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Research Paper

# The glass ceiling experiences and professional challenges of female employees in travel agencies: A qualitative study in Düzce province

Muhammet Caner Kaya[1] ✉, Meryem Muhafiz[1], Ezgi Aydemir[1], Meryem Demirkal[1], Hilal Akyol[1]

[1]*Düzce University, Düzce, Türkiye*

## Abstract

Women's participation in the workforce has increased in various sectors both globally and in Turkey following the Industrial Revolution. However, despite this increase, women remain underrepresented in senior management positions. This situation points to the existence of invisible barriers that limit women's career advancement and is explained in the literature by the concept of the "glass ceiling." The purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of the glass ceiling that women face in their professional lives, the validity of this phenomenon under current conditions, and the difficulties women encounter in their participation in the workforce, specifically within the context of the tourism sector. In the literature, glass ceiling barriers are generally addressed in three dimensions: individual, organizational, and societal. Individual barriers are associated with women's self-confidence, career perceptions, and professional attitudes; organizational barriers are linked to internal organizational practices, promotion processes, and discriminatory approaches; and societal barriers are related to traditional gender roles and expectations regarding work-life balance. The tourism sector is one of the areas where female employees' experiences with the glass ceiling have become more visible due to long working hours, a fast-paced work environment, a seasonal employment structure, and working conditions that require emotional labor. Accordingly, this study was conducted within a qualitative research framework to examine the professional experiences of women working at Group A travel agencies in Düzce Province and to identify the barriers they face in their career development. Data for the study were collected through semi-structured interviews with three female participants and analyzed using content analysis. The study found that individual, organizational, and societal barriers affect women's career development to varying degrees; recommendations were developed to strengthen women's employment in the tourism sector and support their career development processes.

**Keywords:** Glass ceiling, female employees, career barriers, travel agencies, tourism, Düzce destination

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## Author Contributions

| Author | Email / ORCID | Cont. %* | Roles (CRediT) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Muhammet Caner Kaya ✉<br>Assist. Prof. | muhammetcanerkaya@duzce.edu.tr<br>0000-0001-9975-8011 | 20% | Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - Review & Editing, Project administration |
| Meryem Muhafiz<br>Undergraduate student | meryemmuhafiz04@gmail.com<br>0009-0005-3046-4775 | 20% | Validation, Formal analysis, Writing - Original Draft |
| Ezgi Aydemir<br>Undergraduate student | ezgi3453aydemir@gmail.com<br>0009-0000-5366-0430 | 20% | Conceptualization, Validation, Writing - Original Draft, Visualization |
| Meryem Demirkal<br>Undergraduate student | meryemdemirkalll@gmail.com<br>0009-0009-3511-2065 | 20% | Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft |
| Hilal Akyol<br>Undergraduate student | hilaldemir1934@gmail.com<br>0009-0002-2289-3287 | 20% | Conceptualization, Resources, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft |

** While multiple authors may share the same CRediT roles, the contribution percentages indicate the relative magnitude of each author's contribution to those roles and to the manuscript overall.*

## Ethics & Conflict of Interest

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## Declarations

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## 1. Introduction

The growing need for employment following the Industrial Revolution has made women's participation in the workforce more visible and significant. Over time, women have begun to take on more active roles in education, employment, and social life; in particular, they have started to play a greater role in tourism, a key employment sector within the service industry (Karacaoğlu, 2024). However, women's participation in the workforce is not merely an economic issue; it is a multidimensional phenomenon linked to gender roles, organizational structure, occupational discrimination, and career development opportunities.

Gender refers to the roles, responsibilities, and expectations society assigns to women and men. Historically, the division of labor has often associated women with the home, family, and child care, while equating men with economic production and the workforce (Leventer & Ada, 2023). This situation has led to the emergence of structural barriers that limit women's participation in the workforce and their career advancement (Ayoğul & Baraz, 2020). Women's participation in the workforce, their advancement to senior positions, and their chances of receiving promotions may be constrained by factors such as gender roles, organizational discrimination, harsh working conditions, and the perception that certain professions are unsuitable for women. In this context, women's educational attainment and their position in the workforce are among the key indicators that influence a country's long-term social and economic well-being (Kocacık & Gökkaya, 2005).

Although women can hold positions at the lower, middle, and upper levels of the workforce, they face various challenges in their career paths due to gender-based barriers. These challenges can negatively affect women's performance, motivation, and commitment to their jobs; they can also hinder their career advancement (Aydın Tükeltürk & Şahin Perçin, 2008). The gender discrimination that female employees face in the workplace leads to negative social, economic, and psychological consequences for them. For this reason, it is important for organizations to create a safe, equitable, and supportive work environment for female employees (Mercanlıoğlu, 2010).

The tourism sector is one of the fields where women's labor is heavily represented. The sector's service-oriented structure brings together individuals with different educational levels, age groups, and social characteristics in the same work environment. Women in the tourism industry take on roles in many areas using their knowledge and skills; however, sector-specific conditions such as part-time work, seasonality, spatial concentration, time pressure, and a fast-paced work environment can affect female employees' career development (Çiçen, Boyacıoğlu, & Oğuzhan, 2020). Women working in travel agencies within the tourism sector face heavy workloads and responsibilities; over time, this can lead to outcomes such as stress, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction (Altay & Akgül, 2010).

The psychological, social, and organizational inequalities women face in the tourism sector may lead them to seek out work environments where they are less likely to encounter problems (Erkol Bayram, 2022). However, with the growth of the tourism sector, the professional status of women working in travel agencies has become an area that warrants further research. The fact that female employees are often sidelined compared to their male counterparts, must juggle multiple roles simultaneously, and are underrepresented in decision-making processes constitutes the central problem area of this study (Mızrahı & Aracı, 2010).

One of the most significant challenges women face in their careers is the invisible barriers that limit their access to senior management positions. This phenomenon, referred to in the literature as the "glass ceiling," describes how women, despite being able to advance to a certain career level, are prevented from reaching top management positions due to structural, organizational, and societal barriers (Öğüt, 2006). In this context, the glass ceiling is a key concept that explains the invisible constraints women face in their promotion processes and in gaining access to senior leadership positions (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). A study conducted in the United States found that while the number of female CEOs in the country's top 3,000 companies had more than doubled compared to previous years, the proportion of women among all CEOs remained below 6 percent. This finding indicates that women are still underrepresented in senior management positions (Ribeiras, 2021).

The glass ceiling phenomenon is generally examined within the framework of individual, organizational, and societal factors. Although women play a significant role in employment within the tourism sector, their lower representation in management positions indicates that this phenomenon is also a major issue for the sector. In the literature, the glass ceiling syndrome is examined within the context of individual, organizational, and societal factors that hinder female employees' advancement to senior management positions and is conceptualized under various dimensions (Bingöl et al., 2011).

This study examines the challenges faced by women working in travel agencies in Düzce Province in their professional lives, particularly within the framework of the "glass ceiling" concept. Düzce was selected as the research area because it is an emerging tourism destination, and because studies on the career experiences of women working in travel agencies remain limited. The study aims to identify the structural, organizational, and societal barriers women face in their career paths. Accordingly, the study was designed using qualitative research methods, and data were collected through interviews. Thus, the study is expected to shed light on the career experiences of women working in travel agencies and contribute to the literature on gender-based career barriers in the tourism sector.

