

## Abstract

Women in leadership roles have continued to increase and thrive in unprecedented ways. However, research data suggests that gender inequality and unbalanced representation of women in leadership roles is still a significant social, cultural, and organizational issue. This study is a qualitative research on six (6) successful women executives in Siquijor, an island province in Central Visayas, Philippines. Narratives of their personal, professional and family background as well as the facilitating factors and characteristics that led to their success were gathered through case study method using observations, interviews and focused-group discussions. The study revealed that five (5) out of the six women respondents are married, having less than five children, and are second-born in the family. These executives are all licensed professionals, passers of government exams, and achievers in their own right. Furthermore, the women leaders are very competent and qualified in their jobs and possess positive self-concepts as women despite sad, frustrating and humiliating episodes in their lives. Lastly, these women executives share similar facilitating factors and characteristics proving that personal qualities and attitudes play a very important role for a person's success.

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Corresponding Author: Mary Grace B. Lubguban, [gracelubguban@gmail.com](mailto:gracelubguban@gmail.com)

## 1.0 Introduction

Education is generally recognized as being a sector of primary importance to women throughout the world. It is a key element in any movement aiming to break traditional prejudices and gender stereotyping. Leadership is characterized as a social process that influences action towards a shared goal by a person or a community. The success of any organization greatly depends on how competent the leaders are.

History teaches that in the past, women have been treated as inferior beings and second-class people. Women were socialized to be docile and obedient to authority and were taught to work only within the confines of the home. They were marginalized and considered smaller-cost commodities (McKinsey, 2020; Sykes, 2018). Men have long dominated in maintaining elite roles of authority and power (Bauer & Tremblay, 2011). Leadership studies began in the late 19th century studying men in history who were considered to have created the opportunity and led the charge to accomplish what the general public hoped to do or obtain. The unbalanced representation of women in leadership is a significant social, cultural, and organizational issue. Despite hardships for women in obtaining leadership roles, society has now seen a number of highly effective women leaders, such as former Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher (UK), Indira Gandhi (India), PepsiCo's CEO Indira Nooyi, Four-Star General Ann E. Dunwoody and others (Sweat, 2020; Zarya, 2018). Gender and development studies in organizations are constantly evolving and researches on women in leadership roles continued to rise over the years. A vast literature provides researches and readers alike with the needed data and points of reference where to focus women's studies on leadership and gender and development. Recently updated research shows that women in leadership positions are perceived as being every bit as effective as men, that is, women score higher than men in most leadership skills (Zarya, 2018). In 2019, women in management roles grew to a 29% globally. Eighty-seven percent of global economies have at least one woman in a senior management role in 2020 (Catalyst, 2020). This pressing scenario led us to ask questions such as, "Do women nowadays reached that level of equality with men?", "Do women and men lead differently?", and "Are men more effective than women as leaders?"

For the past decades, women have made considerable inroads into domains traditionally dominated by men. However, even though women now account for more than one-third of senior management in the US, women in developing and underdeveloped

countries are still struggling to push forward and still facing a lot of obstacles and barriers in reaching to the top (UN Women, 2020; WEF, 2018). The unbalanced representation of women in leadership (Player *et al.*, 2019) is a significant social, cultural, and organization issue (Launius & Hassel, 2020).

Today, women who work as middle or higher-salaried professionals, entrepreneurs, managers or executives do so not for economic survival but for self-fulfillment, improvement of standards of living, keeping the management of standards of living or keeping the management of an enterprise or wealth within the family.

Many women serve as models for how to lead and how to become leaders. They've taken corporations, governments, academic institutions and other organizations to new heights. They've shown other women the possibilities and the power they hold in their hands. According to a growing wave of research, women in leadership is helping business thrive (Burns, 2017) yet, for all their achievements, these women represent too small a percentage of leaders in general (Catalyst, 2020).

Even in democratic countries where equal opportunities and chances are given to people in all walks of life, women professionals occupying top management and executive positions are still very few compared to men. Discrimination, stereotyping, prejudices and the like still abound in the workplace, not only in the corporate world but also in the academe and in the political arenas.

