

## **Women in Leadership Positions in Puerto Rico**

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### **Abstract**

*Puerto Rican women have increased their presence in management positions. However, there is still a gender gap. This research has considered as main referent the study of seventeen countries in Latin America about aspirations, barriers, challenges, family-work balance and other aspects of women in managerial positions. The objective of this research was to extend the study to Puerto Rican women in management positions and compare the findings. The sample is composed of 120 women. Most of the participants identified reaching a balance between work, personal life and family as their principal challenge as in Latin America. Puerto Rican women had rejected promotion offers more often than Latin American women. Also, some of them admitted that have encountered difficulties in their careers, including: wage discrimination gender discrimination, and schedule inflexibility. Finally, this paper presents other similarities and differences when comparing results with those in Latin America.*

**Keywords:** management, women, leadership, gender, Latin America, Puerto Rican

### **1. Introduction**

The Puerto Rico's census has revealed that women constitute half of the population (51%) of the Island (Institute of Statistical, 2010). They also represent 44% of the labor force (Department of Labor and Human Resources, 2013). Data from Puerto Rico Education Council (2011) shows women enrollment in different university institutions represents almost 59% of the university population in the Island and 63.5% of the total graduates from a four-year program. Statistics reports published by Department of Labor and Human Resources in Puerto Rico (2015) show that Puerto Rican women has historically increased their presence in management positions from 1975 to 2009, increasing participation percent from 17.6 to 46.5 respectively.

The Attorney's office of Matters of the Woman (2003), points out that although women academic's achievements are recognized, gender discrimination is palpable, especially in what refers to the contribution of women to the society. This discrimination is manifested in "double shift", the ceiling glass, wage inequalities, little participation of women in traditionally masculine employments, sexual harassment and the unequal treatment for maternity and pregnancy, among others.

The term "double shift" is used when women has had to carry out double function in the house, when the man doesn't complete the budget. In Puerto Rico, is common that the family head is a woman who works to maintain the family economically, but also, takes the responsibility of the domestic work. The glass ceiling concept refers to the obstacles and barriers that limit women's professional growth and progress to higher levels of management. Scholars, like Zabludovsky (1998), identified this as vertical segregation. If the company is private, the situation is further aggravated because decisions to promote and wage increases are done by taking into account more "subjective" criteria (Stewart, 1991).

Hellriegel, Jackson, and Slocum (1996) noted that the work of the middle and upper management is focused more on interpersonal and strategic skills, and higher levels of management, like supervising requires technical and specialized skills. Therefore, the criteria for promotion to these positions are based on perceptions that executives of companies have on middle and high managerial potential.

As to wage inequalities, the Attorney's office (2003) indicate that woman receives 80% of the wage that a man receives in the same position or one that requires same or similar preparation. In the other hand, when speaking gender discrimination, it is also important to recognize, other issues as sexual harassment and preconceived ideas and stereotypes related to woman (Attorney's office of Matters of the Woman, 2003).

Women have not been able to occupy positions of power in Puerto Rico, in the same proportion that men, even when they have demonstrated their work capacity, and their intellectual development (Hernández, 2004). This inequity situation is very palpable in the corporations and in the business world. Actually, they constitute almost half of the workforce and they are academically prepared. However, its presence in positions of power is scarce. The historical development of the industrial psychology could indicate that the feminine presence in the spheres of power in the corporations, especially the private ones in many cases, is almost invisible (López, 2005). They represent only 5% of the top managers in the private corporations of Puerto Rico. This situation is similar in Europe (Nickie & Davis, 2000; Palacios, 2001) and in the United States and Canada (Fierman, 1990; Orsen, 1992; Tang, 1999; Bertrand & Hallok; 2001). The Interamerican Bank of Development (2003), points out that in countries like Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia, the participation of women has increased in managerial positions but to a slower rhythm and in smaller quantity that the masculine

This research has considered as main referent the study of seventeen countries in Latin America carried out by Cárdenas, Eagly, Heller, Jáuregui, Rivadeneiray and Salgado (2010) about the advance strategies, aspirations barriers and challenges, handling family-work balance, among other aspects of women in managerial positions. The principal objective of this research was to extend the study to Puerto Rican women in management positions and also compare the findings with those made in Latin America.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Profile of Female Managers**

Zabludovsky (1998) realized a quantitative research with a sample of Mexican executive women, companies and human resources directives. Findings indicate that the managerial ones have a high educational level, most (51%) are married and their ages fluctuate among twenty (20) to forty (40) years old. A surprising fact of this research is that 64% of the participants don't have children and 17% has only one. A slight majority of the married women (52%) are not mothers, which constitutes a particular feature of this group in comparison to the rest of the feminine population in Mexico that has three children per family.