## 2. Literature Review

### *The Concept of the Glass Ceiling*

The concept of the glass ceiling emerged in the United States in the 1970s (Wirth, 2001). It has been used to describe the invisible, artificial barriers that prevent women from reaching top-level management positions (Derin, 2020) . The first written reference to the glass ceiling concept appeared in Adweek magazine in 1984. While the concept of the glass ceiling was initially used solely to describe the invisible barriers women faced in the workplace, its meaning has since expanded and been reinterpreted to include minorities, the elderly, and other disadvantaged groups(Akdağ & Üçyıldız, 2020) . The concept known in English as the "Glass Ceiling" (GC) is defined as transparent (non-physical) barriers that prevent women from advancing vertically up the corporate ladder beyond a certain point, thereby hindering their access to top-level management positions in organizations(Akdemir & Çalış Duman, 2017) . Today, the glass ceiling syndrome is not limited to women alone; it is noted that ethnic minorities and men may also experience the glass ceiling syndrome in their career advancement, just as women do (Utma, 2019) . The glass ceiling metaphor is used to describe a barrier that hinders or restricts women's vertical mobility within the organizational hierarchy. Women face what is essentially a "glass ceiling" in their professional lives, an obstacle that allows them to envision where they could go but prevents them from actually reaching those positions (Duruk & İnce, 2024) . Horizontal mobility is influenced by the fact that jobs such as factory work, general management, and engineering are categorized as "men's jobs," while professions like medicine, librarianship, and secretarial work are considered more suitable for women. For this reason, professions traditionally viewed as male (such as managers and executives) are chosen less frequently (Leblebici & Karcıoğlu, 2014). Their underrepresentation at higher levels is a key indicator of the glass ceiling.

The concept of the glass ceiling refers to the structural, cultural, and organizational barriers, often invisible but limiting career advancement, that prevent women from rising to top-level management positions within organizations. In the literature, the glass ceiling syndrome is regarded as a multidimensional career barrier resulting from the interplay of individual, societal, and organizational factors (Acker, 1990; Oakley, 2000; Can & Sakal, 2024; Yolcu & Kutluk Bozkurt, 2021). Therefore, the limitations women face in accessing management positions should be addressed within a holistic framework related to gender roles, organizational culture, promotion policies, leadership patterns, and work-family life expectations, rather than being attributed to personal preference or individual inadequacy.

***Individual factors*** are related to the way obstacles women face in their career development process manifest through variables such as individual perception, self-efficacy, career expectations, role conflict, and work-family balance. The domestic roles society expects women to fulfill place them under dual pressure between their professional lives and household responsibilities; this situation can sometimes be interpreted as a "personal choice" in the form of women declining managerial roles or limiting their career goals (Can & Sakal, 2024) . However, in most cases, these choices are shaped by societal expectations and organizational conditions, independent of individual will. Indeed, managerial perceptions that female employees will experience work-family conflict can lead to their promotion potential being rated lower (Hoobler et al., 2009).

***Social factors*** have a decisive influence on women's career choices, career goals, and tendencies to pursue managerial positions. Gender roles also shape career fields through the tasks, responsibilities, and behavioral patterns attributed to women and men. In particular, the steering of women toward professions deemed "appropriate" by family and society can make it difficult for them to make career choices aligned with their own interests and abilities (Can & Sakal, 2024) . According to role congruence theory, the fact that leadership roles are largely associated with masculinity can lead to women being viewed as less suitable for leadership positions and their leadership behaviors being evaluated more negatively compared to men's (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Therefore,

the social dimension of the glass ceiling can be explained through cultural norms and stereotypes that affect not only women's participation in the workforce but also which positions they are deemed "suitable" for.

***Organizational factors***, meanwhile, are one of the areas where the glass ceiling is most visible. Although organizations may appear gender-neutral in their promotion, compensation, task allocation, performance evaluation, mentoring, and decision-making processes, it has been noted that in practice, they can reproduce male-dominated organizational structures (Acker, 1990; Oakley, 2000). This situation leads to the creation of invisible career barriers that limit women's access to top management positions. The organization's perspective toward female employees, the presence of supportive policies that facilitate women's career development, the level of representation at management levels, and power relations within the hierarchical structure can directly influence the perception of the glass ceiling (Kutluk Bozkurt & Yolcu, 2021) . Particularly in labor-intensive sectors such as tourism and hospitality, where flexible work hours and a customer-focused service culture are prominent, organizational support, mentoring opportunities, and anti-discrimination policies become even more critical for women's advancement to senior management positions (Ng & Pine, 2003; Kattara, 2005).

The glass ceiling causes women to face various inequalities in areas such as pay, education, social rights, promotions, and access to senior management positions. The fact that women are underrepresented in decision-making bodies and management ranks compared to men is one of the key indicators of this situation (Akdemir & Çalış Duman, 2017). The challenges female employees face in the workplace are not limited to wage inequality; they also include multidimensional issues such as barriers to promotion, discrimination, workplace bullying, job insecurity, and the glass ceiling effect (Aksöz & Eroğlu Durkal, 2021). Indeed, the fact that women's labor is predominantly concentrated at the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy, while their representation in decision-making processes and top management positions remains limited, highlights the structural inequalities in the workplace (Alparslan et al., 2015).

Gender roles and stereotypes play a decisive role in the formation of the glass ceiling. The expectation that women should first and foremost be good wives and mothers can influence their career goals, work styles, and attitudes toward managerial roles. Long working hours, travel-intensive assignments, and a demanding work pace can become factors that limit career development for women. Furthermore, the fact that women experience concerns such as being perceived as "masculine" in managerial positions or having their feminine identity questioned demonstrates that the glass ceiling is fueled not only by external barriers but also by internalized social norms (Leblebici & Karcıoğlu, 2014). Similarly, the fact that women are often equated with domestic and family roles in the workplace leads to their professional identities being evaluated within specific stereotypes (Onay & Heptazeler, 2014). Stereotypes about women, in turn, can lead to managerial roles being associated with men and women being deemed unsuitable for these roles (Utma, 2019).

At the organizational level, the glass ceiling is associated with inequalities that arise in promotion, performance evaluation, career development, assignment, and mentoring processes. Women's opportunities for advancement within an organization are closely linked to the existence of objective performance evaluation systems, organizational structures with low power distance, a people-centered management approach, and practices grounded in gender equality (Ergeneli & Akçamete, 2004). Conversely, factors such as organizational culture, power relations, conflicts of interest, political behavior, and organizational climate can limit women's career development (Mohan Bursalı, 2017). Furthermore, even when women possess the necessary qualifications, they have more limited access to business travel, temporary assignments, and overseas training opportunities compared to male employees. This situation is often based on prejudices that women will face difficulties due to their family responsibilities (Leblebici & Karcıoğlu, 2014; Özkan, 2020).

Another factor affecting female employees' career development is the lack of mentoring and support mechanisms. Mentoring is considered an important career development tool through which experienced employees guide less experienced colleagues to support their personal and professional growth (Karatepe & Nalcı Arıbaş, 2015). However, women's inability to fully benefit from such support mechanisms can hinder their access to top management positions. Furthermore, in the context of the "queen bee syndrome," it has been noted that some female managers may adopt male-dominated organizational behavior patterns and distance themselves from other female employees rather than supporting them (Baykal Narcıkaya, 2018).

The effects of the glass ceiling become more apparent in the context of the tourism sector. While tour guides play important roles in promoting their countries, they face various challenges in their professional practices (Köroğlu, Ulusoy Yıldırım, & Kılıç, 2020). In travel agencies and tourism businesses, flexible and demanding work schedules, the expectation of round-the-clock service, travel requirements, and difficulties in achieving work-life balance can

limit women's advancement to senior positions. For this reason, it is noted that women may be required to make greater sacrifices than men in the process of advancing to management levels (Irk & Çeşmeci, 2025; Bazazo et al., 2017).

