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Impact of perceived glass ceiling on burnout among female public administrators in Tunisia: the moderating role of work-life balance

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between perceived glass ceiling and burnout among female public administrators in Tunisia, with a specific focus on the moderating role of work-life balance. Using quantitative methodology and data collected from 144 female civil servants, the research employs validated scales to measure glass ceiling perception, burnout and work-life balance. Results reveal a significant positive relationship between perceived glass ceiling and burnout ($\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, work-life balance demonstrates a significant moderating effect ($\Delta R^2 = 0.046$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that better work-life balance can mitigate the negative impact of perceived glass ceiling on burnout. These findings contribute to understanding the psychological implications of organisational barriers for women in public administration within the Tunisian socio-cultural context and highlight the importance of work-life balance policies in promoting women's well-being in the public sector.

Keywords: glass ceiling; burnout; work-life balance; WLB; female leadership; public administration; Tunisia.

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1 Introduction

The glass ceiling phenomenon, despite decades of research and policy interventions, remains a persistent challenge in public administration worldwide (Kang et al., 2024; Zhang and Basha, 2023; Naguib and Madeeha, 2023; Riccucci and Rodas, 2021). While significant progress has been made in understanding this phenomenon in Western contexts, there is a notable gap in our understanding of how the glass ceiling affects women's psychological well-being, particularly burnout, in Arab-Muslim countries' public sectors (Al-Doghmi et al., 2023). This gap is particularly significant given the unique socio-cultural context of these countries, where traditional gender roles often intersect with modern public administration practices (Bouchaa, 2020; Khanchel and Kahla, 2018).

The Tunisian public sector presents unique characteristics that make it a compelling context for studying gender-related workplace dynamics. Unlike many of its regional counterparts, Tunisia has a long history of progressive gender policies, dating back to the Personal Status Code of 1956, which granted women unprecedented rights in the Arab world. The Tunisian public sector, which employs approximately 670,000 civil servants, of whom 37% are women¹, has been at the forefront of implementing these progressive policies. However, despite this seemingly favourable context, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions within the country. According to official International Labour Organization statistics (2019)², the proportion of women in senior and middle management positions stands at approximately 26%. Moreover, women's representation is even lower in corporate governance, with only 11% of board positions in the 80 companies listed on the Tunis Stock Exchange being held by women (Achour, 2023).

Several factors make the Tunisian case particularly interesting. First, the country's public administration operates within a unique hybrid system that combines French administrative heritage with local cultural practices (Jamil et al., 2022). Second, unlike many other Arab-Muslim countries, Tunisia has explicitly committed to gender equality in its constitution and public sector reforms, yet implementation challenges persist (Charrad and Zarrugh, 2014; Blackman and Jackson, 2021). Third, the post-2011 revolution period has seen increased attention to public sector reform and gender equality, creating a dynamic context for studying organisational barriers (Gherib, 2021).

While existing research has extensively documented the presence of the glass ceiling in public administration (Sabharwal et al., 2024; Bishu et al., 2023; Khan and Saba Ahmad, 2021), less attention has been paid to its psychological implications, particularly in non-Western contexts. Furthermore, while work-life balance (WLB) has been studied as a challenge for women in leadership positions (Nehemia and Lenkoe, 2023; Alshammari, 2023), its potential role as a moderating factor in the relationship between the perceived glass ceiling and burnout remains unexplored, especially in Arab-Muslim societies where work-life dynamics are shaped by distinct cultural norms and expectations.

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it extends the application of glass ceiling theory to the specific context of Arab-Muslim public administration, enriching our understanding of how cultural and institutional factors interact in shaping women's career experiences. Second, it integrates theories of occupational stress and burnout with gender-based organisational barriers, providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding women's workplace experiences. Third, it introduces WLB

as a theoretical moderator in the relationship between perceived organisational barriers and psychological outcomes, contributing to both gender and organisational behaviour literature.

