

RESEARCH ARTICLE



The Glass Cliff and Burnout: The Mediating Role of Self-Confidence Among Women in the Tunisian Public Sector

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between the glass cliff phenomenon, burnout, and self-confidence among female leaders in the Tunisian civil service. Using a quantitative methodology, we surveyed 66 female leaders who experienced glass cliff situations, employing validated scales for glass cliff experiences, burnout, and self-confidence. Data analysis, conducted using Hayes' PROCESS module and ANOVA, reveals a positive association between glass cliff experiences and burnout symptoms (total effect coefficient = 0.29, $p < 0.05$), with self-confidence partially mediating this relationship (indirect effect = -0.12). Glass cliff experiences directly decrease self-confidence (coefficient = -0.35), which in turn influences burnout (coefficient = -0.30). Job tenure moderates these relationships, with less experienced leaders reporting higher stress and burnout levels. This study contributes to understanding gender dynamics in leadership within Arab and Mediterranean public sectors, being among the first to empirically examine these variables in this cultural context. Our findings highlight the need for targeted support mechanisms, including mentoring programs and confidence-building initiatives, to promote the well-being and success of women leaders in the Tunisian public sector. Limitations include the relatively small sample size, potentially affecting generalizability. This research offers practical insights for policymakers and public service managers to address gender-specific leadership challenges while extending a theoretical understanding of the glass cliff phenomenon in diverse cultural settings.

Keywords: glass cliff, burnout, self-confidence, women leadership, Tunisian public sector, gender equality

1. Introduction

Tunisia has made significant progress in gender equality in recent years, with a notable increase in the number of women reaching leadership positions in various sectors, including the civil service. According to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group [1], the feminization rate in the civil service is close to 37%. The feminization index, "percentage of women in functional roles compared to the total number of women in the workforce," is around 40%.

However, despite these advances, women continue to face unique challenges in their career paths. Two phenomena in particular deserve special attention: the glass ceiling, which limits women's rise to the highest levels, and the glass cliff, which describes the tendency to appoint women to leadership positions in crises or high-risk situations.

Although the concept of the "glass ceiling" has been extensively studied both internationally [2–4] and in the Tunisian context [5, 6], the phenomenon of the "glass cliff" and its implications for women leaders' psychological well-being remains relatively unexplored, particularly within the specific context of the Tunisian civil service. This research is essential for understanding the unique

challenges faced by women leaders in the Tunisian public sector and aims to inform policies promoting gender equality.

This research gap is all the more striking given that women in these precarious positions are likely to face an increased risk of burnout and the psychological well-being of women leaders [7–9]. Indeed, these high-risk roles, often associated with increased scrutiny and expectations, expose women leaders to increased stress and uncertainty, creating fertile ground for burnout. As a result, the psychological well-being of women in these situations is disproportionately affected, directly linking the challenges of gender inequality to the onset of burnout.

The cultural and organizational context of the Tunisian civil service presents particularities that deserve to be examined in depth. Indeed, the challenges faced by women in leadership positions in Tunisia reflect a broader global pattern but are uniquely shaped by the local cultural and societal landscape. Beyond the structural barriers, such as limited access to senior management roles, women leaders often grapple with the dual expectations of balancing professional and personal responsibilities. This dynamic not only reinforces gender stereotypes but also exacerbates the difficulty for women to break through the so-called "glass ceiling." Moreover, the intersection of societal norms, organizational practices, and family obligations creates a scenario where even legislative advances in gender equality are insufficient to dismantle these barriers entirely. The persistence of such obstacles suggests that achieving true gender parity in leadership requires addressing

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both the visible and invisible challenges that women continue to face. In examining the situation of women in the public service in Tunisia, this research contributes to a better understanding of the universal challenges related to women's representation in leadership, offering perspectives that could apply to other contexts in the Arab world and beyond. Addressing these issues demands a comprehensive approach that goes beyond policy reforms and delves into changing the cultural and societal perceptions of leadership and gender roles. The main objective of this study is therefore to examine the complex relationship between the experience of the "glass cliff" and burnout among women in management positions in the Tunisian civil service. More specifically, we seek to understand the potential mediating role of self-confidence in this relationship. Recent studies have suggested that self-confidence can play a crucial role in managing occupational stress and resilience in the face of organizational challenges [10–12], but its specific impact in the context of the "Glass Cliff" in Tunisia has not been sufficiently explored. The results of this study could not only contribute to academic research but also provide concrete recommendations for policymakers to support women leaders and improve gender equality in the public sector.

