

Roles, challenges, and resiliency during the COVID-19 pandemic: a case of women political leaders in the Philippines

Mark E. Patalinghug^{1*}, Ann Mariel P. Majorenos², Rezin I. Tigley³

^{1,2,3}*School of Criminal Justice, J.H. Cerilles State College-Dumingag Campus, Philippines*

Abstract

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been substantial scholarly interest in the roles of women in leadership positions. This multiple-case study explores the experiences of female political leaders during the pandemic, focusing on their roles, challenges, and resilience. The study encompasses ten women political leaders actively involved in pandemic-related activities in Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. The findings indicate that these women embodied exceptional compassion and courage in their efforts to curb the virus's spread within their communities. The research underscores that the attributes traditionally associated with femininity, such as empathy and nurturing, were beneficial during the pandemic. Rather than posing a challenge, femininity complemented their leadership roles, with the main obstacles being the risk of contracting COVID-19 and public skepticism regarding the pandemic's seriousness. The study highlights that these female leaders adeptly managed the pandemic's challenges through effective cooperation and collaboration with stakeholders, underpinned by a commitment to altruism. This research contributes to the field by demonstrating that the qualities associated with female leadership can enhance crisis management. It informs the international debate on gender and leadership, suggesting that women's distinctive attributes may be particularly advantageous in navigating global health emergencies. By emphasizing these contributions, the study advocates for a broader recognition of the value of female leadership in crisis situations and encourages further examination of gender dynamics in leadership roles globally.

Keywords: *women leaders; role of women; resiliency of women; women leaders*

*)corresponding author

E-mail : mark.patalinghug@jhsc.edu.ph

Introduction

Women are frequently ignored by those in power, who view them solely through the lens of a vulnerable group and do not provide them with the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process or related considerations. While the association between female leaders and their success in dealing with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has gotten a lot of attention since the beginning of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic (Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2021) However, politics continues to have the highest gender disparity of any industry. Regardless of making up 36% of local deliberative bodies and 26.1% of national parliaments in 2022, women are still marginalized and represented unfairly at all levels of governance around the world. Just 8.3% of government heads and 7.2% of state heads are women (IDEA, 2022). The global repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic are inextricably linked to the kinds of problems that feminist analysts have been researching and examining for a very long time.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has put inequalities between men and women under a microscope and shown that there are cracks in many areas. By doing this, one thing is made very clear: the gender roles, expectations, and stereotypes that lead to these differences are not sustainable and can cause a lot of harm, especially during times of crisis. One of these stereotypes was presented by Lovenduski (2005) because men have historically held the majority of political and leadership positions. This has resulted in the conception of what constitutes a politician or a political leader being traditionally shaped by characteristics that are typically associated with being masculine. Even though women are often underrepresented at the highest levels of decision-making in fields that are directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, they are at the forefront of successful and inclusive COVID-19 response operations in many countries around the world (Dent, 2022). Additionally, a wider variety of social welfare services, such as those for people with mental health issues, substance abuse, and domestic violence, were described by women leaders in their plans to address the COVID-19 pandemic (Dada et al., 2021). Men and women in low-resource communities shared similar accounts of the kinds of social welfare and financial aid that would be most helpful to their communities.

In order to effectively address COVID-19, it is essential to increase the number of women who participate in and contribute to decision-making regarding governance, accountability, and resource allocation. The response of national leaders to the COVID-19 pandemic presents a one-of-a-kind opportunity for global research in the management of national crises, one in which a variety of issues, including the efficiency of leadership, can be analyzed in comparison across nations. There haven't been a lot of studies done on how the gender of a leader affects how they handle a national crisis, in part because there aren't that many female leaders (Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2021). Internationally, women are making significant strides in leading the response to and management of COVID-19. Furthermore, it is essential to make certain that the opinions and requirements of vulnerable women are taken into account in every COVID-19 intervention (United Nations, 2020). The impressive response of countries led by women to the COVID-19 epidemic has been a major topic of study in the international response to the pandemic. Moreover, Garikipati and Kambhampati (2021) disclosed that when confronted with the possibility of fatalities, female leaders acted more swiftly and decisively, instituting lockdown procedures earlier than their male counterparts in comparable circumstances. In addition, although there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that countries led by women have lower reported fatality rates, Windsor et al. (2020) found that these differences are not statistically significant. Even though it seems like a leader's gender does matter, they also say that countries led by women will do better after the pandemic because their cultures have built-in incentives for policymaking based on gender.

Therefore, the scenario that was described above offers a new angle for the study of women's roles in leadership during the time of COVID-19 pandemic that is currently taking place. Fisher and Ryan (2021) presented a guide for future research; academics will need to determine what must be done to level the playing field for men and women. Additionally, they must pay greater attention to gendered groups and examine their research from an intersectional perspective. In light of this, the purpose of this study was to investigate the roles that women political leaders played throughout the pandemic as well as the resilience they showed despite the challenges they faced.