From a practical perspective, this research offers valuable insights for public sector reform in Tunisia and similar contexts. By identifying the psychological impact of perceived barriers and the protective role of WLB, it provides evidence-based guidance for policy makers and public administrators working to promote gender equality and employee well-being. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of considering cultural context in designing interventions to support women's career advancement in public administration.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present a comprehensive literature review examining the interconnections between glass ceiling, burnout, and WLB, leading to our theoretical framework and hypotheses. Next, we detail our methodological approach, including data collection and analysis procedures. We then present our findings, followed by a discussion of their theoretical and practical implications. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for policy and practice, acknowledging limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

2 Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1 The glass ceiling and burnout

The concept of the 'glass ceiling' was introduced by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) to describe the invisible yet persistent barriers that prevent women from reaching the highest levels of organisational hierarchy. Theoretically, the persistence of the glass ceiling is explained by the complex interplay between structural, psychosocial and reproductive mechanisms. At the structural level, Acker (2006) demonstrated how organisations are inherently 'gendered' through their seemingly neutral processes, practices and assumptions, creating unintentional, invisible but effective systemic discrimination. This structure interacts directly with psychosocial factors, notably through what Eagly and Karau (2002) theorised as 'role congruence theory', according to which gender stereotypes create a perception of mismatch between 'feminine' qualities and those associated with leadership. These two dimensions feed into mechanisms of social reproduction that Bourdieu (1994) analysed in his theory of male domination, where disadvantages accumulate and self-reinforce over time, creating a vicious circle where the absence of women in leadership positions reinforces the perception of their inadequacy for these positions. In Arab-Muslim societies, this phenomenon is amplified by the intersection between modern organisational norms and traditional patriarchal values, creating what Metcalfe (2007) describes as a 'double barrier' where women must navigate between Western professional expectations and local socio-cultural constraints, making the glass ceiling particularly resistant. In the context of public administration, despite reform efforts and equal opportunity policies, the glass ceiling persists in the public sector of many countries. Research by Choi and Park (2014) has demonstrated that even in countries where gender equality is considered advanced, such as South Korea, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions within public administration. In the Tunisian context, Ben Hassine (2018) highlighted the persistence of these inequalities despite the existence of a legal framework favourable to gender equality. Several

interconnected structural factors contribute to the maintenance of this phenomenon. First, gender stereotypes, reveal that qualities associated with leadership are traditionally perceived as masculine, creating unconscious bias against women leaders. Second, the 'leaky pipeline' phenomenon (Heinrichs and Sonnabend, 2023; Rauhaus and Carr, 2022) demonstrates that women more frequently interrupt their careers mid-course, thus reducing the pool of potential candidates for senior positions. Furthermore, informal networks, studied by McPherson et al. (2001), remain predominantly male-dominated and prove decisive for professional advancement. Finally, family responsibilities, conceptualised by Beutell and Greenhaus (1985), traditionally fall more heavily on women, limiting their availability for positions of responsibility (Samanmalie and Anjalika, 2023; Glass and Cook, 2016). This constant pressure to overcome these multiple barriers, combined with the need to 'prove' their skills twice over, particularly exposes these female executives to the risk of professional exhaustion or 'burnout'.

Burnout, which was defined by Maslach and Jackson (1981) as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment, represents a complex psychosocial phenomenon that develops progressively through distinct phases, from initial enthusiasm to terminal cynicism. This syndrome manifests through a combination of physiological, emotional, and behavioural symptoms that significantly impact both individual well-being and organisational performance. The process typically accelerates when personal resources are consistently depleted without adequate opportunities for recovery, leading to a state of chronic stress that becomes self-perpetuating. This syndrome is particularly prevalent in public organisations for several reasons. First, bureaucratic pressure and administrative rigidity limit employee autonomy, leading to frustration and a sense of powerlessness. Additionally, limited resources and budget constraints result in work overload, making it difficult to meet growing demands. Frequent interaction with the public, often in distressing situations, further increases emotional strain. Moreover, the lack of recognition affects motivation, while political instability and shifting priorities heighten uncertainty and stress. Studies also show that women are more prone to emotional exhaustion, whereas men tend to exhibit greater cynicism (Załoski and Makara-Studzińska, 2022; Wang et al., 2020; Markus et al., 2018). Several contributing factors have been identified, including work overload and lack of resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), role conflict and ambiguity (Kahn et al., 1964) and lack of autonomy (Karasek, 1979). For women administrators, the glass ceiling exacerbates these problems. For example, studies by Artz et al. (2022) and Hennein et al. (2021) have shown that perceptions of gender discrimination significantly increase the risk of burnout.

2.2 *The moderating role of WLB in the glass ceiling-burnout relationship*

WLB conceptualised by Clark (2000) as two-dimensional satisfaction and functioning, represents a critical challenge for female executives in public administration, particularly when confronting the glass ceiling phenomenon. The literature emphasises that women in leadership positions face unique challenges stemming from invisible barriers limiting their career progression, combined with what Hochschild (1989) terms the 'double burden' and conflicting cultural models of professional and family development. Indeed, women often bear the brunt of domestic responsibilities alongside their professional roles. This dual burden creates significant obstacles to career advancement as women struggle to balance work and family expectations.