To address this issue, our study adopts a quantitative methodological approach, based on questionnaires administered to a sample of 66 women leaders who experienced a glass cliff situation in the Tunisian civil service. This approach will allow us to capture both general trends and nuanced individual experiences. This study aims to contribute significantly to the literature on women's leadership in Arab and Mediterranean contexts while providing practical insights to promote gender equality and the well-being of women leaders in the Tunisian civil service. By exploring the mediating role of self-confidence, we also hope to identify potential strategies to strengthen women's resilience and professional success in the face of glass cliff challenges.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows: Section 2 presents an in-depth literature review on the key concepts of the glass cliff, burnout, and self-confidence, allowing for the formulation of the hypotheses to be tested. Section 3 details the research methodology, including the study design, data collection instruments, and analysis methods. The third part will present the analytical results; Section 4 is allocated to the presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, we conclude by proposing practical recommendations for policymakers and public service managers, as well as avenues for future research in this area.

2. Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

In this study, we adopted an exploratory approach to provide a comprehensive overview of the glass cliff phenomenon, burnout, and self-confidence in the context of women's leadership. We utilized Google Scholar and other scholarly databases to identify relevant and recent articles published between 2000 and 2024. Our search keywords included "glass cliff," "burnout," "women's leadership," "self-confidence," and "public sector." The inclusion criteria focused on articles and empirical studies, with particular attention given to research conducted in contexts similar to Tunisia or other developing countries. This approach allowed us to build a solid foundation for our study, reflecting the current state of knowledge on the subject.

2.1. The glass cliff phenomenon

The concept of the "glass cliff" was introduced by Ryan and Haslam [13] to describe the tendency to appoint women to

leadership positions during times of crisis or organizational difficulties, thereby exposing them to a higher risk of failure. While this phenomenon is related to workplace gender inequalities, it differs from the "glass ceiling" concept [14], which describes invisible barriers preventing women and minorities from accessing leadership positions, despite their qualifications. The "glass cliff" specifically emerges in crisis situations, whereas the glass ceiling represents a more general and systemic limitation.

Several factors contribute to the glass cliff phenomenon. Gender stereotypes play a fundamental role, with traditionally feminine traits such as empathy and communication being perceived as more valuable during crises [15]. These perceptions are supported by research showing that empathy is crucial for group survival and success [16], while strong communication skills are particularly vital during institutional changes or crises [17]. Beyond stereotypes, organizational dynamics also play a role. Robinson et al. [18] suggest that appointing women to precarious positions often serves as "symbolic change," allowing organizations to project a progressive image without implementing substantial structural changes.

Empirical evidence has consistently validated the existence of the glass cliff phenomenon across various sectors. In the corporate world, Cook and Glass [19] demonstrated that women are more likely to be appointed as CEOs of financially distressed companies. Bruckmüller and Branscombe's [20] experimental research confirmed that women are preferentially selected for leadership roles during organizational crises, particularly following perceived leadership failures. Similar patterns emerge in the public sector, where Smith [21] observed that women are frequently promoted during restructuring periods or crises, especially in lower-ranking or elected positions. Recent research by Wheeler and Govindasamy [22] suggests that global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can intensify the glass cliff phenomenon, particularly affecting women in medical leadership roles.

