

# A Bibliometric Analysis of the Publications on the Glass Cliff Published in the Scopus Database<sup>1</sup>

[<sup>1</sup>] Dr. Bahar SUVACI

[<sup>1</sup>] Assoc. Prof., Anadolu University, Eskisehir Vocational School, Eskisehir, Türkiye  
Corresponding Author Email: [<sup>1</sup>]bsuvaci@anadolu.edu.tr

*Abstract— The glass ceiling, which refers to the invisible barriers that women face when rising to the top of an organization, has been the subject of much research. However, another hidden form of gender discrimination, called the "glass cliff," confronts women executives who somehow manage to break through the glass ceiling. According to the Glass Cliff, men are usually preferred as executive candidates in successful and rising organizations, while women are usually chosen to lead in organizations with a high probability of failing and declining. The purpose of this study is to draw attention to the glass cliff problem, which is seen as an application of gender discrimination. It also aims to identify the general state of research on the topic. For this purpose, a bibliometric analysis of publications on the glass cliff issue in the Scopus database, which is actively used by researchers from many countries all over the world, has been conducted. For the identification of publications on the glass cliff, keywords were selected from the "search within" section of the Scopus website and publications were scanned by entering "glass and cliff" in the "search documents" section. Therefore, only publications with the keyword "glass cliff" were identified in Scopus, according to the purpose of the research. As a result of the search, a total of 77 publications were found in Scopus with the term "glass cliff". According to the study results, the first publication in Scopus was in 1961, but the second in 1973 after a long interval of 12 years. The regular publication of at least one paper on the topic every year started only after 2011. Most of the research on this topic comes from the United States (27). The highest number of publications on this topic came from Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (10) and the University of Exeter (10). Consequently, the fact that only 77 publications on the topic were published between 1963, the date of the first publication in Scopus, and today (August 2024) shows that interest in glass cliffs is quite low. In addition, 73 out of the 77 publications (94.8%) have been made between 2011 and 2024 (up to August), when the publications have been made on a regular basis, at least once a year. This shows that interest in the topic increased after 2011, but not enough.*

*Index Terms: Bibliometric Analyze, Gender Discrimination, Glass Cliff, Scopus Database.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination in organizations occurs in many different forms. The so-called glass cliff is another form of gender discrimination in organizations. The Glass Cliff emerges after the glass ceiling, another sexist practice for women, has been overcome as a career barrier. The Glass Ceiling is a metaphor used to represent an invisible barrier that prevents women and other minorities from advancing beyond a certain level in the hierarchy (Sharma, Sharma & Kaushik, 2011). The glass cliff states that while men are generally preferred as management candidates in successful and rising organizations, women are preferred as managers in organizations with a high probability of failure and decline. While this phenomenon is well established, it is still largely unknown how the types of crises encountered affect the strength of the think crises think female relationship and whether female leaders and gender-specific leaders are both affected by this relationship (Kulich, Gartzia, Komarraju & Aelenei, 2021). For this reason, there is still a great need for studies that examine the glass cliff metaphor from every angle.

As a result, the research aim of this study is to draw attention to the glass cliff issue and encourage more researchers to conduct studies on the subject. Thus, many questions that have not yet been clarified regarding the glass

cliff (such as who is exposed to the glass cliff, in what situations does it occur, can it occur in all cultures) can be answered.

The main research questions of the study were formulated as follows:

- Are there sufficient studies in the literature on the glass cliff?
- Do researchers have an interest in the glass cliff issue?
- What is the overall assessment of publications on the glass cliff in the Scopus database (how many, from which country, by which authors, in which years, with which sponsorships, by which affiliations, in what types of publications and in which subject area)?

Based on this, this study aims to present the general status of the publications on the glass cliff published so far in the Scopus database, where researchers from many countries around the world publish their studies.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth of organizations necessitates that very different thoughts, beliefs and perspectives work together within the organization. These differences can sometimes cause women to experience gender discrimination within the organization and therefore encounter various problems in their careers. The glass cliff, one of the career barriers that women can encounter in business life, refers to the tendency

for women to be appointed to risky and potentially unsuccessful leadership positions more than men.

