisions about news assignment nor about the overall shaping of news [2]. Witnessing a slow and uneven progress to breaking into the top position levels, women journalists in Lebanon face significant social, political and cultural barriers, forcing them to fall far short of matching the success of their male counterparts, preventing them from moving into the top leadership positions.

This paper studies the factors that hinder Lebanese women journalists from climbing the ladder to top level positions. It examines the status of women journalists in leadership positions in the media field, studies the obstacles and the barriers, and explores the glass ceiling they face. Based on a three point survey to all participants: Yes, No, and no answer scale, the quantitative method lacked of precise answers; therefore we suggested in-depth face-to-face interviews to same interviewees. The qualitative study provided then comprehensive explanations and in-depth understanding of the related issues.

### The Literature Review

#### The other sex

While taking a look to the obstacles that block women from attaining the Leadership positions; it seems that women's entire history had always been written by men [4,5]. "The other", as described by

De Beauvoir, is trapped by her conditions. She can only hold some privileged places in the fields of the mind and art, where action is not involved, whereas, her voice is silenced when concrete action begins. De Beauvoir pointed to the one main reason that prevents women from escalating the high level positions: the patriarchal civilization's institutions and values. "Women" had always been destined for men: they are just a simple fortunate accident that was drawn from the first male's flank. And marriage is to be considered as the most honorable career for them. Hence, they should stay far behind men in leadership positions where gains are measured.

More than 80 years after De Beauvoir, other authors pointed to obstacles that deprive women their privilege to attaining high level positions, but still fall under the patriarchal umbrella. Nicholson [6] counted: work-family balance issues, lack of mentors, lack of role models and lack of professional development opportunities. Khatib's study [7] stressed that patriarchal values hinder women's political participation and their identification as full citizens; as women are governed by the so-called "kin contract", in reference to Joseph [8] who defined this kind of contract as the mobilization of patriarchal extended kinship and as the venue of social control. In 2016, Melki and Mallat's study revealed that the entry of women into the news field is mainly blocked because of three main elements: gender discrimination, sexual harassment and the lack of a legally and socially enabling environment.

As it seems critical for women journalists in Lebanon to understand the reasons behind their discrimination from leadership positions and the significance of the trap they are caught in; it would be interesting to define and explain two main concepts, Leadership on the one side, and glass ceiling on the other; then try to understand how they enact.

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## On leadership

In terms of Gerber [9], Leadership can be defined as motivating others toward a common, ethical purpose. One can develop a specific Leadership style accordingly to the way the culture treats him or her; and on the schema learnt from the environment. Leadership is highly circumstantial, says Gerber [9] and has different traits such the ability to take risks, to be decisive, but more importantly to strongly hold own convictions.

To Maxwell [10], Leadership is to be divided into five levels: position, permission, production, people development and pinnacle. These five P's determine how effective a leader can be and how volunteers are willing to participate. Level 1 is the lowest level of leadership. It doesn't require any ability or effort to be achieved, and does not result in influence. Anyone can be appointed to this position. It is simply given. In the same line with Weber [11], this type of distribution and exercise of power is rooted in traditional beliefs and practices of the society. The first level exists because individuals can enjoy authority for the simple reason of inheritance, because they are the children or the relatives of people who exercise traditional authority. Regardless of his/her qualifications, the level 1 leader does not possess in the majority of the cases any special skills. Stupid or intelligent, exciting or boring, he/she receives his/her authority just because of the tradition and custom, therefore he/she is not always up to his/her job. Level 2 is based on a relationship, where trust and respect grow simultaneously, influencing the people to give the leader the permission to lead them. Level 3 is more about production, where the best leaders know how to motivate their people and get things done. At this stage, people follow their leaders because they are change agents who always move forward while producing influence and credibility. It is at level 4, that leaders invest in people and help them grow, while raising up new leaders. Finally, level 5 is the most challenging one, a sort of a legacy, where leaders create opportunities. At this level, people follow their leaders because of their positive reputation, of who they are and what they represent.

Analyzing leadership and gender construction in journalism newsrooms can highlight "*how inequalities are created in the workplace*" [12]. For some, they both are viewed as a Modus Vivendi, or as a practical arrangement between conflicting genders that allows them to coexist in a kind of a compromise. For others, such as Bourdieu [13], "*Journalism, is seen as a social field, which means that every part of this field embodies meaning, ordered within a hierarchy*" [14]; whereas hierarchy in Marguerita Melin-Higgins [15] terms, means struggling for power and for social construction.