Empirical evidence underscores the persistence and complexity of these challenges. Greenhaus and Kossek (2014) demonstrate that insufficient WLB particularly impedes women's career progression in the public sector. This situation can exacerbate the negative psychological impact of the glass ceiling, potentially leading to professional burnout. The public sector context presents a unique paradox: while offering potentially more favourable conditions for WLB compared to the private sector (Epstein, 2022), it still maintains structural barriers that challenge women's career advancement. This complex interplay between institutional support and persistent barriers necessitates a deeper examination of how WLB operates as a moderating mechanism in this context.

Drawing on both the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the work-family conflict theory, WLB functions as a crucial moderating mechanism in the relationship between the glass ceiling and burnout through three complementary processes.

First, it provides a buffer effect through essential recovery experiences (Sonnentag, 2003), allowing women to replenish their psychological resources and maintain resilience in the face of workplace challenges (Den Dulk and Groeneveld, 2013).

Second, the structured nature of public sector employment, with its standardised work schedules and formal work-life policies, provides a more robust framework for managing work-family demands compared to the private sector, potentially offering greater protection against burnout when facing glass ceiling barriers (Beauregard and Henry, 2009).

Third, the enhancing effect strengthens resilience to work-related obstacles through what Lee and Hong (2011) identify as stronger organisational support systems typical of public administration. This developmental enhancement effect emerges from the dual role management of family responsibilities and professional duties, reinforced by spousal support, enabling women managers to develop transferable skills such as stress management, problem-solving and leadership (Eby et al., 2005).

Thus, the organisational structure of the public sector, characterised by a 'family-friendly organisational culture' (Den Dulk and Groeneveld, 2013), offers particular potential for implementing such a WLB, which could simultaneously promote the well-being and professional performance of women managers while also being susceptible to their exposure to the risks of burnout. However, this potential advantage must be actively leveraged through appropriate organisational policies and practices to effectively mitigate the impact of glass ceiling effects on burnout.

2.3 Hypotheses development

This study draws on two main theoretical frameworks to examine the glass ceiling-burnout relationship and the moderating role of WLB among female public administrators in Tunisia.

The first theoretical foundation is the job strain model, developed by Karasek (1979), which posits that work-related stress arises from the interaction between job demands and decision latitude. According to this theory, when job demands are high and decision-making autonomy is low, employees experience 'job strain', leading to adverse effects on both mental and physical health. For women facing the glass ceiling, this model is particularly relevant as restricted career advancement opportunities can create a

significant imbalance between professional demands and actual control over one’s career trajectory, potentially exacerbating WLB challenges.

The second theoretical pillar draws from social role theory (Eagly, 1987), which highlights the determining influence of gendered societal expectations on behaviours and perceptions. Within this framework, Eagly and Karau (2002) developed the concept of role congruity, demonstrating that the perception of women as less suited for leadership stems from an incongruity between stereotypically feminine characteristics and qualities considered inherent to managerial functions. This dissonance not only emerges as a major explanatory factor in the formation and persistence of the glass ceiling phenomenon but also creates additional pressure on women to constantly navigate between professional and societal expectations, potentially intensifying WLB tensions and contributing to increased psychological strain.

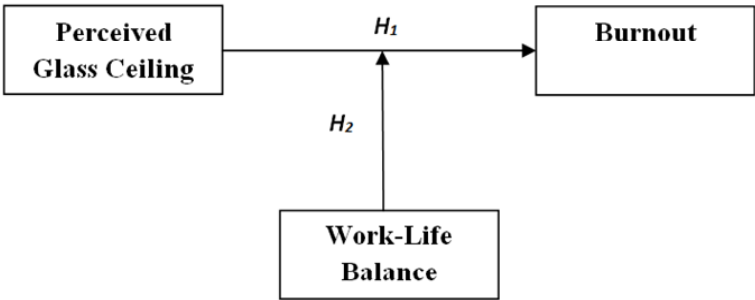
Building on these theoretical foundations and extending the conservation of resources perspective discussed earlier, recent empirical studies have provided supporting evidence for the relationships between our key variables. Research by Bakker and de Vries (2021) has shown that female executives often perceive a constant threat or loss of professional resources, resulting in chronic stress. Gonzalez (2022) specifically applied these concepts to the public sector context, emphasising how resource management is crucial in mitigating workplace stress effects. Furthermore, studies by Mahendran et al. (2019) and Sahay and Lall (2024) have established a negative correlation between organisational policies promoting WLB and both glass ceiling perceptions and burnout prevalence among female executives.

