

Gender discrimination in the workplace: An approach from the glass ceiling effect*

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Abstract

The struggle of women to enter the labor market has generated positive effects in their lives, as it has allowed them, in some cases, to improve their social status, with respect to their productive and reproductive roles. Nevertheless, the same labor market has also hampered female career advancement, since it has limited women's access to managerial, strategic, or decision-making positions, as if there were an invisible barrier known as the *glass ceiling effect*. This review article analyzes this effect, its conceptualization, the theory that sustains it, its empirical application, and public policies, in order to understand the dynamics of workplace discrimination by gender in some Ibero-American countries. The main findings suggest that occupational and wage discrimination against women is the result of social prejudices determined by the sexual division of labor, since educational level and work experience are not what cause women's stagnation, which indicates that markets are functioning without equity.

Keywords

Sexual division of labor, labor market, public policies, glass ceiling

JEL codes

J31, J38, J70, J71, J72

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Discriminación laboral por género: una mirada desde el efecto techo de cristal

Resumen

La lucha de las mujeres por ingresar al mercado laboral ha generado efectos positivos en sus vidas, pues les ha permitido, en algunos casos, mejorar su estatus social, respecto a sus roles productivo y reproductivo. Sin embargo, este mercado también ha obstaculizado el escalonamiento femenino, ya que ha limitado el acceso de las mujeres a cargos directivos, estratégicos o de decisión, como si hubiese una barrera invisible conocida como *efecto techo de cristal*. Este artículo de revisión se acerca a tal efecto desde su conceptualización, la teoría que lo sustenta, su aplicación empírica y las políticas públicas, para así comprender las dinámicas propias de la discriminación laboral por género en algunos países de Iberoamérica. Los principales hallazgos sugieren que la discriminación ocupacional y salarial hacia las mujeres es causada por prejuicios sociales determinados por la división sexual del trabajo, puesto que el nivel educativo y la experiencia laboral no son las que causan el estancamiento de las mujeres, lo que indica que los mercados están funcionando sin equidad.

Palabras clave

División sexual del trabajo, mercado laboral, políticas públicas, techo de cristal

Discriminação no trabalho por gênero: uma visão a partir do efeito teto de cristal

Resumo

A luta das mulheres para ingressar ao mercado de trabalho tem gerado efeitos positivos em suas vidas, pois lhes tem permitido, em alguns casos, melhorar seu status social, no que se refere ao seu desempenho produtivo e reprodutivo. Porém, este mercado também tem obstaculizado o escalonamento feminino, já que limita o acesso das mulheres a cargos diretivos, estratégicos ou de decisão, como se houvesse uma barreira invisível conhecida como *efeito teto de cristal*. Este artigo de revisão faz uma abordagem a tal efeito a partir da sua conceituação, à teoria que o sustenta, à sua aplicação empírica e às políticas públicas, para deste modo compreender as dinâmicas próprias da discriminação de trabalho por gênero em alguns países da Ibero-américa. Os principais resultados sugerem que a discriminação ocupacional e salarial às mulheres é causada por preconceitos sociais determinados pela divisão sexual no trabalho, sendo que o nível educativo e a experiência de trabalho não são as que causam o estancamento das mulheres, o que indica que os mercados estão funcionando sem equidade.

Palavras chave

Divisão sexual no trabalho, mercado de trabalho, políticas públicas, teto de cristal

Introduction

In occasions, work can be conceived as the exercise of a profession or occupation in an exchange process in which workers are rewarded with payment or salary. However, this idea only links the worker to the labor market, leaving aside unpaid work, which includes housework and care work.

For women, work does not only mean generating exchanges, but it also becomes an exercise of female empowerment,¹ since women forge greater control over key aspects of their lives, by questioning their condition of subordination in society. In this way, women renegotiate their relationships to participate and exercise their role in different spheres—public and private, which translates into the possibility of restructuring societies with a more just and democratic distribution of power (Kabeer, 2012). Thus, the labor market becomes an important step for women to participate in the productive sphere, as a vehicle for social insertion and mobility, since it helps to transform their ideas and expectations, the way they express themselves and relate to each other, and, above all, it fosters collective strategies to integrate this population in the pursuit of development (Rosales & Esquenzi, 2017, p. 111).

