

USA: Women are stopped from climbing the corporate ladder because of this worrying trend

By Ellen Wulforth

World Economic Forum (21.10.2019) – <https://bit.ly/35SwEe8> – Enthusiasm for bringing more women into corporate boardrooms is dimming, but the biggest obstacle to women moving up in the corporate world is the very first step to manager, according to newly released research.

The so-called “broken rung” – wherein women are less likely to make a successful step up into management – has meant that just 72 women attain their first management job for every 100 men making the same move, a study released on Tuesday found.

The study on women in corporate America conducted by Lean In, a non-profit group that promotes gender equality, and McKinsey & Co. management consultants, blamed that broken rung for men holding almost two-thirds of manager-level positions.

Conventional wisdom has focused on the glass ceiling, where women can rise only so far in the corporate world, said Rachel Thomas, chief executive of Lean In, who contends that the broken rung is much more significant.

“Where women are most disadvantaged is at that critical step up to manager,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a telephone interview.

“Some senior women are putting cracks in that glass ceiling, but we don’t have enough women coming up behind them.”

Other research shows fewer company directors are concerned with gender diversity.

The importance of diversity fell to its lowest point in five years after a steady climb since 2015, said a survey released last week by business consultants PwC of more than 700 directors on U.S. company boards, 80 percent of whom were men.

Nearly two-thirds said investors actually focus too much on board gender diversity, up from about one-third a year ago.

“Board diversity, and especially gender diversity, have been a hot topic for investors for years and many boards have made strides,” said Paula Loop, leader of PwC’s governance insights center.

“But they are ready to change the subject,” she noted.

The number of women on publicly traded companies’ boards has

increased in five years to about one in four from one in five, PwC said.

But fixing the broken rung so that equal numbers of men and women take the first step into management would add one million women in five years to U.S. corporate jobs, said Alexis Krivkovich, a senior managing partner at McKinsey.

“If companies swing their attention to fixing the broken rung, the impact is massive,” Krivkovich said.

The research collected information from 329 organizations employing 13 million people.

It suggested companies set targets for moving women into first-level management, do more active recruiting and employ unconscious bias training for staff making hiring and promotion decisions.