This integrative theoretical approach enhances our understanding of gendered organisational dynamics within the specific context of Tunisian public administration, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. Based on the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence presented, we propose two main hypotheses:

- H1 There is a significant positive relationship between the perception of the glass ceiling and burnout among female public administrators in Tunisia.
- H2 WLB moderates the relationship between glass ceiling perception and burnout, such that the relationship is weaker when WLB is high.

The proposed relationships between our key variables are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between the perception of the glass ceiling and burnout among Tunisian female civil servants, as well as the moderating effect of WLB. This methodological approach, consistent with similar studies in the field (Batoool et al., 2021; Goodall, 2024), allows statistical testing of the proposed hypotheses through data collection at a specific point in time. The quantitative design is particularly appropriate for measuring the relationships between variables and assessing the moderating effect while controlling for potentially influential contextual variables.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

The study targeted Tunisian female civil servants holding different positions in the public administration. The hierarchical stratification includes three levels: administrators of categories A1, A2 and A3.³ Data collection was carried out mainly via social networks, specifically through Facebook pages and groups dedicated to Tunisian civil servants. The questionnaire was shared with the explicit mention 'questionnaire addressed to female civil servants' to target the study population. This collection approach via social networks was chosen for its ability to reach a wide range of civil servants across different regions and institutions, while allowing voluntary and anonymous participation. Over the study period from April to September 2024, a total of 144 usable responses were obtained, representing a diverse sample of Tunisian female civil servants.

3.3 Measurement instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed based on scales validated in existing literature. The questionnaire used includes four main sections.

First, the perception of the glass ceiling is measured through six items adapted from the scale developed by Al-Manasra (2013), assessing organisational barriers, social barriers, and gender stereotypes on a five-point Likert scale.

Second, burnout is assessed using 11 items adopted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), covering three dimensions: emotional exhaustion (five items), depersonalisation (three items), and reduced personal accomplishment (three items).

Third, WLB is evaluated through with six items inspired by the scale of Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003), measuring the ability to reconcile professional and personal responsibilities. It also used a five-point Likert scale.

Finally, the questionnaire collects socio-demographic and professional information: age, marital status, number of children, level of education, professional grade, seniority and place of work. Table 1 presents the Cronbach's alpha coefficients calculated for each dimension, confirming the reliability of the scales.

All scales and subscales exhibit Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, which is generally considered the minimum acceptable threshold for reliability in social science research. The glass ceiling scale and burnout subscales exhibit good to very good

reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$), suggesting that these constructs are measured consistently and reliably. The WLB scale has acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.76$).

Table 1 Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) of the scales

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>
Glass ceiling (G)	6	0.81
Burnout (B)		
Emotional exhaustion (BD)	5	0.87
Depersonalisation (BE)	3	0.79
Personal accomplishment (BA)	3	0.83
Work-life balance (E)	6	0.76

4 Data analysis and results

4.1 Descriptive analyses

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the main variables examined in the study, based on a sample of 144 respondents. The mean age of the participants is 44.50 years, with a standard deviation of 11.23 and with a range of 25 to 60 years, reflecting a good representation of the different generations of civil servants. The professional experience of the respondents is on average 17.32 years ($SD = 9.54$), suggesting that the participants have substantial professional experience. On average, the respondents have 2.23 dependent children ($SD = 1.36$). In terms of perceived workplace dynamics, the mean score for the glass ceiling variable is 2.96 ($SD = 0.87$), indicating a moderate perception of barriers to advancement. The burnout score is on average 4.10 ($SD = 1.12$), which may indicate a worrying level of stress among the participants. Finally, the WLB variable averages 3.07 ($SD = 0.95$), suggesting that despite some challenges, respondents may perceive their WLB as reasonably acceptable.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the main variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Age	44.50	11.23	25	60
Professional experience	17.32	9.54	2	35
Number of dependent children	2.23	1.36	0	4
Perceived glass ceiling	2.96	0.87	1	5
Burnout	4.10	1.12	1	7
Work-life balance	3.07	0.95	1	5

4.2 Testing hypotheses

Initially, to test our research hypotheses, we used SPSS version 26.0. Our analytical approach was conducted in several rigorous methodological steps.