The long-term effects of the glass ceiling can lead to a loss of motivation and a sense of learned helplessness among female employees. It has been noted that individuals who constantly face obstacles may, over time, lose their will to fight, which can cause them to drift away from their career goals (Korkmaz, 2014). In addition, workplace bullying is one of the significant problems women face in their professional lives. A study conducted with women who were victims of workplace bullying revealed that participants were subjected to rumors, gossip, insinuating behavior, baseless accusations, and unfair managerial practices (Shallcross et al., 2008).

### *Women's Employment in the Tourism Sector and Related Challenges*

Women's participation in the labor market is a multidimensional process shaped by economic, social, and demographic factors (Balcı & Aslan, 2022). While the tourism sector is one of the fields with relatively high female employment, women's position in the sector does not always indicate an equitable structure. According to a report published by the UNWTO, women account for 53% of workers in the tourism sector in Europe. However, this figure reflects the overall average of the 45 countries included in the report. Although women account for a significant share of employment in the tourism sector, their income levels often fall short of expectations, and despite their performance, they do not sufficiently attain the senior-level positions they deserve (UNWTO, 2019).

When examined specifically in Turkey, data on women's employment indicate that gender-based imbalances persist in the tourism sector. According to data shared by the Turkish Hotel Association (TÜROB) in November 2025, 25,484 of the total 64,787 employees at travel agencies are women. Consequently, the female employment rate in travel agencies is observed to be approximately 39% (Tourism Today, 2026). Additionally, it is noted that while female employment in lodging establishments increased by 4.5%, it decreased by 4.8% in travel agencies (Turizm365, 2025). These data reveal that while women's participation in the tourism sector is significant, it varies across the sector's sub-sectors, and that female employment in travel agencies, in particular, requires careful evaluation.

By its very nature, the tourism sector is a multifaceted industry that brings together individuals of different age groups, educational levels, and marital statuses in the same work environment. In this regard, tourism is viewed not only as an economic activity but also as a key dynamic that influences social interaction and the social structure. The mutual interaction that develops between tourists and the local population can influence individuals' behaviors, ways of thinking, and lifestyles; thus, the tourism sector also plays a significant role in terms of socialization, cultural interaction, and social transformation (Irk, Şanlıoğlu, & Erdem, 2025).

The position of female employees in the tourism sector is not independent of gender inequalities in the broader workforce. Traditionally placed behind male employees in many sectors, women have begun to gain opportunities to hold more positions in management as a result of changing social conditions, rising educational levels, and increasing demands for participation in the workforce. However, it is evident that women have had to develop various strategies to secure and maintain these positions (Baykal Narcıkaya, 2018). Indeed, gender-based occupational discrimination leads to certain jobs being deemed suitable for women and others for men; this situation results in women being underrepresented, particularly in management positions (Özkan, 2020).

The multiple roles women assume in social life can directly affect their career trajectories in the workplace. Women are expected to fulfill their domestic responsibilities while also succeeding in their professional lives. This situation causes women to face various pressures in their career advancement. In particular, gender-based discrimination makes it difficult for women to reach mid- and upper-level management positions and contributes to the low number of female executives. In this context, the invisible barriers preventing women from advancing to management levels are referred to in the literature as the "glass ceiling syndrome."

Another obstacle women face in their career development is referred to as the "queen bee syndrome." This concept is associated with some female managers adopting a distant or competitive attitude toward their female peers rather than demonstrating a supportive stance toward their advancement to managerial positions. This situation can lead to a weakening of solidarity among female employees and prevent mechanisms that support women's career advancement within the organization from becoming sufficiently robust. Consequently, the "queen bee syndrome" necessitates evaluating the career barriers faced by women not only through the lens of male-

dominated organizational structures but also within the context of relationships among women within the organization (Baykal Narcıkaya, 2018).

Female employees aspire to hold more management positions in the tourism sector; however, for this goal to be realized, businesses must develop more fair, inclusive, and equitable policies. In this context, it is important to provide female employees with equal opportunities for promotion, develop flexible work models, implement fair compensation policies, ensure access to training and development opportunities, and visibly recognize employee achievements. Furthermore, the principle of merit should be the basis for promotion processes; practices that could lead to gender-based discrimination should be avoided; and institutional mechanisms that support women's career development should be strengthened (Aydın Tükeltürk & Şahin Perçin, 2008).

## 3. Method

This study aims to reveal the extent to which women experience the glass ceiling phenomenon in their professional lives, whether this phenomenon continues to have an impact under current working conditions, and the challenges they face in their participation in the workforce. To this end, a qualitative research design was adopted. Content analysis was used to analyze the research data.

The research process was structured in stages to ensure that the data collection and analysis phases could be systematically tracked. In this context, the stages followed, from the planning of the study to the interpretation of the data, are presented as follows.

