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A Bibliometric Investigation of the Roles and Obstacles of Women's Leadership in the Corporate Sector

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ABSTRACT

This article uses a bibliometric approach to identify the roles of women in leadership and the various challenges they face in corporate management. The study's goal is to determine the leading countries, commonly used keywords, research trends and the dynamics of the growth of scientific papers on this subject over the previous fifteen years (2010–2025). To process and analyse data from the Scopus database, programs like VOSviewer and Bibliometrix (R Studio) were used. As a result of the analysis of 1,036 scientific publications, key research trends, the most productive countries and frequently used keywords were identified. It was found that despite the growing representation of women in leadership, structural barriers, gender inequality, and cultural and social constraints remain. The geographical and thematic differentiation of publications indicates the global importance of the topic under consideration and the interdisciplinary nature of the research. The bibliometric approach enabled the identification of the main research clusters: gender stereotypes and discrimination, institutional barriers, and the phenomenon of the "glass ceiling". The findings highlight a growing interdisciplinary interest linking gender economics, corporate governance, and organizational psychology. Additionally, using the bibliometric technique, the study identifies scientific focus, research gaps, and prospects. Future research should focus on in-depth analysis of under-researched topics such as intersectionality and mentoring, as well as on developing practical tools to overcome structural and cultural barriers in women's leadership.

KEYWORDS: Women's Leadership, Corporate Governance, Gender Economy, Gender Inequality, Bibliometric Analysis, Intersectionality, Asia

SCSTI: 06.71.07

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1. INTRODUCTION

The workforce has seen substantial change over the last 20 years, with a noticeable rise in the proportion of women who are both entering the profession and expressing more intense goals for career advancement. As a result, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women in leadership positions (Krivkovich et al., 2024). Not only do businesses with diverse leadership teams do better financially, but they also have happier employees and are better at solving problems and coming up with new ideas (Russen et al., 2021).

There are many challenges and barriers to women in leadership. Women are still underrepresented in leadership positions, which restricts their impact and prevents them from achieving diversity and gender equity goals despite decades of intensive work across numerous sectors. Women are underrepresented in leadership roles even though they make up a sizable share of the workforce (Times Higher Education, 2021). There is clear evidence of gender discrimination in executive roles in the US, UK, Europe, Asia, and other regions of the world (Maheshwari, 2021). Despite making up a large portion of the workforce, women are underrepresented in leadership positions (Times Higher Education, 2021). According to a lot of international research, societal stigma and work-life balance seem to have the most significant negative influence on women (Smidt et al., 2017; Tomás et al., 2010). According to a UN report from 2023, it will take 140 years for women to be equally represented in leadership roles in the worldwide workforce.

According to Maheshwari et al. (2021), family support, a desire to change society, a drive to advance professionally, and setting an example for younger girls were the factors that made it possible for women to take on leadership roles. Women are more likely to become leaders in their fields if they have the support of their husbands and close family members, such as fathers, brothers, and parents-in-law. Research in the health sector shows that gender-equal leadership will have several advantages, such as Health: enhancing decision-making, bolstering health systems; Gender: empowering women with more income and agency; and Economic: boosting economic growth through the creation of new jobs and stronger health systems (Borger et al., 2025). A perspective from the higher education sector, developing a more equitable and encouraging institutional environment that gives middle-level female academics the tools and supports they need to move smoothly into senior leadership roles and, eventually, strengthens the institution's leadership pipeline requires an understanding of the dynamics from their point of view (Thien et al., 2025).

Furthermore, there is a strong argument for more research on the ways that important life events and larger life domains affect women's leadership styles and productivity at work. This involves acknowledging the beneficial effects these life experiences have on women's leadership abilities. Cultures that empower women leaders can be created by incorporating these insights into diversity- and inclusion-focused training initiatives and organizational policies (Manfreda et al., 2025). Thus, the study's goal is to determine the leading countries, commonly used keywords, research trends and the dynamics of the growth of scientific papers on this subject over the previous fifteen years (2010–2025).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges Women Face in Leadership

Traditional gender roles and cultural conventions continue to have a significant influence on women's empowerment. There may be resistance to women's involvement in healthcare because of the way society views women's participation in public healthcare, especially in roles that are viewed as difficult or out of the ordinary (Alzaaqi et al., 2025; Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010). Prejudice against female leaders can be a manifestation of stereotypes about women's skills and talents. Women's prospects for job advancement may

be restricted by preconceived ideas about their competence and leadership abilities, especially in specialized or leadership professions (Alsadaan et al., 2021). In the context of the Saudi health care sector, the complete fulfilment of gender equality in healthcare is nevertheless hampered by enduring issues such as prevailing gender conventions, workplace prejudices, and inadequate opportunities for mentoring (Alzaaqi et al., 2025). It is possible that social role expectations unintentionally caused women to adopt gender-conditioned habits that intentionally obstruct their advancement into leadership roles and career prospects. Researchers hypothesize that these stereotypes are influenced by women's views of their appropriateness for jobs in computers and IT (Singh et al., 2018). Similarly, a complex socioeconomic issue that affects the entire community is the pervasiveness of child marriages in rural communities. The upsetting cycle of early marriages is perpetuated by survivors of early marriages who face long-lasting economic, social, and generational consequences. Early marriage puts women at the highest risk since it increases their chances of dropping out of school, losing access to economic empowerment, experiencing domestic abuse, and having problems when a young woman becomes pregnant, which could result in stunting in the unborn child. According to data from Malang Regency's public health centre, almost 2,000 toddlers are stunted as a result of pregnancies by moms under 20 (Anzari & Fitri, 2024).