Micheall K. Ryan, a psychiatrist at the University of Exeter, and his colleague S. Alexander Haslam introduced the concept of the 'Glass Cliff' to the corporate world (Lahiri, Sarkar, & Bhargava, 2022). Ryan and Haslam (2005), who introduced the concept of the glass cliff to the literature with their study, define the glass cliff as the desire to appoint women to organizations or positions with a high risk of failure. According to the glass cliff thesis, while men are generally preferred as management candidates in successful and rising organizations, women are generally selected as managers in organizations with a high probability of failure and in decline.

The first comprehensive academic study on the glass cliff was conducted by Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam, academics at the University of Exeter, in 2005. Ryan and Haslam (2005) conducted a study on FTSE 100 companies traded on the London Stock Exchange and determined that a woman was appointed as the chairman of the board of directors of the stock exchange when the shares of most companies experienced a decline. Haslam and Ryan (2008) conducted a series of experimental studies on the subject. Consistent with the researchers' predictions, these studies have found that when an organization's performance declines rather than improves, the probability of a female candidate being selected over an equally qualified male candidate increases. These selections made to improve the status of women did not improve the status of women and did not eliminate prejudices about women in management, on the contrary, they increased them (Yıldız, Alhas, Sakal, & Yıldız, 2016). Therefore, the question of whether organizations where women are appointed as managers fail or whether women are appointed as managers specifically to organizations with a high probability of failure needs to be answered. Ryan and Haslam, who tried to answer this question, conducted a study in 2007 in which they tried to reveal that the Glass Cliff was not only an obstacle to women's careers but also a discriminatory practice (Ryan and Haslam, 2007). In this study, the researchers tried to emphasize that when organizations are looking for a good leader, the first thing that comes to mind is male candidates, and the idea that a woman can be a good leader is not usually formed at first. They considered this belief as a discriminatory practice among people. Ashby, Ryan, and Haslam (2007) also conducted a study with law students in order to support the glass cliff phenomenon they put forward. As a result of this study, it was determined that participants generally preferred to appoint a female lawyer to cases with a low chance of winning.

As a matter of fact, FIFA's launch of the Female Leadership Development Program (FLDP) following the corruption incidents that took place in FIFA (The Fédération Internationale de Football Association) in 2015 can be

considered as an example of a gender discrimination practice of the glass cliff. Especially after a period of crisis in FIFA, the desire to initiate such a program to pave the way for women to become senior managers in FIFA brought the "Glass Cliff" phenomenon to mind (Ahn and Cunningham 2020). In this case, it can be seen that Schein's (1973) perspective, which explains the homosocial prejudices stemming from the "Think Manager-Think Man" culture and restricting the hiring of female managers, has shifted to the glass cliff perspective of "Think Crisis-Think Woman" (Main and Smith, 2017). In this case, it can be said that gender discrimination against women continues, albeit changing shape.

Another example of the glass cliff is the appointment of Theresa May, a female executive, as Prime Minister during the 2016 referendum (Brexit) process, one of the most difficult periods of governance in the United Kingdom (Szucka, 2022). A study conducted in higher education institutions in Sweden examined why women are usually appointed to higher education institutions from a glass cliff perspective. According to this study, being a good researcher or academic is more prestigious in Sweden than being a manager in a higher education institution. Since people appointed to management positions also have to deal with daily management tasks, they cannot spend enough time on the research required for their academic careers. For this reason, being a manager in higher education institutions may not be a very attractive position and more women than men are appointed. However, more studies are needed to have a clearer idea on this issue (Paterson, 2014). When looking at Sweden specifically, although it seems that women are given more chances to be managers in higher education, it can be said that this is because this managerial position is not preferred by men.

