

**Faith and Women in Leadership**

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### **Abstract**

Women are still underrepresented in leadership roles and still suffer from gender stereotypes and injustice. Women of faith are frequently stigmatized by both their faith and place of employment. This study is about women of faith who held leadership roles in rural communities. The objective of this study is to examine the experiences of women of faith in leadership, their qualities, and knowledge as effective leaders. The data used in this study is secondary and it was obtained from a parent study entitled, “Women Ascending to Leadership Positions in Rural Nonprofit Organizations.” This parent study used a snowball approach to interview 32 women who were serving in leadership roles in rural nonprofit organizations. The current study used a phenomenological qualitative approach to determine how their faith influenced their leadership ascension. It is necessary to investigate the journey of women’s leadership development to identify how to best develop future female leaders in nonprofit organizations in rural communities. There is limited research regarding women’s leadership experiences in rural organizations and faith.

## **Faith and Women in Leadership**

In times past, a woman's role was inside the home basically taking care of the family. Whether it was culturally or spiritually, women have been viewed as inferior to men in many countries. One goal of this paper is to explore how women leaders are influenced by their faith to address the plight they face as well as consider ways of addressing problems they encounter in relation to their cultural faith and values. This study, faith, and women in leadership, is focused on from a qualitative perspective. Qualitative research collects its data by interviews, focused groups, first-hand experiences, and more like that. This type of research best suits the topic we have selected.

Today, women in leadership are still not equal to men in many forms, especially regarding their pay. “Women make approximately \$.83 compared to men earning a \$1. (Iacurci, 2022, para. 4). This has been a topic of discussion for years because it still has not changed. In many cultures, women are forbidden to be in leadership roles. In a society that deals with racism as well as sexism; women have excelled and passed the stereotypes. Women in leadership roles typically use the transformational leadership style (Forgarty, n.d., p. para. 7).

A woman’s spirituality helps to mold her beliefs, values, and ethical compass. This plays a major role in how they govern themselves when it comes to leadership roles. It determines how she conducts herself and how she handles things. When looking at women leadership in faith-based employment, women still face barriers such as lacking the proper role models, being told to conform to historical gender norms, and scarce internal and external support systems (Longman & Anderson, 2016). These barriers not only prevent women from striving and

meeting their personal and economical life goals, but they also discourage women from partaking in leadership roles within the church body. Megachurches have been seen to pass over women for leadership positions, commonly due to church theology that consistently favors males, according to Mathews (2022).

Historical theological ideals and writings, such as the Bible, can also be factored in when looking at how women of the modern world are treated, especially within the workplace. Within the teachings of the Bible verse such as 1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001), women were instructed to obey their husbands, stick to society’s norms, and to follow rather than lead. Another controversial Bible verse is Ephesians 5:23, which states “for the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). The following Bible verse can be misconstrued to fit the image of women being inferior to men. Churches can use these verses as their main reason for not permitting females to hold higher positions in the church, such as head pastor or ministry leaders.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Historically, women have been disadvantaged and underrepresented in many areas of life, one of the most controversial areas being church positions. Many denominations in the Christian Faith believe that the roles of leadership are for men only. Recently some denominations have ordained women to serve as leaders; when it was once taboo (Women in Ministry: Equally Called, 2022). Women serving as leaders in the church is a difficult subject which is sometimes filled with bitter accusation, sometimes with claims about the Bible that are not biblically substantiated or justified along with fear of change (Women in Church Leadership - Conclusion,

2022). Society has continuously labeled women as the inferior gender, such as denying them the right to vote, declining those that wanted to serve their country, and overlooking qualified females for job opportunities (Horowitz & Igielnik, 2020). Even though societal issues such as gender role stereotyping and underrepresented women in careers have been talked about, studied, and even fixed in some ways.

Today, women are advancing their education and working more in the marketplace. In America, it is now evident that more women of faith are serving and leading in a variety of fields and institutions (The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World, 2016) However, when compared to men, there is still progress needed in advancing women into leadership roles. According to Ariella (2022), “there is a shortage when it comes to women in leadership in fortune 500 companies and senior positions. Women make up 35 % of senior leadership positions and less than 1% CEO are women of color” (p.1). When conducting this topic regarding women of faith in leadership roles, there is a limited amount of research in areas of rural communities and women of color in this category. Most research studies are conducted from the perspective of an urban Caucasian female culture. The purpose of this study is to show how faith influences women’s advancement in leadership, the challenges women face in the workplace, and the benefits of resolving issues that limit and prohibit women from advancing in leadership roles.

Different studies on the relationship between motherhood and leadership have had varying findings. Some studies have found that women who are mothers develop skills like understanding, empathy, multitasking, and flexibility, which make them better leaders (Berlin Cameron Insights, 2019). A different opinion is that moms are penalized at work because being mothers make the children take their attention away from the workplace; thus, they cannot

perform their roles efficiently and as called for (Berlin Cameron Insights, 2019). Regardless, most studies have focused on the workplace, and very few to none shifted focus to the women of faith. Studying women of faith battling motherhood and leadership is an important area of study as it not only adds to the existing body of knowledge but provides insights into the subject from a different point of view.

### **Why does this research study need to be conducted?**

God calls men and women into leadership roles despite the opportunities, responsibilities, and challenges that individuals might face in their respective roles. The history of the church and the scripture demonstrates that women, like men, can exercise power and influence in various contexts, such as the church. In conjunction with their leadership roles, women of faith are also expected to perform their motherly responsibilities. Several arguments have been posted, which held that mothers have a difficult time being leaders in the sense that there is poor time allocation for performing both motherly and leadership roles (Kaur et al., 2019, p.666). Currently, most research articles and studies that have been conducted on Christian leadership focus on men, with minimal focus being given to women.

As a result, this study is necessary as it explores how women of faith, primarily in Christianity, balance between motherhood and leadership. This research study is necessary because there are laws in place to assist women in excelling in their fields, including as leaders, but these laws are not being properly enforced. These laws include The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act (Women's Rights and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, n.d.). Due to racial and gender discrimination, there is a lack of diversity in the workplace. There are not enough role models for young girls and women when it comes to leadership. Many women have the

experience and education to be leaders in their fields, but they face obstacles due to a lack of workplace policies that benefit both women and men equally.

**What specific issues does this study raise that have not been observed in other literature pertaining to the topic?**

The issues regarding women of faith in leadership that have not been properly addressed include, lack of diversity in the workplace and religious institutions pertaining to female roles, discrimination among the women of faith leaders and the rural issues that women of faith leaders face. Many women's cultures, as well as their faith, have caused them to be restrained to certain roles that make them less likely to be promoted or accepted as leaders.

**Purpose of the Study**

Many people enjoy the title of leader, but most people avoid the responsibilities associated with being a good leader. Women who are in leadership often are married with children which brings on in some cases more criticism because of their multiple roles. Women leaders experience an inter-role conflict when work and family demands are mutually incompatible, negatively affecting their wellbeing (Rincon, Cifre, Castillo, & Segovia-Perez, 2020, p. 1). Women leaders must deal with a unique set of demands in comparison with their male counterparts (Machin-Rincon, Cifre, Castillo, & Segovia-Perez, 2020, p. 22). The purpose of this study is to determine whether women leaders of faith in the secular workplace or in the pulpit of their local churches who are wives, mothers and leaders experience difficulties performing their family duties and leadership roles.

In this study we also investigate to see whether women are looked over and excluded from obtaining pastorship positions in the Christian church because of their female gender. This study is extremely important because it does not only affect churches in the United States but



spreads worldwide. Regarding women of color who are leaders in the Christian faith, there is still a low percentage for the African American women leaders in the Christian faith. According to Ojong (2017). African Christian based churches, only 5% of ministries are led by females, in contrast to the 92% of male led ministries. Christian based churches around the world have been seen to have low rates of female pastors but have not concluded as to why it is so low.