The year 2020 has been set aside to assess the progress made toward women's and girls' empowerment and gender parity (United Nations, 2020). During COVID-19, there was a surge of interest in the theme of women in political roles and in the leadership of countries, which prompted new lines of research (Freizer et al., 2020). However, in light of this, it is essential to determine trends in policy responses, which may differ according to the gender composition of the government, to understand leadership styles concerning the pandemic and to determine prospective research pathways. According to research on gender differences, men and women approach leadership in various ways. Women may adopt a more democratic and transformative tack than their male counterparts, and they may also benefit from other characteristics that have traditionally been associated with them, such as a longer mid-career stay (Arar & Oplatka, 2015; Eagly et al., 2003; Meagher et al., 2020). Moreover, there is considerable evidence in this literature indicating women, including those in positions of leadership, are more risk-averse than men (Charness & Gneezy, 2012; Nelson, 2015).

It was essential to have both women's representation and women's leadership in executive posts, parliaments, and public administration to successfully implement feminist advocacy into policy action (UN Women, 2022). Numerous sources that discuss the great accomplishments of female leaders contend that they were quick to impose restrictions on citizens' freedom of movement (New York Times, 2020). Women leaders are just better at conveying the message about how dangerous the virus is and how important it is for people to follow pandemic protocols (Henly & Roy, 2020). There is no doubt that female leaders have responded better to the spread of COVID-19 than their male political leaders. When compared to the more subtle yet innovative and resolute feminine interpretations of power, the macho strongman model of authority is falling short (Dent, 2020). In times of crisis, women have shown their strength and resilience, as shown by the pandemic. According to several studies, female political leaders appear to have handled the epidemic in a distinct and often superior manner compared to their male counterparts (Orme, 2021). To gain a deeper understanding of women's leadership Ngunjiri (2016) suggests that studies on women's leadership should be done in specific local contexts to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. This is because the experiences and challenges faced by women leaders can vary depending on the cultural, political, and economic environment in which they operate. By studying women leaders in specific local contexts, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence their leadership styles and the barriers they face. Additionally, this approach allows researchers to identify potential solutions that are tailored to the specific context rather than relying on generalizations that may not be applicable in all situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the Philippines, exacerbating existing social and economic vulnerabilities, particularly among women. The country has faced one of the strictest lockdowns globally, which has led to significant disruptions in daily life, economic activities, and public health systems. By October 2020, the Philippines reported approximately 380,000 COVID-19 cases with a mortality rate of 1.9%, highlighting the severe toll of the pandemic on the population (Brackstone et al., 2022). The pandemic's effects were not uniform; women, especially, experienced heightened psychological distress, with studies indicating that female gender was a direct risk factor for developing stress-related symptoms during this crisis (Periyakoil et al., 2023).

Moreover, the pandemic has highlighted the systemic barriers that women face in political leadership. Despite their effectiveness, women remain underrepresented in

high-level political positions, which can limit their influence in crisis management (Kalbarczyk et al., 2022; Mendoza et al., 2021). The COVID-19 situation has underscored the need for greater representation of women in leadership roles, as their experiences and perspectives are crucial for developing comprehensive and effective public health strategies (Lavado et al., 2022; Yamada et al., 2021). As the Philippines continues to recover from the pandemic, the lessons learned regarding women's leadership could inform future policies aimed at promoting gender equity in political representation and decision-making processes.

Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the perspectives and actions of women leaders roles played during the COVID-19 pandemic to better understand those roles. This would also investigate the advantages of being a female leader in addition to the difficulties associated with addressing the pandemic. It also investigates the resilience of women in positions of leadership. Using a qualitative approach, this study seeks to understand and characterize the core elements of human experience as reported by research participants (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, a case study is used to conduct this qualitative research. The purpose of a case study is to learn more about the collective experience of a group by digging deep into one specific instance that stands in for the whole (Stake, 1995). Using in-depth interviews and observations to conclude people's thoughts, feelings, and actions is at the heart of qualitative research, as defined by Taylor et al. (2015). In addition, a case study is an appropriate method because it permits in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of critical topics in their natural environments (Crowe et al., 2015). Moreso, the information obtained from a case study is utilized to completely and in-depth depict a real-life scenario (Yin, 2012).

This qualitative multiple-case study was carried out in the Philippine province of Zamboanga del Sur, specifically in the Municipality of Dumingag. The most significant sources of information are elected women political leaders as local executives (1), members of local elected officials (2), and community/barangay elected leaders (7), totaling 10 participants and 3 cases. These identified participants were chosen since they were engaged in the implementation of the policies and Covid-19 protocols at different functions and capacities. These three cases being explored conform to the guide of Creswell (2014) for a multiple-case study approach. The participants were chosen using a purposive sampling technique with the inclusion criteria of a. the participants must have served at least 3 years before the COVID-19 pandemic; b. they must have been the head of the implementation of COVID-19 protocols; and c. they must be women political leaders in their respective communities. This guarantees that the participants can effectively answer the study's questions, improve the quality of the research, and eliminate flawed selection procedures (Martnez-Mesa et al., 2016). Interviews were guided by a semi-structured set of questions that gave us leeway to ask follow-up questions for clarification and to check in on progress towards the objectives of this exploration. The semi-structured interview guide is divided into four sections: role as a political leader during the pandemic; benefits of being a female leader during the pandemic; challenges faced by female political leaders during the pandemic; and coping mechanisms used by female political leaders during the pandemic. For the in-depth or one-on-one interview to be more valuable, open-ended questions were asked, and the answers were recorded and accompanied by field notes.