2.2. Burnout and occupational stress

In the context of the "glass cliff," burnout, defined by Maslach et al. [23], is a psychological syndrome that causes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal fulfillment. Indeed, the pressures inherent in leadership positions in times of crisis can accentuate emotional exhaustion, which manifests itself in a feeling of overload and depletion of emotional resources [24, 25]. Thus, a cynical detachment from work and colleagues may appear as a way to defend against high expectations and potential criticism in these "glass cliff" positions. Furthermore, the feeling of lack of efficacy and competence may be particularly pronounced in contexts where women leaders are faced with significant organizational challenges with limited resources [26].

An explanation could be found in the role incongruity theory, which was developed by Eagly and Karau [27], who argue that women leaders are often perceived negatively, as leadership is generally associated with masculine characteristics. This perspective is supported by a recent study conducted by Jones and Pal [28], which examines the social role and role congruity influences on the perceived value of women's leadership at Southwestern research universities. The findings indicate that societal expectations continue to favor male leadership, further reinforcing the biases against women in leadership positions.

Incongruity can generate internal and external conflicts, increasing the risk of burnout. Studies conducted recently also emphasize the negative consequences, such as exhaustion, that

these differences may have. The study conducted by Dwivedi et al. [29] revealed that female leaders often face conflicting cultural expectations, which lead to unwarranted scrutiny and stress even after being promoted to high positions. Burnout may occur as a result of this.

In addition, according to Morgenroth et al. [30], women leaders in the public sector face additional challenges, such as the pressure to demonstrate their competence and manage the balance between their work and personal lives. The elements mentioned above, as well as the pressure inherent in glass cliff situations, can increase the risk of burnout. In the same vein, a recent study by Yang et al. [31] highlights the psychological impacts of the glass cliff phenomenon on women in the public sector. The authors find that women are often hired as city managers when budgets are in decline, which exposes them to precarious working conditions. This situation can lead to intense emotional stress, as these women are often perceived as responsible for organizational failures, even when these do not depend on their performance. Furthermore, the study reveals that when the financial situation does not improve after their appointment, women are more likely to leave their position compared to their male counterparts, which highlights the additional challenges they face in their careers.

Papadakis et al. [32] point out that women leaders can experience stress and burnout due to gender stereotypes and cultural expectations. These, along with institutional barriers such as the “glass ceiling,” create a climate in which women often have to work harder to demonstrate their value, which can have a detrimental effect on their well-being and ability to advance in their careers. The study highlights how crucial it is to help women develop their self-confidence so that they can overcome these barriers and take on leadership positions.

Considering these theoretical elements and empirical results, we propose the following hypothesis:

H₁: The experience of the glass cliff is positively associated with the level of burnout in women leaders.

2.3. Self-confidence as a potential mediator

Self-confidence, defined by Bandura [33] as the belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations, can play a crucial role in managing work stress and preventing burnout. In the context of the “glass cliff,” self-confidence becomes particularly important as it can help women navigate the heightened challenges and expectations associated with leadership roles during crises. According to Reinwald et al. [34], self-confidence plays a pivotal role in leadership, particularly in the context of the glass cliff phenomenon. The study suggests that women appointed to precarious leadership positions often need to exhibit exceptional confidence to manage these challenging roles effectively. The authors link this to signaling theory, proposing that the appointment of women during organizational crises serves as a symbolic signal of change, where their confidence aligns with the organization’s efforts to rebuild trust among stakeholders. This highlights the intersection between perceptions of self-confidence and leadership roles in glass cliff scenarios. Indeed, self-confidence would be a crucial element in stimulating an individual’s self and their ability to perform the behaviors necessary to achieve specific results. This belief plays a crucial role in the way people think, feel, and act. According to the same

author, self-efficacy influences various aspects of life, including motivation, emotional well-being, and resilience. High self-efficacy is associated with greater persistence in the face of challenges and a higher probability of achieving goals.