First, to test H1 regarding the relationship between the perception of the glass ceiling and burnout, we performed a Pearson correlation analysis followed by a simple linear

regression. The results reveal a significant moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.428$, $p < 0.001$) between these two variables. The simple regression confirms this relationship with $R^2 = 0.183$ ($p < 0.001$), indicating that 18.3% of the variance in burnout is explained by the perception of the glass ceiling. The standardised regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$) confirms the existence of a significant positive relationship, thus validating our first hypothesis.

Table 3 Results of hierarchical regression analyses

<i>Model</i>		<i>R²</i>	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>ΔR²</i>
Model 1	Direct effect (H1)	0.183	0.176	0.001	-
Model 2	Main effects	0.241	0.229	0.001	-
Model 3	With interaction	0.287	0.271	0.001	0.046

Subsequently, to test H2 regarding the moderating effect of WLB, we conducted a two-step hierarchical regression analysis. The first step included the main effects of the glass ceiling and WLB ($R^2 = 0.241$), while the second step included the interaction term ($R^2 = 0.287$). As shown in Table 4, the significant increase in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.046$, $p < 0.001$) and the significant negative interaction coefficient ($\beta = -0.216$, $p = 0.002$) demonstrate the existence of a moderating effect. These results indicate that WLB significantly moderates the relationship between the perception of the glass ceiling and burnout.

Table 4 Regression coefficients and collinearity diagnostics for the moderation model

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient β</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>VIF</i>	<i>Tolerance</i>
Constant	0.142	0.068	2.088	0.038	-	-
Glass ceiling	0.356	0.072	4.944	0.001	1.483	0.674
Work-life balance	-0.284	0.071	-4.000	0.001	1.392	0.719
Interaction	-0.216	0.069	-3.130	0.002	1.267	0.789

The robustness of our analyses was verified through several diagnostic tests. The variance inflation factors (VIF) are all below 2 (maximum = 1.483), ruling out any multicollinearity issues. The normality of residuals was confirmed by the Shapiro-Wilk test (0.976), the independence of errors by the Durbin-Watson test (1.892), and homoscedasticity by the Breusch-Pagan test (2.341), thus validating the assumptions for our analyses.

In summary, these results confirm both of our research hypotheses:

- 1 there is a significant positive relationship between the perception of the glass ceiling and burnout among female public administrators in Tunisia
- 2 this relationship is moderated by work-life balance.

Specifically, the relationship is stronger when work-life balance is low and weaker when it is high being of female public administrators. This relationship is moderated by WLB, being stronger when WLB is low and weaker when it is high. These findings highlight the crucial role of WLB as a protective factor against the harmful effects of the glass ceiling on the psychological well-being of female public administrators.

4.3 Additional analysis

Beyond the moderation analysis, we also examined the potential mediating role of WLB in the relationship between glass ceiling perception and burnout. Following the recommended steps for mediation analysis (Baron and Kenny, 1986), we first confirmed that glass ceiling perception was a significant predictor of burnout ($c = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). We then verified that glass ceiling perception also significantly and negatively predicted WLB ($a = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$). When we introduced both glass ceiling perception and WLB as predictors of burnout, the effect of WLB was significant ($b = -0.29$, $p < 0.001$), while the direct effect of glass ceiling was reduced ($c' = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$). A Sobel test further confirmed that the indirect effect of glass ceiling on burnout through WLB was statistically significant ($z = 4.12$, $p < 0.001$). The results of the mediation analysis presented in Table 5 indicate that WLB partially mediates the relationship between perceived glass ceiling and burnout. Our findings complement and enrich Khan and Khan's (2022) discoveries by demonstrating that the glass ceiling influences burnout in two ways: directly and indirectly through its impact on WLB. This deeper understanding of the mechanisms emphasises the crucial importance of organisational initiatives aimed at promoting WLB as a strategic lever to mitigate the detrimental effects of the glass ceiling on the psychological well-being of women in public administration.

Table 5 Mediation analysis of the relationship between glass ceiling perception and burnout through WLB

<i>Effect</i>	<i>Coefficient (β)</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Step 1: total effect		
c: glass ceiling perception $\rightarrow$ burnout	0.41	$p < 0.001$
Step 2: mediator effect		
a: glass ceiling perception $\rightarrow$ work-life balance	-0.38	$p < 0.001$
Step 3: direct and indirect effect		
b: work-life balance $\rightarrow$ burnout	-0.29	$p < 0.001$
c': direct effect – glass ceiling perception $\rightarrow$ burnout	0.29	$p < 0.001$
Sobel test		
Indirect effect ($a * b$)	0.11	$z = 4.12$, $p < 0.001$

5 Discussion

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate a significant relationship between glass ceiling perception and burnout among female public administrators in Tunisia. Specifically, the identified moderate positive correlation suggests that women who perceive greater barriers to their professional advancement experience an increased risk of burnout. These results align with extant literature, particularly the work of Balasubramanian and Lathabhavan (2017) and Bayati and Alavi (2018), which demonstrated that perceived discrimination and professional obstacles can precipitate psychological strain and diminished job satisfaction.

