

Lived Experiences of Female Barangay Captains in Local Governance: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract:

One of the significant advancements in moving beyond the traditionally patriarchal nature of politics has been the increased involvement and participation of women. This study explored the experiences of female barangay captains in local governance in the selected barangays in the municipalities of Panaon and Jimenez, Misamis Occidental. The phenomenological research design was used in the study. There were five female barangay captains as the participants selected through convenience sampling technique. An Interview Guide was used during the face-to-face interviews conducted. The Moustakas' method of analysis was used in analyzing the data gathered. Results revealed the following emerging themes: motivation and pathways to leaderships, gendered experiences in leadership, leadership strategies and coping mechanisms, and personal fulfilment and values in leadership. Despite holding positions of leadership, female barangay captains have faced gender-related challenges in their roles. However, they have embedded a sense of resilience that has helped them navigate their roles effectively. It is recommended that local government units explore low-cost or non-monetary recognition initiatives, such as public commendations, certificates of appreciation, feature articles, or social media spotlights, to acknowledge the achievements of outstanding female barangay captains. These efforts can enhance visibility, boost morale, and inspire others without requiring significant financial resources.

Keywords: barangay governance, empowerment, equality, female leadership, gendered challenges

1. Introduction

Women's involvement has been key to challenging patriarchal dominance in politics. As men increasingly accept feminist ideas, greater female representation emerges. Though leadership styles may differ by gender, men and women deserve equal rights, privileges, and opportunities. Promoting gender inclusivity strengthens democracy through women's participation and leadership. Research shows gender-diverse political leadership improves policy outcomes and fosters inclusive governance (Patel & Kim, 2023; Smith & Johnson, 2021). The growing visibility of women in top roles reflects cultural shifts toward empowerment (Lopez, 2022), while studies confirm that gender-diverse leadership enhances inclusivity, innovation, and organizational effectiveness (Baczor, 2022; Dwertmann & van Knippenberg, 2024).

Despite progress, women remain underrepresented in politics. As of 2023, they comprise only 24% of legislators globally, with just 31 female Heads of State and 26.5% of parliament members (Atske et al., 2023; UN Women, 2023). Achieving parity requires proactive measures such as quotas, gender-sensitive procedures, and support networks (Atske et al., 2023). In the Philippines, as a CEDAW signatory, laws such as the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710) and Women in Development and Nation-Building Act (RA 7192) institutionalize gender equality and political participation, rooted in constitutional guarantees (Article 2, Section 14) (Rivera, 2020; Delos Santos & Cruz, 2022; Tan & Morales, 2023).

While Filipino women have gained prominence, challenges persist due to entrenched patriarchal norms from colonial history (Caballero, 2024). Misogyny—defined as the

enforcement of patriarchal norms—remains prevalent, sanctioning women who defy gender roles (Caballero, 2024; Dovi, 2024). Political misogyny operates by framing elite insults to align with societal prejudice, perpetuating negative perceptions of women leaders (Dovi, 2024).

Local governance, particularly barangays, offers opportunities for inclusive leadership. Barangays, the smallest political units, are led by captains tasked with significant community responsibilities (Pelayo, 2023; Villahermosa, 2025). Female barangay captains challenge gender stereotypes and promote equality, inspiring inclusive grassroots participation.

However, existing studies on women in politics remain largely quantitative and focused on national positions. Few explore the lived experiences of grassroots leaders, revealing a methodological gap (Firmase & Prieto-Carolino, 2023; Pavo & Tamayo-Gutierrez, 2023). Qualitative and longitudinal research is needed to understand how female barangay captains navigate gendered power structures, bias, and limited networks. Addressing this gap is crucial for context-sensitive policies that advance women's leadership in local governance.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study explored the lived experiences of female barangay captains in local governance. Specifically, it sought to answer the following objectives:

- 1.1.1. Explore the experience/s of female barangay captains in local governance.
- 1.1.2. Determine the coping mechanisms employed by female barangay captains in overcoming challenges.
- 1.1.3. Look into the participants' views or aspirations.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of female barangay captains (Creswell, 2013). This approach emphasized understanding participants' unique perspectives, challenges, and meanings attributed to their leadership roles within socio-cultural and political contexts. Through in-depth interviews, narratives

were analyzed to capture patterns and the essence of the phenomenon often overlooked by quantitative methods.

2.2. Research Environment

The study was conducted in the municipalities of Panaon and Jimenez, Misamis Occidental. Panaon has 16 barangays with two female captains, while Jimenez has 24 barangays, three of which are led by women who consented to participate. These areas were chosen to understand women's political experiences within specific socio-political contexts.