Further, we approached the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) in Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur, and asked for their permission and approval so that we could carry out this research. Before conducting the study, the protocols for the study were reviewed and approved by experts in sensitive topics involving human subjects, ensuring that the research was ethical following the four-dimension rigor of qualitative research suggested by Lincoln and Guba (2011), namely: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, which determined whether the article or qualitative analysis was valid. We have substantial knowledge of and familiarity with the political setting and cultural background of the participants, as we are residents, and we also have experience working in teams to conduct qualitative research. Rich descriptions of the participant's experience made it possible for us to apply them to different situations while the data was being collected, and working in teams assured the transferability. An excerpt of the transcribed interviews was coded and organized. The dependability of the study was significantly improved as a result of our collective efforts to edit and classify the primary output of the interviews. We ensured the confirmability of the findings by putting a strong emphasis on building of the audit trail, and the results were generated from the information that was acquired through personal notes, documents, tables, and narratives.

The interview transcripts were coded and categorized using Yin's (2012) approach for the emerging themes of interview transcripts. After determining how the other characteristics influence these categories, we arranged the data in chronological order. The analysis was done by comparing themes that recurred in the data, coming up with explanations that fit together, looking at a trend or pattern over time, and putting together what we learned from different cases to come up with a compelling description of the cases.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study uncovered three different issues, namely: the roles and advantages of being a woman leader; the challenges of woman political leaders during the pandemic; and the coping mechanisms of women political leaders during the pandemic. Interviews were conducted with a total of 10 different female political leaders from each of the three categories, and their experiences were analyzed. The results of the thematic analysis included the following 4 main categories and 9 sub-themes, as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. Emergent Themes and Sub-themes

Emergent themes		Cluster themes/Sub-themes
I.	Role of women political leaders during the Pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educate the constituents about Covid-19 ▪ The epitome of compassion and courage ▪ Oversee and monitor the implementation of the Covid-19 Restriction Policy
II.	Advantages of Being a Woman Leader During the Pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Nature of Gentleness ▪ Innate Motherly Instinct
III.	Challenges of Women Political Leaders During the Pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Anxiety about contracting covid-19 ▪ Denial of the people on the seriousness of covid-19
IV.	Coping Mechanism of Women Political Leaders During the Pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cooperation and Collaboration with stakeholders ▪ Altruism

Source: processed by the author (2023)

Role of Women Political Leaders During the Pandemic

During the COVID-19 crisis, we were told anecdotally that female leaders perform better, and a recent study supports this claim. Women who hold political leadership roles have displayed the true spirit of service during times of crisis when authentic leadership models are required. Further, women political leaders continue to execute the same duties as their male counterparts. Researchers have focused their attention on women's political leaders' roles as political leaders during the pandemic. This theme consists of three subthemes (Educate the Constituents about COVID-19, Epitome of Compassion, and Oversee and Monitor the Implementation of COVID-19 Restriction Policy), which represent the role of women political leaders during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Educate the constituents about COVID-19

People of varied ages should be able to comprehend the information regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19), which includes its symptoms, consequences, mode of transmission, and methods for preventing the disease. Each individual should understand the information that is suitable for their age group. Therefore, this responsibility resides in the hands of the leaders of the community, which may include women community leaders.

Women in positions of leadership have demonstrated attributes of becoming educators by providing crucial information to their constituents about the virus and how to avoid coming into contact with it while carrying out the task of preventing the virus from spreading further. The activities of educating the people about the virus have been shared and collaborated on with others whose job is to stop the spread of the virus in their community. This is in addition to the fact that the individuals involved took the initiative to educate the people about the virus themselves.

According to Participant 3, during the interview, I shared that my main responsibilities are educating my fellow people about the risk and effects of COVID-19 and how to avoid them. Make sure that the minimum health standard protocol is being followed, such as wearing a face mask, refraining from mass gatherings, and practicing proper social distancing. Also, Participant 7 shared her role by saying that since it is very evident that people are greatly affected by the pandemic, we strive to campaign and educate people about the importance and long-term effects of the COVID vaccine and its substantial help in bringing life back to normal.

In the interviews conducted, women leaders emphasized the importance of continually educating the people about the virus, which significantly aided in the low number of cases in their community. This was evident in the interviews, with Participant 8 saying that my role as a political leader during the pandemic is to always protect my people from the harm COVID-19 may bring by informing and educating them about the risk of the virus, which reduces the number of cases in my community.