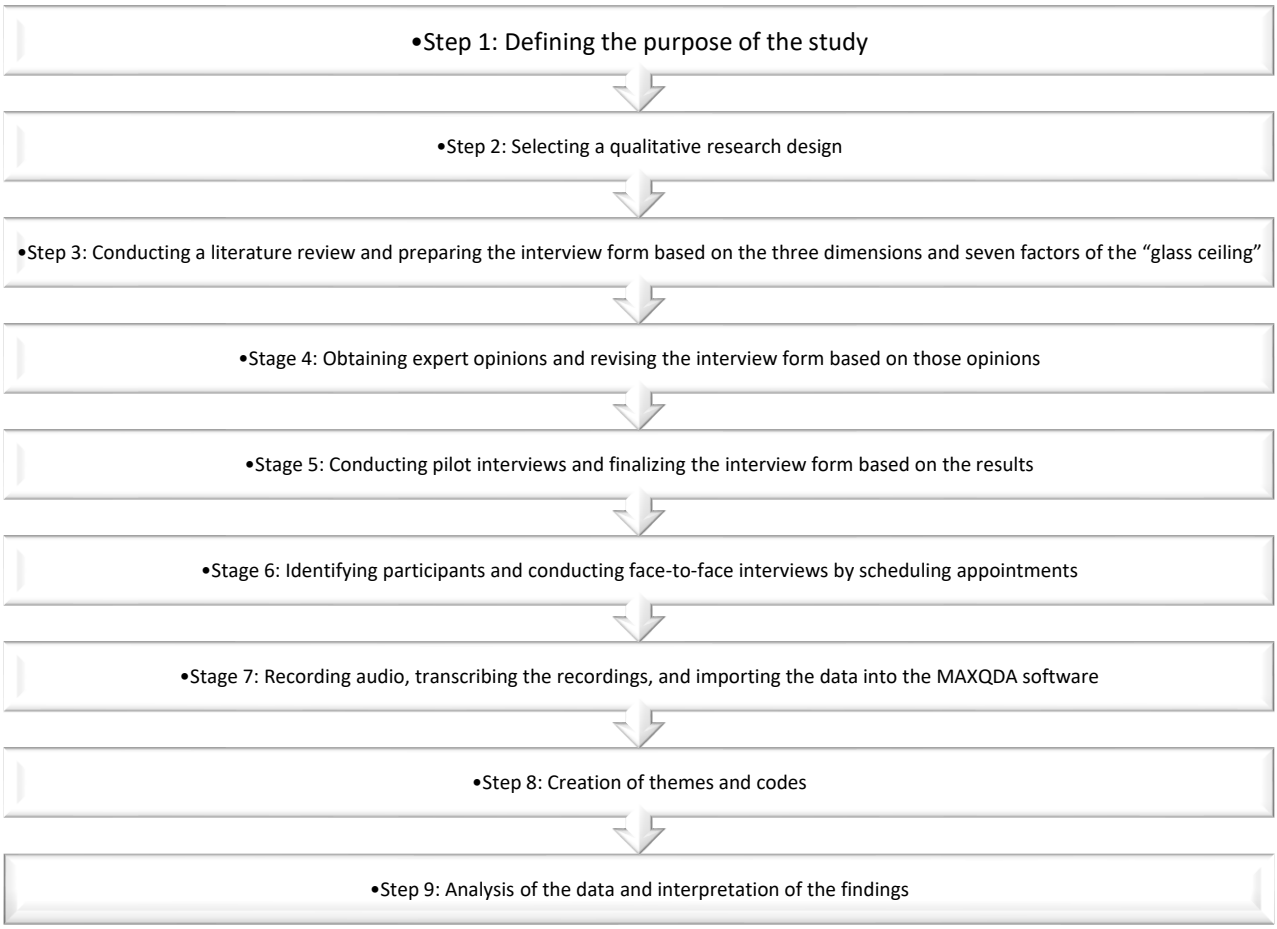



**Figure 1: Research Process**

***Source:*** *Created by the authors.*

As shown in the figure, the research process was carried out in sequential stages, from the preparation of the data collection tool to the analysis of the data. Details regarding this process are explained below. The study group consists of female employees working at Group A travel agencies operating in Düzce Province. The number of

participants was limited to three due to the limited number of female employees at travel agencies operating in Düzce, difficulties in accessing suitable participants, and the low number of female employees who volunteered to participate in the study. Research data were collected using a semi-structured interview form. During the preparation of the interview questions, the literature on the glass ceiling phenomenon was first reviewed; a pool of questions was created based primarily on the three dimensions and seven factors of the glass ceiling syndrome. The prepared questions were then submitted for review to four academics specializing in tourism at various universities. The panel of experts consisted of two female and two male academics. Necessary revisions were made to the interview form based on the experts' feedback.

The revised form was first tested in pilot interviews. As a result of the pilot interviews, the clarity, scope, and functionality of the questions were re-evaluated; the interview form was finalized based on the feedback received. The interviews conducted as part of the research were carried out face-to-face in the participants' own offices after scheduling appointments in advance. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the subject and purpose of the study as well as the interview process; it was explained that participation in the study was voluntary. In this context, a "Voluntary Consent Form" was obtained from all participants. During the interviews, audio recordings were made with the participants' permission, and these recordings were later transcribed into written text. The interview form is provided below.

**Table 2. Interview Form**

**A. Demographic and Descriptive Information**

1. Your age:
2. What is your educational background? Have you received any education in the field of tourism?
3. What is your marital status? Do you have children?
4. What is your current job title or position?
5. How long have you worked in the tourism sector in total?
6. How long have you been working at your current employer?

**B. Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe your career path at the travel agency where you work?
2. How would you assess the position of female employees within the organizational structure of the company where you work?
   *(You may evaluate this in terms of task distribution, representation, areas of responsibility, and participation in decision-making processes.)*
3. What similarities and differences have you observed regarding practices, opportunities, or expectations for female and male employees in terms of career advancement?
   - Have there been any notable examples in promotion, task allocation, or delegation of authority processes?
4. What experiences have influenced, facilitated, or hindered your career development as you've advanced to higher-level positions?
5. What can you say about situations you've observed or experienced regarding expectations, biases, or stereotypes toward female employees in the workplace?
6. What can you say about the impact of work and personal life responsibilities on your career path?
7. How do you evaluate your organization's processes for promotions, job assignments, performance evaluations, and the support and training it provides to employees?
8. What is your overall assessment of career development processes for female employees within the context of your organization and industry?

***Source:*** *Created by the authors.*

Data collected from the field was analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. During the analysis process, themes initially identified based on the literature were considered; however, in light of findings stemming from the unique structure of the travel agency sector, an additional theme was developed alongside the existing three. Thus, the analysis process of the study was conducted based on a total of four themes. As part of the analysis, a code hierarchy, subcode statistics, word analysis (word clouds and word frequencies), and holistic overview maps of the interrelationships between codes and subcodes were created; these visual and conceptual outputs were used to interpret the research findings.

## 4. Findings

The demographic and descriptive characteristics of the participants interviewed for this study are presented below to provide a clearer context for the findings. Information regarding the participants' age, educational background, marital status, whether they have children, job title/position, and length of service in the industry and at their current employer is important for reflecting the general profile of the research group.

**Table 3: Demographic and Descriptive Information of Participants**

| Participant Code | Age | Educational Level | Level of Tourism Education | Marital Status | Whether You Have Children | Job Title/Position | Length of Service in the Industry | Length of Employment at Current Company | Interview Duration (min.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **K1** | 31 | Associate's Degree | No | Single | None | Sales Manager | 9 years | 8 years | 21 min |
| **K2** | 28 | Bachelor's | Yes (Bachelor's Degree) | Single | None | Business Owner | 11 years | 1 year | 28 min |
| **K3** | 31 | Bachelor's Degree | Yes (Bachelor's Degree) | Single | None | Sales Manager | 5 years | 5 years | 26 min |

***Source:*** *Compiled by the authors based on research data.*

The themes derived from the content analysis of the research data and the codes associated with these themes are presented below to outline the general framework of the findings. The figure reflects the holistic view of the conceptual structure reached during the analysis process.

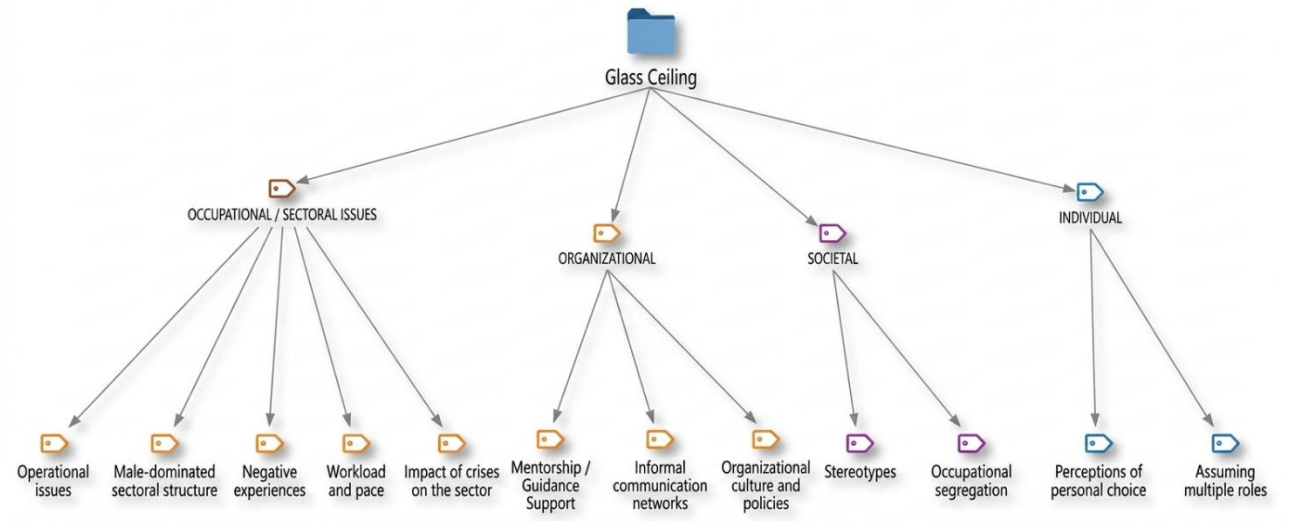



**Figure 2: Hierarchical structure of themes and codes obtained within the scope of the research**

***Source:*** *Created by the authors based on the MAXQDA analysis.*

As seen in the figure, the research findings are structured around four main themes. Three of these themes were developed based on the dimensions of the glass ceiling syndrome found in the literature. However, during the analysis process, it was observed that some findings stemming from the unique structure of the tourism sector could not be fully evaluated within the existing framework; therefore, a fourth theme was developed based on the data. Thus, the study presents a holistic thematic structure that is both grounded in the theoretical framework and shaped by field data.