Despite this positive outlook, the participation of women in the labor market has brought on problems of discrimination in terms of access, work conditions, retribution, and permanence, which generates a situation of inequality between men and women. Such penalties are more intense when it comes to promotions to managerial positions, since the relative rates of women promoted to decision-making and strategic positions decline with the level of the hierarchy (Meza & Mora, 2013). This phenomenon is known as the *glass ceiling effect*, which refers to an invisible barrier that hinders women from reaching the top of the hierarchical structure; in this way, their working career has a limited development, which, in turn, leads to wage and occupational discrimination (Bucheli & Sanromán, 2005). This effect results from the sexual division of labor as a determinant of social prejudices, as well as from an androcentric culture that stresses gender discrimination (Bustos, 2002).

1 Manifestations regarding the importance of female empowerment are rooted in popular mobilizations, especially feminist ones, which made the relationship between gender and development visible. They have aimed to expose how unequal power relations between men and women block women's ability to participate in and influence development processes, as well as to highlight female empowerment in order to promote this ability both individually and collectively (Kabeer, 2012).

These and other considerations laid the foundation for this article, which is the result of a research that aimed to carry out a documentary review of 75 articles and studies, as well as four public policies. All the reviewed documents were previously submitted to a conceptual structuring that allowed identifying different patterns that directly affect women in the labor market; these were classified in three categories: occupational discrimination, wage discrimination, and the sexual division of labor, mainly between 2000 and 2017.

This article is divided into two parts. The first one, entitled “The glass ceiling effect: Perspectives on the discrimination of women in the workplace,” illustrates how this effect explains occupational discrimination and vertical segregation, and contributes to a better understanding of social relations that give way to gender discrimination in the workplace.² The second part—“The glass ceiling: Theoretical and empirical discussions”—presents three theories that examine gender discrimination in the workplace, as well as the main results of the reviewed studies that empirically agree with the existence of the glass ceiling effect, which leads to the conclusions of the article.

The glass ceiling effect: Perspectives on the discrimination of women in the workplace

Historically, in different spheres of everyday life, relations between men and women have been unbalanced. One of the causes is the subordination of the feminine, which is the result of declaring the masculine as predominant. This perspective is determined by the naturalization of the arbitrary social construction of the biological that informs the sexual division of labor according to an androcentric approach (Sandoval, 2002, p. 1).

First, it is necessary to distinguish between sex and gender. *Sex* is the biological and physiological condition with which human beings are born, and which determines whether they are men or women; in other words, sex is assigned dichotomically according to anatomy (Cabral & Maffia, 2003). On the other hand, gender is a socio-cultural construction based on sexual differences, which promotes norms of behavior and relationships between men and women, who are assigned the mas-

² It should be noted that this article will only focus on the binary vision of gender: man and woman.

culine and feminine gender, respectively. In this gender assignment, masculinity is related to ideas of toughness, strength, and character, while the feminine is related to delicacy, weakness, and insecurity. This separation creates differentiated and complex attributes. Thus, gender as a social interpretation of the biological indicates that what makes a woman feminine, and a man masculine, is not biology (sex), but a cultural construct that defines the position of women and men, as well as assigns their activities, limitations, and possibilities (Lamas, 1996, p. 108).

Due to this assignment of attributes, gender becomes the basic criterion for social organization, in which there is an unequal distribution of roles and responsibilities (Ortega, 2005). This fosters the “hierarchization of powers,” where dominant agents are men, creating the social imaginary that masculine values and experiences are normative, imitable, and desirable, and therefore these spheres are more valued, remunerated, and of higher order. All this represents an androcentric view (González, 2013).

