

Ambitious women must use their social capital to reach top jobs

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Aspirational professional women would benefit from a better understanding of how to build, maintain and use their social capital to succeed in reaching the top.

This is one of the findings of a study by postgraduate student Natasha Abajian, supervised by Dr Ruth Sealy, at City University London presented today, Wednesday 6 January 2016, at the British Psychological Society's Division of Occupational Psychology annual conference in Nottingham.

Natasha Abajian said: "Access to social networks typically differs for men and for [women](#). Usually women have less access to networks typically associated with career progression. These networks or 'who you know and who knows you' are responsible for a large percentage of career progression so limited access could be a barrier to women's opportunities."

The researcher interviewed 12 women employed as a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Managing Director (MD) in the communications industry to explore their perceptions of social capital and how much they believed it was instrumental in helping their careers. The interviews were recorded and analysed.

The results showed that the women perceived their social capital to have contributed to their appointments. However, the findings of this study also revealed a difference in how the participants perceived their ability

to build, maintain and use social capital and how they perceived women in general to do so. All of the participants reported that women generally lacked the ability, knowledge or opportunity to accrue or use their social capital in the context of senior-level promotion.

Natasha Abajian said "It's interesting to examine the perspectives of women who have broken through the glass ceiling. However, I believe this phrase, by depicting a single obstacle at a high level, fails to account for the subtle inequalities that arise throughout a career journey.

"The continual use of this metaphor may encourage women to behave in a stereotypical gendered way rather than challenging the status quo. The participants in this study acted in a non-stereotypical manner and they succeeded in being appointed MD/CEO. Women who want to progress to the highest levels need to be aware of the value of [social capital](#) and know how to use this to their advantage."

Provided by British Psychological Society

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