Although glass cliff behavior is perceived as an attitude displayed by men towards women, interestingly, some studies have shown that glass cliff behavior is supported by women. In a study conducted with students of a Turkish University, the effect of age and gender on making decisions supporting the glass cliff was tried to be determined. While the ages of the participants participating in this study were not effective in supporting the glass cliff phenomenon, female participants were more likely to support the glass cliff than male participants (Ece, 2020). In support of this study, a study conducted with Kafkas University students attempted to determine whether it was male employees or female employees who dragged female candidates into the glass cliff during periods when companies exhibited negative performance. As a result of this study, it was revealed that it was women, not men, who dragged female management candidates into the glass cliff (Yıldız, Sakal, Alhas and Kosa, 2019). The study conducted by Hunt-Earle (2012) reached results that support these two studies. As a result of her study, the researcher found that women are brought to risky

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positions not by men, but by their peers. When these studies are analyzed, it is concluded that women are sometimes pushed to the glass cliff not by men but by women. The reason for this can be explained by the queen bee syndrome, which describes women managers who are in positions of authority in a male-dominated environment and who are more critical of female subordinates.

The “Glass Cliff” phenomenon, which was put forward by Ryan and Haslam in 2005, has been studied in many different countries and cultures over the years. These studies have not reached a full consensus on the subject. For this reason, Reinwald, Zaia, and Kunze conducted a comprehensive study in 2023. The researchers examined 26,156 senior management appointments to determine the female managers appointed to US companies between 2000 and 2016 and the companies’ crisis situations. As a result of the research, they determined that women are more likely to be appointed to senior management positions than men in crisis situations, supporting Ryan and Haslam’s view. In an attempt to determine whether the glass cliff truly exists, Morgenroth, Kirby, Ryan, and Sudkamper (2020) found that women, as well as members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, were more likely to be appointed to leadership positions during times of crisis across a variety of methodologies.

Despite all these studies showing that the glass cliff exists and is observed, the issue of the glass cliff has not yet been clarified. As a matter of fact, Acar (2015), in a study conducted with METU students to determine whether women leaders face a type of discrimination called glass cliff after they rise to elite leadership positions, stated that contrary to the results obtained from these studies, it is too early to say that the glass ceiling has been replaced by the glass cliff. Similarly, Samuel and Wendt (2023), in their study on female CEOs of colleges and universities, emphasized that the glass cliff phenomenon should be further investigated in future studies using alternative risk measures (Samuel & Wendt, 2023).

The issue of the glass cliff, which is still open for research, is an important phenomenon for women who will continue to participate in business life in the future. Therefore, more studies should be conducted on the subject to reveal the real existence of the glass cliff and to investigate in which situations, under which conditions and in what ways it can occur.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to identify the gap in the literature by presenting the general state of the literature on the glass cliff, to draw the attention of researchers to this issue and to increase the number of studies on this subject. The study is important in terms of drawing the attention of researchers to the glass cliff issue, revealing the missing parts of the studies and thus raising awareness about gender

discrimination practices such as the glass cliff that may occur in the future.

For this purpose, bibliometric analysis method was used in this study to reveal a general view of the publications published on the 'Glass Cliff' in the Scopus database. The bibliometric method is an analysis method that is frequently used to provide quantitative analysis of written publications. This type of analysis is based on the identification of the corpus of literature in a given subject area, i.e. publications in the broadest sense (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). In this study, bibliometric analysis method was preferred since it was aimed to reveal a general view of the studies on the glass cliff.

The population of the study consists of publications on the glass cliff in all databases from past to present. However, since it was not possible to reach the entire population, the study was carried out by determining a sample using the purposeful sampling method. In accordance with the purpose of the study, all of the publications published on the “glass cliff” from past to present in the Scopus database, which is a database where many researchers in the world publish their studies and includes international citation indexes such as Science Citation Index (SCI), Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and Art & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), were determined as the sample of the study.