### **Influence of faith in leadership on women**

Over the years, religion has been a significant defining power in institutionalizing leadership positions. Religion also acts as a controlling power in the background of many leadership positions in many countries across the globe. In a region such as in Europe, where the Pope resides, he still plays a political role, illustrating the existing power of religion (Gaitho, 2019). There are also cases where church leaders indulge in politics and define leadership positions, not forgetting that most Christian denominations adopt the patriarchal system, limiting the expansion of the leadership freedom women wish to have (Browder, 2021). In this case, women in religion continue to suffer under the patriarchal system ingrained in their path of faith, especially regarding leadership (Carbajal, 2018). Men hold the power to lead on all occasions in most accounts in the Bible, which also reflects current realities in churches. In patriarchal Faith-based institutions, men are advantaged in gaining leadership positions.

Most women under Christianity still face male-dominated systems which acutely dismiss their ability to lead within Faith-based organizations and companies. In some denominations within Christianity and in the modernized world, women are forbidden to serve however many continue to rise in leadership positions. Their efforts to maneuver through religion to define themselves as women leaders are seen as an act of bravery (Gonzales, 2022). Over the years, many scholars and interested parties have continued to study the different dimensions of the

influence of faith and its sharpening on women's leadership skills. The literature review, therefore, aims to examine how women's participation in religious institutions affects their leadership ascension.

## **Literature Review**

### **Women in workplace**

Society must re-evaluate the perspective of a woman. The image of a woman has been defined by man and limitation for advancement for women in an issue in a male-dominated society, Christian institution, and workplace. What can help women to prepare for the workplace and eventually leadership position, is having leadership development in local schools and higher education institutions. Research is needed to understand the cultures as well as sex in today society. Women are poorly misrepresented in senior leadership roles. "The ceiling is not holding women back, it's the whole structure of organization in which we work, the foundation, the beams, the walls, the very air" (Myerson & Fletcher, 2000, p. 136). The Myerson and Fletcher pointed out in their article, that women reaching to the next level in leadership is not the problem, but that organization policies, mission and culture could be the issue that prohibit women from advancing.

Further the researcher stated that a "well-designed and targeted strategies for women's leadership development can bring exponential benefits not only by expanding the pool of gifted individuals to meet today's current leadership challenges. For a woman to be able to excel in her career, she must be given the opportunity and have the support to help the accelerations. This also revealed that further research is needed regarding- motivation for women and men to move into leadership roles- to what extent those motivations differ in ways related to gender (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012).

For many years the workplace has been dominated by men; even in the progress we still have some inconsistency and unresolved issues. Only about 27% of women are in management and leadership positions (Botwin, 2022, p. 1). Women of today still face unequal pay, discrimination, gender-based harassment as well as lack of support. Gender stereotypes can affect a women's self-confidence and their pursuit of prestige careers. The image of women is often portrayed in a bias, stereotypical manner that is often shown through advertisement and media in the American society (Clotilde Napp, 2022). Many women must face internal barriers because of their faith and culture, image and perception of women and their roles.

### **Women and Double Stigma**

The environment helps create the child into the adult they become. One can be developed to be a leader or a follower. If a young girl does not see or around women in leadership; what would influence her, who would influence her. There is a lack of role models regarding women of faith in leadership. When this survey was conducted around the world about women in leadership; many were in denial of their prejudice of women in leadership. Political scientists have found that when asked direct, explicit questions about prejudice against women leaders, many survey respondents deny their prejudice (Ro, 2021).

### **Women of Color face double jeopardy of sexism and racism because of their sex and race.**

“Women of color are judged according to negative stereotypes more often applied to prototypical group members (Livingston R. W., 2012) “. Women in the workplace face many obstacles including discrimination and stigma. Imagine being a woman of color? Now is the time to change the perception of this nation regarding race and sex. “It is therefore important to consider the intersectionality of race and gender stigmas in order to better capture how women of color are perceived by others” (Remedios, 2016).

## **Women and their Culture**

Society and culture have their own perception of how a woman and a man should behave, conduct themselves and even dress. Many women must overcome the bias and inequality in their culture as well as the society. Stereotypes about gender can cause unequal and unfair treatment because of a person's gender. This is called sexism (What are gender roles and stereotypes? n.d.). There is a brave woman of faith who has overcome sexism and adversity by speaking up and challenging the system. Women who are wives and mothers must learn how to balance their lives along with their careers. Faith is a fundamental resource of coping for some women with challenges and non-conformist life situations. In the article by Mayer and Viviers, they study a woman who was a Christian but also a leader in the engineering field. In a male dominant field, she had to balance traveling, motherhood, being the breadwinner and leader at an expatriate status. Through her faith she develops self-confidence, guidance and strong social values based on social justice and meaning in her life and work (Mayer & Viviers, 2018, p. 832).

Identity is taught and learned within the family, community, and the world. A person's identity is rooted in their culture and for some in their faith. Many women of faith find their belonging and uniqueness within their faith. "The ascription of identity is the roles learned within the family, the community, and society. These roles are prescriptions for the role of women in private and public life. "Faith is the foundation of life and essential to identity development" (Weber, 2022, pg. 90).

Gender stereotypes can be a good or a bad thing. Women are known for being nurturing and weak and soft. The labels that are placed on women have prohibited many advancements as well as opportunities regarding leadership. In Discriminatory and gender role stereotyped

behavior places a strain on women's resilience in traditionally male-dominated occupation (Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2012).

### **Women's participation in religious institutions**

Available research shows that the treatment of women in religion varies from one denomination to another. However, future research on those denominations within the same religion can also experience differences in the perception of women and their roles looks into the different aspects of gender and religion in women's leadership, especially in Africa (Sande, 2017). The article focuses on the adversities that arise from the patriarchal nature of the most dominant Christianity denominations, which enforce the existing diminished nature of women in society. As extracted by some biblical accounts, women perceive women's role as being submissive and silent as a command from God. In most cases, women feel the need to be equal to men to achieve a leadership position, a goal that still lacks enough institutionalized evidence, however, points out that Women in Zimbabwe find hope in the Pentecostal churches, which contain accommodating Christianity doctrines which emphasize a more unified system of determining a leader (Sande, 2017). The article acknowledges that Pentecostal churches, unlike the Patriarchal denominations such as Catholics and Protestants, view leadership in a more holistic view as a calling from God with no discrimination in the "eyes of man." With such an assumption, the Pentecostal churches provide a platform for women to exercise their leadership skills without limitations.

Women for centuries have suffered from inequality even in their faith. Many women of faith are prohibited to be leaders in their denomination. In the article by Campolo, he stated that the Fundamentalism Evangelicals believe that women should be submissive to their husbands and quiet (Campolo, n.d.). He quoted that this group of people used the following scriptures:

Ephesians 5:22-25 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (p.2) to support their belief. He further owns pointed out that these group of people argue the radical feminism argue that God has a female side and that in the bible scripture in Galatians 3:28, it quoted “in Christ there is neither male nor female” and that “all are one in Christ Jesus.” In conclusion this sect of Christian organization firmly believes that women are not prohibited to lead but to be submissive to their husband and live a quiet life (Campolo, n.d.). The concern is many women in leadership were raised in the doctrine of being silent and discriminated against in their own faith. Many women have voiced their concerns and pointed back to the doctrine that once taught them to be inferior and silent by pointing out women that God used to do great exploits for his kingdom.