The findings can be interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of discrimination theory and occupational stress theory. In Arab-Muslim societies, discrimination theory

elucidates how gender stereotypes and cultural biases construct invisible barriers to women's professional advancement. Indeed, traditional role expectations may constrain their opportunities, generating perceptions of inequity and consequent psychological frustration. Furthermore, these findings corroborate the research of Al-Asfour et al. (2017) on female executives in the Middle East, which highlighted the substantial impact of invisible barriers on professional burnout.

Within the Tunisian context, where public administration has historically been male-dominated, these findings possess particular salience. Female administrators encounter specific challenges, including restricted access to leadership positions and pervasive prejudices that diminish their contributions, as evidenced by Alhalwachi et al. (2024) in their examination of persistent glass ceiling effects in Qatar. This circumstance not only constrains their career trajectories but also adversely affects their psychological well-being, manifesting in elevated stress levels and burnout as they navigate systemic barriers and cultural expectations that devalue their roles in both professional and societal spheres.

This situation presents a notable contrast to Chen et al.'s (2018) observations in the Chinese public sector, where the impact of the glass ceiling on burnout exhibited less prominence, thereby emphasising the distinctiveness of the Tunisian socio-cultural context. The study's distinctive contribution lies in identifying the moderating role of WLB. The negative interaction coefficient ($\beta = -0.216$) and substantial moderating effect ($\Delta R^2 = 0.046$) empirically demonstrate that enhanced WLB can attenuate the adverse effects of glass ceiling perceptions on burnout.

These findings align with Bayati and Alavi's (2018) research, which established correlations between glass ceiling perception, emotional exhaustion, and mental health among female professionals. Through the promotion of improved WLB, organisations can potentially mitigate these adverse effects by providing targeted support to female employees in managing their professional and personal responsibilities. Additionally, these results corroborate Brough et al.'s (2020) findings regarding the protective effect of WLB among female executives in Asia-Pacific, suggesting a degree of universality in this moderating role across diverse cultural contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings enhance the understanding of mechanisms through which professional barriers affect women executives' psychological health. In practical terms, they underscore the critical importance of organisational support for WLB initiatives, which can enhance both the well-being and productivity of female administrators managing concurrent professional and personal responsibilities.

In conclusion, these findings strongly indicate that Tunisian policymakers and organisational leaders should prioritise addressing glass ceiling issues and promoting enhanced WLB. Future research trajectories could explore additional variables influencing this relationship, such as cultural factors or organisational climate, to develop more comprehensive interventions tailored to the unique challenges faced by women in this sector.

6 Conclusions

This research provides significant insights into the relationship between glass ceiling perception and burnout among female public administrators in Tunisia, while

highlighting the crucial moderating role of WLB. The findings demonstrate that the glass ceiling phenomenon in Tunisian public administration has tangible psychological implications, contributing to increased levels of professional exhaustion. However, the study reveals that maintaining a healthy WLB can significantly mitigate these negative effects. Theoretically, our conclusions enhance the understanding of organisational barriers and their psychological impacts in non-Western contexts, particularly in Arab-Muslim societies. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that public sector organisations in Tunisia should adopt a dual approach: first, addressing structural barriers contributing to the glass ceiling, and second, implementing policies supporting WLB. Despite certain methodological and contextual limitations, notably the cross-sectional nature of the data and sample size, this study opens new perspectives for future research, particularly in exploring specific cultural and organisational factors influencing gender equality in public administration within Arab-Muslim countries.

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Notes

- 1 <https://www.ins.tn/enquetes/caracteristiques-des-agents-de-la-fonction-publique-et-leurs-salaires-2010-2021> (accessed 20 October 2024).
- 2 <https://ilostat.ilo.org/fr/data/> (accessed 20 October 2024).
- 3 Civil service administrators in Tunisia are classified into three categories A1, A2 and A3 according to Government Decree No. 2020-115 of February 25, 2020 relating to the special status of the common administrative body of public administrations.