General theories of social change including those of Marx, Weber and Pareto's are valuable in providing basic orientations in a dynamic world. They helped establishing a new climate of opinion in which many issues were exposed, including that of the "women question" [16]. Through their ideological interpretation of social change, as expressed in their books such as *Capital* [16], *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [17] and *The mind and society* [18], all three authors expressed the need for change in women's roles and status since "*women must satisfy their needs as individuals rather than as family members*" [19]. In Weber's terms and as expressed by Hacker [19], "*a woman might work up to be head of the Federal Security Agency but she would have less possibility than a man of transferring to the top position in the Department of Commerce. In the case of women, even more than men, special knowledge and long service are emphasized more than general capacity*".

Today's problems are still the same, as they were decades ago.

Accordingly, female leaders have to have special skills, extra knowledge and special talents to accomplish the same tasks and goals demanded by men; gender equality being still largely rhetorical for far too many women [20]. The difference between skills, knowledge and talents is profound. The distinction among the three, according to Clifton (2016), is that skills and knowledge can be easily taught, whereas talents cannot. Skills are capabilities that can be transferred from one person to another. Knowledge is what one is aware of; but talent is a different phenomenon. Whether striving, thinking or relating, it is what carves the recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behavior of a person. The limitation of skills and knowledge is that they are situation-specific; whereas talent is transferrable from one situation to another. Struggling to win the fight for talent for women is hard but can be reached with unique capabilities. Mixing up skills with talents, the PWC report [21] points to the main talents that put women ahead of her counter partners. They are: adaptability, problem solving, collaboration, creativity, innovation and emotional intelligence. These capabilities are a move away from traditional masculine traits. They are rather a shift towards *Leadership skills that are more intuitively female* [21].

## The glass ceiling

Even though it is critically important to shed the light on all female talents that can boost her position, it is also beneficial to spotlight the most critical glass ceiling and obstacles women journalists are to face at the senior professional level. According to a study [1] "the term glass ceiling had been used across nations of the world for several decades to refer to an invisible but nonetheless real barrier that women encounter in the workplace". In other terms, qualified women who possess skills, talents knowledge and experience for advancement are prevented from climbing up the ladder of the senior professional level, because of factors such as institutionalized prejudices and gender discrimination. Defined by the Harvard School of public health in 1999, the latter indicates "all forms of differentiation, exclusion, or limitation, made without any justifiable reason on the basis of one's sex". At the workplace, it includes unequal pay, unequal benefits, unequal hiring practices and unequal opportunities for advancement. More, these obstacles are usually expressed implicitly rather than explicitly in the day-to-day life of the organization. The glass ceiling studies found that the most relevant obstacles for women journalists in media companies are mostly related to:

**Family concerns and responsibilities:** Few women get to high level positions, with no clear path of advancement, because of their "other responsibilities". According to Franks [22] "what determines whether women are reaching senior posts is whether they have family responsibilities". It is noteworthy to implicate that researches have found that conflict lies when women try to strike the balance between her work and her family. Family responsibilities are difficult to combine with work, and men with no family responsibilities are to be considered as "ideal workers" [23], while in controversy women seem to be "problem-causing" as they fail to combine childbearing and full-time jobs. Accordingly, digital whirlwind had created new forms of journalism, where women skills have flourished, while leaving the full-time journalism and writing from home as freelancers [22]. According to ILO [23], the disbalance between work and family has always been the primary cause that affects not only women journalists, but all women who to succeed, are to sacrifice their professional careers to family responsibilities. Such situations lead to gender discrimination, where women are reluctant to a gender pay gap and no promotion. Back to the European Commission [24] definition, we will consider that the gender pay gap is "a clear expression of existing inequalities

and of the obstacles women face when entering and staying in the labor market”.