Outcomes and Benefits of Women

In order to achieve gender parity, promote creativity, and advance inclusive decision-making processes, women's leadership development is essential. In order to address complex global concerns, it guarantees various perspectives on leadership and helps women to overcome systematic hurdles. Additionally, cultivating female leaders improves organizational performance since diversity in leadership is associated with better social impact, employee happiness, and financial results. Similarly, a higher percentage of women in management teams improves a gender-diverse workgroup's capacity to cooperate and contribute to overall performance. Implementing gender-inclusive policies, which can eliminate long-standing gender divisions, is made easier when there are more women in management teams (Lee et al., 2025; Sil & Lenka, 2025). According to Hillman (2015) and Triana et al. (2013), companies with female directors typically have higher reputations, make more investments in innovation, gain significant resources, and eventually achieve better company performance. Edacherian et al. (2025) highlighted in their study that a favorable relationship between company success and the representation of women on boards and in executive roles.

Strategies for Advancing Women in Leadership

Women leaders must overcome stereotypes and biases in order to be successful in their roles and contribute significantly to their organizations (Smith & Sinkford, 2022). The following are some thorough methods for navigating and overcoming these obstacles: Women leaders frequently have to strike a careful balance between being direct and personable. Although assertiveness is necessary for good leadership, women may be viewed negatively when they exhibit it. Women leaders can overcome this by taking a well-rounded strategy that blends assertiveness and approachability. This entails keeping lines of communication open and showing team members empathy while still being forceful and decisive when needed (Chikwe et al., 2024). Authenticity is necessary for effective leadership, yet women leaders may feel pressured to conform to traditional gender norms in order to be taken seriously. Nonetheless, maintaining one's integrity is crucial for gaining the respect and confidence of teammates. According to Mashele and Alagidede (2022), women leaders can overcome bias by embracing their authentic selves, demonstrating confidence in their abilities, and refusing to compromise their

ideas or values. In order to overcome obstacles and seize opportunities, women leaders must establish networks of support. In the workplace, mentors and allies can offer invaluable advocacy, support, and direction. They can provide insight, counsel, and development opportunities, assisting female leaders in overcoming challenges and realizing their objectives (Chikwe et al., 2024; Akindote et al., 2023). By actively seeking out mentors and sponsors who may offer advice and promote their progress, women leaders can build supportive networks (Akindote et al., 2023). They can also establish connections with coworkers and peers who have gone through similar struggles and experiences. Professional associations, mentorship programs, and networking events can all offer beneficial chances to meet and encourage people (Keating et al., 2022). The engineering and ICT sectors should establish official family-friendly policies, which should be appropriately applied and equally embraced by men, in order to prevent stigmatizing women as being seen as unprofessional and simultaneously promoting men as the ideal dedicated worker. In order to meet the unique career needs of competent women in leadership roles, it is advised that organizations merge work and family life not only by encouraging flexible workplace rules but also by making sure the policies are implemented effectively (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2025).

Leadership Styles and Approaches

Leadership philosophies are correlated with gendered attributes: transformational leadership is more in line with community qualities (like empathy and support), which are more commonly associated with women, whereas transactional leadership reflects agentic qualities (like task focus and rewards), which are typically associated with men (Offringa & Groeneveld, 2023). According to empirical research, men are more likely to engage in agentic or directing behaviors. In contrast, women are more likely to engage in transformational behaviors including intellectual stimulation, customized consideration, and even contingent reward (Wolfram & Gratton, 2013). Furthermore, women who possess greater resilience and self-advocacy are better able to overcome obstacles and institutional biases, which enhances their leadership capacity. Authentic leadership is undermined by impression management and impostor syndrome, according to a qualitative study of women leaders in the UK professional business services. Women frequently struggle to balance being authentic with adhering to male-dominated leadership standards (Howard, 2025). Thus, women's skills in self-awareness, emotional intelligence, teamwork, transparency, moral decision-making, and resilience make them natural advocates for authentic leadership. He emphasizes how women frequently succeed in these fields, setting a new standard for genuine leadership.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

It is well recognized that a variety of scientific approaches are developing for efficient research. Focusing on the examination of scientific material and the operation of a particular scientific discipline, bibliometric analysis is one of these successful scientific methodologies. Bibliometric analysis is a crucial technique for evaluating the scientific results of research papers, authors, keywords, journals, organizations, and nations in any field of study. Additionally, it aids in comprehending how conceptual, social, and intellectual frameworks have changed over time (Donthu et al., 2021). The primary purpose of this analysis is to locate, evaluate, and comprehend the literature or a portion of it, in a specific field of study (Öztürk, 2021).