This is a qualitative research study on the identified six (6) successful women leaders and executives in Siquijor, Central Visayas, Philippines. It aimed to explore their lived experiences and elaborated on the following: (a) Personal, professional and family background of the women executives; (b) Their successes and failures; and (c) Facilitating factors and characteristics that led to their success.

## 2.0 Methodology

This study is a qualitative descriptive research using case study method. A case study is a detailed study of a single group of individual's behavior or personality. In this type of research, the data was gathered through observations, interviews and focused group discussions. A narrative was developed, integrated, coded, and summarized focusing on issues and concerns about the women respondents.

The locale of the study is Siquijor province. Located in Central Visayas Region of Philippines, Siquijor is the smallest province in the

region and the 3rd smallest province in the country. It is classified as a fifth class province and has one congressional district. It became an independent province by virtue of Republic Act 6398 enacted on September 17, 1971. It has a total land area of 343.7 square kilometers boasting of a 102-kilometer long coastline.

Siquijor is a beautiful island blessed with stunning white sand beaches, crystal-clear seas, and rich marine biodiversity. The island province has a total population of 103,395 (2020 census). Siquijor province recorded a literacy rate of 98.8 percent among the 78,162 household population aged 10 years and over. The 98.9 percent literacy rate was accounted to females comprising the 38,761 household populations, while males had 98.8 percent literacy rate comprising 39,401 household populations. By major occupation, skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers comprised the largest group at 32.1 percent with large number of male workers. Service and sale workers came next at 13.9 percent with mostly female workers. Large number of female workers was also evident in major occupation groups like managers, professionals, technicians, associate professionals and clerical and support workers.

The subjects of the study were the six (6) women executives and administrators in the various government offices or agencies in the place. These women executives were occupying top positions in politics, academe, health, law, social services, and business. The researcher personally identified these women respondents whose success stories inspired most women respondents in the province. In the conduct of the study, ethical considerations and protocols were observed. Responses on interviews were recorded, coded and analyzed through the help of an expert professional and psychologist.

### 3.0 Results and Discussion

The study is anchored on the theories of Alfred Adler, Harry Stack Sullivan, Albert Bandura, the gender schema theory developed by Sandra Bem and Carol Hymowitz.

#### *Personal, Professional and Family Background*

The women executives are all well-educated and successful in their chosen careers. They are all passers of various civil service and government examinations before occupying top positions in the organization. Many studies reveal that women who are successful and occupy managerial and executive positions are also schooled and well-educated. Likewise, this research further explains that despite being busy juggling careers and family responsibilities, they were able to balance their time for their husbands and children. It can also be observed from this study that all the women executives grew up in poor but disciplined home environment. Five (5) of them came from struggling and poor families whose parents were schooled and educated. Only one (1) has parents who were educated and have stable, permanent, and high-earning jobs which adequately supported the family's socio-economic needs.

The study shows that four (4) out of six (6) of these women are second-born children. This data gave a positive tone on the theory of Alfred Adler which favors second-born children than first-born. However, two (2) women executives are middle and last-born children. These women respondents are all licensed professional and passers of government examinations. They have at least fifteen to thirty-five years of working experience in the government. Furthermore, they possess adequate trainings and seminars making them more qualified and competent in their profession. The women executives also identified significant others who were instrumental

Table 1. Personal, professional and family background of cases

Personal Background	Professional Background	Family Background
Case 1-62 years old, married, second born, has one child.	Doctor of Medicine Career Executive Service Officer	Grew up in democratic family, parents are professionals
Case 2-56 years old, single, second born child has only child.	Mayor, Politician, Businesswoman, licensed Social Worker	Grew up in poor family, single parent childhood
Case 3-47 years old, married, fourth child has two children	Doctor of Veterinary Medicine	Grew up in democratic and disciplined family, parents are professionals
Case 4-42 years old, married, seventh born has four children	Doctor of Medicine, Businesswoman	Grew up in a deprived, addictive family, parents are government employees.
Case 5-57 year old, married, second born has two children	Election Officer	Grew up in a poor family with a single mother
Case 6-43 years old, married, second born has two children	Bank Manager, Banker	Grew up in a poor and broken family, was a working student in a college year

in their successes. These are their parents, relatives, associates, and mentors who have helped them become who they are today. This particular point in the study concurs to the theory of Harry Stack Sullivan on "significant others."