**The confidence gap:** Referring to Dunning [25] paper on “how chronic self-views influence (and potentially mislead) estimates of performance”, the authors revealed that an important source of people’s, but especially women’s perceptions of their performance, are related to the “chronic views people hold regarding their abilities”. Women underestimate their performance because they think less of their reasoning ability than men do. The four studies conducted in the paper proved that self-views often produce errors on how well one can perform. Other studies have also found that starting their adolescence, women rate themselves as less talented than men, that they do less well on some specific tasks, and that they rate themselves more negatively than men do [25,26]. This confidence gap diminishes women enthusiasm when performing; therefore instead of maximizing their efforts, women tend to sacrifice themselves, without attempting to ask or to do what seems to be impossible [27,28]. This kind of metacognition in problem solving is largely observed in all fields, as women’s most influencing perception factor of themselves is when “receiving praise from mentors and leaders” [29] as they wait to be encouraged to believe in and have more confidence in themselves. The problem with satisfying is that it encourages women journalists to accept writing news related to emotions [30] rather than centering on hard news related to serious stories [31]. This leads us to the third obstacle: the soft and hard news.

**The soft and hard news:** It is noteworthy to distinguish between the soft and the hard news [32], as the soft news refer to the social and the human-interest stories that are related to emotions with no “informational value” [33]. The binary division helps understand the horizontal segregation in journalism: serious stories, including politics, business and economics, but especially of war [34] are left for male reporters, while those of social interest, emotions, trends, entertainments and lifestyle are left for women [35]. This dichotomy is deeply related to hierarchy [30], as the hard news are especially tailored for men for their importance, while the soft ones are left for women, for being less important. Some authors attribute these suitable tasks to the culture of distrust of female journalists, as women can be rarely considered as reliable sources [36,37], when distributing men and women in occupations; which may influence implicit stereotypes [38]. Others point to the patriarchal culture as being the main cause that prevents women from climbing the ladder [39]. These signals serve the readers as indicators to consider women as incapable of leadership roles [36]. Weakened by her “soft” position, women are allocated softer tasks than men; while the “hard” news are better written by men who are to be given the privilege of occupying high level positions and high decision-making ranks [3].

**Be pretty: The gendered bodies:** Women journalists face more pressure than men in terms of appearance and age; therefore they try to gain credibility by coping with the social expectations [40]. Physical appearance highly affects not only women’s but also the spectators and/or auditors’ actions and attitudes. It has an impact over their career path and acts as a barometer of their profession. Ferri [41] studies acknowledged that the physical appearance, for television news anchors is differently perceived between both sexes, as it can play a career barrier role for women not experienced by men in their workplaces. As their occupation provides visibility in the public’s eye, Stone (1973-1974) noted that the viewing audience expects several features from the anchors, as it doesn’t matter if women are less paid than men; the latter are always put under the spectators’ lens, whereas they are always

judged on appearance [42,43]. They are routinely sexualized through explicit scrutiny of their bodies, hairstyles, clothing, and voices [44]. Back to Brainbridge [45], their study revealed that the newscasters’ appearance is essential, as it helps construct a bridge with the audience. It is a “form of marketing designed to attract a greater audience share for the network’s news broadcasts”. To build credibility, the “promotion of a key personality” [46] and that of a physical appearance [46] are one of the most important components.

In a bid to better understand what prevents female journalists from climbing the ladder to high level positions in the media field, this paper analyses written comments and face-to-face interviews made by survey participants in relation to key questions about the different components that frame the glass ceiling.

## Methodology

### The sample

In this perspective and during the same time period, a survey and an interview were conducted to collect data from each of the 25 journalists working in different media organizations in Lebanon, from January till June 2018. For the purpose of this study, we will define the journalist as someone who is involved in the news production for a media organization.

To note that most of the respondents were women with an average of 80.7%, while men who did, reached only 19.3% of the total population. These sex differences in attitude reveal that there is a quiet revolution among women journalists concerning their identity and their career. The need for women to express themselves was obvious while few men were enthusiast to respond. Men journalists criticized the subject as they said that they would rather prefer to focus on issues related to the predominant struggles the country is facing rather than on women’s interests in the media field.

As illustrated in Table 1, the majority of women and men who participated in this study spanned different age groups and positions. The “sample description” in Table 1 collects demographic data related to the journalists’ age, educational level, work experience and current position in a TV or radio station.

### The procedure

This study is a blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Both methods were useful as we looked for consistency among knowledgeable informants [47]: the quantitative method served us to turn the data from words into numbers; while the qualitative one helped us better understand the phenomenon by collecting precise data from those who are living the experience in the media sector. It served to tell the story as it is seen and helped us explicit how themes are related to one another, using the power of the word to build our study.