It is in this context where public and private spheres emerge. The first one includes decisions regarding social, political, and economic life that require reason, a skill linked to the masculine—a productive role. In turn, in the private sphere, home requires sensitivity and care, linked to the feminine, which limits women to performing family-related works—a reproductive role (Sánchez, 1986). This is where the sexual division of labor originates, since it determines the specialization of roles and tasks according to sex, which leads to a domination over women’s work capacity (Barbieri, 1993).

The sexual division of labor and, of course, the restriction of women to domestic and care work have historically hindered their access and permanence in the labor market in conditions of equality with men (Abasolo & Montero, 2004). It must be recognized that, in recent decades, women have increased their participation in the labor market with higher levels of education, although this has not been accompanied by better and higher permanence and quality of employment, given that women are still restricted due to performing a double role in society: productive and reproductive ones. This means that they must face unequal forms of insertion in the paid labor market (Barberá, Dema, Estellés & Devece, 2011).

Thus, it is important to analyze workplace discrimination as a result of the sexual division of labor, and therefore a consequence of the respective social positions held by men and women in organizational structures (Barberá, Ramos, Sarrió & Candela, 2002). Despite the fact that they can have the same productive competences, women receive inferior treatment in terms of possibilities to get

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employed or to obtain better working conditions, as it happens with other populations discriminated by race, religion, sexual preference, etc. (Guataquí, Baquero & Sarmiento, 2000).

Due to different types of discrimination, the dominant position of men in the labor market is reinforced. This also allows gender segregation: women are concentrated in jobs with greater instability, lower retribution, and lower recognition (Barberá et al., 2011, p. 987). Thus, gender segregation³ becomes another form of discrimination against women, since, while there exists the feminization and masculinization of occupations, the jobs with a greater participation of women will have lower social value, which will result in a wage penalty and obstacles in career advancement (Barberá et al., 2002).

The glass ceiling effect

The glass ceiling effect was first proposed in 1987 in the book *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America's Largest Corporations?* In this text, Ann Morrison, Ellen van Velsor, and Randall P. White revealed how the executive environment is different for women than for men, since they must face obstacles on their way to reaching positions at the top of the hierarchical structure of organizations. It is as if there were a transparent barrier that prevents women's promotion due to mechanisms of discrimination that are not always visible, as if there were a "glass ceiling" (Ardanche & Celiberti, 2011, p. 9).

This category has been used by different knowledge areas and social movements to sustain the existence of a vertical segregation suffered by women. Despite having skills to occupy positions that require higher qualification, responsibility, and power in various areas, at a certain point in their career women get stagnant (García, 2006). This fact evidences discriminatory problems, given that this lower upward mobility in terms of positions also becomes a wage penalty (Bucheli & Sanromán, 2005).

³ In the labor field, there are two types of gender segregation: horizontal segregation and vertical segregation. The first refers to the fact that women are concentrated in certain occupations or branches of economic activity, which, due to their attributes, are mostly associated with the service and care sector (Castillo, Novick, Rojo & Tumini, 2007). Similarly, the second refers to the impossibility of women to move up in organizational hierarchies to positions of power or management positions, concentrating them in lower and middle positions, with lower salaries and qualifications and less responsibility (Abasolo & Montero, 2004).

Precisely because these barriers are invisible, they do not disappear on their own; when criteria or situations appear neutral, women are put at a particular disadvantage (Barberá et al., 2011), since objectively there are no distinctions in terms of performance to explain inequalities with respect to salary or occupation (Bustos, 2002). It is recognized that barriers that make up the glass ceiling are subjective, fostered by aspects related to gender stereotypes (Riquelme & García, 2008, p. 259) that facilitate the stagnation of women in their professional careers and limit their potentials (Tomàs & Guillamón, 2009).

It is important to note that the aspects that make the glass ceiling viable are classified as external and internal. External aspects explain the limited number of women in positions of high responsibility, due to a preference regarding leadership styles linked to gender and the employer's bias to hire women or men to occupy certain positions. Internal aspects take into account the cultural context, expectations, and preferences of each individual to shape social gender roles (De Garay, 2013), which in their interaction affect work performance and hinder the access of women to managerial positions (Riquelme & García, 2008).