Zabludovsky (1998) also found that among the highest level in the organizational pyramid, it diminishes the probability of finding executives with children. In the questionnaires administered to the presidents and general directors, they said that important attributes for women to compete with men in leadership positions depend on themselves. For them, the necessary aspects are: the formal and up-to-date preparation, commitment and responsibility, trust, strength, and maturity. Heller (2003) studied managerial women from Argentina through thorough interviews. The women have an age average of forty two (42) years, 64% has post-graduate studies or specializations in the exterior, 62% are married and 60% has children. Furthermore, it was found that 60% has been working for over ten years at the company, leading the author to think that the culture and values of the company where they work greatly influenced them, developing a strong identification between their values and those of their companies. On the other hand, it was found that 55% come from companies that have between 500 and 1,500 employees and 90% of the managerial interviewees coming from foreign companies. They consider that their organizations are favorable to promote women in executive positions. However, 70% pointed out that they were promoted along the time, only 6.9% occupies the managerial position, but 30% aspires to occupy its immediate boss's position. Also, 70% pointed out that aspires to continue ascending.

On the other hand, Samayoa and Lazo (2003) carried out a qualitative research with the woman managerial in El Salvador and found that the majority of them have university studies including master's degrees. The age average is fifty one (51) years and they receive wages that turn out to be high in comparison with the rest of the population. Most works for companies in the services and trade industries.

When questioning them on employment discrimination, the opinions were divided. Half said that unequal salaries is a serious problem at high levels executives, while the other half considered that there is no evidence of salary discrimination in its companies. In general, all said that the Salvadoran women in these positions show little tolerance with this type of discrimination.

According to Maxfield (2005) in Latin America generational differences can be appreciated among leaders in the corporate world and the generation of younger women that are reaching higher positions in companies. In comparison with the business woman in the United States, the woman in directive positions in Latin America is characterized mainly to have a bigger inclination to develop her career in only one company, to get married, to have more children. However, they receive lower wages than male managers, as in the United States.

Cárdenas y Durana (2009) carried out an exploratory research about the Colombian managerial women. Colombia was pointed out as the Latin American country with more proportion of women in managerial positions. They attribute their promotions to their performance which they qualified as successful and also mentioned personality attributes and education as essential characteristics for their outstanding performance. Most studied in a feminine school and most of them have reached upper management positions through the financial or commercial track. The women in the highest positions are characterized to have studies in engineering, law and business and to be the older ones. They have graduate studies and they have been or they are married with children. These women value the domestic help.

Deloitte (2013) studied the Costa Rican managerial woman and found that the age of the sample oscillates between the 40 and 45 years, 62% of the women are married, 19% of them are single, and 15% divorced, 70% of the sample has children. Also 70% of the sample possesses master's degree and 90% of the samples are bilingual.

Cárdenas, et al (2014) conducted a research with 162 female executives in Latin American. They were from 17 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Perú, Uruguay, and Venezuela. These women tended to be middle-aged and married with children. Most possessed university degrees. Their most common professional background was in business and economics or engineering and other sciences. Their work schedules were demanding in terms of hours and travel requirements. They work in different types of private national and international organizations. These companies are characterized to be big, mainly in the service and financial sectors and tend to have a great quantity of women as employees.

Sen and Metzger (2010) suggested that in the United States, only 21% of the women executives have experienced discrimination in the workplace, as compared to 61% of the women executives in Latin America. In this regard, the author suggests that efforts for equality in United States have had an impact, while in Latin America is the battle is still fairly new. As in the United States, there are laws in different countries that had been implemented to increase representation of women in management positions. In 2007, Spain passed a law for equal employment opportunities which requires business with 250 employees to have 40% of women in their management positions. There are also similar laws regarding opportunities for women in France, United Kingdom, Canadá, Australia, among others (Grant Thornton, 2012).