The second section included 45 questions, divided between a quantitative method using 37 questions with a Yes or No and no answers; and 8 qualitative open questions. To mention that the Yes and No approach facilitated faster interviews that can be easily analyzed, while the open questions gave the respondents the space and freedom to answer in much detail they would like to; which served the goal of the study. To note that the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods allowed us not to influence the anchors’ answers, but to obtain better results on whether and how women should reached high level of leadership positions in Lebanon in the media sector. It discussed the main obstacles that prevent them from climbing the leadership ladder.

| Anchor Variable | Age | Educational Level  | Work Experience | Current Position  |
|-----------------|-----|--|-----------------|---|
| Women           |     |  |                 |   |
| 1               | 35  | BA in Media and Communication  | 14 years        | Assignment Desk Producer News – Presenter of Morning Political Show |
| 2               | 36  | Masters in Negotiation and Strategy – Masters in Information and Communication | 13 years        | CEO of An Nahar Newspaper   |
| 3               | 50  | BA in Journalism   | 23 years        | Head of Reporters at MTV  |
| 4               | 35  | Masters in International affairs and Harvard Executive Education Alumnus       | 16 years        | Vice President of Al-Jadeed TV                                      |
| 5               | 47  | Masters in Journalism  | 25 years        | President of NNA  |
| 6               | 54  | Masters in Arabic Literature   | 33 years        | Journalist  |
| 7               | 34  | BA in Journalism   | 13 years        | Senior Reporter and Presenter                                       |
| 8               | 34  | BA in Radio TV – BA in Written Journalism                                      | 15 years        | News Anchor   |
| 9               |     | BA in Journalism   | 25 years        | Senior Reporter at LBC – Writer and Reporter at An Nahar            |
| 10              | 55  | Masters in Communication and Journalism  | 33 years        | News Anchor – Host of Political Talk Show                           |
| 11              | 37  | Masters in Journalism  | 11 years        | News Anchor – Host of Political Talk Show                           |
| 12              | 53  | Masters in Media and Communication – BA in Political Science                   | 35 years        | Coordinator of PR and Media at LCU                                  |
| 13              | 40  | DESS   | 14 years        | Senior Correspondent – News Anchor – Talk Show Host                 |
| 14              | 38  | Masters in Media and Communication   | 16 years        | Editor in Chief   |
| 15              |     | BA in Journalism and News Agencies   | 26 years        | Journalist  |
| 16              | 50  | BA in Journalism   | 16 years        | Executive Producer at LBC   |
| 17              | 33  | BA in Education  | 10 years        | Reporter – News Anchor  |
| 18              | 58  | BA in Journalism – Masters in Political Science and Administration             | 30 years        | Journalist and Political Writer at An Nahar                         |
| 19              | 57  | BA in Political Science and Economy  | 30 years        | Editor and Journalist   |
| 20              | 57  | BA in Media and Journalism – BA in the History of Cultures                     | 32 years        | Journalist and Talk Show Host in BBC                                |
| Men             |     |  |                 |   |
| 21              | 32  | Masters in journalism  | 4 years         | Deputy Editor in Chief – Senior Correspondent at MTV News           |
| 22              | 45  | BA in Law and Economy  | 15 years        | Principal News Anchor   |
| 23              | 59  | Masters in Communication   | 41 years        | Manager of News and Political Talk Shows                            |
| 24              | 50  | BA in Political Science and Administration                                     | 28 years        | Reporter and News Anchor at LBC – University Professor              |
| 25              | 49  | BA in Media  | 28 years        | Political Talk Show Host – News Anchor                              |

Table 1: The sample description.

The mixed approach aimed at gauging anchors’ perspectives on the glass ceiling and its components. It was divided into two major sections, based on two research questions identified in the literature review, on:

RQ1: How the religious, the political beliefs and the social issues affect women’s Leadership positions in the media sector?

RQ2: Where do women stand in the binary division between the soft and the hard news?

We intentionally kept these two research questions because they can cover all other issues; as one theme leads to the other.

### Research Findings and Discussion

Following the two above mentioned research questions, we collected the following data:

#### On the religious, political and social levels

Women in the media sector continue to struggle to gain access to good opportunities whereas all answers concerning social, cultural, political and religious issues reveal their strong impact over women’s rights. Questions in Table 2 have the following initials: a QC question goes for the cultures issues; a QP addresses a question on political issues; while a QR concerns a question on religious issues. We blended all three: social, political and religious issues together because they have

the same roots in Lebanon: the patriarchal culture that plays the role of an umbrella that covers all three different components in reference to Khatib and as shown in below Table 2.