According to Darouei and Pluut [35], in the specific context of female leadership, self-confidence can be beneficial for women in order to overcome challenges related to gender stereotypes and to successfully navigate “glass cliff” situations. Self-confidence would therefore be a motivating factor for women who accept risky leadership positions. The results of the study indicate that some women are motivated by the desire to take on challenges and prove their abilities, which is often linked to their self-confidence. Other recent research has highlighted the importance of self-confidence in stressful professional environments. According to Liu et al. [36], self-confidence plays a protective role against the negative consequences of professional stress, which reduces the risk of burnout. Similarly, Pinar et al. [37] found a significant positive correlation between self-confidence and resilience. Women who feel more confident in their abilities are also more resilient in the face of professional challenges.

The safeguarding role of self-confidence is particularly pertinent in the Tunisian cultural milieu, where societal expectations and gender stereotypes may exacerbate the pressures women encounter in leadership roles. Understanding how self-confidence interacts with the cultural and organizational factors in Tunisia is crucial, as these elements can shape women’s experiences and their approach to leadership during challenging times. Indeed, in Tunisian society, the idea of gender “complementarity,” rather than equality, remains widespread, which might put additional pressure on women in leadership roles [38]. Due to this cultural context, women leaders in Tunisia frequently bear a “double burden” of handling their customary household responsibilities in addition to their professional obligations, which may increase stress levels. Moreover, in the Tunisian business environment, women leaders may encounter the “think manager-think male” phenomenon, where leadership traits are often associated with masculine characteristics. This can lead to increased scrutiny and higher performance expectations for women in leadership roles, making self-confidence even more critical for navigating these challenges. In this context, self-confidence becomes not just a personal attribute but a necessary tool for overcoming societal barriers and organizational biases.

Based on these theoretical considerations, we propose the following hypotheses:

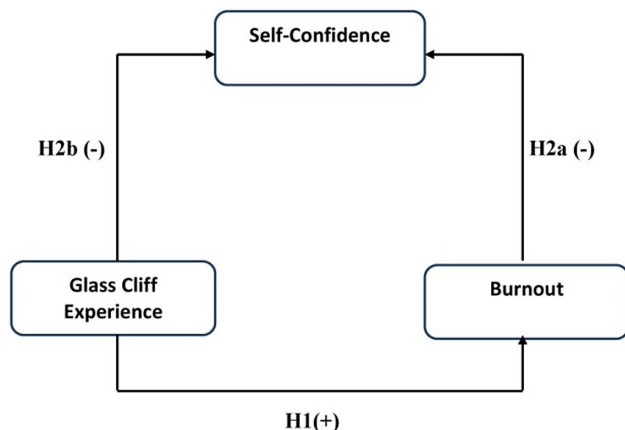
H_{2a}: Self-confidence is negatively associated with the level of burnout among women leaders.

H_{2b}: Self-confidence plays a mediating role in the relationship between the experience of the “glass cliff” and the level of burnout among women leaders.

These hypotheses are formulated based on the theoretical framework established above, highlighting the critical role that self-confidence plays in mitigating burnout and supporting women leaders in crisis situations. Thus, fostering self-confidence among women leaders not only enhances their resilience but also equips them to handle the complexities of “glass cliff” situations more effectively.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this research.

Figure 1
Conceptual framework



3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study follows a structured quantitative research design, chosen to facilitate the measurement and analysis of relationships between the variables under study. This design ensures objectivity and allows for statistical analysis of the collected data, which is appropriate given the research objectives. A quantitative approach was selected for its ability to quantify the relationships between the glass cliff phenomenon, burnout, and self-confidence, allowing for statistical comparisons. This approach aligns with the study's goal of exploring these constructs in a large, representative sample of women in leadership roles in Tunisia.

3.2. Sampling and data collection

Data collection took place between July and December 2023. Convenience sampling was used to recruit female participants in management positions in various sectors of the Tunisian civil service. Of the 263 questionnaires distributed, 71 were completed in full, while 5 were deemed unusable, resulting in an effective response rate of 25%. This response rate, although relatively low, remains within the acceptable range for organizational surveys [39].