Upon examining the table, it is evident that the participants' views are grouped under four main themes: professional/sectoral issues, organizational, societal, and individual. This thematic structure reveals that female employees' experiences with the glass ceiling phenomenon are multidimensional. Accordingly, the glass ceiling

phenomenon is not limited solely to individual preferences and attitudes; it is shaped by organizational processes, societal norms, and sector-specific conditions.

**Table 4: Distribution of themes, codes, subcodes, and frequencies derived from participant responses**

| Theme | Code | Subcode | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Operational Issues | - | 2 |
| **PROFESSIONAL/SECTOR-SPECIFIC ISSUES** | Male-dominated sector structure | - | 2 |
| | Negative experiences | - | 2 |
| | Workload and pace | - | 8 |
| | The Impact of Crises on the Industry | - | 1 |
| **ORGANIZATIONAL** | Mentoring/Managerial Support | Peer Support | 3 |
| | | Managerial Support | 4 |
| | Informal Communication Networks | The Impact of Sincerity on Business Relationships | 1 |
| | Organizational Culture and Policies | Supportive Work Environment | 4 |
| | | Women's Solidarity | 2 |
| | | Participation in decision-making processes | 3 |
| | | Training and development opportunities/support | 4 |
| | | Flat hierarchy / limited promotion structure | 2 |
| | | Division of labor and distribution of responsibilities | 3 |
| | | Lack of Recognition | 1 |
| | | Injustice / Inequality | 1 |
| | | Behaviors that create barriers | 2 |
| | | Jealousy/Envy | 5 |
| **SOCIAL** | Stereotypes | Gender-Based Approach | 6 |
| | | Security and ethical concerns | 1 |
| | | The Risks Posed by Women's Visibility | 2 |
| | | Expectations of Domestic Responsibilities | 2 |
| | | The perception that women are not productive | 2 |
| | | The perception that men are more effective | 2 |
| | Occupational Segregation | Gender-Based Division of Labor | 2 |
| | | Men's tendency to pursue field work | 2 |
| | | Women's shift toward office/sales jobs | 1 |
| **INDIVIDUAL** | Perceptions of Personal Preferences | Strategic Coping | 1 |
| | | Interest in the Profession | 2 |
| | | Career Orientation | 1 |
| | | Perception of Equality | 1 |
| | | Commitment to work/enthusiasm | 1 |
| | | Openness to learning/Adaptability to the profession | 3 |
| | | Attributing success to personal effort | 2 |
| | | Desire / determination | 1 |
| | | Love for one's profession | 2 |
| | Taking on Multiple Roles | Pressure from Household Responsibilities | 1 |
| | | Family support | 1 |
| | | Impact of Marriage/Motherhood | 2 |
| | | Work-Life Balance | 4 |

***Note:*** *The frequency values in the table indicate how often the relevant codes and subcodes were mentioned in the interview data.*
***Source:*** *Compiled by the authors based on the results of the MAXQDA analysis.*

The frequency distributions presented in the table indicate that certain codes and subcodes stand out more prominently in the participants' narratives. In this context, it is evident that the subcodes "workload and pace" under the professional/sectoral issues theme, "jealousy/resentment" under the organizational theme, "gender-based approach" under the societal theme, and "work-life balance" under the individual theme were expressed with higher frequency. These findings indicate that the barriers female employees face in their working lives do

not arise from a single dimension but emerge within the framework of interrelated individual, societal, organizational, and sectoral dynamics.

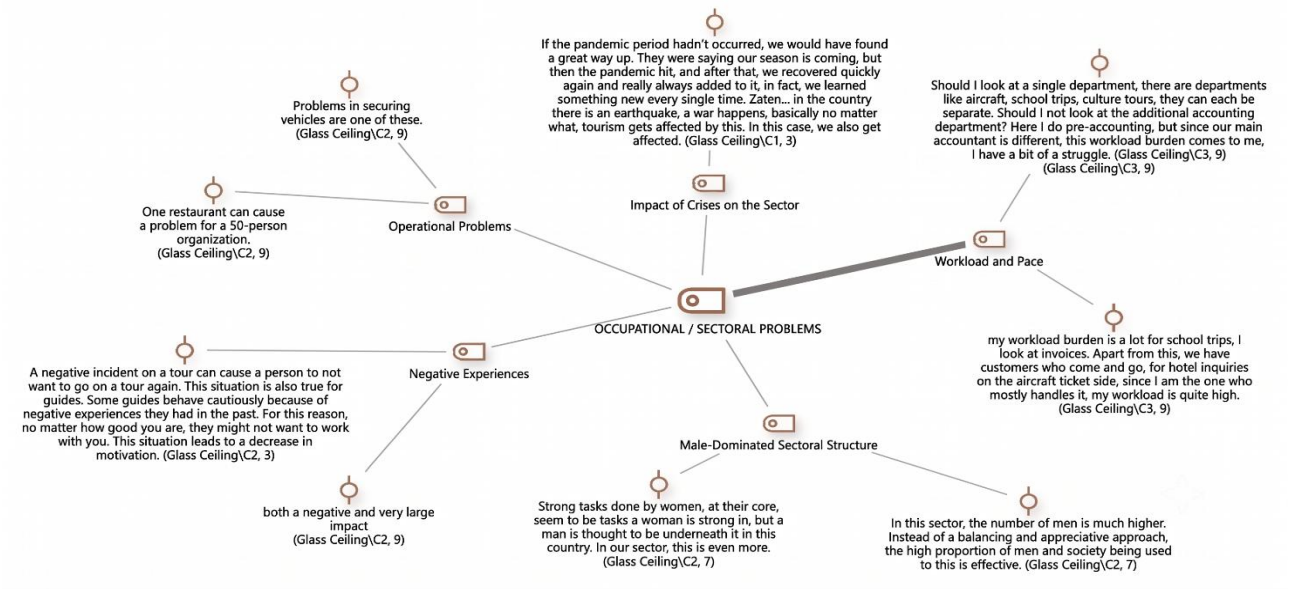



**Figure 3. Code-Subcode-Section Model for the "Occupational/Sectoral Issues" Theme**

***Source:*** *Created by the authors based on the results of the MAXQDA analysis.*

Upon examining this model, it is evident that the "occupational/sectoral issues" theme is particularly concentrated around the "workload and pace" code. The thickness of the lines indicates that the strongest emphasis in the participants' narratives is focused on this code. In contrast, while the codes for operational issues, the male-dominated sector structure, and negative experiences exhibit a more limited yet notable presence, the code for the impact of crises on the sector appears to have a relatively weaker emphasis. This finding reveals that the intense pace and workload associated with day-to-day operations emerge as a defining factor in female employees' sector-specific experiences.