The epitome of compassion and courage

A woman is the epitome of compassion and strength, and she is the driving force behind the development of the future of her family, her community, and her nation. It is this one aspect of being empathetic and courageous that has been demonstrated by the rapid proliferation of COVID-19. These qualities have been radiated towards their responsibilities, which aim to safeguard others from danger by assisting them. Their tremendous dedication and compassion contributed to the successful control and intervention of the COVID-19 outbreak. The women who hold

leadership positions in this community possess the skills necessary for working together, which enabled them to successfully manage the cases of COVID-19 that surfaced in their community. Women in positions of authority were put in a tough spot since individuals should be outside to make their living, but they should not be in places with other people to prevent the spread of a virus. Yet, being compassionate became their strength to solve the situation successfully.

The participants have shared their reflections on the experience they had while performing their role as political leaders. Participant 4 shared her reflection by saying, "Though we encountered some difficulties and challenges during the process since people would need to go out to make ends meet to sustain their daily needs, this does not prevent us from ensuring the safety of our community and citizens against COVID-19." Moreover, sharing the experience, participant 6 shared that she will remain firm and strong in serving the people and community. As a female leader, I believe that I can carry and uphold the minds of the people, especially those who are mentally affected by the situation.

In addition to this, the duty that is placed on the shoulders of women leaders causes them to have greater compassion for the people they serve. They derive great satisfaction from working to eliminate any instances of COVID-19 in their community. As a result, everything that has been mentioned up to this point should be looked up to by leaders. Compassionate principles, which are significant in their own right, might be seen as one of the strengths that women in leadership possess.

The interviews illuminated the boldness with which women in positions of authority exercise their leadership skills, in particular, while confronting and coping with the difficulties that developed as a direct result of the pandemic. Participant 10 narrated Being a female leader, especially during this time of the pandemic, has many advantages, one of which is forbearance. We have longer patience and a wider understanding when dealing with queries, complaints, and concerns, and we can also multitask. Participant 9 added, As a woman leader, I see it as a motivation and a challenge rather than a burden and liability. As a norm, society views women as weak and not fit to lead a community and its people; however, I see it as the total opposite, which has already been proven over time.

Oversee and monitor the implementation of the COVID-19 restriction policy

The national government of the Philippines, operating through its Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases, developed a wide range of quarantine policies to decrease the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic's consequences, and women leaders spearheaded the implementation of the protocols. These regulations range from allowing only those institutions to function at a specific capacity to only allowing those enterprises to stay open. Under certain conditions, those who fall within a certain age range are also prohibited from leaving their homes. Depending on the severity of the pandemic in their region, the local government units (LGUs), which include municipalities and provinces, can implement any one of these measures. The goal is to reduce the severity of the economic impact of the pandemic while also reducing the number of deaths and infections caused by it, and women leaders play a significant role in ensuring that everything is in place.

In the interview, participant 1 shared that she performs tasks to ensure the proper implementation of the protocols. I oversee all the agencies and councils that handle and implement all mandated rules and regulations from the national government, including the local inter-agency anti-COVID-19 task force. We are also

responsible for drafting local ordinances following the national regulations, suited to the needs and demands of our local people in this time of pandemic. We have made the emergency operation center operational and available round the clock to properly manage and respond to any urgent needs of our people; these include the availability of our emergency vehicle (ambulance), temporary treatment and monitoring facility (TTMF), isolation center, and food pack distribution.

Women leaders were involved in developing policies and rules for protocol implementation in their local communities, in addition to monitoring and supervision. As Participant 2 shared, during the pandemic, I was assigned to monitor the ins and outs of the people in the barangay with the help of the district councilor. We had to make sure that all quarantine facilities were watched over securely to prevent people from going out during their quarantine period.

Women leaders continue to assist the community throughout the pandemic, from developing and implementing processes to enforcing laws and regulations and overseeing inspections at community checkpoints. As Participant 8 narrated, our barangay established a "Covid-19 checkpoint" to monitor and identify the people coming in and out of the area and also to limit the number of individuals leaving their homes.

Advantages of being a woman leader during the pandemic COVID-19

It does not seem to be restricted to one particular country or culture that gender plays a key role in achieving a leadership position. There are not nearly enough women in top positions in any industry or sector, whether private, public, or military. This theme presents a description of the advantages of being a woman in leadership to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

The nature of gentleness

One of the key aspects of being a woman leader is the ability to recognize the needs of the family in handling uncertainties brought about by the pandemic. Participant 3 has narrated her experience that, as a woman leader, our ability and capability to lead are being questioned more often than not compared with men's political leaders. Nevertheless, this does not give us the disadvantage of not being an effective and efficient leader. As a woman and a mother, I use this as an advantage, especially in reaching out to families. Moreover, as described by Participant 4, being a woman is advantageous as a leader in times of the pandemic. As she said, I can relate to and feel the immediate needs of being a mother to the family; I can suggest ways and encourage other parents to bond and spend more quality family time at home, especially with their kids who are not allowed to go out and with senior citizens who are considered vulnerable to infection.

Besides this, women are typically portrayed as kind, especially toward their children. In times of distress, a female leader has expressed her care for and affection for the people. This is beneficial since leaders' maternal instincts tend to reassure people that everything is going to be all right.

Participant 1 opined that there is this element of compassion, empathy, care, and motherly love in leading my people and community. Through these elements, we would extend and convey to people that they are being heard, cared for, and prioritized, especially in these very trying times.