From the perspective of external aspects, female leadership style is culturally less accepted because it is considered less effective. This determines the view that men are more suitable to be leaders, since traditionally they are the ones who are accustomed and trained to exercise power (Fernández, López, Maeztu & Martín, 2010). Thus, in the employer's social imaginary, men inspire: 1) greater credibility in decision-making because they are more rational; 2) encourage employees' compliance and responsibility; and 3) promote order within organizations (García, 2006), which allows them to meet organizational objectives due to their masculine attributes.

On the contrary, in the social imaginary of employers, female leadership style generates an opposite feeling, since women are believed to be motivated by emotions. This leads to adopting behaviors promoted by values related to collectivist interests (Cuadrado, Navas, & Molero, 2004) sanidad, burocracia pública, burocracia privada y organizaciones productivas, which establishes that women are not the most suitable to work in a management position.

Thus, employers, based on their prejudices, are inclined to hire or promote more men than women to managerial positions, since they tend to think that men have values and aptitudes related to the professional capacity of exercising power (Riquelme & García, 2008; García, 2012). This reinforces the idea that management positions should be filled by people who possess masculinity traits: "think

manager, think male” (Fernández et al., 2010). Consequently, if a woman wants to have access to a managerial position, she must have enough “masculine” attributes so that she is given the necessary confidence to have successful job performance.

In addition, some business rules or policies may favor the hiring and promotion of men (García, 2006). For example, formal promotion systems with seniority criteria impose limitations on women, because during motherhood there are periods with interruptions, and for this reason men are given an advantage, since they generally do not sacrifice their professional development in favor of family life (Mateos, Gimeno, & Escot, 2010).

Regarding internal aspects, gender roles and the sexual division of labor are highlighted again, since the responsibilities assumed by women at home while caring for their families can prevent them from moving up in the organization. These issues compete with the time women should dedicate to a managerial position (García, 2006), since in the social imaginary of the employer they will have greater absence due to their commitments at home.

In short, the social and cultural tradition becomes an implicit and powerful norm that conditions women to assume roles linked to the domestic and private spheres. In this way, motherhood and family responsibilities as a “natural condition” are aspects that restrain women in their careers from achieving positions of greater responsibility and decision-making (Díez & Terrón, 2009, p. 31).

In addition to social imaginaries, women also experience fear to disappoint the expectations regarding their female role—a woman dedicated to her home and children—due to a lack of new models that enable an independent and successful life. This aspect and the fact of remaining in a sexuate culture (Tomàs & Guillamón, 2009) help build a barrier that is difficult to break, as it becomes a struggle against a model that rewards male values (Burin, 2008).

In sum, social and attitudinal factors (Riquelme & García, 2008) related to organizational culture, gender stereotypes, and family and care responsibilities become obstacles in the professional advancement of women, which hinders the possibility of gender equality in the labor market.

The glass ceiling: Theoretical and empirical discussions

There are many studies and researches developed by academics as well as social groups and movements that try to describe how women must face different types of discrimination in the labor market, and which have based their analysis on the concept of *glass ceiling*. Thanks to this, it has been possible to identify existing gaps in terms of occupation, salary, participation, working conditions, among others, which are activities that allow understanding situations that women must face at the time they decide to get a job.

This article will examine the effects based on gender analysis, the theory of taste-based discrimination, the theory of statistical discrimination, and the theory of segmented markets, in order to understand theoretically workplace discrimination against women.

The theory of *taste-based discrimination* has been widely used to analyze workplace discrimination from a gender perspective. Its promoter is the renowned economist Gary Becker (1957), who suggests that employers, since they have prejudices regarding certain personal characteristics, find difficult to tolerate the presence of candidates or workers with these personality traits, and prefer to sacrifice productivity in exchange for exercising their prejudices (Guataquí, Baquero, & Sarmiento, 2000).