Similar records exist in a report by the International Knowledge Network of Women (2009), which points out religious institutions’ accounts as a significant influence on women in leadership positions. The reports account for significant limitations in Christianity regarding the ascending of women in leadership positions. The reports provide different accounts of countries using religion to determine national policies limiting women’s power in leadership positions. Even though some religions have tried to integrate new doctrines, individuals within the religion, including fellow women, fail to support women who seek to rise to leadership positions. Karam’s report (2009) reviews the realities of women across the globe and their struggle to ascend to a leadership position in religion or politics due to dominant religions devaluing women’s leadership.

### **Women And Religious Political Parties**

Politics have also been associated with high-level masculinity from a traditional perspective. In most democracies, associating religious doctrines with political parties gives the party power to attract those who follow the religion. In most cases, such parties adopt or push

religious ideologies, hoping the believers of the religious group they adopt follow their political ideologies. According to Schuster, even though they endorse their self-righteous political ideologies, they still carry the religion's illiberal, hierarchical, and patriarchal doctrines (Schuster, 2007). Most doctrines involve diminishing women in power, mostly in Christian denominations. Schuster uses the case of Staantkundig Gereformeerde Parti (SGP) in the Netherland to show the impact of religious and political parties on women (Schuster, 2007). The SGP party pursues theoretical political ideologies while excluding females from leadership positions. Such a political impact shows a direct relationship between the influences of religion on women in political positions in a negative way (Schuster, 2007). The article also points out the different dimensions of illiberal characteristics, which continuously dismisses the possibility of women in leadership positions in politics and religion.

### **Women's Resistance to Religious Limitations**

In the past few decades, the ability of women to stand up for themselves and make an impact as leaders have enabled many religious groups to adopt the new reality of empowered women. In Christianity, most women allude to different women recorded in the biblical account who stood out as significant figures in society. Women such as Naomi, Ruth, and Ester represent the women who showed their ability to serve God as leaders within environments which seemed to be dominated by men. Most women resist religious limitations and view leadership as a God-given responsibility that should be exercised diligently in faith with no gender discrimination.

However, most scholars blame the patriarchal status of most religions which operate on rigid guidelines that, in most cases, dismiss the ability of women to be in power, connects faith, education, and leadership in defining women in leadership positions and the limiting factors ingrained in religion (Carbajal, 2018). According to the article, Faith is deeply rooted in the

cultural belief adopted by different communities, which influences how people live (Carbajal, 2018). Women have now realized the limiting powers of religion and have begun to stand up for themselves amid the cultural crisis withheld by religion.

Most Christian groups of women across the globe have grown to overcome all odds to access significant positions of leadership. African American women are well known for unflinching trust in their faith regardless of the multiple Gender and race discrimination cases points out the rise of African American women in leadership positions as a product of their Faith (Walker, 2007). According to Walker, most African American Willing to get to leadership positions had to resist the different religious limitations from the hatred they received from the whites who dominated most religious institutions. The ability to penetrate the religious institution leadership to the public leadership position for a black woman continues to be a significant problem in the United States. Walker points out that most women depend on a supernatural power to feel empowered (Walker, 2007). Relying on faith as a source of power enables women to feel more inclined to pursue leadership positions regardless of multiple social and religious limitations.

### **Questions**

Do existing Christian denominations enhance the inclusion of women in leadership positions? If a dominant denomination controls the national policies, which include ideologies that dismiss women's leadership needs, does it indicate the existence of women's limited leadership roles in politics and religion?

### **Christian Women Leadership in the Church**

Society defined gender roles can be seen as one of the main factors that can either positively or negatively affect women of faith, especially inside and outside the church body. The article “Female Leadership and Role Congruity within the Clergy: Communal Leaders



Experience No Gender Differences Yet Agentic Women Continue to Suffer Backlash”, explains how gender roles specifically affect women leaders and how role congruity theory plays a role in it (Ferguson, 2018). The article’s main purpose was to conduct a study to examine “female leadership within the context of the religious congregation and the profession of the clergy” (Ferguson, 2018, pg. 409). Although this article is not explicitly stating that it is researching the Christian faith, the studies insights and findings can be applied to women of Christian faith and leadership.

Ferguson states that role congruity theory examines relationships between gender and social roles and how those roles interact with each other as well as the individuals assigned to them (Ferguson, 2018, pp. 409-410). In other words, role congruity can be seen when individuals perform activities that are labeled as stereotypical for that gender, such as a woman who is a stay-at-home mom while the males work full time jobs. When looking at how society views leadership, it can be noticed that their first instinct is to lean towards men, due to the set gender roles found in the theoretical framework of role congruity theory.

In this article, Ferguson administered surveys to determine the actual effect stereotypes and gender norms affected women of faith in leadership positions. The results of the study did prove that there were negative attitudes from the clergy when a woman was seen in top leadership. Ferguson states that “congregants were less likely to see their clergy as a good fit with the congregation when the leader was female” (Ferguson, 2018, pg. 419). This result does give the notion that women are seen as less experienced and capable of properly leading a church by themselves.

The article explains how women who have a strong identity that is rooted in Christian faith can improve their ability to be a leader (Glanz, 2020). This article reviews a variety of

literature that analyzes topics such as adult identity, gender role stereotypes regarding leadership, and cultural influences. The article then explains their qualitative study which included face-to-face, online, and semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to help gather more information regarding women of faith in leadership.

The first theme identified within the study is that women seemed to thrive more due to their mentors in the church. Glanz states that “over half the women described supervisors as people who helped them to thrive by offering dialogue and processing time, believing in their abilities and affirming their gifts verbally, and watching out for and challenging them with new opportunities and roles” (Glanz, 2020, pg. 331). These women pointed out that due to their positive relationships with their female and male mentors, they had opportunities as individuals and in teams to perfect their craft, receive guidance, and practice their preaching in a safe environment.

The next theme identified is regarding giving the women the opportunities to form their own leadership identity and learn how to adapt to their church environment. The most common statement by the women regarding this theme is that they were expected to fit into an environment that was more tailored to males. Glanz stated that “adaptations involved finding their voice, managing emotions, personality curtailment, understanding others’ leadership style, and taking on more masculine traits” (Glanz, 2020, pg. 333). Two of the women participants even stated that although their church welcomes them and respects their roles, they are strongly discouraged from pursuing opportunities such as becoming lead pastors.

The women also dealt with stereotypical assumptions from within their church because of their leadership positions and their gender. The male counterparts made assumptions such as females wanted to be leaders because of negative relationships they have had with men in the

past. Another common assumption was a general belief that women could not be effective leaders, just because of their gender. These assumptions and forced adaptations these women faced created invisible boundaries for them, planting the notion that they were not meant to lead in the church, solely because the males deemed it so.

The third theme identified is how contextual factors affected these women and their leadership journey. Contextual factors identified by Glanz includes “environmental arena in which the study participant’s work, the freedoms they experience, their perceived effects of feminism in culture on their leadership, and their generative view toward empowering the next generation” (Glanz, 2020, pg. 337). One important subfactor identified in this theme is that women who had a healthy amount of freedom felt like they were able to thrive more. Freedom in this case looks like allowing them to do their jobs without being micromanaged and giving input on the ministry vision without fear of backlash. The fourth theme is focused on how leadership can be empowered with agency when there is a strong identity in Christ. The women in this study stated that the ministry’s foundation should be rooted in Christ, and that their personal identity as Christians gave them feelings of purpose and belonging (Glanz, 2020, pg. 340).