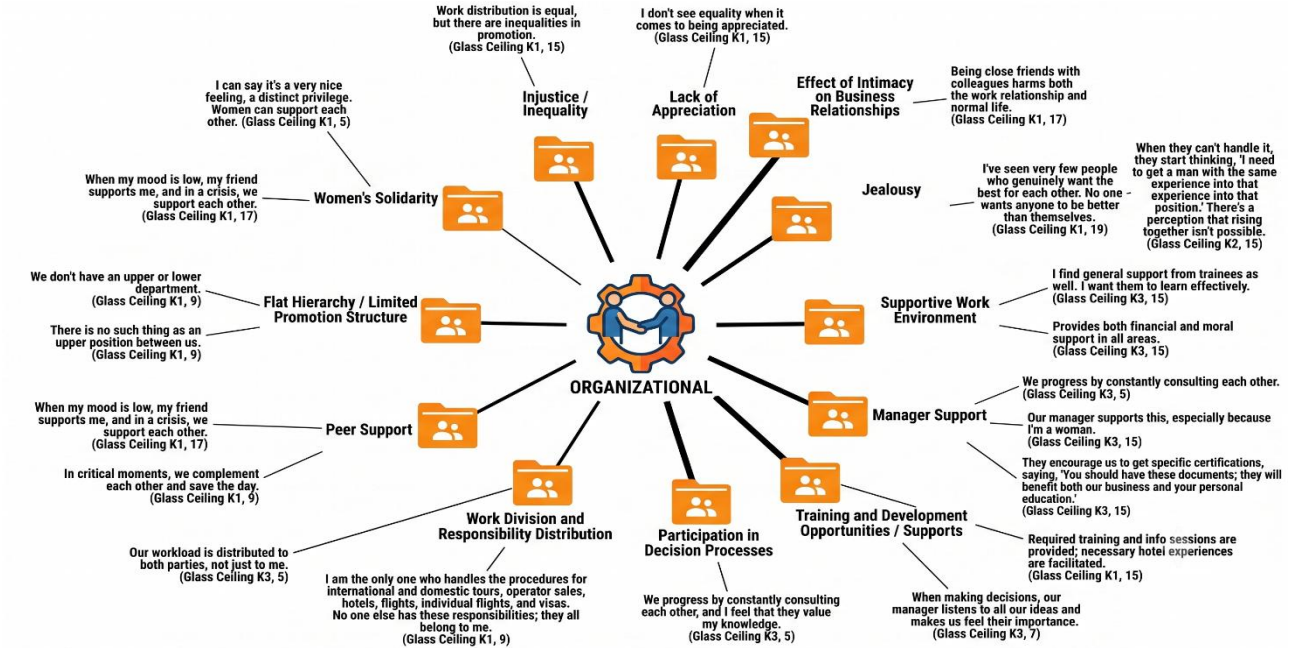



**Figure 4. Code-Subcode-Section Model Related to the Organizational Theme**

***Source:*** *Created by the authors based on the results of the MAXQDA analysis.*

The model related to the organizational theme shows that the strongest relationship among the codes is concentrated in the dimensions of organizational culture and policies. The line thicknesses reveal that participants' organizational experiences were shaped particularly around organizational elements such as a supportive work environment, participation in decision-making processes, training and development opportunities, and the division of labor and distribution of responsibilities. In addition, while the mentoring/managerial support code exhibits a certain level of intensity, the informal communication networks code appears to have a more limited level of emphasis. This finding suggests that the glass ceiling phenomenon is experienced within the organizational context largely through internal culture, management philosophy, and networks of relationships.

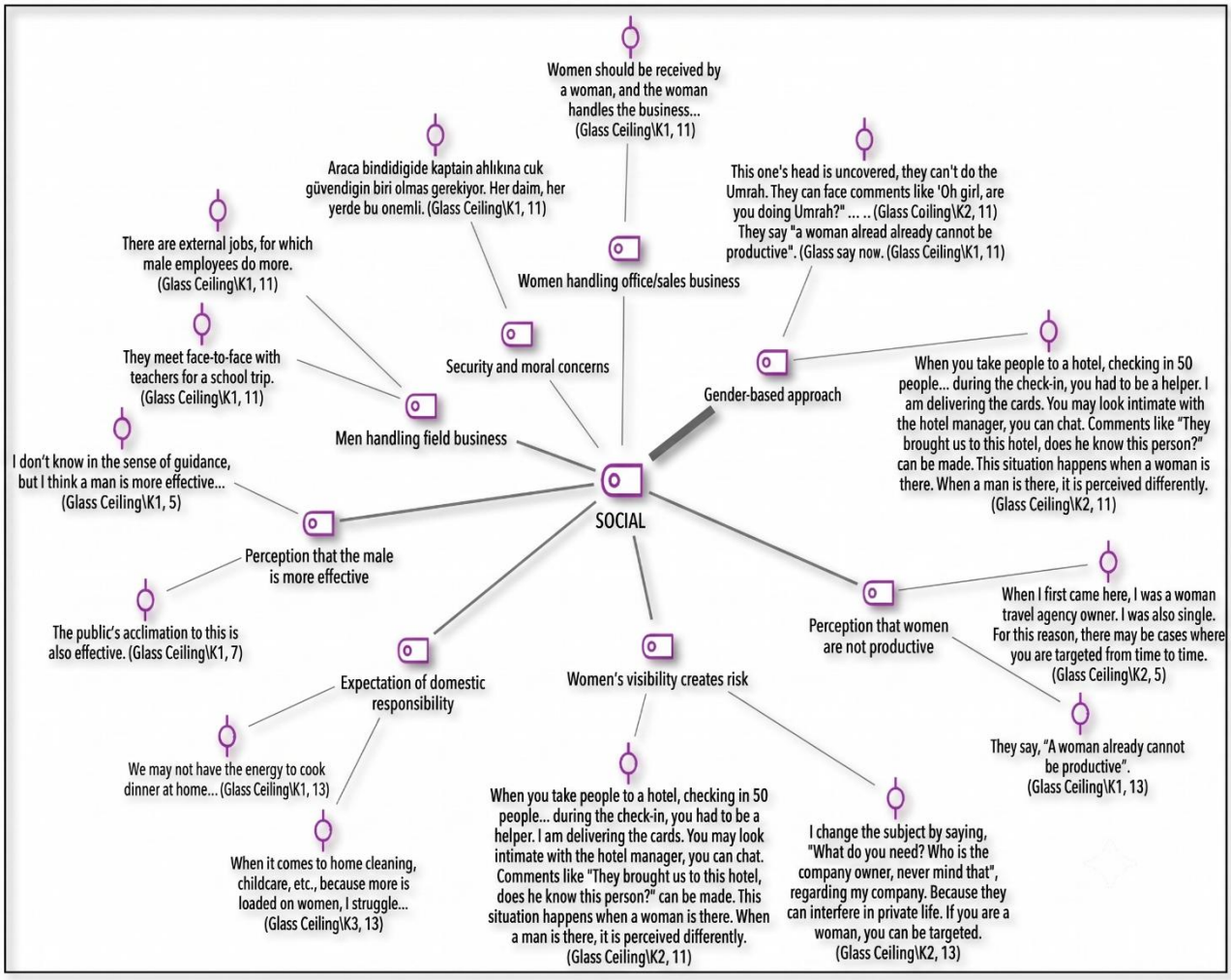



**Figure 5. Code-Subcode-Section Model Related to the Social Theme**

***Source:*** *Created by the authors based on the results of the MAXQDA analysis.*

In the model related to the social theme, the strongest emphasis is concentrated on the "stereotypes" code. The thickness of the lines indicates that sub-dimensions, particularly a gender-based approach, expectations regarding domestic responsibilities, prejudices regarding women's productivity, and the perception that men are more effective, stand out distinctly in the participants' narratives. In contrast, while the occupational discrimination code is also an important component of the theme, it is represented with a more limited intensity. This finding reveals that female employees' experiences of the glass ceiling are not limited to the workplace alone but are also shaped by gender norms and entrenched assumptions about the profession.