While determining the studies in the sample, keywords were selected from the “search within” section of the Scopus website and the studies were scanned by typing “glass and cliff” in the “search documents” section. Thus, in accordance with the purpose of the study, it was tried to identify the studies that only contain “glass cliff” in their keywords among the studies in Scopus. As a result of the search on August 15, 2024, a total of 77 publications containing the keyword “glass cliff” were reached. These 77 publications were determined as the sample of the study and the study was conducted on these 77 publications. The study data were analyzed using the bibliometric analysis method. While organizing the data, the export button in the Scopus database and the graphics on the page were also used<sup>1</sup>.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings obtained from the analysis of 77 publications published with the keyword "Glass Cliff" in the Scopus database were examined under seven subheadings. The analysis results are as follows:

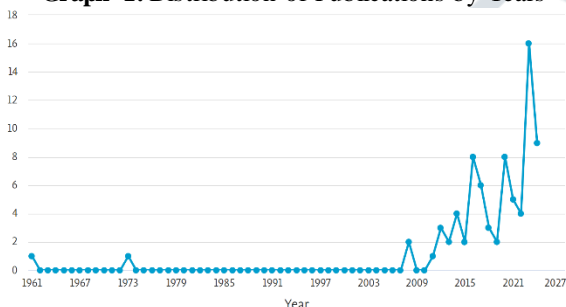
#### 1. Distribution of Publications by Years

A total of 77 publications were found between 1961 and 2024 (August) as a result of a search in the Scopus database

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scopus.com/term/analyzer.uri?sort=plff&src=s&sid=a02e8751069442cf95120a3e3f73acf0&sot=a&sdt=a&sl=16&s=KEY%28glass+cliff%29&origin=resultslist&count=10&analyzeResults=Analyze+results>

with the keyword Glass Cliff. The first publication with the keyword glass cliff in the Scopus database was published in 1961. When the publications are evaluated according to the years of publication, after the first publication in 1961, the publications were interrupted for 8 years and another publication was made in 1973. After 1973, publications were interrupted for 35 years and two publications were made in 2008. Although the number of publications on the subject has shown continuity after 2011, it has been observed that the number of publications has decreased and increased over the years. For example, the number of publications, which was 8 in 2020, reached the highest level with 16 publications (20.7%) in 2023, although it was 4 in 2021 and 4 in 2022. The decrease in the number of publications in 2021 (5) and 2022 (4) can be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic in the world. As a matter of fact, according to the results of the research conducted by Aviv-Reuven and his colleague Rosenfeld (2021), it was determined that the pandemic had a tremendous impact on academic studies. In support of this conclusion, Boshra et al. (2022) determined that the Covid-19 pandemic had major effects on human life as a result of their study. The distribution of the 77 publications in the research sample according to years is shown in Graph 1.

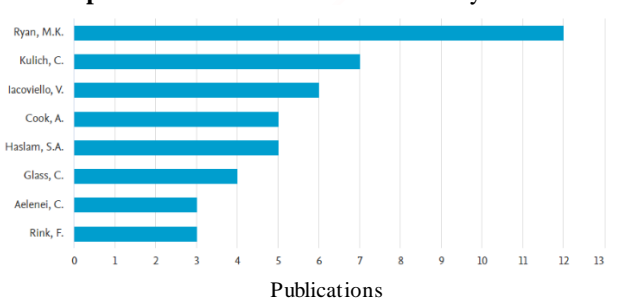
**Graph 1.** Distribution of Publications by Years



**2. Distribution of Publications by Authors**

The 77 publications in the sample of the research were also analyzed according to the number of publications of their authors. This examination gives us the researchers in the literature who have published the most on the subject and naturally have the most knowledge on the subject. As a result of this examination, the graph of the authors who have at least 3 or more publications on the subject is given below.

**Graph 2.** Distribution of Publications by Authors



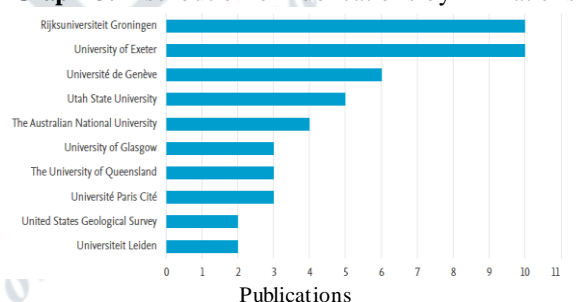
**Note:** The graph is based on authors with 3 or more publications.