Innate motherly instinct

Anyone, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, is capable of developing a love for their child early on and keeping it throughout their growth. However, this skill is not the same as a mother's impulse to care for her children. Irrespective of their desires, requirements, or prior experience, society assumes that all women are born with an innate desire to start a family and an innate understanding of how to care for children.

This theme represents how female leaders care for their communities and the people they serve during difficult times, such as the pandemic. Further, it infers that becoming and being a mother in the home and the community comes with a pre-programmed set of intrinsic knowledge and caregiving actions.

In the interview, participant 9 talked about how being a woman leader makes her want to help other people. She shared that it is very natural for us as women to feel compassionate about the situations of others. As a woman leader, I see it as a motivation and a challenge rather than a burden and liability. When seen in a good light, being a woman leader is an asset. As mothers, women can understand the worries of the rest of the community as they deal with the problems caused by the pandemic. As shared by Participant 4, I can personally say that I can feel and relate more to the mother's side.

Challenges for women political leaders during the pandemic COVID-19

Many women political leaders face the challenge of balancing their responsibilities as leaders with their responsibilities at home, particularly as mothers and caregivers, which can make it difficult for them to fully focus on their work as leaders and can also lead to feelings of guilt and stress. Additionally, women are underrepresented in political leadership positions, which can make it harder for them to have their voices heard and their perspectives considered when decisions are being made, leading to a lack of diversity in decision-making and perpetuating the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Women political leaders may also face double standards, harsher criticism, and different expectations in terms of their leadership style and decision-making, which can lead to unfair evaluations of their performance and discourage women from pursuing leadership positions. Furthermore, during the pandemic, misinformation and fake news have spread rapidly, making it difficult for leaders to communicate accurate information to the public and make effective decisions, leading to public confusion and mistrust, and also making it difficult for leaders to take effective action to combat the pandemic. Lastly, the pandemic has resulted in significant economic challenges, and women political leaders may have to take difficult decisions that have a significant impact on the economy and society, including difficult choices about how to allocate resources and support struggling businesses and individuals, which can have long-term consequences for the economy and society.

Anxiety about contracting COVID-19

Anxiety about contracting COVID-19 can be a significant challenge for women political leaders, as it can make it difficult for them to focus on their responsibilities, make effective decisions, and communicate with the public. It can also lead to feelings of isolation, depression, burnout, and decreased productivity, which can further impact their ability to lead effectively during the pandemic. Additionally, this anxiety can also make it harder for political leaders to communicate with the public and encourage

them to comply with public health guidelines, so women political leaders may have to find ways to manage their anxiety and provide support and resources to others who may be struggling with similar concerns.

During the interview, Participant 8 shared her worries: As a front-liner, I cannot guarantee that I am safe, and I am afraid that I might contract the virus and compromise the health of my children. Furthermore, participant 3 also shared that during the pandemic I felt tired, yet as it was my responsibility to help, even though I fear COVID-19, I worked for my constituents. In addition, participant 5 shared that fear and anxiety are not making her sleep at night thinking about what happened to the community and her family.

Denial of the People and Community on the Seriousness of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The denial of the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic by some members of the public and communities can pose a significant challenge for female political leaders. This can make it difficult for leaders to implement effective measures to control the spread of the virus and protect public health, as they may face resistance and pushback from those who do not believe the threat is real. This can also lead to a lack of compliance with health guidelines, such as mask-wearing and social distancing, which can prolong the pandemic and put more people at risk. Furthermore, this denial can also lead to misinformation and conspiracy theories, which can make people less likely to trust the government and public health officials, which can further complicate efforts to combat the pandemic.

During the interview, participant 3 shared One of the most challenging parts of being a public servant is reaching out to people. When the pandemic started, most people did not believe that the virus existed, that it could have a great impact on people's lives, and that it could eventually cause death if not prevented. In addition, people are assuming that the virus does not exist because of hearsay talk spread in the community, as Participant 1 shared. Also, because people were not believing the seriousness of the virus, it challenged us, as Participant 6 shared.

Coping mechanisms of women political leaders during the pandemic COVID-19

Women leaders have had to find ways to cope with the unique challenges posed by the pandemic, such as balancing their responsibilities as leaders and caregivers, navigating new ways of working and leading, and addressing the additional stress caused by the pandemic.

Cooperation and collaboration with stakeholders

Cooperation and collaboration with stakeholders were the coping strategies for women political leaders during the pandemic. This can involve working with other leaders, community members, and organizations to find solutions to the challenges posed by the pandemic. This includes building partnerships, sharing resources and knowledge, and working together to advocate for policies that support the well-being of the community. By working together, women political leaders can leverage their collective expertise and resources to make a greater impact and mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. Additionally, it also helps to build trust and support from the community, which can be beneficial for their leadership.