Through bibliometric analysis, one can systematically and comprehensively grasp the actual structure of any field, the subtle evolutionary changes within it, the research clusters that define it, the emerging trends, and gain a broad view of the key concepts and their interconnections within the field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Mukherjee et al., 2022; Kraus et al. 2024). As a result, bibliometry has a broader use and is growing in popularity

among scholars. One of the most essential prerequisites for accurate and successful bibliometric analysis is careful keyword selection. For this reason, we started by compiling phrases associated with the work of women in leadership roles. Moreover, the paper collected keywords related to the difficulties and obstacles that women face in high-ranking positions.

The process of selecting and filtering articles is shown in Figure 1.

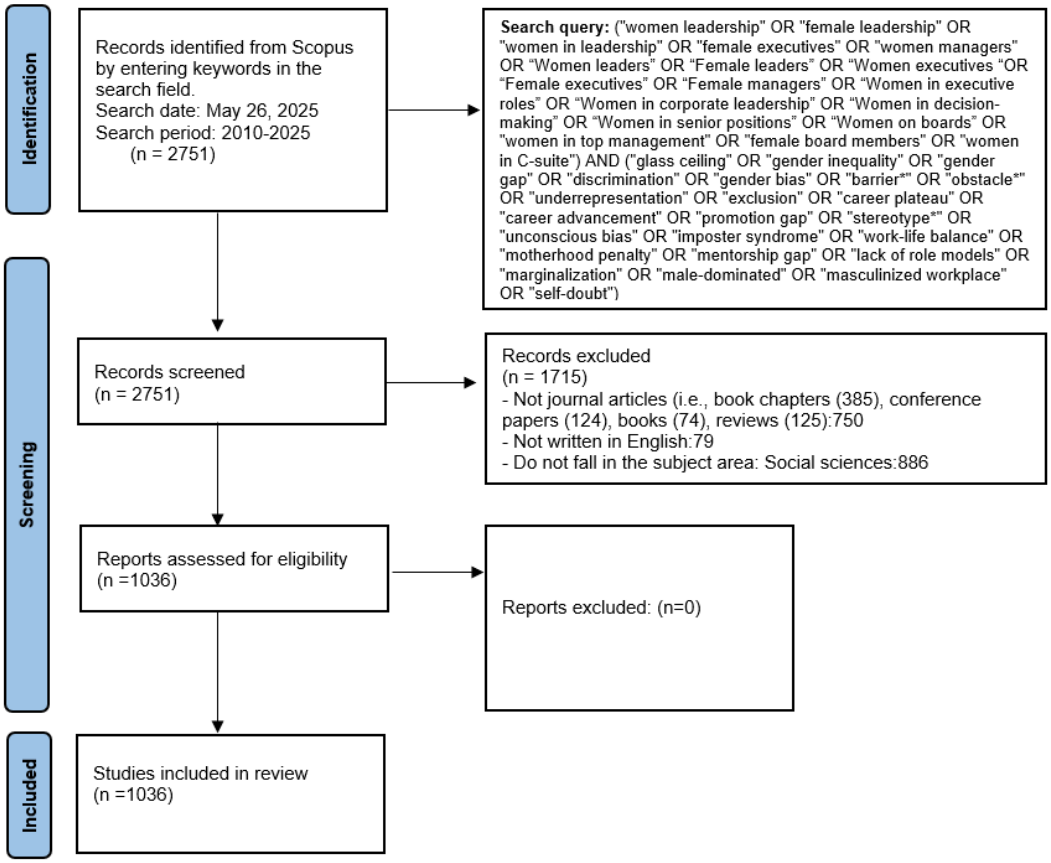


Figure 1. Data selection process

After that, using the Boolean operator AND, this research combined the keywords in both directions and performed a search in the Scopus database. On May 26, 2025 the following keywords were used to search in the Article title, Abstract, Keywords field of Scopus database: ("women leadership" OR "female leadership" OR "women in leadership" OR "female executives" OR "women managers" OR “women leaders” OR “female leaders” OR “women executives”OR “female executives” OR “female managers” OR “women in executive roles” OR “women in corporate leadership” OR “women in decision-making” OR “women in senior positions” OR “women on boards” OR "women in top management" OR "female board members" OR "women in C-suite") AND ("glass ceiling" OR "gender inequality" OR "gender gap" OR "discrimination" OR "gender bias" OR "barrier*" OR "obstacle*" OR "underrepresentation" OR "exclusion" OR "career plateau" OR "career advancement" OR "promotion gap" OR "stereotype*" OR "unconscious bias" OR "imposter syndrome" OR "work-life balance" OR "motherhood penalty" OR "mentorship gap" OR "lack of role models" OR "marginalization" OR "male-

dominated" OR "masculinized workplace" OR "self-doubt"). In total, there were 2,751 articles related to a research topic in the database. The maximum search period is set for 2010-2025. The field of Social Sciences was chosen as the main scientific direction. In addition, only journal articles were taken into account in the search method. In addition, only documents written in English were accepted for the study. Ultimately, 1,036 works were selected for further study, meeting the requirements for inclusion in the study.