Overall, the research is lacking regarding how faith influences women in leadership in areas such as influenced environments, variety of influencing religions, and where in the world this can be seen. The main theme I noticed regarding research while conducting the literature review is that there are few studies regarding this specific topic about faith, women, and leadership, and that there is not much consistency in the literature for the research that is published. It was found that out of the studies talking about women and religion in the workplace, most of them focused on the catholic religion, while others discussed religion in the general sense. It was also difficult finding literature that was based within the United States,

whereas there were many articles that talked about the specific research topic in other countries, such as Africa. One more notable theme that was found is that the specific theme regarding women leadership within the church is also a topic that is kept relatively quiet. When using the specific phrase “Christian female leadership”, the most common theme that was studied revolved around higher educational settings such as colleges.

Women have been underrepresented for a very long time in leadership positions. An article that speaks about this issue speaks of the gender imbalance in senior-level leadership within the U.S. member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, or CCCU (Longman and Anderson, 2016, pg. 24). This article takes a different approach to looking at women leadership roles by looking at those roles in a Christian college. This issue is very prevalent within Christian higher education but is an issue globally as well. Leadership is something that women have always had to fight for in every aspect, including education institutions. “Leaders are expected to be decisive, instrumental, and agentic, which traditionally have been viewed as male qualities; in contrast, women are expected to be developmental, expressive, and communal” (Longman and Anderson, 2016, pg. 26).

For Christian women in leadership roles, they must fight against not only the normal assumptions of why women do not belong in those roles, but also their own beliefs and expectations of women. The CCCU institutions collectively have a student body that is well over halfway female, and yet only 20% of women have senior leadership roles within schools (Longman and Anderson, 2016, pg. 26). This is an imbalance that could easily be fixed and would be beneficial for the female students. It is important for those female students to see fellow women in roles that they could possibly be in themselves soon. The authors of this article

speak about the importance of Christian colleges, and all colleges in general, get on board with making room for more women on their respective school boards.

There are many uncertainties going on in our world today and having effective and inspirational leaders who can give a better understanding for a brighter future is what is necessary. Institutions for higher education are globally facing many of those challenges. This article examines a study that explored how twelve female leaders at Christian universities and colleges successfully developed and implemented a vision that caused institutional change (O'Connor, 2018, pg. 198). Their strategy processes differed vastly from their male counterparts. The study found that the female participants were less likely to take risks like the males, because they preferred to establish their competence with the facts and details (O'Connor, 2018, pg. 199). It also expressed that, because of the male stereotype for so long, women are perceived to be unattractive in leadership positions (O'Connor, 2018, pg. 199).

Women who are in leadership roles cannot easily avoid the backlash and comments they receive simply because they are not a man. Men have been in leadership positions for centuries, and women used to have little to no say in their own homes how things were to be ran. In today's world, for women to be put in leadership roles, it is still hard for some, particularly certain men, to be able to comprehend that. Women are not being silent anymore as they were once taught to yet be still having to fight to have their voices heard amongst certain populations, especially when their opinions would differ from a male colleague. "...their highly collaborative style of envisioning and leading change, linked to an ethic of care, was different than the typical leadership style of their male colleagues and therefore not always recognized and valued" (O'Connor, 2018, pg. 210). The participants were able to contribute to an understanding of the change process and the effectiveness of women in leadership roles.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, scholars have continued to understand the impact of religious ideologies on influencing the limitations of women in leadership positions. Religious institutions continue to maintain a rigid negative perception of women in leadership. However, other scholars point out that some denominations within religious classes, such as the Pentecostal church, support women's leadership. Other scholars relate the use of women to push political ideologies by promoting their highly hypocritical rights. Such effects mainly affect the religious and political parties that disguise themselves in the name of promoting women while maintaining a cultural background that bars women from executive positions. Researchers also point out women's resistance to limitations by religion. Therefore, faith is critical in influencing women's ability to become leaders.

## **Method**

Many women are motivated as well as empowered by their faith. This study is important because it contributes to the literature regarding women in workplaces, their achievements as well as the adversity and injustice they faced and conquered. This breed hope as well as stimulate justice for women in marketplace from different environments, cultures as well as women of faith. This research will also meet the gap in literature regarding women of faith leaders in positions of influence to serve as mentors. This will be beneficial to career innovation for women as well as lead to addressing societal issues such as pay inequality, changing workplace policies that would benefit both men and women which ultimately would attract more diversity in workplace especially in rural communities.

## **Research Question**

What effects does faith have on women in leadership?

## **Research Design**

For this study, qualitative research is preferable to quantitative research. Quantitative research relies on experiments, surveys, and more precise and generalizable data than qualitative research. “Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences” (Bhandari, 2020). Thus, this qualitative study with a phenomenological design aims to learn a more about people lived experience. Method with phenomenological designs primarily convey individuals’ experiences and observations from their perspectives, thereby inspiring structural or normative expectations (Grossoehme, 2014). The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of women of faith as they advance to leadership positions in various organizations. The data used is secondary.

## **Sampling**

Women of faith who work in leadership roles in rural settings are the study’s target population. The women in this study will be of various ethnic races. The faith would be from a Christian perspective, with a multi-denomination (Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Church of God in Christ, etc.).

Researchers began by selecting participants using a purposive sampling approach based on their knowledge of the population and context, which eventually lead to the snowball effect (Carbajal, et al., 2018). This study's participants were 32 women. Women in leadership are defined as business owners and hold high-level management positions such as CEOs, administrators, and so on. This is appropriate for a study in which the researcher wishes to include known participants as well as diverse perspectives from previous studies. The study will

only include people who meet the above-mentioned criteria. Individuals who are not leaders, are not women or do not practice a specific Christian faith were excluded from the study.

### **Instrumentation**

Snowball sampling was used for the parent study which entails participants identifying other potential interviewees and submitting their names via email or telling the researcher. Once the researchers received a positive response from the potential participant from the email, they scheduled interviews. They conducted an interview that had 10 specific questions on leadership and trajectory. Once the participant agreed to the interview they met at the participant's preferred time and place. Schedule an interview after a ten-question interview was conducted with the appropriate participants. They focused on women who were in rural communities and were in leadership positions (Carbajal, et al., 2018).

### **Data Collection**

The data has already been gathered and will be used in this study. The data collection will come from a parent study "Women ascending to a leadership position in the rural nonprofit organization" which is a qualitative study using interviews. In this study, they used ten questions to interview their participants. The questions focused on women in leadership positions (Carbajal, et al., 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

In this study we will analyze the interview data from the parent study. We will review the transcripts for key words such as faith, God, or religion. The goal is to select emerging themes. The team will condense emerging themes into major themes. Finally, we will condense codes based on our research question. After reaching consensus, we will finalize the themes into how



faith affects women in leadership. Then from there we will create a visualization of what those results depict.

### **Human Rights**

The secondary data that will be used included participants who were guaranteed to be protected and the researchers adhered to ethical standards such as maintaining confidentiality and locking all files in a cabinet. These people signed a consent form. The computer that stored the data was secured with a password. The participants in the parent study were not compensated.

### **Results**

The results showed that the participants climbed to their existing positions in similar ways, most of the participants ascended to leadership roles within their agencies as some stumbled upon theirs. They all spoke on their own firsthand experiences and their perspective leadership style. The group came up with the following themes: leadership attributes, vision and goals, cultural beliefs and values, mentor and support, education, stereotypes and conflicts, motivation, experience, non-profit, corporate America, and community collaboration engagement and expectation regarding gender and age. We reevaluated the themes and condensed them to the following selective themes: leadership, support, experience, stereotype, networking, collaboration, age, gender, inspiration, and faith.