2.3. Participants of the Study

Five incumbent female barangay captains from Panaon and Jimenez served as participants. They were selected through convenience sampling based on three criteria: being an incumbent captain, having prior political experience, and giving informed consent. This ensured participants had relevant experiences to share.

2.4. Data Gathering Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide with opening, core, and exit questions was used. The opening questions gathered participant profiles, core questions focused on leadership challenges and gender biases, and exit questions ensured completeness. Follow-up questions encouraged elaboration to capture deeper insights into their experiences.

2.5. Data Gathering Procedure

Permissions were secured from institutional and municipal authorities prior to data collection. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with informed consent, and sessions were recorded for accuracy. Data were then transcribed, translated, and analyzed to extract emerging themes.

2.6. Mode of Analysis

Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach, which involved bracketing, horizontalization, and clustering into themes. Textural and structural descriptions were developed to explain what participants experienced and how they experienced it. These were synthesized to reveal

the essence of women's leadership experiences in local governance.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Interviews were recorded only with explicit permission, and participants could withdraw at any stage. Ethical approval was secured before the study, aligning with academic and professional standards.

3. Results and Discussions

This section presents findings from a qualitative study on the experiences, coping strategies, and perspectives of female barangay captains. Thematic analysis of interviews revealed key themes: pathways to leadership, coping and leadership strategies, and leadership values and aspirations.

Lived Experiences and Pathways to Leadership

The leadership journeys of female barangay captains reflect a blend of personal motivations, cultural norms, and societal expectations. Many are driven by values such as compassion, care, and service, often shaped by early life experiences and exposure to community needs (Domingo et al., 2020). Volunteerism and grassroots advocacy strengthen their sense of agency to create meaningful impact.

Familial encouragement is another critical factor, as family support boosts confidence and frames leadership as a shared responsibility (Gomez & Gaspar, 2023). Societal changes—such as advocacy for gender equality, visibility of female leaders, and shifting perceptions—further inspire women to break traditional norms (Lin et al., 2023). By running for office, many view their roles as part of a broader push for gender parity and inclusive governance (Zheng, Kark, & Meister, 2022).

Despite these motivations, challenges persist. Female leaders often face authority being questioned in male-dominated spaces, struggle with gender stereotypes, and navigate the double bind of being seen as either too strong or too soft (Zheng, Kark, & Meister, 2022; Lin, Wang, & Yu, 2023). Balancing governance with family

responsibilities adds further strain, requiring resilience and family support (Gomez & Gaspar, 2023). Yet, by stepping into leadership, these women challenge gender norms, empower other women, and reshape expectations for future generations (Domingo et al., 2020).

Becoming a female barangay captain is thus the result of a complex interplay of personal conviction, social support, and cultural shifts. Recognizing these factors is vital for policies that foster women's empowerment and gender equity at the grassroots level.

Belief in One's Self

A strong sense of self-belief drives female barangay captains to pursue leadership, rooted in personal conviction, past experiences, and resilience (Zheng, Kark, & Meister, 2022). This confidence, often developed through community involvement and smaller leadership roles, empowers women to challenge gender norms and assert authority in male-dominated spaces (Lin, Wang, & Yu, 2023). Serving as a counterweight to external doubts and biases, self-assurance becomes a transformative force that enables women to lead effectively and redefine power at the grassroots level.

"It is my personal choice to enter into politics. I also know within myself that I am capable of handling this position. In fact, in our family line, I am the first politician." (P1)

"What made me decide to take the position of being a barangay captain is that I realized that I have the potential to help the people and contribute to the development of the barangay." (P2)

"Because of my long experience in politics before becoming barangay captain, I have proven that I am truly capable of holding this position." (P3)

"I saw for myself that I am capable of taking on the role of barangay captain." (P4)

"Of course, I also reflected on it myself and saw my own potential." (P5)

A barangay captain, as the local chief executive, must demonstrate self-confidence to lead, make decisions, and gain public trust. Confidence not only signals readiness for leadership but also influences community support, as people are more likely to trust leaders who believe in themselves. This reflects relational leadership, where motivation often arises from

community trust and social networks, supported by family and friends, rather than political ambition alone (Komives et al., 2005; Northouse, 2022).