3.3. Measurement instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed based on scales validated in existing literature. The questionnaire includes the following sections:

- 1) Demographics: including current position, tenure, and other relevant sociodemographic characteristics.
- 2) Glass Cliff Experience: adapted from the scale developed by Ryan and Haslam [13], this section assesses whether respondents were promoted during a crisis and the time after a significant crisis occurred.
- 3) Job Stress and Burnout: Using an adapted version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, this section measures stress levels and symptoms associated with burnout on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = always).
- 4) Self-Confidence: Based on Weinman's [40] general self-efficacy scale, this section assesses respondents' self-confidence and the impact of stress on it, also on a 5-point Likert scale.

The content validity of the instrument was ensured by an expert review and a pretest with a small sample of women leaders ($n = 5$) not included in the final study.

4. Results and Discussion

The reliability analysis of the scales used in this study was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results, presented in Table 1, indicate good internal consistency for all measures. The "Glass Cliff" scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$), while the Burnout scale exhibited the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.89$). The self-confidence scale also showed strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.86$). These values, which exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, attest to the robustness and validity of the measurement instruments employed in this research. This high reliability enhances confidence in the obtained results and supports the validity of subsequent analyses.

Table 1
Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha)

| Scale | Cronbach's alpha |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Glass Cliff | 0.83 |
| Burnout | 0.89 |
| Self-Confidence | 0.86 |

4.1. Descriptive analysis

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents as well as their experiences related to the glass cliff phenomenon. Among the elements considered crises by the participants, we mainly observe significant upheavals that occurred after the 2011 Revolution in Tunisia. These crises include the persistent political instability, frequent strikes, and union demands that marked the post-revolutionary period. These events contributed to a climate of volatility and uncertainty in the civil service, directly impacting women's promotions and leadership roles. By examining the demographic characteristics and the experience of the "glass cliff" of the respondents, this table highlights how these contextual factors may have influenced the challenges faced by women in management positions in this tumultuous context.

4.2. Testing hypotheses

To evaluate the hypotheses of this study regarding the mediating effect of self-confidence on the glass cliff experience-burnout relationship, the "glass cliff" phenomenon, we used Hayes' PROCESS module, adapted to analyze the mediating effect. This method is particularly suitable for small samples, as it allows testing the relationships between variables while providing confidence intervals for indirect effects, which is crucial for the robustness of conclusions drawn from limited data. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27.0 and the PROCESS macro.

Table 3 shows that the experience of the glass cliff is positively associated with burnout symptoms, confirming hypothesis H1. The positive coefficient of 0.29 for the total effect of glass cliff on burnout supports this hypothesis, illustrating how these risky positions can exacerbate stress and burnout symptoms. However, it is important

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of respondents

| Variable | Mean | Std. dev. | Min | Max | N (%) |
|--|------------|-----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Age | 47.2 years | 6.1 years | 35 years | 59 years | – |
| Tenure in the Company | 12.3 years | 5.4 years | 6 years | 23 years | – |
| Current Position | | | | | |
| Intermediate Manager | – | – | – | – | 26 (39.4%) |
| Senior Executive | – | – | – | – | 24 (36.6%) |
| Other (specify) | – | – | – | – | 16 (24.4%) |
| Promotion after Crisis | | | | | |
| Yes | – | – | – | – | 49 (74.2%) |
| No | – | – | – | – | 17 (25.8%) |
| Time after Significant Crisis (for those who answered “yes”) | | | | | |
| Less than 3 months | – | – | – | – | 17 (34.6%) |
| 3–6 months | – | – | – | – | 22 (44.9%) |
| More than 6 months | – | – | – | – | 10 (20.4%) |
| Stress Level | 3.6 | 0.6 | 2 | 5 | – |
| Burnout Symptoms | 3.0 | 0.7 | 2 | 4 | – |
| Self-Confidence | 2.9 | 0.5 | 2 | 4 | – |
| Impact of Stress on Self-Confidence | 2.75 | 0.65 | 1 | 4 | – |