Although there are numerous visualization programs available for bibliometric analysis, we chose VOSviewer and Biblioshiny to perform descriptive analysis in this study (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). VOSviewer was used to analyze keywords and study their co-occurrence (Eck & Waltman, 2009). To sum up, this article's methodology uses bibliometric tools to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the literature on the challenges faced by women in higher positions. This study intends to determine the most contributing nations, commonly used phrases, trend topics, and co-occurrence of keywords that have been encountered in works on the research issue using the aforementioned functional research components.

4. RESULTS

Annual academic research

In the past few years, the number of yearly scientific studies on the challenges faced by women in leadership positions has significantly increased. Only the last fifteen years' worth of articles that addressed the research issue were selected for examination. From Figure 2 below, you can see the general trend of the annual level of scientific productivity.

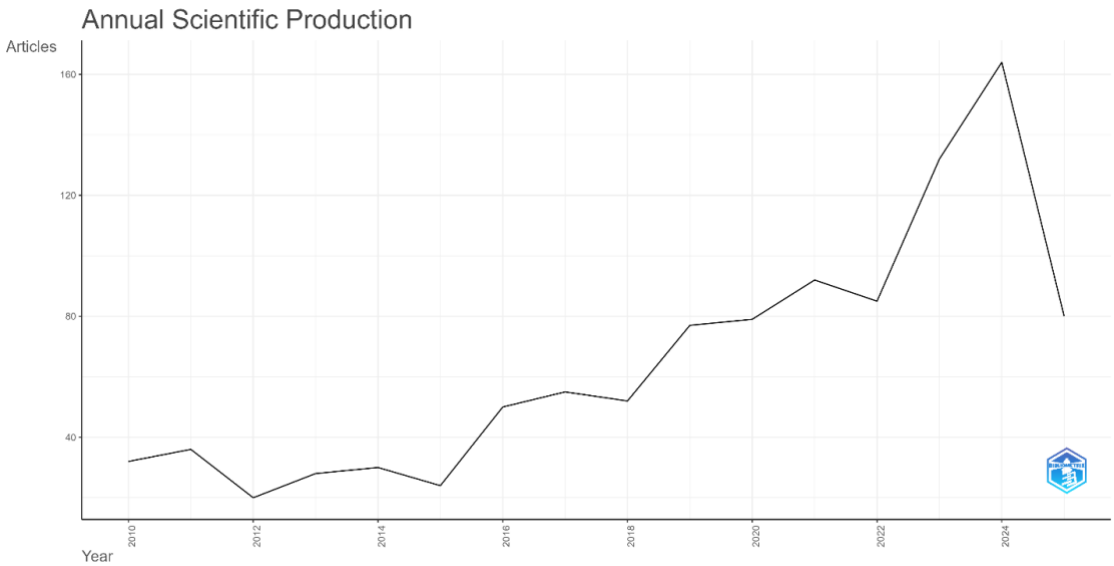


Figure 2. Annual scientific production

Graph 2 shows the annual scientific production on the challenges of leading women from 2010 to 2025. Interestingly, in the early years, there was little activity. An upsurge in publications has been observed since 2016.

From 2010 to 2015, interest in this topic was limited, as can be seen from the small indicator of the number of published articles. The number of publications has gradually increased since 2018, with 2021 and 2023 showing relatively high indicators (92 and 132 articles, respectively). This growth continued, albeit with slight fluctuations, and in the first half of 2025, 83 articles were published.

The most remarkable increase was observed in 2024, when the number of articles increased sharply, with 164 publications published in the same year alone. Such growth may indicate a growing global focus on gender equality, socio-economic issues, and broader recognition of the role of women in leadership positions. Overall, the findings indicate that in recent years, the issue of obstacles facing women in higher positions has gained significant attention from academics.

The proportion of countries that produced articles in the field of challenges faced by women leaders shows significant geographical differences, with different countries in different corners of the world being leaders in productivity. The United States leads the list of nations with the most contributions (716 articles), followed by the nations with the most publications, like Australia and the United Kingdom, each of which has a notably greater quantity of research papers (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of articles per country

Country	Number of articles
USA	716
UK	192
AUSTRALIA	161
CANADA	133
SPAIN	126
SOUTH AFRICA	101
INDIA	85
INDONESIA	71
GERMANY	63
MALAYSIA	55
CHINA	51
TURKEY	35
BRAZIL	34
NETHERLANDS	34
GHANA	33
PAKISTAN	32
SWEDEN	30
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	28

Note: compiled by the author

The data in the table indicates that South Africa, Canada, and Spain are among the nations with the highest levels of productivity. The fact that so many research papers from many nations around the world have been published demonstrates the significance of the research topic.