Interviews with the participants showed that collaboration and preparation helped them deal with the pandemic. On the other hand, it is overwhelming to feel the

weight of responsibilities as a municipal mayor, but with the help and cooperation of my local constituents, the plans under the Genuine People's Agenda were successfully performed and executed, as Participant 1 shared. In addition, participant 2 shared that partnership and cooperation with my fellow public constituents and volunteers have been the keys to achieving a peaceful and harmonious implementation of health and safety protocols. Further, it is with the joint and collaborative efforts of all local officials, both men, and women, that we have arrived at a positive result against COVID-19. For the past fourteen years, the foundation of success in rising against the challenges and turmoil has come from the Program of Government and Genuine People's Agenda, with its ultimate purpose of putting the people's welfare and safety as the top priority, as opined by Participant 4. Lastly, we, together with the local chief executive and all workforce members from RHU and the municipal health officials, are working hand-in-hand to lawfully implement the ordinance in place, shared by Participant 10.

Altruism

Altruism, or the act of helping others, was a powerful coping mechanism for female political leaders during the pandemic. By focusing on the needs of others, women leaders redirect their energy and attention away from their stressors and challenges. Additionally, by taking action to help others, women leaders were able to feel a sense of control and agency in a difficult and uncertain time. Additionally, women leaders prioritize the needs of their communities and take action to support them during the pandemic. Engaging in activities that benefit others helps individuals feel a sense of purpose and control, which can counterbalance feelings of helplessness or despair. Additionally, helping others provides a sense of social connection and belonging, which can be especially important during times of isolation. Furthermore, research has shown that engaging in prosocial behavior can have positive effects on mental health and well-being, such as reducing stress and anxiety, increasing positive emotions, and promoting resilience.

During the interview, participant 1 shared that, personally, as a mother, the challenge I face every day is not being able to spend quality time with my family anymore, especially with my kids. They are still in the developmental stage of being a child, and that saddens me because I am not there by their side every step of the way. However, this does not prevent me from fulfilling my responsibilities as the mother of the municipality. Another altruistic act was seen as narrated by Participant 2. COVID cases and numbers of infected individuals have become very alarming throughout the course of the pandemic; however, I see this as an opportunity to extend more help to our fellow people who are affected by the situation. Participant 3 also shared her motivations: "This does not stop me from doing what I ought to do to ensure that my people are fully aware of the rules and regulations in place, as this would uphold the safety of every individual. Aside from these, being a woman as a political leader during the pandemic has never been an issue for me because we exactly do and act at the same level as men's political leaders in terms of leadership, function, and action. The challenge is not about being a woman leader; it is all about taking the initiative to fight and contain the spread of COVID-19 in the community, as shared by Participant 4. Also, during the interview, Participant 5 shared that, at the end of the day, regardless of your gender orientation, what matters most is how you serve and respond to the needs of my people. Lastly, Participant 8 shared by saying, "As a woman leader, I see it as a motivation and a challenge rather than a burden and liability. As a norm, society views

women as weak and not fit to lead a community and its people; however, I see it as the total opposite.

Conclusion

During the pandemic, women political leaders have played a crucial role in addressing the crisis and its impacts on their communities. They have developed and implemented policies and strategies to slow the spread of the virus, supported those affected by the crisis, ensured the availability of necessary resources, and communicated with the public to provide updates and guidance on the situation. In the context of the pandemic, this may translate to increased support for vulnerable populations, such as low-income families, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions. The result of this study is consistent with prior research showing that women leaders are more socially conscious (Funk, 2020; Willis et al., 2021), which may motivate them to boost state capacity by increasing spending on social programs connected to pandemics. Aside from this, women leaders have proven their protective femininity (Johnson & Williams, 2020) by taking steps to prevent the spread of viruses such as COVID-19 and protecting the health and well-being of their constituents. This includes implementing measures such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and vaccinations, as well as supplying support and resources for those affected by the virus. Furthermore, women leaders have always showed empathetic attributes, which are beneficial to their tasks. Similarly, empathy, or the ability to understand and share the sentiments of others, is one of these characteristics, as is the ability to bring people together and establish common ground (Thomas & Adams, 2010). These characteristics can be advantageous in post-conflict and post-dictatorship nations, where healing and reconciliation are frequently required. Furthermore, women leaders' perspectives can contribute diversity and a distinct approach to leadership and governance, which can be helpful to society.

Additionally, they have worked to provide support for vulnerable populations, maintain transparency and accountability, and take into consideration the specific challenges that women face during the pandemic to ensure that women's needs are addressed in the response. Unlike a recent study that postulated the challenges of women in terms of gender bias (Woitowich et al., 2021), gender is not a challenge for women political leaders in local settings. Women leaders have shown great concern for the anxiety and fear that people and communities have regarding the contraction of COVID-19 and the denial of the seriousness of the pandemic by some individuals. They have taken a proactive approach to address these concerns by providing accurate information and resources about the virus, implementing preventative measures, and encouraging people to follow guidelines and protocols to protect themselves and others. They have also focused on providing support and resources for those who are affected by the virus, including mental health support for those dealing with anxiety and stress. They have been actively working towards educating people on the importance of following guidelines and protocols and the consequences of not taking the pandemic seriously. They have been emphasizing the importance of being responsible and being aware of the seriousness of the pandemic so that the community can work together to curb the spread of the virus.