In the labor market, this taste for discrimination causes economic effects in two ways. First, on the minority group, since it reduces their real income (Meza & Mora, 2013), and, second, on companies, since employers, in order to exercise their prejudices, are willing to pay higher wages to hire or promote their personnel according to their preferences, which decreases their profits (Abadía, 2005) and marginal productivity (Rivera, 2012). On the other hand, the survival of a discriminating employer depends on the type of market where he is located. If he is in a monopolistic situation, discrimination can last more for two reasons: (1) there is only one employer, and (2) profits are above competitive levels, fact that allows him to exercise his preferences, even if he has to sacrifice utilities while hiring people at higher costs (McConell, 2003).

On the contrary, in a competitive market, the exercise of preferences can lead to exiting the market due to high costs that would cause a reduction in profits; so the employer will have only one solution here: to be willing to hire members of the minority group, but with a wage penalty. In the context of gender, this means

that since men and women are perfect substitutes, employers will exercise wage discrimination against women, in order to maximize their profit and remain in the market (Guataquí, Baquero, & Sarmiento, 2000).

On the other hand, the first promoters of the *theory of statistical discrimination* were Phelps (1972) and Arrow (1973). According to this approach, based on the premise that in a competitive market information is imperfect and can generate uncertainty, employers will prefer to make decisions based on the average information available, and reduce risks in this way (Rivera, 2012; Abadía, 2005). Such action penalizes the minority group when its characteristics differ from the market average (McConnell, 2003).

This theory, reviewed from a gender perspective, suggests that women differ from the market average, since they are thought to have lower levels of education, experience, and time to have long working days due to their dual role—care of the home and work (Guataquí, Baquero, & Sarmiento, 2000), or a more emotional form of leadership to occupy managerial positions. Consequently, they are penalized decisively in terms of opportunities offered by the labor market.

Finally, the *theory of segmented markets* has among its main exponents Doeringer and Piore (1971), who support the existence of two types of markets: a modern and a traditional one. The first is characterized as an innovative and competitive sector, with a large stock of capital, intensive use of technology, and highly skilled labor. In this type of market, employers have few incentives to cause high staff turnover, since they are able to standardize salaries, train their personnel, and improve contracting methods, while carrying out their vision of capital accumulation (Espino, 2001). This allows a positive interaction between labor supply and demand, since salaries are defined institutionally according to skills, experience and seniority, in addition to having clearly defined hierarchical structures (Janssen, 2005, p. 48).

On the contrary, the traditional market is characterized by operating with a small stock of capital and little use of technology. Even the technology used can be considered outdated. Its companies are of small size and do not require highly skilled personnel, including unpaid family workers (Espino, 2001). Due to this, there are no clear policies for the selection and promotion of personnel or the allocation of salaries, since this market is characterized by precariousness, informality, low opportunities for promotion, the presence of arbitrary supervision, and high rate of unemployment (Janssen, 2005).

From the perspective of gender analysis, the theory of segmented markets allows understanding the existence of workplace discrimination towards women. Given their prejudices about women having lower levels of education and less labor mobility, employers estimate that they do not provide the stability required by the modern sector, so women are penalized and end up moving to the traditional sector, which has greater uncertainty due to low stability and lower salaries (Torres & Pau, 2011). In this way, segregation in the labor market is encouraged (Murillo & Simón, 2014).

Some results of empirical evidence on workplace discrimination against women

In addition to conceptualizing the glass ceiling effect and theoretical approaches that allow understanding different forms of gender discrimination in the workplace, empirical works enrich the analysis of socioeconomic dynamics. As the objective here is not to examine these researches in detail, but to show that there are common results and conclusions, below are three subcategories that explain the glass ceiling effect: (1) occupational discrimination, (2) wage discrimination, and (3) the sexual division of labor.

Occupational discrimination is based on segregation, since women remain at the base of the organizations, despite an increase in their educational level—similar or even higher than that of men—and higher rates of activity and occupation reached by the latest generations (García, 2012; Garay, 2013). Socio-cultural barriers and prejudices are preserved to maintain feminized certain positions based on gender stereotypes—such as general services, secretaries, assistants, nurses, etc.—that, despite their importance, are valued less in the imaginary of organizational structures (Díaz, Verján, & Castrejón, 2014), which intensifies horizontal segregation.