#### ***Table 1***

##### ***Primary and Selective Themes***

<b>Primary Themes</b>	<b>Selective Themes</b>
1. Leadership attributes	1. Leadership
2. Vision and Goals	2. Support
3. Cultural belief and Values	3. Experience
4. Mentor and support	4. Stereotype
5. Education	5. Networking
6. Stereotypes and conflicts	6. Collaboration
7. Motivation	7. Age
8. Experience	8. Gender
9. Non-profit	9. Inspiration
10. Corporate America	10. Faith
11. Community Collaboration	
Engagement	
12. Expectation regarding gender and age	

### **Primary Themes**

Each group member read the interviews multiple times, and the last themes we used to bring on the emerging themes were based on interviews regarding women leadership and ascension. The group was able to find in the interviews the following emerging themes: leadership, visions, and goals, support, experience, education, cultural belief and values, mentorship and support, non-profit, American corporate culture, community collaboration, and engagement, expectations regarding gender and, or age, motivation, stereotype, connection and network, challenges, decisions, inspiration, and faith.

### ***Leadership***

When it came to leadership, the women interviewed shared similar views on integrity, honesty, effective communication, and servanthood. One participant is praised for her attitude when she got promoted to a position of leadership, "Well, it scared the hell out of me, the very idea, but I knew I was not going to be, I could not go to work the jobs that were available to me as a clinician." I believe it was due to my dissatisfaction with the framework. One participant emphasized the importance of "Your dignity" in leadership. One participant pointed out the

importance of leaders "leading by example, who can be compassionate and caring while holding me and others accountable for the job they do."

### ***Visions and Goals.***

Some participants discussed how they knew from childhood that they would be leaders, or they were going to serve others. One participant stated, "I had a real clear sense of call when I was a kid that I was going to help folks". Another participant stated, "Probably, being a leader actually kind of comes naturally to me, though I mean from when I was a kid that was just weird because I am the baby, I ran the show as a child."

### ***Experience***

Most of the participants had a college diploma, and some did not. Education was a central theme in the interviews, as it played a crucial role in shaping participants' careers and leadership paths. However, the participants agreed that their experiences were the driving force behind why they were in the positions they had now. "What helped was years of experience, the book "Jesus on Leadership" being open to learning from others, and college," said one participant. What did not help was missing out on opportunities to learn from others who made themselves available."

### ***Cultural beliefs and Values.***

The participants spoke about how their upbringing, beliefs, and values influence their leadership style. Some participants were Christians, and their belief systems influenced their leadership style. Other participants' upbringing and personal standards were significant to them. "You work for that company, which means you must do your best," one participant stated. Another participant defined leadership as "having empathy for the people you work with."

One participant stated that she believes people are put on this earth by God for a reason. She felt that her life was influenced by God. She quoted:

And he created each one of us for this specific purpose and I am not saying that my life's journey was God's fault, but he kept me and he protected me even through my mistakes and the consequences that I lived through because of those mistakes and now those things help me to have to be less judgmental and to have a true understanding in everything that women specifically go through.

### ***Mentorship and support***

Participants expressed the importance of having support, and discussion over the role of mentors in their leadership ascension. When the interviewer asked one of the participants if they had a mentor, the participant replied, "I do not think so." She continues later in the interview on how she created a community to assist her in receiving support. However, she did not begin with a mentor. Another participant stated her support started with her mother. Her mother was her role model; she said, "I am very blessed that I had my mom." Some women did not have mentors inside the agencies or peers' support but had family members or church leaders to help them succeed. Some participants had mentors and support. They stated how it helped them in their career. One participant said, "I've had a mentor, I've had a couple of mentors that have helped me to learn things and to do things."

### ***Non-profit***

One of the participants stated that there are more women's non-profit organizations than men. Several women who had interviewed were in managerial positions working at non-profit organizations. They discussed the importance of connecting with the community and securing adequate funding to keep the organization running.

### ***America Corporate Culture***

Many of the participants who interviewed worked at non-profit organizations or an organization that was community-based. One participant talked about working in corporate America and her experience. The participant went on and discussed how she learned her rights,

there was an incident where she became pregnant, and the supervisor stated she could not continue to work. She stated:

Young girls who get pregnant at our company. Boss speaking “that are not married, they don't get to stay here. You can't work here as an unwed mother. You don't have a husband.” And he said -he said, “More specifically, we can't cover your benefits.” That's what he said.

She stated she talked with her dad who informed her of her rights. She stated the corporate woman came down to help her regarding her rights. She quoted:

That woman flew down the next day from that state, met me in the office, and said to me, Which one? Which manager- that one? She said, I'll be back in a minute. She walks to the back of the building, closed the door. She said, when she came back, "He'll be relocated.

### ***Community collaboration and Engagement***

The participants discussed the importance of collaboration and networking with the community, particularly in meeting the needs of the community's residents. They emphasized the importance of being active and the disadvantage of not being a part of or known in the community. A few participants shared their experiences working with various agencies and stakeholders to help their organizations or businesses succeed. Involvement in a community was essential in terms of influencing, maintaining, and growing the organization. When asked if professionalism is significant in the community, one participant responded, "Absolutely, it can ruin your credibility in court." "I believe that leadership is about collaborating to ensure that other members of your team succeed," said another.

### ***Motivation.***

Each participant had varied reasons for wanting to be a leader at work. Many came from different backgrounds and had different experiences that shaped who they were and how they operated. Some were motivated by the failures of their families. Others were inspired by their

coworkers, while some by their faith. Even though they all wanted to help others, their motivations differed.

### *Stereotype*

All the participants in the interview were women. Some participants were women of color who discussed their experience of being discriminated against and stereotyped. The interviewer asked one participant how others act toward her regarding her race, and she responded, "Yeah, not really, has not been an issue." Other participants discussed that their gender and race included factors that affected them in leadership. Another African American participant expressed concern that if a management position became available, she would not be considered because of her race. "And Linda has been here 11 years and is still here with this and me," she added. So, I assumed she was insane because I was black."

### *Connection and Network*

The slogan "who you know" is very relevant in rural East Texas, and the participants expressed this in their statements. One participant talks about how difficult it was for her initially because she was not from the town where she worked. Connecting with the appropriate agencies and stakeholders resulted in resources and revenue for the businesses to thrive. "I am an outsider; many people did not know who I was, and they knew the organization based on the awareness to help raise money to keep it open."

### *Challenges.*

All the participants who got interviewed had unique stories and backgrounds. Some were raised in similar and different circumstances, whether in poverty or single-parent households. However, all the participants mentioned the numerous challenges they faced. One participant stated, "I always felt like I could not please anyone." He stated the trouble he had with people

pleasing. One woman responded to her dilemma in her position as a woman of color; she stated, " I feel like if I were a woman of color, that preconception would not necessarily be there." There are many misconceptions that women of color are not naturally intelligent."

### ***Decisions***

The participants discussed their interviews, their actions, and any repercussions that followed. participants' decisions or choices led them to their current position. The participants' decisions or choices led them to their current role, while others discussed the options that were not working for them. One participant stated the importance of doing your research and letting love be the driving guidance in action. She stated, "don't let anybody deter you, don't follow, do your research, and most of all, love, that is the number one commandment."

### ***Inspiration and Faith***

Each participant's definition of inspiration was different from their faith. One participant expressed her faith regarding her position at her job. She stated, "I feel like God had shaped my heart for this for now, for however long I will be in this position, and I feel like it is a blessing to be doing what I do. But, you know, I get to do it out of the grace of God, and so, I will do it as best I can for as long as he has me here. Another participant expressed her faith in God as a Christian and that she cannot do anything without God. She quoted, "I am a Christian, I believe that God does nothing by mistake, I believe that he gave us the spirit of -- he gave some of us the spirit of discernment. We teach, we teach, and faith is one of the things we need to survive; if you don't have faith in God and in yourself, you can't do anything."