## **2.2 The Ceiling Glass**

According to Thornton IBR (2012) although in the last twelve years there are women that have assumed positions of leadership in economy and politics, in the corporate world they occupy alone one of each five high managerial positions worldwide. In 2012, women occupied 21% of high managerial positions and only 5% positions of CEO in the biggest companies (World Economic Forum, 2010). In the list Fortune 500, only thirteen have woman presidents (Fortune, 2010). According to the International Organization of Labor (2004), the higher the hierarchical level of the company, the bigger the discrimination, which implies less women presence. This phenomenon is known as ceiling glass.

The term ceiling glass was coined by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) for the eighties and refers to the obstacles that women face when they aspire to achieve high positions in the corporations, government, educational organizations and nonprofit organizations. These obstacles can be presented in many and complex ways. Researchers have identified and classified them as internal and external factors, individuals, situational and environmental. The internal or individuals obstacles refer to characteristics that women possess that don't boost their managerial development, such as the lack of self-esteem, of ambition, of trust, of security and of leadership.

On the other hand, the external barriers are those related to the corporate cultures and the recruitment processes and promotions, which are discriminatory with women that are mothers. According to Muller and Rowell (1997) women felt that discriminatory behavior is both subtle and explicit. Traditional cultural stereotypes are the obstacles they face in achieving managerial positions. Half of the respondents felt that one of the reasons for not being hired or promoted is that men are more comfortable working with men. They believe that women cannot perform the work required and would not accept women as colleagues.

Augut & Martin (2010) identify external factors that they considered as real and significant barriers. They recognize the stereotypes that are the widespread beliefs about the features that possess and distinguish men and women. It is believed that the women are passive, submissive, less willing to accept responsibilities and prioritize the family. Authors consider these features can cause them do not be entrusted with strategic tasks and responsibilities. As consequence of these stereotypes, women concentrate on certain types of employments which generate a horizontal segregation. According to Augut & Martin (2010), the horizontal segregation contributes in a significant form to the discrimination that constitutes one of the biggest barriers for women to achieve positions of high responsibility. The obstacles outline the reality that women lives deals with the dichotomy of family commitments versus their responsibilities with the companies. These demands limit their connection with contacts that allows her to access the sources of power to the interior of the corporations.

According to Barberá et al. (2004), the available documentation allows to synthesize that the ceiling glass bolsters it two crucial aspects: the organizational culture of the corporations where it maintain social beliefs stereotyped about the genders and the family responsibilities that the women mainly assume.

### **2.3 Management Styles**

One of the most studied aspects related to women in managerial positions is if there are differences in their management styles. Pollack (2000) investigated leadership styles of managerial women in Chile. Respondents indicated that they seek consensus and team work, while men want to impose their authority. They also indicated that they humanize organizations because they take into account the person while men have their mind set in one goal. In addition, it was noted that women have more capacity than men to face various problems simultaneously and incorporate a greater number of variables in their decisions. Men, by contrast, tend to be more sequential in solving problems.

Márquez and Lejter (2002) point out that the Venezuelan managers have a style, which they call "cuaima", which means to be aggressive in communication and negotiation. In general, according to the author, this feature is considered acceptable for males but not for females. Furthermore, Heller (2002) found in her study that the majority of respondents agreed that for them there is not a pattern to exercise leadership, by the mere fact of being a woman, but pointed out some features considered distinctive of its status of women in a managerial position. These include: greater patience and ability to listen, less afraid to express their ideas, see facts faster but are slower to execute, generate loyalty, engage more with people than with the results, very motherly to make decisions and accept some criticism.

Bruschini (2002) outlines that Brazilians women in managerial positions describe the feminine style as persuasive and intuitive while men tend to be more authoritarian and centralized. Muller and Rowell (1997) indicated that the Mexicans managerial women are characterized as interactive, connective and give empowerment to others. They distinguished five attributes: encourage, open communication, are not abrasive to solve problems, strong sense of self-esteem, support employees in their personal and professional problems, delegate and organize work and care details and give priority to the development of their work team. Perez and Camps (2011) carried out a research with Puerto Rican supervisors of both genders which found that the women presented higher levels of leadership transformational and transactional superiors when compared with men. No significant differences were found when considering other important demographic or an interaction of those with the gender of the supervisor.