In this context, it could be said that there are male and female territories in the occupational structure. Among them, female territories have worse working conditions, lower remuneration, and fewer possibilities of career development (Castillo, Novick, Rojo, & Tumini, 2007), since women are predominantly placed in basic positions with lower qualification requirements (Martín, 2007) or in organizational support areas. Over time, this translates into fewer women at higher levels (Torres & Pau, 2011). This situation shows that women's work trajectories,

compared to those of men, tend to be at a disadvantage, since their work careers have less mobility between positions and slower rates of promotion (Viveros, 1997).

One of the factors affecting the shortage of female directors are the so-called “invisible networks,” which are woven by men during workplace after-hours, when women are dedicated to the responsibilities of home and care. These are strategies used by men to support each other in the race to occupy positions in the hierarchy of power (Díez & Terrón, 2009). In this way, the hegemonic forms of masculinity are reinforced in organizations due to certain alliances, which allows a better understanding of the individualistic behavior of men (Viveros, 1997).

For their part, the reviewed authors agree that women are stuck at the base of the organizations as if they were *stuck to the floor*,⁴ regardless of the branch of economic activity. Even in activities considered feminized, the presence of women in positions of high responsibility and decision-making is minimal—for example, health and education (Caro, García, Rodríguez, & Jiménez, 2007). Thus, workplace discrimination faced by women is closely related to the presence of prejudiced and segregationist attitudes and behaviors, rooted in the complex system of gender relations in society (International Labor Organization, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Organization of the United Nations, 2013, p. 88), which agrees with the analyzed theories.

A notable example to illustrate the above observations is the education sector, which, although it is considered highly feminized, presents difficulties for women to access positions of representation and high responsibility. This fact shows that the social imaginary about men having greater powers to exercise authority still remains (Fleta-Asín & Pan, 2017).

Nevertheless, in NGOs, it is visible the incorporation of women in the highest positions as part of an approach to recognize this gender (Hernández, 2010), which is understandable given the high presence of women in the *social services* sector, of which NGOs and foundations form a part. Similarly, in the public sector, more women are present at levels of greater responsibility compared to the private sector, due to the bureaucratic structure of the public sphere, as well as the existence of an administrative career with rules that manage to neutralize some discriminatory effects (Viveros & Arango, 1996, p. 7), such as the quota law.

4 This concept is known as *sticky floor*, which is another way of explaining how women find themselves stuck in the middle and lower levels of the organizations with no possibility for promotion. Given that it explains vertical segregation in the same terms as the glass ceiling effect does, it was not used in this article in order to avoid any confusion for the reader.

From the perspective of salary, the concept of segregation prevails in the explanation of its causes, since salaries are negatively affected by the concentration of women in certain occupations (Barraza, 2010; Torres & Pau, 2011). Another cause that explains wage inequality is that men receive more salary supplements due to greater availability to extend their working hours, receiving thus extra income (Vázquez, Santos, & Pérez, 2015).

However, many aspects of the wage gap that are not explained by different productive characteristics originate from discriminative issues against women (Murillo & Simón, 2014). Taking care of dependents, having children—especially under five years of age—or living with someone—independently if married or in a free union—impose barriers to accessing positions of responsibility (Matus & Gallego, 2015; Meza & Mora, 2013). According to the employers' prejudices, these elements introduce a risk factor and uncertainty, since women are thought to have lower productivity, on the assumption that they will leave their position because of their care responsibilities. Because of these ideas, employers penalize women with lower salaries (Tenjo, Ribero & Bernat, 2005).

Motherhood is not the only barrier to women's career advancement, but it is also the lack of co-responsibility in the exercise of paternity and other care and home activities. These activities compete with the time of women and force them to exacerbate their double role (Díez & Terrón, 2009), since these activities are almost exclusively their responsibility in the social imaginary of both employees and employers.

Even when women enter the labor market as entrepreneurs, there exists the imaginary that this is only possible when they are single and without children. Nevertheless, it is demonstrated that having a family is not an impediment to entering the business world, since women promote their business with, precisely, the alliance of household members, either their spouse or parents (Da Gloria, 2017, p. 272).