M.K. Ryan [12] was the most prolific writer on this topic. Ryan was a researcher in about 16% of papers published in Scopus. It is to be expected that the author has so many works on the subject, as he is one of the authors who brought the topic of the Glass Cliff into the literature. C. Kulich (7) is the author with the highest number of publications after Ryan. In this case, Ryan has almost twice as many publications on this topic in Scopus than the author with the closest work. So, it can be said that M.K. Ryan is the author who knows the most about the glass cliff issue.

**3. Distribution of Publications by Affiliations**

Analyses were also carried out according to the affiliations of the researchers who published using the keyword "glass cliff". Analysing the number of publications, researchers from Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in the Netherlands and researchers from the University of Exeter have the same number of publications (10) and share first place in the list. A quarter (26%) of the publications on glass cliffs in the Scopus database are by researchers from these two universities. The institutions whose researchers have published at least two or more articles are shown below.

**Graph 3.** Distribution of Publications by Affiliations



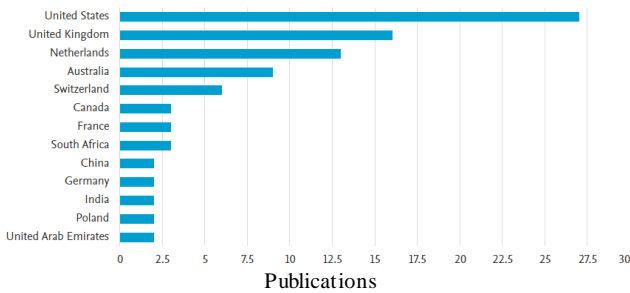
**Note:** The graph is based on institutions with 2 or more publications.

It was expected that Exeter University would be at the top of the list, since Ryan and Haslam, who put the glass cliff issue on the agenda with their comprehensive studies, published as researchers at Exeter University. However, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen with 10 publications, just like Exeter University, is an unexpected result. These two universities are followed by Université de Genève with 6 publications and Utah State University with 5 publications.

**4. Distribution of Publications by Country**

The research also examined the distribution of publications with the keyword glass cliff in Scopus by country. The distribution of countries with at least two publications is shown below.

**Graph 4.** Distribution of Publications by Countries



**Note:** Countries with two or more publications are included in the graph.

When publications were grouped by country of origin, it was found that the highest number of publications (27) were by researchers from the USA. This result can be explained by the fact that the USA hosts a large number of researchers, allocates a lot of funds to research, and emphasizes issues related to discrimination. This result is similar to the 2016 bibliometric analysis on social entrepreneurship by Rey-Marti, Ribeiro-Soriano and Palacios-Marques, which identified the US as the country with the highest number of publications (Rey-Marti, Ribeiro-Soriano and Palacios-Marques, 2016).

After the US, the UK (16) and the Netherlands (13) are the two countries with the most publications on the subject. In a sense, the number of publications by countries on the glass cliff shows how much importance they attach to gender discrimination in general and the glass cliff in particular. In terms of the results, all countries with at least 3 publications or more are developed countries. Although the countries that have fewer than three publications are generally developing countries (e.g. Poland, India, Bangladesh, Brazil), the inclusion of Germany (2) as a developed nation comes as a surprise. In fact, a large number of studies on gender inequality confirm the existence of gender discrimination in developing or underdeveloped countries. One of the most comprehensive of these studies was conducted by Cislighi et al. in 20/22. In 2022, Cislighi et al. collected data from 97 countries and conducted a cross-sectional analysis that included the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey. The results of the analysis showed that pro-equality percentages ranged from 97.7 percent in Iceland to 7.8 percent in Egypt (Cislighi et al., 2022). Some low- and middle-income countries, such as Yemen, Iraq, and Bahrain, have pro-equality cultural norms below 20 percent (Khan and Tidman, 2023). Obviously, women are not expected to be in the workforce or to hold leadership positions in these countries.