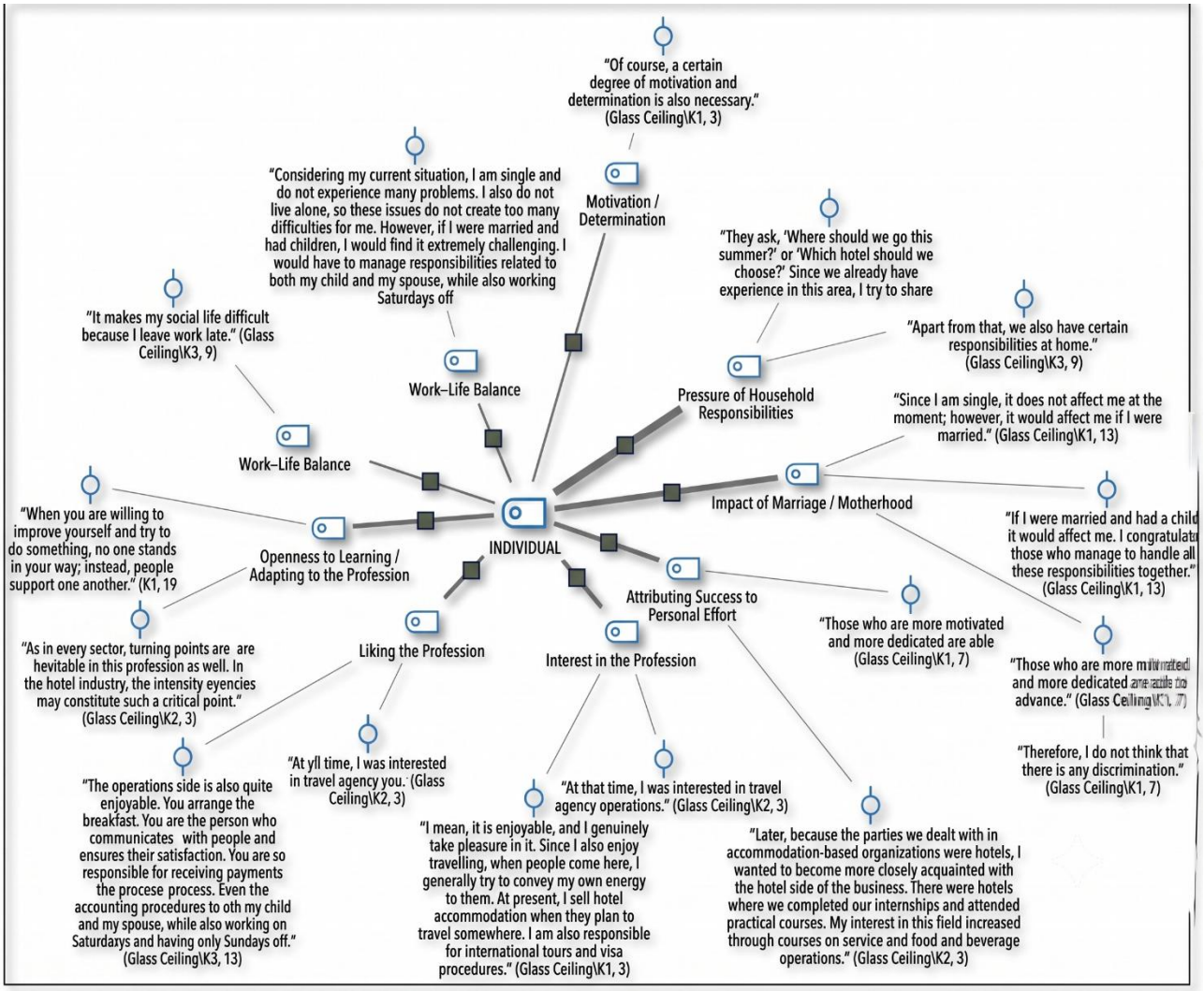



**Figure 6. Code-Subcode-Segment Model for the Individual Theme**

***Source:*** *Created by the authors based on MAXQDA analysis.*

The model related to the individual theme shows that the strongest connections in the participants' narratives centered around the "perceptions of personal preferences" code. The thickness of the lines indicates that certain dimensions—particularly openness to learning/adapting to the profession, interest in the profession, love for the profession, and attributing success to personal effort—stand out more prominently. At the same time, the "multiple role-taking" code also plays a significant role; in particular, elements such as work-life balance, the pressure of domestic responsibilities, and the impact of marriage and motherhood stand out as important components of individual experiences. This finding suggests that female employees assess the glass ceiling not only through external barriers but also within the framework of their personal adaptation processes and the multiple roles they assume.

Following the theme-based code-subcode models, a holistic overview map has been included to more clearly illustrate the interrelationships among the elements constituting the glass ceiling phenomenon. This figure is significant in that it simultaneously displays the direct and indirect interactions between themes.

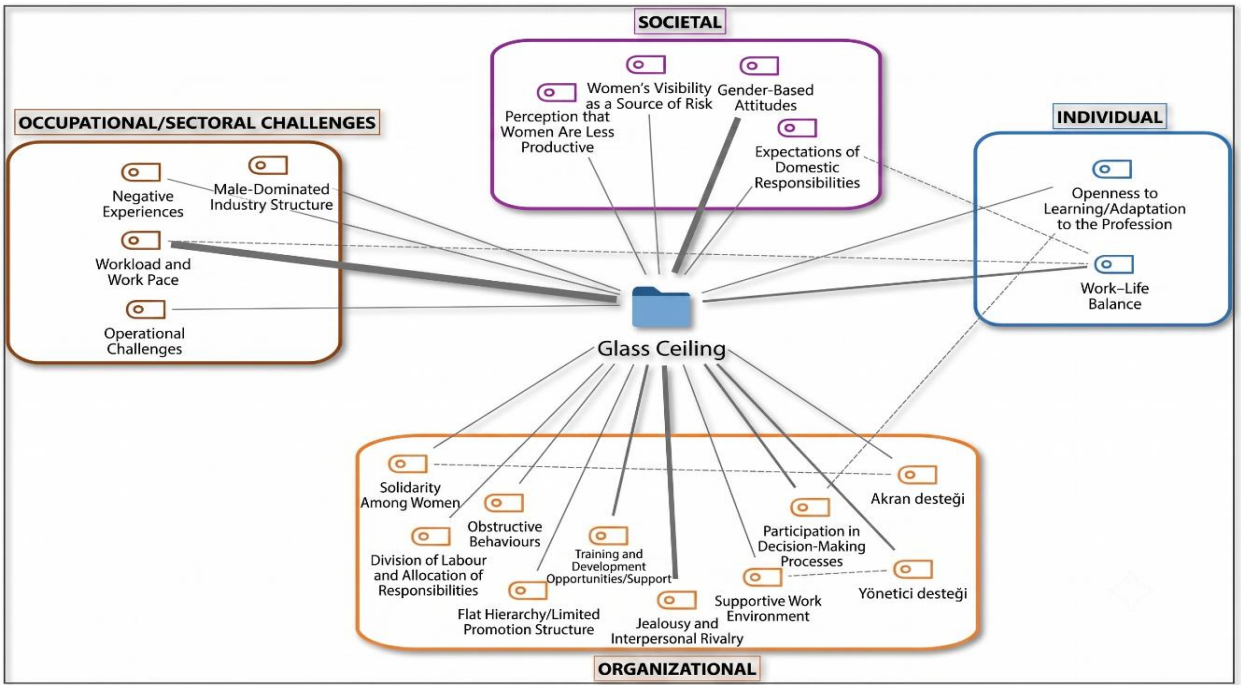



**Figure 7. Holistic View of Interrelationships**

***Source:*** *Created by the authors based on the results of the MAXQDA analysis.*

Figure 7 demonstrates that the glass ceiling phenomenon is shaped not solely by a single theme, but through the mutual interaction of professional/sectoral, societal, organizational, and individual dimensions. Unlike theme-based code-subcode models, this holistic overview reveals that female employees' experiences emerge within a multilayered and relational structure rather than in independent domains.