### ***Expectations regarding gender and age***

Some of the participants stated how they were not surprised by how others treated them because of their gender or age. They did not deny the feelings or the reactions. However, the

expectation helped in the acceleration in their leadership. One participant explains how her gender is considered a strike against her in her line of work. "Sometimes, my gender also impacts the issue we are dealing with, but I am still called the little girl, the sweetheart." Another participant points out that she feels that non-profits are mostly managed by women. She quoted, "I feel a lot of non-profits are headed by women, and I don't know if that's because of our nurturer nature as women want to help, but I think it's kind of standard, I guess you could say around here and I think it's been positive, I don't know."

### **Selective Themes**

The significant and final selective themes were based off the leadership framework. The following selective themes are leadership, support, experience, stereotype, inspiration, networking, faith collaboration, gender, and age.

#### ***Support***

The interviewed participant described how they received support from family, colleagues, and friends. These participants demonstrate the value of having support and how it has helped them excel in their careers. In the previous interview, a participant stated that her church was her support system, and one participant was her mentor motivated her to achieve her goals. "I have probably had several mentors," she said. Through my church, Hope Skipper was the county clerk here". She went on to say that her mother was a support and mentor to her, but that she had to learn how to support and encourage herself on many occasions. There was throughout the interviews some women who did not have support and had to rely on their ambition.

#### ***Stereotypes***

In good and bad ways, a woman can fit into different labels. The interviewed participants included African American and Hispanic women, women who were raised being poor, single-



parent families, and religious women. Throughout the interviews, most of the participants faced some form of stereotype, but only a few Caucasian participants stated that this was not an issue, from the perspective of this interview, she felt the need to prove that if she worked as hard as a man, she would be accepted, which leads to the realization that women may not work as hard as men. "I have gotten better at it; I feel like I am probably operating more like a man than a woman most of the time," she said.

One participant who were interviewed was African American, dealing with the double stigma of being a woman and a woman of color. She talked about her experiences as a woman of color. "A black woman with any type of intelligence is scary to society today, so when I speak of fear with people, it is a fear all over the country," because of the stigma attached to the African American culture, she perceived a double threat to her as a woman from a stigmatized culture.

One participant stated that the stereotype was so bad that she had to change her appearance just to be accepted as a woman in her position. "I started making a conscious effort to wear my hair straight, dress appropriately, nothing ethnic, and always took someone with me, someone local with me," she explained.

### ***Faith***

According to Christian belief, faith is the substance of something hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. The women had hope of accomplishing their goals in their way. Even when they faced obstacles or challenges, they kept the belief and confidence to achieve. One participant discussed overcoming fear and remaining humble through prayer. "I prayed to God to keep me humble because I had a lot of belief in the systems put in place, I believed in myself, so God gave me humility." One participant stated how she questioned her placement,

but once she started serving others and heard the praises of others, she knew it was the right place for her.

She said, "I don't know if I can work with seniors. I'm not sure that that's the area that I would be good at, but I prayed a lot about it, and I felt like every day -- and this is just what I say, and I say this to everyone. Every day when I wake up, I feel good about coming to work and feel happy and excited, like what I am going to do today. Then I feel like I have been -- that God put me in the right place and I feel like there are so many things to offer seniors and so many things that people missed out on that I don't miss out on because I get to see -- I hear the stories that they tell us which are great stories."

### ***Inspiration***

Each participant had a different story that inspired them to be in their field and positions of advanced leadership. One participant discussed how she majored in psychology but was inspired by her field practicum to change careers and excel in something else. "The way people were treated and the things they went through were just callous, and how people got in there and didn't get to leave just broke my heart. After that, I did not do well because that wasn't who I wanted to be."

Many women got inspired by their faith in God. Christians believe that God guided and directed them. Negative thoughts and difficulty accepting who they were and the position they were in were some of women's sources of inspiration. From the interviews it was apparent that several participants used rejection from their peers or the opposite sex or race to motivate them to achieve their goals and become leaders.

The following are some quotes from the interviews; "So I have always felt that being a female and being young required me to work extra hard to prove myself." "I have always said that if a white man sat up here, you wouldn't be this difficult, but I'm a black woman, so you

think you can get to know me." Some participants spoke about how their families motivated and inspired them to become the leaders they are; that their drive came from my family.

### *Age*

Ageism can affect any person who is young or old. Being discriminated against because of your age is often found in many workplaces. The participants of these interviews varied from young to older adults. The interviewer asked the participants about their age and if so, how it affected their leadership position. A few of them have mentioned that they believe that a combination of their age and gender is what had bad reactions from others in their field, while some had issues with their age alone, whether they were believed to be too young or too old. One can also tell by the years of experience by estimation of their age.

Some of the women had over 20 plus years of experience as well as older kids in their 20s. One woman stated, "So I have always felt being a female, I did have to work extra hard to prove myself and also being young." These participants were having to go against their odds not only because they are women, but also because of their age to reach the level of success that they are currently at. Some of the participants who got interviewed felt because of their age, they either were not going to be taken seriously or overlooked. Many workplaces consider age when hiring someone, and some participants discussed it.

### *Gender*

The information was collected through interviews with women in positions of leadership. They never disassociated themselves as women or females in the interactions. The goal of the research and interviews was to collect each person's unique contribution and skills in the areas of women and leadership in rural communities. The women discussed how their gender influenced upper management in their careers. "I still believe there is a place for treating women with

equality and fair compensation," one participant said, "and I believe a lot of non-profits are led by women."

Although many of the participants have had issues in their workplace with coworkers and others undermining their authority because of their gender, there are also a few participants who did not have this issue. One participant stated that she believes that her age had more of a bad reaction than her gender in her leadership role. "I don't think they have reacted negatively in any way because of my gender... I think I have had more of a reaction because of my age than my gender." Some of the participants that were interviewed have been fortunate in their jobs regarding their gender, but unfortunately, the same cannot be said for all, and will not be able to be said for some time. All those who were asked the question of the reaction to their gender spoke with honesty and compassion, no matter their answer.

### *Experience*

The theme of experience revealed the diverse backgrounds and life experiences of the woman interviewed. One participant discussed her career path and the challenges she faced: " So I got into - I really like testing, I liked the quantitative style all that and I did some work and validating some personality test and some work readiness, and aptitude test, and that kind of stuff." The participants' experiences not only shaped their perspectives but also contributed to their success in leadership roles. During the interviews, the women discussed their professional experiences, including the support and training that helped them advance in their position of leadership. Some of the women got their jobs without even trying. They would discuss how they got promoted within the company. "The previous Executive Director recommended the position to me and me to the Board of Directors," one participant said.

Some of the participants' childhood experiences influenced them to become the leaders they are. "I grew up in an abusive home," one participant stated. She is now a manager at a Women's Shelter. While others began by volunteering, for example, one participant said. "I started volunteering with Habitat for Humanity when I was 12."

Another common theme amongst the participants in the interviews is experience. They spoke about the experiences they had before ending up in the position they are in now, and the experience they are steadily gaining as well. The participant talked about how her personal life experiences with domestic violence and sexual assault made helped her with her work, "...having victory over those things that really gave me a passion to work with victims and to learn how to help victims, to overcome those things." Another participant moved up to executive director in her place of employment, and she explained how she believed that lower-level position bettered her for her place of leadership she has now. "It gave me the experience to know the operation that's what I could say and getting to know the people, getting to know how this place ran." All the participants received their roles in leadership by going through many ups and downs, and they used that experience to their benefit.

### ***Networking***

Networking is seen as extremely beneficial because it allows for people of different backgrounds to come together and create relationships through activities such as seminars, training, conferences, etc. Throughout their discussion, the theme of networking emphasized, especially its importance for women of faith in leadership positions. Participants who were familiar with their position or attempting to advance in their careers would frequently attend various seminars and conferences, including forming groups to develop support and learn from one another to build a network. The interviewees then discussed establishing groups, connecting

with mentors, or attending various events to develop a support system eventually. Some of the participants stated that they had to attend numerous conferences and that they had leadership training. "I surround myself with leaders, and I watch them, and I pick out the traits that I feel are the areas where they are succeeding, and I listen to their stories and experiences," one participant said.