In addition, the study further reveals that all the women respondents have positive self-images or self-concepts. These positive self-concepts evolved from various positive and negative personal and professional experiences. This result emphasizes the principle that childhood experiences have a significant impact on leadership abilities of these women executives (Veihmeyer, & Doughtie, 2015). These positive self-images and self-concepts are female's mindsets which help them maintain focus and constantly opportunities to grow and learn, even amidst mistakes and failures in life.

Mentoring is a time-honored way for young professionals to break into the ranks. While this process has historically been very successful for males, it is less effective for females. Most mentors are male and present senior people in management. Women who adopt male mentors must tread the fine line between getting too close to them and not being too distant. Females with male mentors may be confronted with allegations between them, which will weaken the former's professional credibility. Men who dominate in either private or governmental organizations tend to perpetrate their kind (Player *et al.*, 2019; Veihmeyer, 2015). Nevertheless, these women executives can able to find successful female leaders who serve as mentors and role models in their profession. They have someone to emulate in terms of professional skills, values, work ethics and professional integrity. This particular finding echoes similar result from Ghosh and Reio (2013), who claimed that mentors also double as role models for protégés (Paoloni & Demartini, 2016).

### Successes and Failures

Women executives also have their own share of successes and failures while climbing the ladder in their chosen field. The successes come in the form of academic achievements like earning a college degree, scholastics honors, scholarships, awards, and recognitions, successful careers, a happy married life, balanced physical and emotional well-being, and material wealth. As imperfect as life itself, these women leaders have their highs and lows in both personal and professional lives. All of them experienced difficulties, and sad and frustrating episodes in one way or another in their lives. Among these are envy and jealousy from colleagues, biases, prejudices from male colleagues and associates, and discrimination in the workplace (Hourani & Parkman, 2020; Landoy, 2019; Zenger & Folkman, 2019). They believed that the problems and difficulties they experienced made them better and stronger individuals. Overall, the women executives reveal more happy and successful episodes rather than sad and unfortunate life experiences.

### Facilitating Factors and Characteristics

Leadership and gender studies reveal certain facilitating factors and characteristics that help people, especially women, reach the top level and was able to occupy top executives positions in various types of organizations. Literature reviews identified certain personality traits and characteristics that helped women to be successful. The women executives in this study share similar facilitating factors and characteristics that helped them survived against biases, prejudices, and discrimination enabling them to break the "glass ceiling" and "sticky floors" that culture and a patriarchal society dictates.

The women executives see themselves as determined, patient, ambitious, risk-takers, output-driven, open-minded, confident and emotionally competent individuals. They claim that their pains and struggles as well as their joys and victories helped shaped their personalities, make them succeed and help them reach the top. These findings clearly concur with various literatures on women possessing certain leadership traits and characteristics like empathy, self-awareness and confidence (Sandberg, 2019; Burns, 2017; Cerado & Abdullah, 2015). More so, the women executives claim to have attained a high level of intelligence in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities. They are fully aware of the barriers and obstacles faced by women in both home and workplace, but they face these challenges head-on, survived all the difficulties and reached the top (Turgut *et al.*, 2019; Mayer *et al.*, 2016; Caleo & Heilam, 2013).

### 4.0 Conclusion

A woman is a force to reckon with. A woman's view of leadership begins to take shape in childhood, starting with the family values she learns, her personal and professional experiences, her exposure to leadership skills, and whether she has positive role models. Success in leadership depends on various factors that enable women to rise and lead. To empower women to reach the highest ranks is to provide women with the needed platforms and opportunities for them to conquer and break the "glass ceiling" so they could navigate themselves and afford the much needed respect and equality that have been deprived of them for many decades and years.

The results of case study accounted the veracity, truthfulness and sad realities of gender inequality reflected in the present society we live in. Results of the study show a positive tone and concur with the ideas of Sullivan, Bandura and Adler. It also reinforced the philosophy

of the gender schema theory of Sandra Bem and the leadership traits identified by Carol Hymowitz. The majority of the women executives shared similar family backgrounds and experiences and exhibited similar facilitating factors and characteristics that helped them reach their goals and ambitions in life.

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