The stereotypical beliefs on gender differences are strong, as 92% of the respondents’ answers were positive. Traditional family roles in Lebanon largely favor strong preference to men, more specifically to sons (68%), when important decisions are to be taken. Ties are strong whether social, political or religious. Statistics in Table 2 reveal that the span of aforementioned ties and beliefs that affect women’s shares in top management positions are around 84%. They all affect women’s shares in top management positions and entitle them to little support, as their place is better seen at home than in leadership positions. Patriarchal culture is deeply rooted in the Lebanese society and it would be hard to shrink or downsize its effects.

On the other hand, when asked about the percentage of women in Leadership positions, none of the answers came similar, as they varied between 1% and 45%. All interviewees assumed however that inheritance plays a vital role in the concentration of power and wealth. The fact that some Lebanese women have succeeded in acquiring a high status in the world of media and have managed to reach the top of the journalism pyramid by filling up leadership positions is not always a proof of women’s progress or liberation, but the perfect example of a commitment to the traditional patterns of culture and behavior in Lebanese society that aim at preserving power and wealth in case there

| NB          | Questions   | Yes | No  | No Answer |
|-------------|---|-----|-----|-----------|
| QC1         | Women’s cultural capital in terms of education and skills affect women’s progression  | 92% | 8%  |           |
| QC2         | As part of the Lebanese culture, it is more important for the son to get a good job than for a daughter.                              | 68% | 32% |           |
| QC3         | Despite all the progress made so far, part of the Lebanese culture is to keep women back home.  | 56% | 44% |           |
| QC4         | Familial and social ties affect women’s hiring and progression  | 84% | 16% |           |
| QC5         | Connections and Relationships differ between men and women journalists  | 64% | 36% |           |
| QC6         | Men are better appreciated since they represent the breadwinners  | 72% | 28% |           |
| QP1         | Journalism in Lebanon is currently related to political parties or philosophy and this does affect share in top-management positions. | 72% | 28% |           |
| QP2         | Political beliefs and connections affect women’s share in top-management positions  | 84% | 12% | 4%        |
| QPR         | There are ties between political and religious believes in Lebanon  | 80% | 16% | 4%        |
| QR1         | Religious beliefs affect women’s share in top-management positions  | 84% | 12% | 4%        |
| QR2         | Religious concepts dictate rules that hinder women’s progression  | 85% | 15% |           |
| Q Synthesis | Patriarchal culture affects the gender dynamic in Lebanon   | 75% | 25% |           |

Table 2: The effects of the patriarchal hierarchy.

| NB  | Questions  | YES | NO  | No. Answer |
|-----|--|-----|-----|------------|
| QW1 | Even if they get into leadership positions, men are better paid than women   | 52% | 48% |            |
| QW2 | Do you think that the fact that men should be paid more than women is due to the mentality suggesting that men are the breadwinners? | 48% | 48% | 4%         |
| QW3 | The gender-pay gap is relatively tremendous in Lebanon.  | 24% | 76% |            |
| QW4 | Even if women are the only ones who are bringing a salary for their families, they should be less paid.                              | 32% | 64% | 4%         |
| QW5 | Women should accept lower wages and lower positions because of the fear that they would become the decision-makers at home.          | 12% | 88% |            |

Table 3: The gender gap pay.

is no male inheritor in the family. In line with Maxwell, it can be said that this type of status is simply given and that the exercise of power is rooted in traditional beliefs and practices of the society. However and in controversy, we cannot admit as Maxwell that this position is taken regardless of some vital qualifications, for all known journalists women in Lebanon that figure in level 1, possess significant skills and competencies as journalists, according to our interviewees. We can propose for instance the examples of the Freiha’s (From Dar Al Sayyad), the Tueni’s (From An-Nahar newspaper), or the Khayyatt’s (from Al Jadid TV).

Our qualitative method also pointed to the fact that most men respondents agree with the following statement:

*“The stress of managing dual roles of work and family life demands seem to be one of the major reasons why some women should stay home; more, to leave “the career of trouble” and manage motherhood”.*

This reminds us Debeauvoir who implicated that a woman’s voice is to be silenced; however, women’s replies were the opposite, as women tend to believe that there should not be any gender differences, but rather that both genders should have the same equal rights.