Thus, the authors agree that the glass ceiling is based on the sexual division of labor that revolves around values and strategic forms that associate leadership with masculinity. That is why men are privileged when accessing managerial positions, since the predominant and universal model of thought is the male scheme. It tends to be accepted that the rational and analytical thinking of men leads to achieving objectives and success (Duque, 2004, p. 6), thanks to their techniques of individuality and independence (Beléndez, Hernández, & Martín, 2009) the reality of

polarization in advertising agencies (with very few managers and many employees in the second and third levels).

From a cultural feminist perspective, markets, regardless of whether they are competitive or monopolistic, operate according to principles based on the masculine structure, and therefore they will privilege these ways of acting and thinking. For this reason, it is almost impossible for women to break this conditioning, and consequently they stay subordinated in the low and medium organizational structure, which limits their possibilities of development (Duque, 2004, p. 6).

Nevertheless, there are other positions that indicate that, instead of an emotional leadership style, women lead using a more democratic and participative style based on the creation of relationships (Díez & Terrón, 2009), while men do so in a more autocratic style looking for results. Despite this, there are no differences in task orientation that would indicate that one style is better than the other (García, 2006).

The Peterson Institute for International Economics and the EY Study Center, after concluding in 2016 their research *Is gender diversity profitable?* in 13,017 companies worldwide, even suggested that companies in which 30% of senior managers are women can improve their net profit margin⁵ by one percentage point, due to the diversity and skills women bring to companies.

However, not only men maintain the conviction that strategic leadership is a masculine skill, but also many women share the social imaginary that managerial success is a characteristic possessed by men by nature (Fernández et al., 2010). In this way, women themselves end up having no interest in occupying these positions, as if there existed a self-segregation.

Again, maternity and the care of families appear as a support for segregation. Due to these perspectives, women adhere to roles that are more conventional and stagnate at the base of the organizational pyramid. Thus, they end up paying a high price when facing two apparently opposite options: recognition in organizations and motherhood and the care of the home (Burin, 2008). This shows that the patriarchal tradition continues to be an impediment to raising awareness of indirect discriminations in the labor market due to cultural practices that determine social order (Díez & Terrón, 2009; Barberá et al., 2011).

Despite the massive incorporation of women into the labor market, the belief continues to prevail that men are the household providers and women are com-

⁵ *Net margin* is defined as income minus costs and operating expenses.

plementary contributors. In addition, the idea that domestic tasks and care are women's responsibility is also preserved. This results in an unequal distribution of work hours, which is reflected in the difficulties of women to harmonize their participation in the economic and labor structure with reproductive and household obligations (International Labor Organization, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Organization of the United Nations, 2013, p. 51). This also means that gender stereotypes do not seem to change as fast as social transformations occur (Díaz & Rocha, cited by Martínez & Camacho, 2017, p. 369).

In conclusion, despite women's progress in various arenas, deficit in decent work,⁶ as well as gaps in labor and occupational participation and income distribution continue to persist. Disadvantageous income positions remain with higher levels of education, as well as the distribution of unpaid time that men and women dedicate to the care of their families (International Labor Organization, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Organization of the United Nations, 2013, p. 28).

The most important causes include employers' prejudices regarding competencies and leadership styles to exercise a managerial position, even if greater qualifications are evident. This is one of the strongest reasons that promotes gender bias in the labor market, since women end up being penalized in terms of position and wage (Guataquí, Baquero, & Sarmiento, 2000), which highlights discrimination they have to face in the labor field due to segregation.