One participant stated that "we go to coalition meetings- those kinds of things. There would be meetings for social service groups to gather. We would go. You must be a walking advertisement and be passionate about what you believe." These networking meetings also equipped them to handle any discrimination or backlash they might receive from those with opposing views regarding the gender and age of leadership. Unfortunately, some of the interviewees experienced discrimination at these networking events. Instead of learning how to lead effectively, many participants were not as welcomed as the men. One participant stated that she "felt a sense of hostility that they just didn't think I should be in there because I was specifically there to talk about Christian Men's Job Corps."

### ***Collaboration***

The participants talked about different projects as well as fundraisers to grow their company or bring resources to the community. They spread the importance of collaborating with the community as well as the stakeholders into bringing in the necessary goals as well as the needs of their clients. The other theme that was emphasized by the interviewees was collaborating at all levels, for all types of situations and problems. A participant stated "there are CEOs or executive directors, and our goal is to network to look at something that we can cultivate together to create some major fundraiser that would help the underserved population. And to just talk collaboratively about what is happening in our agency, and we have been

meeting at different agencies”. Another participant stated that her collaboration style is going “to different churches at different organizations and I speak about what we do in the community and every presentation I present a little different depending on who the audience.”

Although collaboration can be extremely beneficial to women of faith that hold leadership positions, it can also be used against them. One participant also confirmed this scrutiny by stating “I have to always be open to understand that in the community I have to present myself you know in a different way than you know than other people do because I represent this organization.” This comment portrays the underlying corporate attitude that tells participants that to get what they want; they must man up. Another participant stated that to dress for success they had to dress like the men and that they were not held to any type of expectations.

A couple of the interviews broke it down even more and examined the professional side of collaborating with the community and gender stereotypes that others encounter. One factor is how women are stereotyped as soft and nurturing, which may cause them to be less respected in the agency, institution, or community even. Then there was a participant stated that

being a leader in a social work role and then also having it branch out into the community where you are a leader among your community partners and you are working with the community at large that the community having to make sure that you are good credible person in front of these judges, good and strong relationships with everyone.

This stereotype can hinder women in reaching certain positions because their “softness” might not match the job description. In the following, a participant gave another example of a failed collaboration caused by one's gender:

Our rural area is still very sexist and though I have not personally been hindered tremendously by that, I witness it daily and specially in ministry I will say well maybe not specially included in ministry there are some in this community who even today don't respect my authority or my, authority is not the right word my leadership role because I am now executive director of Christian Women's and Christian Men's Job Corps and being executive director of a Christian Men's Job Corps there some churches who do not

want to be affiliated with us because I am a female. Even though they are happy to be affiliated with us with Christian Women's Job Corp, they don't want to be affiliated with us for Christian Men's Job Corps because they feel that it's inappropriate that I am the executive director, and the program coordinator is going to be a man because their whole goal for the ministry is men serving men and women serving women.

The church is especially guilty of holding back women from prominent positions because of their gender. These preconceived notions that men are far superior to women is holding back society from growing, it is clear in rural churches around the county. These preconceived notions of gender and the workforce are only hindering our society, yet they continue to spread throughout office buildings all over America. An individual's profession or gender does not justify the discrimination that some women must tolerate today.

### ***Leadership***

The participants' perspectives on leadership varied, depending on their performance or how they perceived leadership. The participants discussed how their coworkers perceive them in terms of leadership. They go on to explain how they frequently struggle between meeting the expectations of a leader based on company or coworker guidelines and balancing it with their perception of what leadership should be.

Women are oppressed, which was a learning experience for me as a leader. "I have met different people in the walk-ins that have helped me understand leadership in different ways and also kind of learning what to do and not do as a leader," one participant said.

Some participants stated that they were born into a family of leaders or that they knew they would be leaders because of their family or upbringing. It was as if the participants knew that when they grew up, they would be in a position of power.

One participant equated leadership to being a servant, and she saw it as more about serving people than ruling over them. "Servant leader, I feel that being a leader doesn't



necessarily mean being the one telling everyone this is what you should or shouldn't do," she said. Overall, the participants' definition of a leader was mostly about helping others rather than ruling over others. It was more about serving others rather than being domineering.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

This study focuses on women and how faith impacted their journey to leadership. Many participants involved in this study were willing to talk about the obstacles they had to overcome regarding a variety of factors; age and race being the two most prominent. It further discusses the outcome of the research question, the Influence of Faith in Leadership on Women. The study also addresses the similarities and differences between the actual outcome and the results of other authors. Furthermore, the section provides an interpretation of the outcome as well as a summary and conclusion. Finally, the section provides the implications and limitations of the research. The women who were interviewed spoke about their desire for their careers, their experiences and how they chose to help others and make a difference in their communities. This appeared to lead to the structure of women's leadership, with the evidence of the data that was collected.

#### ***Discussion of Research Question***

The research question was "what effects does faith have on women in leadership?" From the information gathered from the interviews, the women are very resilient despite what they face. Every participant discussed the challenges they overcame which helped them ascend to their current positions in their careers. Each participant's definition of faith was different. Some participants' faith was influenced by their religion "Christianity," while others' faith was inspired by their family morals and beliefs. Overall, the participants' faith played a significant role in their leadership perspectives as well as their decision making.

In rural communities, there is lack of employment and resources, and they are known for being in small sizes. For any organizations or agencies to succeed in rural communities, a relationship as well as integrity must be established. The participants discussed the importance of networking and collaborating with local stakeholders and residents. If a person does not know you, they will have a problem trusting you. The participants also discussed the significance of building relationships with both staff and the community. The leadership style the women strive for was servant approach as well as empowerment.

### *Similarities and Differences*

When it came to ageism, some participants had experienced it, but the majority did not speak about it. According to Reed (2022), there is an issue with ageism among women; “No matter what a woman looks like in person or in a photograph, gender and age discrimination are still a reality in the workplace” (para. 30). Ferguson (2018) stated that role congruity theory examines relationships between gender and social roles, and how those roles interact with each other as well as the individuals assigned to them. In other words, role congruity can be seen when individuals perform activities that are labeled as stereotypical for that gender, such as a woman who is a stay-at-home mom while the males work full time jobs. When looking at how the society views leadership, it can be noticed that their first instinct is to lean towards men, due to the set gender roles found in the theoretical framework of role congruity theory.

The participants were extremely vocal about their experiences as women in leadership. Each participant was different. However, all women overcame some form of struggle to achieve their advancement. Studies have shown that women are more open to discuss their struggles and accomplishments. Women are no longer silent as they were once taught to be, yet they still must fight to have their voices heard amongst certain populations, especially when their opinions

differ from those of a male colleague. According to O'Connor (2018), "their highly collaborative style of envisioning and leading change, linked to an ethic of care, was different than the typical leadership style of their male colleagues and therefore not always recognized and valued" (p. 210).

The participants in this study had some form of faith, but very few identified their faith as Christianity based. Faith can be defined in a variety of ways, but including spirituality makes it more distinct. The women in this study stated that the ministry's foundation should be rooted in Christ, and that their personal identity as Christians gave them a sense of purpose and belonging (Glanz, 2020).

Leadership roles in a male-dominated society can be challenging for a woman. The participants did not ignore the bias and the stereotypes, but instead refused to let them stop them, and took it as an opportunity to overcome them. The most common statement by women today regarding this topic, is that they were expected to fit into an environment that was more tailored to males. Glanz (2020) stated that "adaptations involved finding their voice, managing emotions, personality curtailment, understanding others' leadership style, and taking on more masculine traits" (p. 333).