### **2.4 Work-Life Balance**

Previous researches of women managers coincide on the dilemma they confront in dealing with work responsibilities and multiple commitments with their families, causing mixed feelings (López, 2011). Historically, woman is mainly responsible for daily tasks at home, taking care of children and also assists her spouse or couple. Scholz (2000) called this dilemma "double socialization" and Marquez (2003) called it "double shift". Research's findings performed by Garrido and colleagues (2015), suggest that women still perceive itself as responsible for the family.

Authors, also emphasizes that male involvement in childcare, is still considered as an aid to the women and not as a responsibility to the male gender. Alternatives have been studied so that women are able to continue growing professionally (Fierman, 1990; Arango, et al., 1995; Dillanes, Espinosa & Medina, 1998; Márquez, 2003).

Women managers with academic degrees recognize that they should have a structure that helps them maintain a balance between work and family tasks. Therefore, the solution is to look for a mechanism that reconciles them or, at least, allows them to coexist. This structure can be achieved through agreements of mutual help with the couple, a relative or hiring domestic service (Marquez, 2003). However, Hymowitz (2006) suggests that professional success requires a complete dedication that is not coherent with an adapted family life. Data provided by Hymowitz (2006) and Hirschman (2007) point out the tendency among very prepared women to retire of conventional careers. A survey from the University of Stanford in 1981 indicated that 57% of graduate women abandoned workforce at forty years old. Also, Clancy (2007) indicates that among a third and half of the women with successful careers as executives, most of them don't have children and 33% are single.

In the study carried out by Cárdenas and her colleagues (2014), 70% of women in managerial positions indicated that in some moment they had to give priority to its work over their family responsibilities. The author also indicates that 81.5% of women contribute with 50% or more in monthly expenses and 87% pointed out that value the domestic support. In the study, findings reveal that their main challenge has been to achieve a balance between the work and the personal life. According to Maxfield (2005), most of the women in executive positions feel that they have not achieved a balance between family and work. Due to the importance this issue has for Latin American women, it is vital to investigate more the topic.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Instrument**

The questionnaire was developed as part of a research in Latin America (MEPLA for its acronym in Spanish). We contacted the author of the questionnaire by email and asked for her consent to use it in our research and she agreed. Although the instrument was written in Spanish, some of the questions were adapted according to common Puerto Rican language and it was reviewed by a panel of five experts. A total of 51 questions were included. Most of the questions were closed-ended and mostly quantitative in nature. However, some of them included an open-ended option so they will be able to explain or to add a different answer. It included categorical and ordinal questions. Information collected includes demographic data, factors that influence their promotion, goals, challenges and difficulties faced by women, among others.

#### **3.2 Sample Profile**

For the purpose of this research, management and leadership positions refers to those women who are responsible for planning, organizing, directing and controlling part or all of an enterprise. Participants were identified from different sources. Some were contacted in person, other were contacted via email or telephone. A self-administered questionnaire was e-mailed or given personally. Follow-up emails were sent or calls were made after few weeks of the invitation to participate in the study. The final sample of the research is composed of 120 women in leadership positions in Puerto Rico, in different organizations, either public or private. Each of the participants was given the questionnaire with an explanatory letter and a consent form. Participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Women participants are employed in manufacturing, healthcare, baking/financial services, information technology, services and education, among others. In respect to age, 6.8% of the participants are less than 30 years old, 21.8% have 31 to 36 years old, 23.5% have 37 to 42 years old, 17.6% have 43 to 48 years old, 16.0% have between 49 to 53 years old and 14.3% have more than 53 years. In respect to marital status, 62.5% were married, 15.0% were single, 15.0% were divorced, 2.5% were separated, 4.2% were on "free union" and 0.8% widow. Participants attended public education system (38.3%), private education system (31.7%) and others were part of both type of education systems (30.0%). In contrast with previous findings in Colombia (Cárdenas & Durana, 2009), where most of the women in executive positions study in female college/school (74.5%), our participants studied in mixed gender college/school (90.8%). Only 2.5% indicated that they studied in female college/school and 6.7% studied in both type.