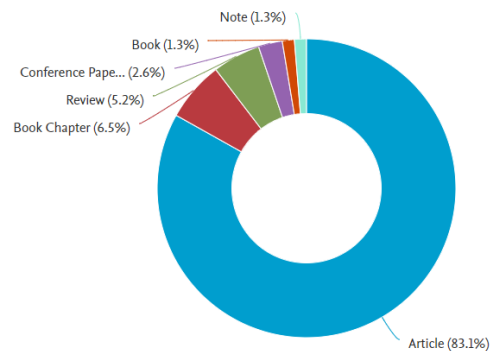
Germany remains Europe's economic engine, but has historically lagged in gender equality. But since 2005, Germany has made significant progress and is ranked relatively high on the European Gender Equality Index. In addition, Germany has recently adopted far-reaching

legislation in a number of key policy areas related to gender equality. This sweeping policymaking is said to have occurred during Angela Merkel's chancellorship (Ahrens, Ayoub and Lang, 2022). The fact that Germany, as a developed country, has been in the forefront of gender equality issues in recent years (especially after 2005) may be a reason for the low number of studies on the glass cliff. In fact, if we look at studies conducted by German researchers on this topic, we see that the publications were made in 2019 (Bechtoldt, Bannier and Rock) and 2023 (Reinwald, Zaia and Kunze).

**5. Distribution of Publications by Types**

The types of publications on the glass cliff were also analyzed in the study. Publications are classified under five titles: articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, and notes. As expected, the majority of the publications on the topic were articles in the Scopus database. The distribution of publications on 'glass cliff' in the Scopus database according to their type is given below.

**Graph 5.** Distribution of Publications by Types



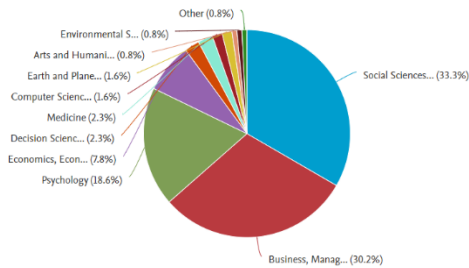
Scientific articles provide significant contributions to the body of knowledge on topics of interest and relevance to various groups of people and readers, including academic researchers, research practitioners, managers, policymakers, and society as a whole (Ortinou, 2011). Unlike other publications, articles are very important publications that can reach a wider audience and provide specific information on the topic. Therefore, it would be preferable to have a higher number of papers (83.1%) on the "glass cliff" than on other publications.

The fact that there are only 2 conference papers among the publications is an indication that the glass cliff issue is not much on the conference agenda. However, conferences are platforms where researchers from many countries meet and draw attention to issues in the field. Therefore, it is expected that the number of conference papers should at least equal or exceed the number of book chapters (5).

**6. Distribution of Publications by Subject Area**

As part of the study, it was also analyzed in which subject areas the publications were carried out. The distribution of the publications according to the subject areas is shown in the following.

**Graph 6.** Distribution of Publications by Subject Area



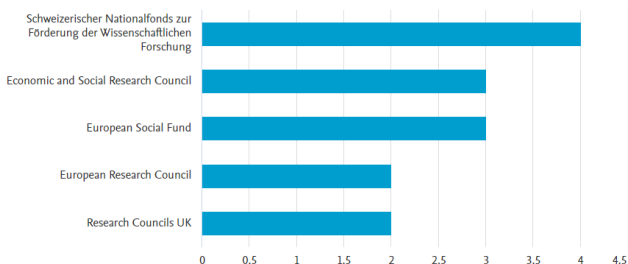
By distribution, most publications were in social sciences (43) and business, management and accounting (39). Both fields together represent the majority (63.5%). Since the glass cliff is a practice of gender discrimination and since this issue is generally dealt with in the social sciences, the largest number of publications (43) has been made in the field of social sciences. Similarly, since the glass cliff is a topic dealing with women's discrimination when appointed to senior positions in organizations, the second largest number of publications (39) were in the field of Business, Management and Accounting.