Another notable cause is the sexual division of labor with a set of roles that society has imposed on women and men. Men are encouraged to have ambitions in pursuing their careers, while women are encouraged to think about their maternal role, and therefore to sacrifice their professional aspirations. It is important to note that performing a double role in society implies for women more work time—both remunerated and unpaid—as a result of an excessive assignment of “functions” in the labor market and in the care economy. Given the current dynamics, such as growing urbanization and the territorial expansion of cities, commuting is more difficult and travel times are longer, and, consequently, the time available for self-

6 According to the United Nations' definition, it is a productive work, adequately remunerated and carried out under conditions of security, with right to voice and representation, and free of all forms of discrimination. It is also integral, which supposes, in the first place, the right to access a job (International Labor Organization, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Organization, 2013, p. 187).

care and leisure is even more restricted. This directly affects women's productivity, personal well-being, and quality of life (Todaro, 2009, p. 46).

Finally, the invisible barriers that make up the glass ceiling effect are characterized by an apparent neutralization of all types of discrimination, which allows perpetuating gender differences, as well as reproducing asymmetric relations between men and women (León, 1993). However, empirical evidence on the existence of workplace discrimination against women, in addition to the fight of different social movements, especially feminist ones, has made possible the recognition of this issue in public opinion, seeking to integrate women's participation in the development agenda.

Conclusions

Although the glass ceiling effect can be considered an analytical category to discuss workplace discrimination, it does not have its own conceptualization that explains different restraints on women's career advancement. For this reason, the sexual division of labor continues to be a basic concept for studying the labor market from the perspective of gender analysis.

On the other hand, theories that support the glass ceiling suggest that, based on a gender analysis, women have disadvantages in getting promotion to the top hierarchical structures of organizations, since they are slowed down when employers exercise their preferences and prejudices in the labor market. Due to this, women get stuck in positions in the lower and middle structure (Martín, 2007; Torres & Pau, 2011) and are penalized with lower wages (Guataquí, Baquero, & Sarmiento, 2000; Barraza, 2010). This evidences that the taste-based discrimination theory comes true.

In addition to the above, the theory of statistical discrimination is met as well, given that women are thought to have less time availability to work in a managerial position due to maternity and care commitments (Todaro, 2009; Tenjo, Ribero, & Bernat, 2005). This perspective also leads to the assumption that women have a more emotional leadership style when occupying managerial positions (Puyol, 2006), which is far from the belief "think manager, think male" (Fernández et al., 2010; Bélendez, Hernández, & Martín, 2009; Duque, 2004). Similarly, the theory of segmented markets allows understanding the reason for women's less labor

stability and lower wages (Torres & Pau, 2011; Janssen, 2005), taking into account that they are forced to participate in informal markets with few labor guarantees.

On the other hand, empirical results show that education, work experience, or leadership skills do not count as variables to explain the stagnation of women's careers, given that markets work with principles based on the male structure, and this is why masculine ways of acting and thinking are privileged (Duque, 2004). This also allows men to generate invisible networks that make possible their promotion, based on their individualist vision (Díez & Terrón, 2009; Viveros, 1997).

It has to be recognized that motherhood and care commitments fall almost exclusively on women, which exacerbates the sexual division of labor, and women end up sacrificing their job aspirations for the care of their children and families (Barberá et al., 2011; Burin, 2008). This evidences an indirect employment discrimination.

The above leads to suggesting that the design of public policies to eliminate the glass ceiling effect must start from the assumption that gender equality in the labor market has a multidimensional nature. It must seek to propose comprehensive solutions regarding the labor market, beyond focusing on women's access to work, which also implies coherence between economic, social, and employment policies promoted by countries.

It is therefore important to transform the social imaginary of gender stereotypes that define women on the basis of feelings and emotions, and men based on rationality (Castillo et al., 2007). These representations reiterate a cultural model of masculine domination that projects men with authority and power, as if this were part of a natural order (Ortega, 2005; González, 2013). In this way, women are segregated and limited to activities at the service of masculinity and linked to family life: motherhood, family care, and domestic service.

In summary, public policies, in order to be effective in the fight against gender inequality in the labor field, must analyze various overlapping and interacting systems of discrimination, taking into account the social origin of discriminations motivated by the sexual division of labor, in addition to labor and contractual relations. In this way, what is sought is to promote conditions of equality in the workplace, which also implies ensuring coherence between macroeconomic, social, and employment policies (International Labor Organization, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Organization, 2013).

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