Despite the toll that the pandemic has taken, women leaders have been coping with the various challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways. Women leaders have coped with the challenges of the pandemic and leadership by

cooperation, collaboration with stakeholders, and altruism. They have brought different groups and individuals together to work towards a common goal, working with other leaders, healthcare professionals, and community members to develop and implement strategies to address the crisis. Additionally, they have shown a great degree of altruism during the pandemic, putting the needs of others before their own by actively working to support those affected by the virus and promoting the well-being of their communities through supplying resources, volunteering, and other means. Cooperation, collaboration, and altruism have been key drivers in overcoming the challenges faced during the pandemic and ensuring that the communities they serve are supported and protected to the best of their abilities. Similar results from previous studies have postulated that coping is done through cooperation, collaboration (Coscieme et al., 2020; Thorgersen & Mars, 2021), and altruism (Bolton et al., 2016; Iwasaki et al., 2005; Patalinghug, 2021) among service workers and leaders.

Furthermore, based on the findings regarding the role of women political leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, several specific implications for policy and practice can be drawn that contribute to enhancing women's leadership roles. Policies should prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations, including low-income families, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions, through targeted social programs that provide financial assistance, healthcare access, and mental health support. Given the evidence that women leaders are more socially conscious and likely to increase spending on social programs, governments should allocate more resources to health and social services, including public health initiatives and educational campaigns about health risks. Training programs for current and future leaders should emphasize empathy and community engagement to foster better connections with constituents, thereby promoting a leadership style that values inclusivity and responsiveness.

Additionally, policies should encourage collaboration among stakeholders, including healthcare professionals and community organizations, to enhance crisis response strategies, showcasing the effectiveness of cooperative leadership. Implementing clear and transparent communication strategies is essential for providing accurate information about health risks and guidelines, addressing public concerns, and building trust within communities, further solidifying the role of women leaders as effective communicators. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by women during the pandemic, policies should be designed to address these issues specifically, ensuring that women's health needs are prioritized and that they are included in decision-making processes, thereby reinforcing the importance of women's perspectives in governance. Encouraging a culture of altruism and community support can enhance resilience during crises, with initiatives promoting volunteerism and community engagement, which are often championed by women leaders. Finally, as communities recover from the pandemic, it is crucial to develop recovery plans that incorporate lessons learned from women leaders' responses, focusing on building state capacity, enhancing social safety nets, and ensuring robust health systems prepared for future crises. By implementing these implications, policymakers can leverage the strengths demonstrated by women leaders to create more effective and inclusive governance structures, thereby contributing to the advancement of women's leadership roles and practices that better serve their communities in times of crisis and beyond.

Acknowledgement

The researchers appreciate the time and effort put in by the key informants who helped complete the study's data collection. Also, the researchers would like to thank J.H. Cerilles State College Administration and Office of the Vice President for Research the guidance in the completion of this research.

References

- Arar, K., & Oplatka, I. (2015). Current research on Arab female educational leaders' career and leadership. Challenges and opportunities of educational leadership research and practice: *The state of the field and its multiple futures*, 87-115. <https://bit.ly/3eA5WQy>
- Bolton, K. W., Praetorius, R. T., & Smith-Osborne, A. (2016). Resilience protective factors in an older adult population: A qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis. *Social Work Research*, 40(3), 171–182. <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svw008>
- Brackstone, K., Marzo, R. R., Bahari, R., Head, M. G., Patalinghug, M. E., & Su, T. T. (2022). COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and confidence in the Philippines and Malaysia: a cross-sectional study of sociodemographic factors and digital health literacy. *PLOS global public health*, 2(10), e0000742.
- Charness, G., & Gneezy, U. (2012). Strong evidence for gender differences in risk taking. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 83(1), 50–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2011.06.007>
- Coscieme, L., Fioramonti, L., Mortensen, L. F., Pickett, K. E., Kubiszewski, I., Lovins, H., Mcglade, J., Ragnarsdóttir, K. V., Roberts, D., Costanza, R., Vogli, R. De, & Wilkinson, R. (2020). Women in power: Female leadership and public health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. *MedRxiv*, 2020.07.13.20152397.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. SAGE publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (SAGE (ed.); 4th ed.). Thousand Oaks. http://www.drbramedkarcollege.ac.in/sites/default/files/Research-Design_Qualitative-Quantitative-and-Mixed-Methods-Approaches.pdf
- Crowe, M., Inder, M., & Porter, R. (2015). Conducting qualitative research in mental health: Thematic and content analyses. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 49(7), 616-623.
- Dada, S., Ashworth, H. C., Bewa, M. J., & Dhatt, R. (2021). Words matter: Political and gender analysis of speeches made by heads of government during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMJ Global Health*, 6(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-003910>
- Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & Van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: a meta-analysis comparing women and men. *Psychological bulletin*, 129(4), 569. <https://bit.ly/3S2nSAZ>
- Freizer, S., Azcona, G., Berevoescu, I., & Cookson, T. P. (2020). *COVID-19 and Women's Leadership: From an Effective Response to Building Back Better*. New York: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).
- Funk, K. D. (2020). Local Responses to a Global Pandemic: Women Mayors Lead the Way. *Politics and Gender*, 16(4), 968–974. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000410>