The aforementioned map displays the regional distribution of study findings on female leaders, identifying the countries that have published the most publications (refer to Figure 3).

The US, UK, and Australia are the top states, as indicated by the dark colours, which also show a significant number of publications. Almost all the world's major areas are represented in this picture, with a significant concentration of research being conducted in North and South America, Oceania, Europe, and Asia. In other regions of the world, including the African continent, where comparatively few publications were released, the map likewise demonstrates a dearth of publications. Nonetheless, certain nations on this continent, including Ghana and South Africa, have produced a specific quantity of articles. This illustrates how much academic performance varies by region.

The three fields' diagram shows how authors, nations, and keywords are interconnected, with grey lines signifying their relationships.

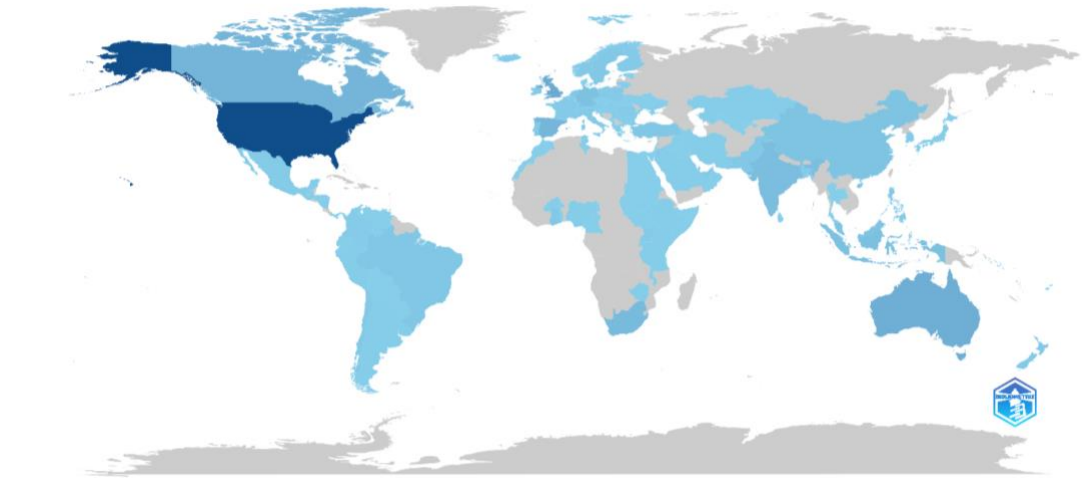


FIGURE 3. Most contributing countries

Note: compiled by the author based Bibliometrix (R Studio)

The author's country of origin is the first link in this connection, which then links to the author and concludes with research-related keywords. The size of each rectangle indicates the number of papers associated with each component. The author's country is displayed on the left side of the diagram, while commonly appearing keywords such as “leadership,” “gender,” “gender stereotypes,” “women leaders,” “intersectionality,” “gender equality,” “glass ceiling,” “higher education,” “barriers,” “gender inequality,” and “discrimination” emphasize the main themes in the field (see Figure 4).

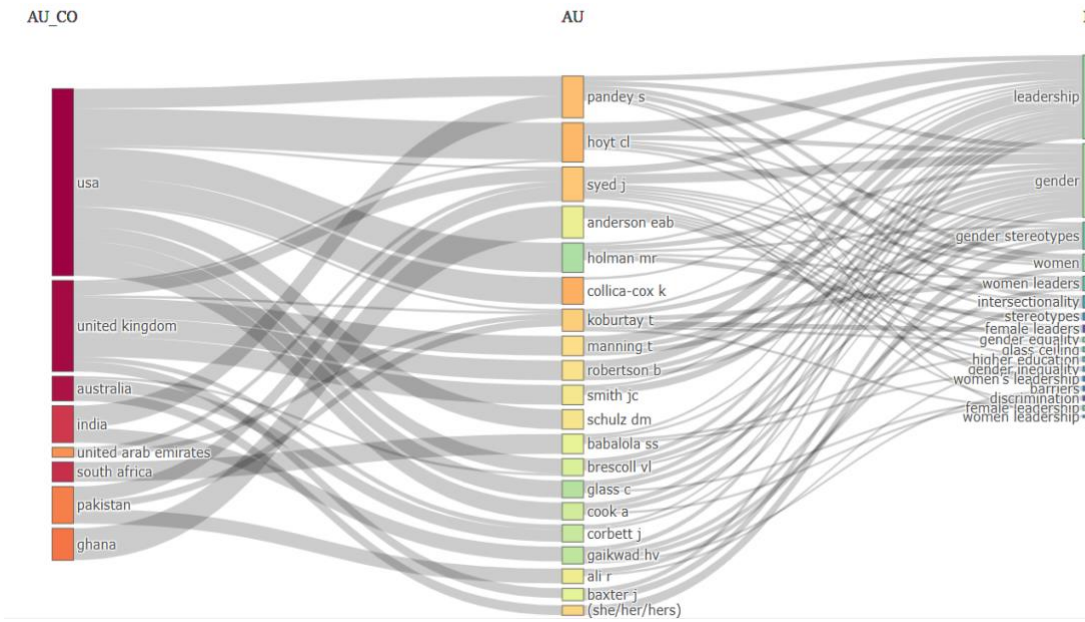


Figure 4. Three-field plot analysis

Note: compiled by the author based Bibliometrix (R Studio)