Psychology (18.6%) was the third most published field of study. Since gender discrimination has both psychological and cultural aspects, studies in this field may have ranked third. In fact, in their theory of role fit, Eagly and Karau (2002) argued that the perceived aptitude of men and women for leadership positions varies with cultural norms and the profile of the particular industry (ie, stereotypical "masculine" or "feminine" issues).

**7. Distribution of Publications by Funding Sponsor**

Finally, publications published in the Scopus database using the keyword "Glass Cliff" were analyzed regarding sponsoring institutions. In total, almost half of the publications were sponsored by 25 organizations sponsoring 33 publications. The graph below shows the list of organizations that sponsored 2 or more publications.

**Graph 7.** Distribution of Publications by Funding Sponsor



The countries of the top five sponsorship organizations, which had nearly half (16) of the sponsorships, were also examined. The top 5 sponsors' countries are listed below.

1. Swiss National Science Foundation (Switzerland)
2. Economic and Social Research Council (United Kingdom)
3. European Social Fund (European Union)
4. European Research Council (European Union)
5. Research Councils UK (United Kingdom)

In the analysis of the countries of the five sponsors, it can be seen that one of them is Switzerland, two of them are the United Kingdom and two of them are funds with support from the European Union. The reason for looking at the sponsorship of the publications is to reveal the countries and institutions that are interested in the subject and that support the studies on the subject. Looking at the list, we can see that developed countries, or unions such as the European Union, formed by developed countries, support research on the "glass cliff", a practice of gender inequalities, as can be seen from the number of publications on the topic. This is not a coincidence. Developed countries are aware of the negative consequences of women being underrepresented in business or not being employed in positions where they could use their talents due to gender discrimination. Indeed, there are studies showing that gender inequality affects real economic outcomes (Bertay, Dordevic and Sever, 2020, Braunstein, 2011, Khayria and Feki, 2015).

Therefore, all kinds of support is provided to reduce this inequality as much as possible in developed countries compared to developing or underdeveloped countries. In this study, it is a natural result that developed countries ranked first in terms of both number of publications and funding.

**V. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

This article was conducted to determine researchers' interest in the glass cliff as a gender discrimination practice and to draw researchers' attention to the glass cliff phenomenon, which is not fully understood. It is expected that this study will be a guide for researchers who do research on the glass cliff.

A total of 77 publications with the key word "glass cliff" were found in Scopus until August 2024, when the study was conducted. The number of publications is definitely insufficient. Although the first paper on the topic appeared in 1961, the second did not appear until 1973, twelve years later. At least one publication was regularly published each year between 2011 and 2024. This shows that the topic started to attract researchers' attention after 2011. Most publications were published in 2023 (16). As the research was carried out in August 2024, the data for the year 2024 are not exactly known, but it was found that a total of 9 publications had been made by August. The most prolific author, with 12 publications, is M.K. Ryan, who contributed significantly to the discovery of the topic. The country with the most

publications on the glass cliff is the United States (27).

Looking at the affiliations with the highest number of publications on the glass cliff, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen and the University of Exeter lead with 10 publications each. Social sciences (33.3 %) and business, management and accounting (30.2 %) were the fields in which the most research on the glass cliff was conducted. In third place was psychology (18.6%). The institution sponsoring the most studies on the subject was the Swiss National Science Foundation (4).

Analyzing the types of studies on the topic, it was found that the most common type of publication on glass cliffs were articles (64). Furthermore, there are very few conference papers (2). In the future, it is expected that researchers will present their studies on the glass cliff more frequently at conferences and thus draw attention to the glass cliff issue in these environments, where a larger number of scientists come together.

This study provides some insights that may be helpful in providing guidance to researchers who are planning to do work on the glass cliff. However, future studies should look at publications related to the Glass Cliff in WOS, another database widely used by international researchers, and compare Scopus and WOS. Furthermore, subsequent bibliometric studies may limit bibliometric analysis by examining only glass cliff articles in Scopus and WOS, excluding non-article documents like reviews, proceedings, book reviews, etc.

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