- Garikipati, S., & Kambhampati, U. (2021). Leading the fight against the pandemic: does gender matter? *Feminist Economics*, 27(1–2), 401–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1874614>
- Henley, J., & Roy, E. A. (2020, April 25). *Are female leaders more successful at managing the coronavirus crisis?* The Guardian. <https://bit.ly/3s37Jku>
- IDEA. (2022, April 11). The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women in Politics. The Global State of Democracy. <https://bit.ly/3ezl5BR>
- Iwasaki, Y., MacKay, K., & Mactavish, J. (2005). Gender-based analyses of coping with stress among professional managers: Leisure coping and non-leisure coping. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 37(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2005.11950038>
- Johnson, C., & Williams, B. (2020). Gender and political leadership in a time of COVID. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 16, 943–950. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S1743923X2000029X>
- Kalbarczyk, A., Harrison, M., Chung, E., Glass, N., Genberg, B., Decker, M. R., & Manabe, Y. C. (2022). Supporting women's leadership development in global health through virtual events and near-peer networking. *Annals of global health*, 88(1).
- Lavado, R. F., Nowacka, K., Raitzer, D. A., Rodgers, Y. V. D. M., & Zveglic Jr, J. E. (2022). COVID-19 disparities by gender and income: Evidence from the Philippines. *International labour review*, 161(1), 107-123.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2011). *Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences*. The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, 4, 97–128. <https://bit.ly/3537uuy>
- Lovenduski, Joni. 2005. *Feminizing Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Meagher, K., Singh, N. S., & Patel, P. (2020). The role of gender-inclusive leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic to support vulnerable populations in conflict settings. *BMJ Global Health*, 5(9). <https://bit.ly/3ghQ1Hm>
- Mendoza, R. U., Dayrit, M. M., Alfonso, C. R., & Ong, M. M. A. (2021). Public trust and the COVID-19 vaccination campaign: lessons from the Philippines as it emerges from the Dengvaxia controversy. *The International journal of health planning and management*, 36(6), 2048-2055.
- Nelson, J. A. (2015). Are women really more risk-averse than men? A re-analysis of the literature using expanded methods. *Journal of economic surveys*, 29(3), 566-585.
- New York Times. (2020, April 30). *In the Coronavirus Crisis, True Leaders Stand Out*. <https://nyti.ms/3Mzi2WV>
- Ngunjiri, F. W. (2016). "I Am Because We Are": Exploring Women's Leadership Under Ubuntu Worldview. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 18(2), 223–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422316641416>
- Patalinghug, M. E. (2021). The Life Changer: Social Workers in Rehabilitation Facilities for Child in Conflict with the Law. *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 11(1), 33–44. <https://doi.org/10.26618/ojip.v11i1.5072>
- Periyakoil, D., Periyakoil, P., Tee, C.A., Spanos, C.J., Diener-West, M., Tee, M. and Prata, N., 2023. Are There Differences between the Stress Responses of Philippine Men and Women to the COVID-19 Pandemic?. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 20(3), p.2326.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Thomas, G., & Adams, M. (2010). Breaking the final glass ceiling: The influence of gender in the elections of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Michelle Bachelet. *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy*, 31(2), 105–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15544771003697270>
- Thorgersen, K. A., & Mars, A. (2021). A pandemic as the mother of invention? Collegial online collaboration to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. *Music Education Research*, 23(2), 225–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2021.1906216>
- UN Women (2022). *Government responses to COVID-19: Lessons on gender equality for a world in turmoil*. UN Women – Headquarters. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://bit.ly/3EKb5jR>
- United Nations. (2020, May 15). *Over 50 women leaders from various districts of the Republic of Moldova met online for DemocracyTalks to share their experiences as front liners in the crisis*. UN Women – Moldova. <https://bit.ly/3TsLfVG>
- Willis, H., Smith, J. C., & Devine, D. (2021). Care to trust? Gender and trust in leaders during the Coronavirus pandemic. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 31(S1), 232–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2021.1924737>
- Windsor, L. C., Yannitell Reinhardt, G., Windsor, A. J., Ostergard, R., Allen, S., Burns, C., Giger, J., & Wood, R. (2020). Gender in the time of COVID-19: Evaluating national leadership and COVID-19 fatalities. *PLoS One*, 15(12), e0244531. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0244531>
- Woitowich, N. C., Jain, S., Arora, V. M., & Joffe, H. (2021). COVID-19 Threatens Progress Toward Gender Equity Within Academic Medicine. *Academic Medicine*, 96(6), 813–816. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000003782>
- Yamada, E., Shimizutani, S., & Murakami, E. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic, remittances and financial inclusion in the Philippines. *Philippine Review of Economics (Online ISSN 2984-8156)*, 57(1), 18-41.
- Yin, R. K. (2012). *Applications of case study research* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.