The three-field diagram illustrates the links between authors' countries (left), individual authors (centre), and frequently used keywords (right) in research concerning obstacles in women's leadership. Notable keywords like “leadership,” “gender,” “gender stereotypes,” and “women leaders” underscore key focus areas. On the other hand, nations like the USA, UK, and Australia are notable for their significant contributions, as they are associated with prominent writers and important subjects in this field.

TreeMap is a technique for displaying the most prevalent terms in the data that has been collected (Nailah & Rusydiana, 2020). The TreeMap visualisation shown in Figure 5 illustrates the words that frequently appear in the dataset of articles analysed in the area of women's leadership.

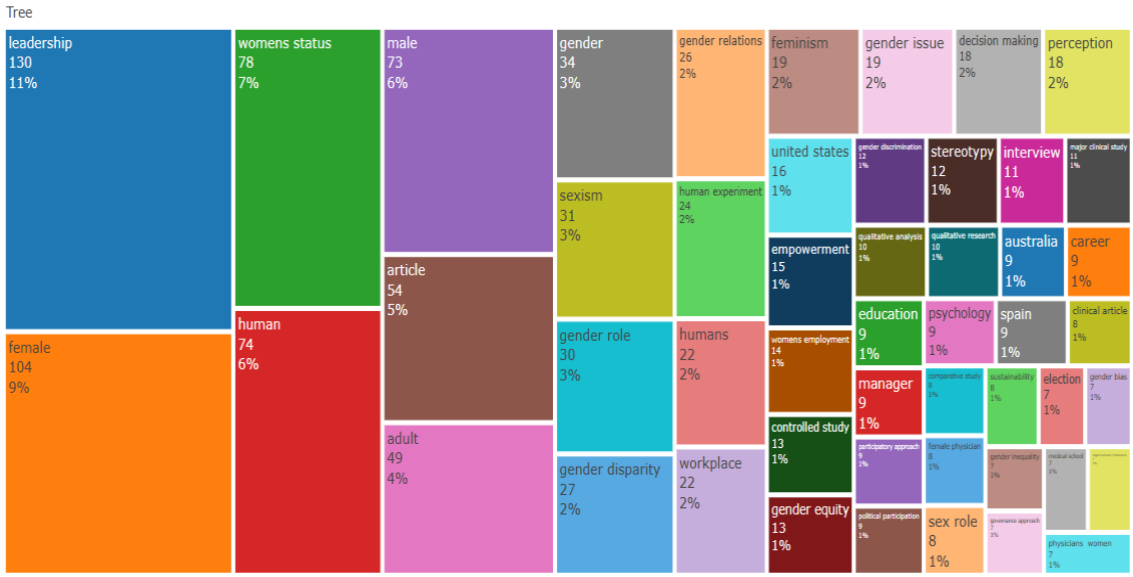


Figure 5. TreeMap analysis

The words like “leadership”, “female”, “women's status” and “human” are the most repetitive words with 130 times (11%), 104 times (9%), 78 times (7%) and 74 times (6%), respectively, which identify the interest sphere of authors. Furthermore, keywords like “gender role” 30 times (3%) and “gender disparity” 27 times (2%) were repeated in the field of research subject. The frequent occurrence of words like these suggests that gender equality issues are among the main obstacles in women's leadership.

Finding trend topics in bibliometric analysis aids in understanding the reasoning behind the evolution of the field and in making informed decisions about the course of scientific investigation. It can be used to evaluate the scientific significance of a specific topic and to take into account new developments. Examining more recently researched subjects allows us to see how scientific study is evolving.

Figure 6 illustrates the dynamics of trend subjects in research articles about the issues facing women in leadership roles.

Based on the information in the graph, the main topics and issues related to the topic of women's leadership have become more relevant in recent years. For example, since 2021, topics such as leadership, women’s status, and gender roles have been widely discussed and have gained a large frequency. In those periods, these topics were often mentioned among scientists.