Table 3
Effects of the “glass cliff” on burnout and self-confidence, including direct and indirect effects

| Effect | Coefficient | Standard error (SE) | Confidence interval (CI) [95%] |
|---|-------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Total Effect of the “Glass Cliff” on Burnout | 0.29 | 0.09 | [–0.47, –0.11] |
| Direct Effect of the “Glass Cliff” on Self-Confidence | –0.35 | 0.09 | [–0.53, –0.17] |
| Direct Effect of Self-Confidence on Burnout | –0.30 | 0.11 | [–0.51, –0.09] |
| Indirect Effect of the “Glass Cliff” on Burnout via Self-Confidence | –0.12 | 0.06 | [–0.24, –0.01] |

to note that this coefficient, while statistically significant, does not indicate an extremely strong relationship. In line with the work stress model, the results reveal that stressful work situations, such as those created by the glass cliff, increase the risk of burnout, especially when individuals lack personal resources such as self-confidence. This finding aligns with the meta-analysis conducted by Purvanova and Muros [41], who noted that various contextual factors, such as occupational roles, work environments, and societal expectations, significantly influence burnout experiences. According to the same authors, women often face additional stressors, such as balancing work and family responsibilities, which can exacerbate feelings of burnout. Our results are also in agreement with those of Ryan et al. [42] and Schulz’s [11] observations on the pressures during crises. They remain, however, in conflict with Eagly and Carli’s [43] conclusions, which suggest that female leadership styles might mitigate this stress.

Moreover, results show that the “glass cliff” experience has a direct effect on decreasing self-confidence (coefficient of –0.35), and this decrease in self-confidence is associated with an increase in burnout symptoms (coefficient of –0.30). The mediation analysis also reveals that self-confidence plays a significant role in this relationship: the “glass cliff” has an indirect effect on burnout symptoms through self-confidence, with an indirect effect of –0.12 (H2b). This result is supported by a confidence interval that does not contain zero, confirming the robustness of this mediating

effect. While these findings are promising, it is important to interpret them with caution due to the moderate correlation coefficients.

Bandura’s self-efficacy theory [33], which emphasizes the importance of self-confidence in managing challenges and stress, offers a key explanation for the decrease in burnout symptoms. Thus, self-confidence partially mediates the relationship between the “glass cliff” and burnout, indicating that the impact of the “glass cliff” on burnout is partly due to its influence on self-confidence. This helps to better understand how psychological dynamics related to the “glass cliff” can exacerbate burnout symptoms.

The results of this study provide significant insight into the mechanisms underlying the glass cliff phenomenon and its impact on burnout, considering self-confidence as a mediating factor. According to the glass cliff theory, individuals facing high-risk leadership situations are more likely to experience failures and increased pressures, which translates into increased burnout symptoms. The negative coefficient of –0.35 for the direct effect of glass cliffs on self-confidence indicates that glass cliff situations reduce individuals’ self-confidence, which in turn worsens burnout symptoms. This decrease in self-confidence, as shown by the direct effect of –0.30 on burnout, is crucial to understanding why individuals in glass cliff situations are more vulnerable to burnout. The mediating role of self-confidence, with an indirect effect of –0.12, indicates that although self-confidence

cannot completely eliminate the impact of a glass cliff, it plays an important role in mitigating this effect. In other words, building self-confidence could help mitigate the negative impact of the glass cliff on burnout, providing an avenue for interventions to support individuals facing these challenges.

Thus, these findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving self-confidence could be effective in reducing burnout in individuals facing glass cliff situations. This reinforces the importance of supporting individuals in high-risk work environments to minimize the negative effects on their psychological well-being. However, it must be acknowledged that recent research has, for instance, shown that women sometimes perceive “glass cliff” situations as opportunities for personal and professional growth, rather than as purely negative experiences. Although these women have all occupied risky leadership positions at some point in their careers, their perception of such situations varies depending on cultural and individual factors [44].

4.3. Additional analysis

To further analyze the data, an ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of tenure in the company on stress, burnout, and self-confidence, and the impact of stress on self-confidence. The tenure groups considered were: less than 5 years, 5–10 years, and more than 10 years. The ANOVA analysis, presented in Table 3, indicates that women with less tenure in their positions report significantly higher levels of stress and burnout compared to those with more tenure. In contrast, respondents with longer tenure show less pronounced levels of stress and burnout. Self-confidence is also lower among women with less tenure compared to those with more tenure. The impact of stress on self-confidence is more pronounced among women with less tenure compared to their more experienced counterparts.