The majority of the participants earned a degree after they graduated from high school. Highest academic level representation is from bachelor degree (44.2%) and master degree (39.1%). Also, 9.2% earned doctorate degree, 5.0% earned associate degree and 2.5% completed high school. Therefore, academic degree is a common factor in Puerto Rican women occupying leadership positions.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of data collected from the instrument was performed on IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. Analysis was made on academic degree earned, grouped by managerial level. First level managerial positions include CEO, general managers and president of the company. Second level positions includes Vice-President or second in command equivalent. Third level positions include any other management position, as department manager, supervisors, among others. Bachelor degree is more common among women occupying third level positions, while higher percent of women who earned a doctorate degree have a first level management position. According to the number of employees, women identified the size of the company they were working on. Micro-sized companies are composed of 10 employees or less(12.6%), small companies are composed of 11 to 50 employees (23.5%), medium-sized companies are composed of 51 to 250 employees (13.5%), and large companies has more than 250 employees (50.4%).

##### 4.1 Barriers and Challenges

The participants were asked to identify barriers they have encounter in their careers. In respect to interrupt their professional career, not considering maternity leave as a reason, participants identify some reasons, including: taking care of children (35.7%), health problems (17.9%), jeopardize marital relationship (10.7%), and continue graduate studies (10.7%). Women who use maternity leave respond that the organization respected the position they occupied when they returned back to work. The participants were asked to identify challenges they confront. Most of the participants (70.7%) identified reaching a balance between work, personal life and family as their principal challenge. This finding is consistent with Latin America (Cárdenas et. al, 2013), although the percent is higher in Puerto Rico (70.7 versus 55.0). The second challenge, identified by 58.6% of the participants, was to enforce their own leadership style in the organization. When asked if they had to put ahead their work life over their family life, 47% answered always or almost always. Of those who answered affirmative, 40% had considered seeking for another job or retirement.

##### 4.2 Expenses

Among married women, 89.3% of their partners have a job. The questionnaire did not ask their partner's salary. However, results reveal that 75% of women assume 50% or more of monthly housing expenses. Analysis was made taking into consideration only married women who had partners. This shows that only 25 percent of married women assume less than 50% of monthly expenses. This finding suggests that, in addition to manage a balance between work, personal and family life, they also have to deal with economic issues. Correlation analysis was made on pairs of variables. First, annual salary range and proportion of monthly expenses was analyzed using Pearson Correlation. For this analysis, only married women were used. Findings on these variables suggest that there is statistically significant correlation ( $p= 0.003$ ;  $r = 0.357$ ) between annual salary and proportion of monthly expenses assumed. In other words, women with higher annual salary may assume higher proportion of monthly house expenses. Correlation analysis for other variables is shown on Table 1. As shown on the table, there is statistically significant negative correlation between managerial level and annual salary ( $r = -0.298$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). In addition, a statistically significant correlation between managerial level and interest in power position ( $r = 0.207$ ;  $p = 0.031$ ).

**Table 1: Correlation among Different Variables**

Variable 1	Variable 2	Pearson Correlation	Correlation	Sig.
Managerial level	Annual Salary	-.298	Weak	.001
Managerial level	Academic degree	-.184	None	.052
Annual Salary	Monthly expenses	.357	Weak	.003
Interest in power positions	Managerial level	.207	Weak	.031

### **4.3 Factors in Promotion and Discrimination**

The participants were also asked to identify key factors that influence their promotion. Mean values were analyzed for each managerial level using a 4-point scale (1= not important, 4= very important). In all managerial levels, the factor identified with highest influence on promotion was personality traits. The second factors with highest influence were performance. Other factors mentioned by the participants are: years in the company, consulting, knowledge of the company, English proficiency, experience and academic education. Further analysis was performed on factors grouped by type of industry, including Puerto Rican and foreign companies. On this regard, all of the participants working on foreign companies (100%) said that performance in previous position have had influence on their promotion, compared to 89% for participants working on Puerto Rican companies. There is also significant difference between type of companies when other factors were analyzed. Women also identified contacts and recommendation as having influenced their promotion (56% vs. 88%), company's promotion policy (34% vs. 73%), and implied personal research for promotion (29% vs. 58%). Higher percents in all four factors corresponds to women working in foreign companies.