*“It is wrong and unfair to believe that women are to face barriers and have to choose between work and family. They can accomplish both roles but they have to show perseverance and endurance, and should believe in themselves”.*

Moreover, some of the women respondents asserted that women have the superficial appearance that they lack of ambition and the desire to be at the top; while the truth that lies beneath is that they are not less confident than men and that they don’t rate themselves more negatively than men do, as study revealed and in reference to Dunning [25] or Eccles [26]. But they are unable to confront male corporate culture and patriarchal hierarchy predominance, as told by most interviewees. Moreover, climbing the ladder is not always one of the women’s top priorities; as they would rather prefer reaching some high positions without being enforced to disrupt the balance they try to

create and preserve throughout their lives between their individual life and their work. While work seems to be the final objective for men, it is simply not the predominant cause for women. The study revealed that women’s perspectives are different from those of men. While men see in every field a kind of an opportunity, more of an arena, where they can fight and gain battles by being competitive and showing aggressiveness, women prefer to create a very-well defined niche; and stay in it, as it can provides her security, stability and self-fulfillment.

Back to the aforementioned in the literature review, this environment leads to gender discrimination. Therefore, to find out whether women in our case are reluctant to low-pay and no promotion, we proposed five different questions with (QW) initials concerning wages (Table 3).

Answers to QW questions are contradictory; whereas QW1 is the opposite of QW3. We intentionally addressed these two opposite questions to better understand how respondents perceive the differences in pay between genders. 52% of them assumed that men are better paid than women when in leadership positions; whereas only 24% of the respondents admitted that the gender-pay gap in Lebanon is tremendous. What seems to be more significant is that 100% of all men respondents, a total of 5 over 5, expressed that women should accept lower wages and lower positions.

### The binary division between the soft and the hard news

Understanding the difference between soft and hard news is crucial as most women journalists encounter discrimination; as hard news are considered more prestigious than the soft ones in the news hierarchy. Hence, despite the fact that 88% of the respondents admitted that women do not cover particular fields in journalism, and that 80% of them assumed that politics is not a men’s affair; the face-to face interviews revealed that the horizontal segregation of journalism, between political, business, economics and war stories is almost totally kept for male reporters, because of the need for toughness and masculinity, as criticized by the majority of our interviewees. Therefore, except for

some political programs that are broadcasted in the mornings, and rarely in the evenings, the presence of women journalists is scarce in the hard news arena. In this perspective, most respondents admitted that the small range of women journalists who are entitled to figure in the hard news, had encountered hard experiences in their lives, including sexual harassment and sexual assault, making them tougher, in other words, more masculine.

*“Some role models’ journalists well known for their endurance and hardness have faced hard experiences in their lives, creating the news leaders they are today”*, as expressed by one of our interviewees.

Nevertheless, some women journalists made it to Maxwell’s level 2 or level 3, because they simply deserve it after years of trust and respect. They influence the spectators whose in return give them the permission to become their opinion leaders. According to our respondents, the gender imbalance is related to:

- a) The Patriarchal culture which considers females as less capable than men to analyze and discuss issues that are related to politics and business.
- b) The role of the investors who are always in search for those who are able to fulfill 24 over 24, and 7 over 7, the needs of the stations, whether seen or listened. The study found that at level 3, some women journalists represent change agents while producing influence and credibility. Still, this category is scarce because women journalists are not always given the chance to cover the hard stories that men do. For instance, most of the political analysts who appeared on the media to comment on the 2018 parliament elections were men. This goes for two reasons: firstly because of the fact that women are rarely considered as reliable sources in the same line as Armstrong, (2004) or Kyung- Hee, (2006), when distributing men and women in occupations. And secondly, because the investors and advertisers want to sell their final product, which is the news, to their customers, with a sole objective: making large profits. Therefore talk-shows in prime time are mostly left to famous charismatic men, as told by our interviewees; who do represent reliable sources and pools of information and of cash.
- c) The women journalists themselves who are in search for fame and not for the position itself. Our respondents agree on the fact that most of women journalists put nowadays a lot of efforts on their physical appearance rather than on the context of the news or stories themselves. They follow the trend as suggested by most of the respondents, who blamed them for letting the audience on the one side and the investors on the other impose their conditions; while all what matters is the news itself.