The solid lines in the figure represent direct relationships, while the dashed lines represent indirect relationships. Additionally, the line thicknesses reflect the intensity of emphasis and the strength of the relationship of the relevant code or subcode within the dataset. Within this framework, it is evident that the elements of "workload and pace" at the professional/sectoral level, "gender-based approach" and "expectations of domestic responsibilities" at the societal level, "jealousy/resentment" at the organizational level, and "work-life balance" at the individual level stand out more prominently. This picture demonstrates that, for female employees, the glass ceiling is not limited solely to institutional barriers; rather, it is shaped by social roles, the sector's working conditions, and individual life arrangements.

The indirect relationships indicated by dotted lines suggest that while some problem areas may not be directly visible, they continue to exert an influence through other themes. In particular, it is understood that societal expectations have indirect effects on work-life balance, sector-specific workloads affect women's daily experiences, and organizational support or obstruction mechanisms influence individual adaptation processes. This situation reveals that the glass ceiling phenomenon is shaped by multifaceted, mutually reinforcing dynamics and therefore must be addressed from a holistic perspective.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has revealed that women working at Group A travel agencies in Düzce experience the glass ceiling not as an outdated issue, but as a multidimensional structure that persists in evolving forms. The fact that the findings extend beyond individual, organizational, and societal themes to also address professional/sectoral issues demonstrates that the glass ceiling cannot be evaluated independently of the tourism sector's unique working conditions. In this regard, while the study maintains the tripartite classification widely accepted in the literature, it highlights the need to include specific challenges arising from the nature of the work within the context of travel agencies in the analysis. This finding aligns with studies showing that invisible, gender-based barriers embedded in the day-to-day operations of the tourism and hospitality sectors limit women's career advancement (Carvalho et al., 2019; Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

The research findings indicate that one of the most visible manifestations of the glass ceiling is workload and pace. In addition, it has been established that factors such as the male-dominated sector structure, gender-based approaches, expectations regarding domestic responsibilities, work-life balance, jealousy/resentment, and a limited promotion structure directly affect female employees' career experiences. This situation demonstrates that the barriers women face in the workplace are not solely the result of formal organizational decisions but are produced by interrelated, multilayered structures such as gender roles, managerial discourses, internal organizational relationships, and the daily work routine. Indeed, it is emphasized that discourse in tourism management can still be shaped by gendered attributes, and that women are often evaluated within stereotypes associated with caregiving, emotionality, or family responsibilities (Costa et al., 2017; Carvalho et al., 2019).

Organizational findings also show that in the career development of female employees, not only overt discrimination but also more subtle mechanisms, such as a lack of support and a weak perception of internal organizational justice, play a decisive role. While factors such as peer support, managerial support, training and development opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes serve as facilitators, the exclusionary nature of informal communication networks, obstructive behaviors, and a lack of recognition have emerged as factors that reinforce the glass ceiling. This finding is consistent with studies showing that mentoring and support mechanisms play a significant role in women's career advancement; conversely, perceived injustices in promotion processes weaken the sense of organizational equity (Dashper, 2020; Russen et al., 2021a).

When the societal and individual dimensions are considered together, it becomes clear that female employees experience the glass ceiling not only through external barriers but also within the framework of internalized social roles and multiple responsibilities. In particular, findings such as the perception that women's visibility poses a risk, the assumption that women are not productive, expectations regarding domestic responsibilities, and work-life balance indicate that women's career advancement is still considered in conjunction with family life and social norms. This finding aligns with research showing that women's career development in the tourism sector is constrained by work-family reconciliation, social norms, and gendered organizational structures (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Russen et al., 2021a).

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the glass ceiling phenomenon in travel agencies is not merely a matter of "failure to be promoted"; rather, it is reproduced within the interplay of the sector's intense work pace, gender stereotypes, organizational culture, and the multiple roles women assume. Therefore, efforts to find solutions aimed at reducing the challenges women face in their professional lives must not be limited to a single dimension but must be based on a holistic approach that takes into account all levels—sectoral, organizational, societal, and individual. This assessment is also consistent with the multi-layered structure of inequality highlighted in the current literature on tourism and hospitality (Carvalho et al., 2019; Dashper, 2020; Russen et al., 2021a; Russen et al., 2021b).

***The recommendations developed based on the research findings are presented below:***

Promotion and job assignment processes must be based on objective criteria. Processes such as promotions, job transfers, leadership assignments, and pay raises at travel agencies must be conducted according to written, transparent, and traceable criteria. Career advancement for female employees should not be dependent on personal opinions or informal networks; practices that strengthen the perception of organizational justice should be institutionalized (Russen et al., 2021a).

Formal mentoring and career development mechanisms should be established for female employees. Taking into account the need for managerial support, peer support, and development opportunities identified in the research, mentoring programs, leadership training, and career planning meetings should be developed, particularly for female employees in the early and mid-stages of their careers. Mentoring not only provides individual support but also helps identify invisible barriers within the organization (Dashper, 2020).

Sector-specific regulations should be implemented regarding workload, pace, and work-life balance. Taking into account the workload and pace issues highlighted in the findings, task distribution should be reorganized during peak periods, overtime practices should be monitored, and flexible scheduling options that allow employees to maintain their personal lives should be evaluated. To prevent women, in particular, from being forced to give up their careers due to expectations regarding domestic responsibilities, practices that support work-family balance should be developed (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

Organizational awareness initiatives should be implemented to combat gender-based biases. Stereotypes—such as the notion that women are less productive, that their visibility poses a risk, or that leadership roles are better suited for men—are institutionalized problems that cannot be explained solely by individual attitudes. Therefore, regular gender equality training should be provided to managers and employees; complaint and monitoring mechanisms against discrimination, exclusion, and harassment must be made effective (Carvalho et al., 2019; Costa et al., 2017).

Women's participation in decision-making processes must be increased. Female employees must be made visible not only in operational roles but also in positions requiring decision-making and representation. Having women take on more active roles in areas such as project leadership, team coordination, customer relationship management, crisis management, and strategic meetings can limit the reproduction of the glass ceiling in everyday practices. This approach is also consistent with studies emphasizing that women's participation in decision-making mechanisms in the hospitality sector requires multi-stakeholder support (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

It is recommended that future research prioritize comparative and multi-stakeholder designs. Similar studies could be conducted at travel agencies, hospitality businesses, or other tourism subsectors in different provinces to compare findings. Furthermore, studies that include the perspectives not only of female employees but also of male employees, business owners, and managers could shed more detailed light on the institutional mechanisms of the glass ceiling.

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