Moreover, since 2023, researchers have focused more on the issues of gender and feminism.Thus, the gender inequality and

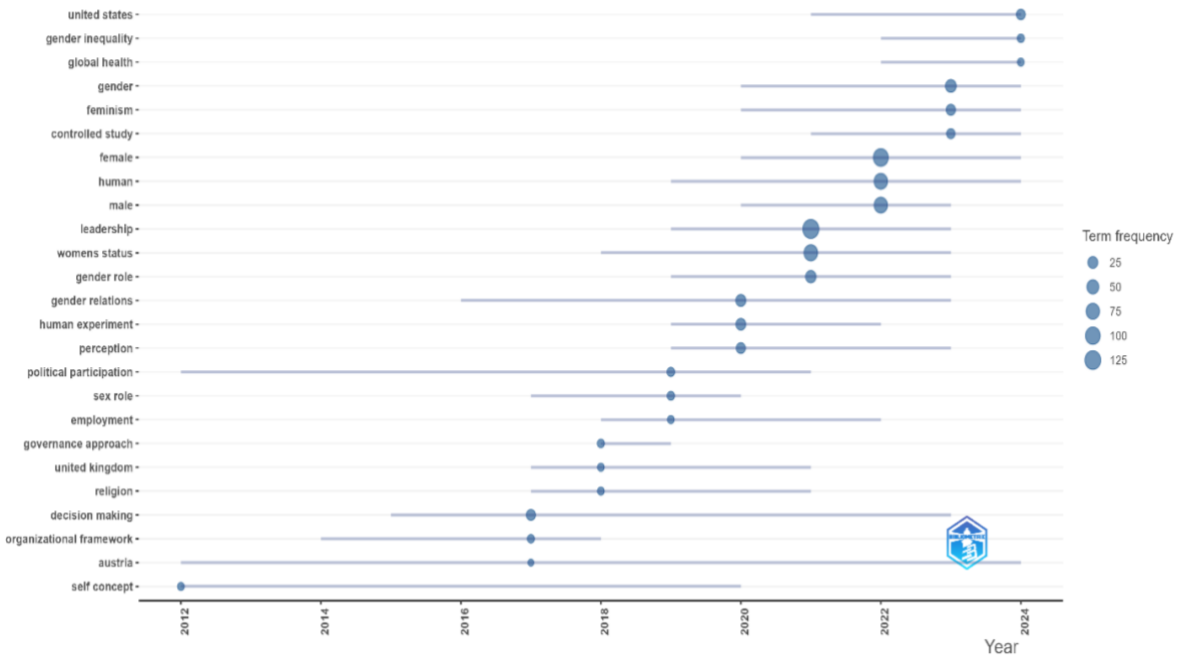


Figure 6. Trend topics

health care are the primary topics at the forefront of current study. As a result, it is well known that scholars frequently emphasize the fact that women leaders encounter gender-related challenges when carrying out their duties.

The keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed that 51 out of 2617 keywords satisfied the requirements by establishing a threshold of 9 occurrences. The main concepts and topics found in research on women in leadership positions are summarized by these 51 keywords. Five different clusters were formed from these keywords, which may indicate different research directions or thematic areas within this field (Figure 7).

This network visualization shows the co-occurrence of keywords in research on the difficulties faced by women in leadership roles. Each hue indicates a theme grouping, and the keywords are arranged into clusters. The frequency of the keyword is reflected in the size of each node; larger nodes denote important research areas. This kind of study revealed five major clusters. Cluster 1 (red) contains keywords related to gender stereotypes and discrimination. The keywords found in this cluster are “female leadership”, “gender bias”, “gender stereotypes”, “women executives”, “management”, “mentoring” and “patriarchy”. This cluster reflects the following social barriers that women face in a professional environment: stereotypes, discrimination, and patriarchal culture. Furthermore, Cluster 2 (green) covers the institutional and cultural context. The frequent occurrence of keywords such as “gender gap”, “sexism”, “gender roles”, “empowerment”, “organizational culture” in this cluster means that the topic of gender culture and institutional barriers within the organization or society has gained significant interest of researchers.

The following cluster 3 in blue addresses the issues of education and the glass ceiling. The following words are often reflected in this direction: “higher education”, “glass ceiling”, “women's leadership”, “gender equity”. Through this cluster we can find out that education, academic leadership and the phenomenon of the “glass ceiling” have been widely discussed among scientists. This cluster allows us to describe some of the barriers to women reaching higher-level positions. Moreover, cluster four (yellow) includes