These results, presented in Table 4, confirm that tenure moderates the relationship between “glass cliff” experience and stress and burnout variables. Newly promoted women, especially those with less tenure, seem to face greater challenges related to legitimacy and acceptance in their roles, leading to higher levels of stress and burnout. This trend aligns with Eagly and Karau [27] role incongruity theory, suggesting that women with less tenure encounter more significant obstacles to their integration and recognition of authority. While the results provide valuable insights, the small sample size necessitates caution in interpretation and calls for further research to confirm these trends.

This study contributes significantly to both theoretical and practical domains. From a theoretical perspective, our research expands the existing literature by extending the glass cliff theory to the specific context of the Tunisian public sector, thereby offering a novel perspective on this phenomenon in an understudied cultural context. Moreover, the incorporation of self-confidence as a mediating factor in the relationship between glass cliffs and burnout elucidates the psychological mechanisms involved. Additionally, our study demonstrates the applicability of

the role incongruity theory in comprehending seniority-related disparities in the experiences of women leaders. From a practical standpoint, our findings suggest several approaches for supporting women leaders, including the implementation of targeted mentoring programs to enhance self-confidence and resilience, the development of leadership training addressing the specific challenges inherent in glass cliff situations, and the establishment of organizational policies promoting equity in leadership opportunities and support for women leaders.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study attempted to explore the complex dynamics between the phenomenon of the glass cliff, burnout, and the mediating role of self-confidence among women in senior management in the Tunisian public sector. However, it is important to clearly articulate the unique contributions of this research to the existing literature. Our results confirm the positive association between the glass cliff and burnout, highlighting the increased stress and burnout faced by women in high-risk leadership positions. Notably, self-confidence plays a crucial mediating role in this relationship. Higher levels of self-confidence can mitigate the negative effects of the glass cliff, emphasizing the essential role of personal resilience in managing stress at work.

Furthermore, tenure moderates this dynamic, with women with less experience displaying higher levels of stress and burnout, exacerbated by lower self-confidence. This interaction suggests that the lower self-confidence of less experienced women intensifies the negative impact of the glass cliff.

Building on the work of Zheng et al. [45], which highlights the positive impact of leader self-confidence on employee performance, it becomes evident that fostering self-confidence in women leaders can improve their ability to navigate challenging leadership positions. The study of Dwivedi et al. [46] reinforces this idea by advocating for comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that address not only recruitment but also retention and promotion practices to create a supportive environment for women.

In light of these findings, it is imperative that organizations implement targeted support mechanisms for women leaders. Developing mentoring programs, confidence training, and equitable organizational policies are essential to fostering a supportive work environment. Additionally, the study acknowledges certain limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results, such as the relatively small sample size, the cross-sectional design, and the use of convenience sampling, which limit the generalizability and causality of the findings.

Future research should explore longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to deepen the understanding of the glass cliff and burnout, as well as other influential factors. This study calls for a thorough review of organizational practices and public policies to strengthen gender equality and well-being at work, thus contributing to a more efficient and equitable administration.

Table 4
ANOVA results of tenure on stress, burnout, and self-confidence

| Tenure | Stress level | Burnout symptoms | Self-confidence | Impact of stress on self-confidence |
|--------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Less than 6 years | 4.2 (0.5) | 3.5 (0.6) | 2.7 (0.5) | 3.1 (0.6) |
| 6 to 12 years | 3.0 (0.4) | 2.8 (0.5) | 3.2 (0.4) | 2.8 (0.5) |
| More than 12 years | 2.8 (0.4) | 2.3 (0.5) | 3.5 (0.4) | 2.4 (0.5) |

Ethical Statement

This study does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by the author.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest to this work.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support this work are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Author Contribution Statement

Zyed Achour: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration.

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