On the other side, it was clear for many respondents that women journalists are finding for themselves a better place to be than on TVs and screens. According to them, the social media and the social networking are offering women journalists a platform to better express themselves and to be followed. In a competitive environment, women journalists are switching to networking that is affecting the news organization and changing the business models of news. For, empowered by technology, today’s audiences are not only in search for information, but they rather want to choose what they read and even discuss and contribute their opinions. Our women interviewees strongly explicated how they can impact this new sector with their know- how, their strong networking and their communication skills. More, one of the respondents argued that:

*“The audiences do trust the women journalists who are behind the scenes. Nowadays audience needs partnership, transparency and trust. A new business model in journalism is emerging where women are hired based off their appearances and looks. The social media won’t replace the TV but will add on it; therefore in the foreseeable future, this open doors to some women journalists to play a role in breaking the hard news”*.

On another hand, the wall that had been created between femininity and the world of politics had been obstructing the advancement of women not only in the news world but also in the political one, whereas women’s chances for instance, to be elected in the parliament, are still missed in the Lebanese patriarchal society, where civil codes are absent and where sectarianism prevails. This does not however deny the fact that some women journalists in Lebanon have served in positions that were traditionally considered as the exclusive arena of males’ journalists and are still dominated by them. In reference to Khatib [7], only few names can be however named, as they played an active on-screen role in televised political debate programs. Despite all obstacles, some women journalists made it to the fourth level, as they succeeded in going beyond their current position as journalists to becoming influential leaders. The latter were able in investing in people, in helping them grow and in rising up new leaders, as they founded new organizations, NGOs and foundations in order to serve the youth and the freedom of expression. They had been followed because of their positive reputation, of who they are and what they represent. However, for these women, it cannot be told whether they belong to the 4<sup>th</sup> or to the 5<sup>th</sup> level. According to our respondents, swinging between both levels goes for the following range of reasons:

- a) Women journalists deliberately chose the media path and forced themselves not to choose their children or their family lives over their career.
- b) They belong to a political or to a civil party to back them up and market their efforts. For if they don’t, this could be explained as being uninterested in power and politics, in the same line as Peterson [48].
- c) They had been able to surpass the gender stereotype that plays in favor of male participation while it discourages female participation in the media field. Adopting an appropriate “masculine” behavior helped them reach a powerful position. For, as reported by one of the interviewees:

*“If they think you’re too feminine, they will think you can’t run high level positions and work on hard news. If they think you can run one, they worry you are not feminine and not emotional enough”*.

- d) They had severe experiences in their lives, making them who they currently are.

## Conclusion

This study helped us shed the light on the different components of the glass ceiling that prevent women journalists from reaching high level managerial positions in the media field. Our analysis challenged two themes: one that is related to religious, politics and social issues and another one that is related to the binary division of the news.

In an ideal world, men and women journalists would have enjoyed the same opportunities in the media workplace; however, in an environment where the patriarchal civilization’s institutions and values still prevail, the media world continues to struggle with gender inequality. This study found that it is still hard for women to induce change, as patriarchal culture is largely embedded not only in the



Lebanese society but also in the corporate behavior as well. However, it also revealed that role modeling and women leaders can be found in the media field in Lebanon, as women journalists occupy different levels of leadership, in line with, despite criticizing, Maxwell's five levels of leadership. However they are still few to hold positions of great privilege and to make decisions about the news coverage. They are not sufficiently represented at high levels and continue to fill more the low level roles, where they are getting stuck.

Creating gender balance is therefore challenging. To become more inclusive for women, new strategies in the management level are to be found to help establish social stability: it should guarantee diversity; adopt a clear top-down approach; and be committed to gender equality that needs to become more systematic. More, media organizations as a whole must ensure promoting role models at all levels, pushing women leaders to tell their success stories and to demonstrate their leadership in governance, because these women journalists made a difference and should therefore serve as an inspiration across the country and the generations.

Gender discrimination, patriarchal civilization, wage discrimination, sexual harassment, and men's power motivation negatively affect women's opportunities in the media world. They provide a kind of a socializing context for organizational decision makers' reinforcing discrimination and the level of a hostile environment, leading to women's dearth in leadership positions. Although we portrayed all these components as a nest that can perpetuate discrimination, we found that technological change can represent the loophole that can increase women's promotion and start a cascade of transformations leading to a better equal environment that can improve the status of women journalists. In a digital, technological world, the study found that women interviewees were realistic about their know-how, their strong networking and their communication skills. Therefore, the digital Media field cannot ignore their power workforce and their leadership traits; but should embrace them, apart from their appearance, because of their positive reputation, of who they are and what they represent. A new door is opened to further researches.

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