One article explained the importance of mentorship and provided an example. Mentorship can help any person to excel in their careers. Some participants did not have any mentors, but they connected with others and established a network and collaboration. There were participants who had mentors that helped them advance in their positions. The first theme identified within the study is that women seemed to thrive more because of their mentors in the church. Glanz (2020) stated,

Over half the women described supervisors as people who helped them to thrive by offering dialogue and processing time, believing in their abilities, and affirming their gifts

verbally, and watching out for and challenging them with new opportunities and roles. (p. 331)

Many rural communities are Christian-based, and relationships and connections are highly valued. There were participants who were not from rural communities and had difficulty connecting at first. Faith in God was a major contribution to majority of the participants' success in their careers. There is evidence that women who associate their faith with Christianity, attribute their success to their faith. The article "Exploration of Christian Women's Vocational Ministry Leadership and Identity Formation in Evangelical Churches on the West Coast" explains how women who have a strong identity that is rooted in Christian faith can improve their ability to be a leader (Glanz, 2020). This article reviews a variety of literature that analyze topics such as adult identity, gender role stereotypes in leadership, and cultural influences. The article then explains their qualitative study, which included face-to-face, online, and semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to help gather more information regarding women of faith in leadership.

According to Walker (2007), most women depend on a supernatural power to feel empowered. Relying on faith as a source of power enables women to feel more inclined to pursue leadership positions regardless of multiple social and religious limitations.

### ***Interpretation of the Results***

From the data collected, it is apparent that the participants were women of faith, not necessarily based on religion or spirituality, but rather in a belief in achieving something that may appear unattainable, but with the right support, research, and mindset, a promotion in a position that once was not considered or available. There were participants whose faith was Christian based, with the clarity that the position they are in is because of God, it was no coincidence nor mistake, but rather God orchestrated it all. Most of the participants made it clear

that the position they had was not given on today's date. Some participants had to overcome more difficult obstacles than others to obtain their current positions. It was obvious from the interviews that the participants had to face and overcome something. For some participants, their age was the barrier, while others the color of their skin, but they were all determined to overcome that barrier by any means necessary.

Every participant had a unique story about themselves which shed light on why they were in the position they were in. One participant was in a domestic violence relationship, which explained why she worked as a supervisor at a domestic violence company. The results from the collective data also indicate that your beginnings do not define your end. Some of the participants had humble beginnings, whether they were poor or grew up in an unsafe environment, but that situation inspired them instead of destroying them.

In rural communities, it is all about who you know as community collaboration and network are a necessity. The participants emphasized the importance of relationships, support, and mentorship, especially those who were not originally from the communities they were serving. Many rural communities are small, close knit and familiar with one another, which makes it difficult for a stranger to develop a relationship, let alone trust in them. One participant had to connect with a trustworthy resident to build her relationship in the community, because she was not originally from that area.

It is evident from the collected data that education and experience were tools that brought on acceleration in the path to leadership. There was a participant who did not have a college degree but had experience, which made her qualify for a position on offer, even though she thought she was not qualified.

The definition of leadership was elaborated from a servant's approach. The participants discussed the importance of dignity, integrity, as well as power structure in which they do not dominate over people but rather help them. The participants discussed a leadership style that does not involve sorry speaking or micromanaging but rather one that educates, supports and serves using a team approach. They also described their understanding of what a leader should be and what their attributes are, which overall shows the importance of professionalism, servanthood, compassion as well as accountability.

The outcome of the study recommends that faith in leadership has a significant effect on the ability of women to be leaders. Therefore, women who had strong beliefs while forming their leadership roles were more likely to be happy and perform their leadership roles with great satisfaction. This implies that performing leadership positions, especially for women, were greatly influenced by their faith and church for them to be recognized. Moreover, when choosing women leaders in any organization, it is essential to always consider women's role of faith.

### ***Implication of Further Research***

From the start of this paper's research, it was obvious that there is a lack of research on women in leadership roles, let alone limited information on rural communities. Currently, women are evolving into leadership roles in a male dominated workforce. There are strategies, statistics, as well as rights that are needed to help the advancement of women in leadership as well as understanding women in the workplace. There is a lot of information and data about women that is stigmatized or stereotyped, but there is a lack of women, women of color research and leadership roles. The data collected for this paper was very helpful but not sufficient for understanding leadership, reality and faith with the target population being women. There is research about leadership, leadership styles and methodologies for ascension. However, women,

women of color and rurality are major components that are lacking in research. Women in the workforce or leadership positions bring in different kind of views, structure, cultural diversity as well as value compared to their male counterpart.

There is a need for more research on women, women of color in leadership positions as well as how their faith has influenced them to excel against barriers, and how to be overcomers in their positions. This study focused on women and how faith impacted their journey to leadership. Many participants involved in this study were willing to talk about the obstacles they had to overcome regarding a variety of factors, the two most prominent being age and gender. All of the participants involved had various experiences where their faith is concerned, which are discussed further in this paper.

This topic of study could be very beneficial going forward for women in all fields, and not just social work. Women are increasingly taking on leadership roles in our society, while keeping their faith in the forefront of everything they do. There are many changes that come with that as time passes, so this is something that should always be updated and kept up to date.

### ***Study Limitations***

There is limited research on women in leadership roles especially in rural communities. The 32 participants who were interviewed represent a small percentage of women in leadership, which cannot be generalized. Most of the participants were from rural areas, but there was an insignificant amount of data to provide a comprehensive representation of women's leadership in rural communities, as well as how faith affects them as leaders. The participants came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including African Americans and Hispanics, but no other cultures were represented, implying a bias towards women of color in leadership. The data from the

interviews showed that the representation of women in leadership, their zeal, and their faith in overcoming obstacles was very distinct but not in depth.

The participants were either single, widowed or married, which gave a perspective of how the correlation of their environment played a significant role in their leadership. However, due to the small sample size, there was insufficient research on women from different social classes, immigrants, and first-generation Americans, and how their culture and faith affect their leadership, which was not expressed in this study. There were not enough questions from the interview that went into detail about culture or elaboration of what faith is. The research question asks how faith affects women in leadership roles, but there were no follow-up questions that would allow the women to elaborate more on their faith. The questions to the participants also brought on limited information which brings on unlimited study. Faith is one of the major objectives of the research and therefore there should have been more questions geared towards that, which were missing in the interviews because there were not enough questions to bring that out of the participants.

There was also a lack of diversity in careers, with most of the women working for profit organizations and few for nonprofits. Some of the careers in different fields do not feel our representation, including the medical field, food industry, agriculture, and other related fields. Overall, due to the lack of diversity, whether cultural, career or even social class, the study was good but was still limited because key components were missing to give a clearer picture of how faith really affect women in leadership roles, how women from different races and background raised in different social classes view faith, and how it helps them thrive in the positions they are in.



Accessibility and snowballing sampling may be considered a limitation as the lack of random selection does not ensure representativeness. For example, the lack of interviewees who were faith driven may have missed an important and different perspective. However, the interviewees' distinct origins and collected experiences provided a rich source of data on which to base significant study. The "coding down" approach to theme development introduces a limitation in terms of potentially narrowing perceived concepts from interview content. However, published articles allowed the researchers the chance to make assumptions based on new data.

### **Conclusion**

From the findings of this study, faith in leadership has significantly impacted leadership positions in women. This is evidence that faith must be vital in implementing policies in any organization, church, or political party before recruiting women for leadership. The role of faith in leadership will assist women in breaking the monotony, especially in African countries where women are not considered worthy of leadership positions. Women must always be considered, therefore there is no need to make them biased in society.

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