Women were asked to identify how important was domestic support for their achievement of their promotion and to maintain the position. In this regard, 68.1% responded that domestic support was a key factor for their promotion and 67.2% view it as a key factor to maintain their position. Further analysis was made after grouping the data file in two groups: women without children and women with children. The purpose was to explore if domestic support for Puerto Rican women is quite different if they had children or if it remains equal. In a 4-point scale value (1= not important, 4= very important), women with children considered domestic support more important (3.32) than those who don't (1.93). The questionnaire on this research also asked if women have faced discrimination in the workplace. The majority of women did not face any difficulty throughout their careers. However, some have encountered wage discrimination (31.0%), gender discrimination (19.0%), promotion discrimination (11.2%), schedule inflexibility (25.0%), sexual harassment (4.3%), and verbal mistreatment (12.1%). Few participants detailed other difficulties, which were not among the list of options including: sexist comments, racial discrimination, promotion denied because of pregnancy, underestimation of their performance, condescending treatment of men, and veiled discrimination. Most women in our research has never felt rejection of her or her work (83.1%), but 82.9% responded that machismo hinders promotion opportunities in Puerto Rico.

### **4.4 Goals and Leader Characteristics**

Participants were asked to identify goals in their professional development throughout their careers using a 4-point scale value (1= not important, 4= very important). Analysis was made with the entire sample and then grouped by managerial level. In each managerial level, the goal with highest mean value was personal fulfillment. In first managerial level, personal fulfillment (3.95), implement previous learning (3.90), to gain experience (3.86), and reaching management position (3.86) where the four goals with highest mean scores. In second managerial level, personal fulfillment (3.77), implement previous learning (3.60), and to gain experience (3.54) received highest mean values. In third managerial levels, personal fulfillment (3.82), to gain experience (3.79), and implement previous learning (3.76) received highest mean. Participants also identified the order of relevance in eight characteristics of a good leader. They identified the order as follows: having vision, achievement-oriented, team work, able to communicate, know the organization, good interpersonal relationships, be sensitive to other's problems, and have control of their emotions.

### **4.5 Additional Comparisons between Puerto Rico and Latin America**

Latin America women and Puerto Rican women in leadership positions are prepared with a bachelor degree or more (79% and 89% respectively). In Latin America, 91% of executive women responded that few times they had rejected a promotion offer (or never). There is a quite difference between Latin America response (91%) and Puerto Rican response (64%). In other words, Puerto Rican women opt to reject a promotion opportunity in their career more often than Latin American. In addition, 85% of Latin America women in managerial positions and 73% of Puerto Rican women in managerial positions had children. In respect to their interest in position of power, women in Latin America showed greater interest than Puerto Ricans (94% vs. 81%).

## 5. Conclusions

Academic degree is a common factor in Puerto Rican women occupying leadership positions, so it is important to encourage women to continue studying if they want to pursue a leadership position. Puerto Rican women had faced several barriers and challenges, including: taking care of children, health problems, and jeopardize marital relationship. The biggest challenge they confront is reaching a balance between work, personal life and family. This finding seems to be quite similar to previous research on Latin American executives. For most of the participants, personal fulfillment was the principal goal in their careers. They also consider that a leader must have vision. In regard to housing expenses, women must also deal with economic issues as they assume most of the monthly expenses no matter of their civil status, while those with higher salaries assume higher proportion of monthly expenses. Puerto Rican women consider their personality traits and performance on previous position as those factors that influence in their promotion. They also recognize that domestic support received during their careers was a key factor for their promotion and also to maintain their management position. After comparing results with findings in Latin America, Puerto Rican managerial women tend to have fewer children than Latin America managerial women and women with children considered domestic support more important than those who don't. Rejection of promotions is more common in Puerto Rican women than Latin America. Finally, there is a similar interest for ascending in their careers.

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