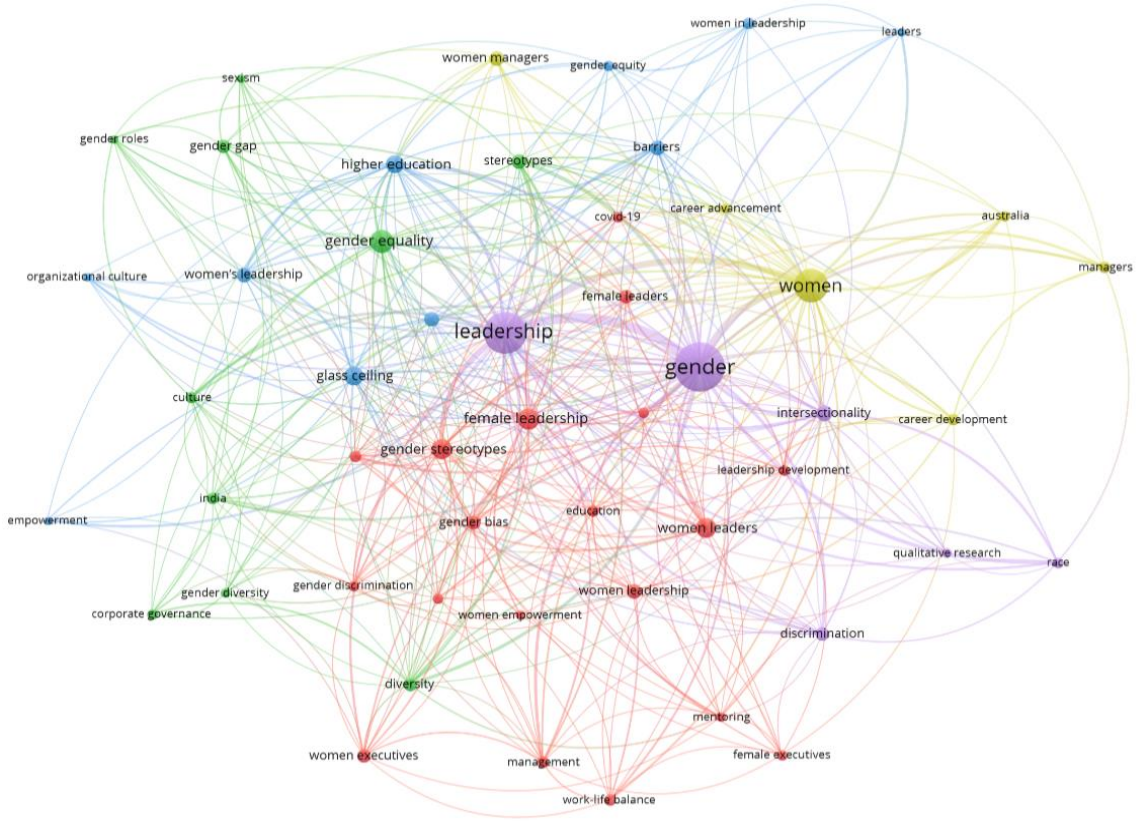


Figure 7. Keyword co-occurrence network

Note: compiled by the author based VosViewer

difficulties in personal development and career growth. In this direction, such words as "women", "career development", "women in leadership", "managers" were often used among researchers. This cluster describes factors such as career development, professional advancement, and issues of women in managerial roles. In the last 5th cluster (purple), questions of inclusivity and intersectionality are often addressed. "Intersectionality", "race", "discrimination" are found among the main keywords in this cluster. In this bunch, gender issues are considered not only in terms of gender, but also in relation to race, ethnic origin and intersectional experience. In general, through this analysis, we know that scientists in different directions have studied the difficulties and problems faced by women leaders in their workplace. This paper notes that women leaders face gender issues and various socio-economic problems in the course of their activities. In addition, the fact that the words "mentoring" and "intersectionality" contain a small circle means that these topics have not been studied in depth and indicates that they can be considered as one of the areas of study in the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS

With a bibliometric method, this paper distinguished the scientific literature on the obstacles experienced by female leaders in their professional endeavours, demonstrating that the research topic is now being examined from several perspectives. The study examined

the degree of scientific productivity in recent years and determined which nations published the most on this subject. It was also feasible to distinguish under-covered themes and potential research fields by identifying the most commonly used terms and trend topics in the research articles that were selected for examination. This could be the foundation of upcoming studies. In addition, the study found that such concepts as "gender inequality", "social stereotypes", "glass ceiling", "patriarchy", "women managers", "career development", and "intersectionality" are common. Collected data shows the multiplicity of factors that prevent women from reaching higher positions. In particular, it has been noticed that gender stereotypes and structural inequalities are still an urgent problem in the work environment. It is also important to pay attention to how intersectionality – that is, women's gender, as well as other factors such as race, social status, and cultural background- affects their career path. In this context, qualitative studies are becoming increasingly important, as they help to describe the real experience of women deeply. Generally speaking, even if current scientific research indicates advancements in the understanding of the formal obstacles faced by female leaders, several facets still need further investigation. As a result, it is becoming more pertinent to expand this topic in future research by analyzing specific examples and practical advice. Bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive picture of the state of research today, emphasizing important clusters and emerging patterns. These observations can help guide future theoretical and empirical research projects that try to remove the societal and systemic barriers that prevent women from achieving their full leadership potential.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Writing – original draft: Rab Nawaz Lodhi, Zahida Parveen.
Conceptualization: Rab Nawaz Lodhi, Zahida Parveen.
Formal analysis and investigation: Rab Nawaz Lodhi, Zahida Parveen.
Development of research methodology: Rab Nawaz Lodhi.
Resources: Rab Nawaz Lodhi.
Software and supervisions: Rab Nawaz Lodhi, Zahida Parveen.
Data collection, analysis and interpretation: Rab Nawaz Lodhi.
Visualization: Rab Nawaz Lodhi, Zahida Parveen.
Writing review and editing research: Rab Nawaz Lodhi.

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