“To be honest, becoming a barangay captain was never in my wildest dreams, but as they say, what comes to you is your destiny. It’s also because the people themselves wanted me to become a barangay captain.” (P3)

“Based on what the people were saying, they themselves endorsed me for the position.” (P4)

“The main reason that really made me decide to run for barangay captain is the call of the people, and the support from my family, especially from my close friends.” (P5)

Overall, the responses show that the female barangay captains were motivated to lead by both outside support and their growing confidence. Most of them did not plan to enter politics at first, but encouragement from their communities, families, and friends helped them decide to run. Their stories show that female leadership in local government is based on strong relationships, support from others, and trust.

Prior Experience.

Prior experience in government significantly strengthens readiness and effectiveness in local governance by providing exposure to public administration, policymaking, and community engagement. Programs like the Municipal Leadership and Governance Program (MLGP) enhance technical skills, confidence, and decision-making through training and mentoring (Adap et al., 2021). Such experience also builds credibility, fosters trust, and shapes empathetic, participatory leadership styles among female barangay captains (Chiong & Remoroza, 2023; Enriquez et al., 2022).

“The people themselves wanted me to become a barangay captain, maybe because they had observed how I served as a barangay councilor before I became a barangay captain.” (P3)

“Before becoming barangay captain, I was serving my last term as a barangay councilor for 13 years. I personally know the people in our barangay better, so I understand their needs more.” (P4)

“Before I became a barangay captain, I already had experience working in government because I worked as an auditor in the municipal office.” (P5)

Long-term involvement in governance builds familiarity with community issues and public trust, making individuals strong candidates for leadership roles. Prior governmental experience provides knowledge of local concerns, political dynamics, and strategic decision-making, allowing leaders to assess their readiness and credibility (Lauengco, 2023; Northouse, 2022). Such experience not only develops competence and confidence but also fosters relationships and visibility, essential for managing barangay responsibilities like budgeting, policymaking, and coordination.

Coping Mechanisms and Leadership Strategies

This theme highlights the complexity of participants’ leadership roles, which involve balancing relationships with constituents and higher authorities in male-dominated spaces. Female barangay captains rely on emotional intelligence to understand community needs, build trust, and foster cooperation through empathy and inclusivity (Evans & Maldonado, 2021). They also demonstrate political awareness by navigating power dynamics and informal governance structures, skills essential for advocating effectively within decentralized systems (Tadros & Khan, 2023).

Peaceful Dialogue

Participants commonly resolved disputes through calm, respectful dialogue, reflecting a leadership style rooted in diplomacy and emotional intelligence rather than authoritarianism (Jordan & Hume, 2022). By prioritizing empathy, active listening, and collaboration, they fostered inclusive decision-making and strengthened community trust (Yasin & Aslan, 2020). This approach aligns with modern leadership perspectives that emphasize relationship-building and conflict resolution over top-down control (Mullen & Davies, 2021).

“For me, it’s important that we all clear things up through calm and respectful conversation... I exercise authority not through aggression, but by

fostering clear and peaceful dialogue so that, as much as possible, further conflicts can be avoided.” (P1)

P2 and P3 also reinforced the idea that professionalism and clear communication are essential tools in maintaining peace and order at the grassroots level.

“We should remain professional and handle things through calm and peaceful conversation.” (P2)

“Since this responsibility was given to me, of course I was also given the authority to settle problems through proper communication.” (P3)

By choosing dialogue over force, these women demonstrate a collaborative and inclusive leadership model that seeks to unify rather than divide. This method helps prevent escalation, encourages mutual understanding, and reinforces the legitimacy of the barangay captain’s role as a peacemaker. P5 highlights resolving disagreements formally and respectfully not only preserves harmony but also strengthens the credibility and moral authority of local leaders.

“Whenever there are disagreements, I would make sure to settle them in the office through proper discussion and peaceful resolution.” (P5)

Using respectful conversation helps participants reduce stress and resolve disputes calmly while following proper processes. This approach, rooted in emotional intelligence, de-escalates conflicts and promotes collaboration, building long-term community trust (Yasin & Aslan, 2020). It demonstrates that effective leadership relies not only on authority but also on emotional resilience and the ability to foster cooperation.

Cooperation

Participants stressed the importance of fostering cooperation with colleagues and constituents by valuing opinions and encouraging participation. This inclusive approach builds trust, promotes civic engagement, and ensures decisions reflect community needs (Hawke, 2020; Smith & Freeman, 2021). For female barangay captains, cooperation is a vital leadership trait for navigating social dynamics and achieving effective governance (Nguyen & Li, 2023).

“Communication with my constituents is one of the most important things. For me, it’s essential to truly get to know the people I work with, so I can listen to each of their opinions on the matters we discuss. It’s important for me that my constituents feel their opinions and observations are valued.” (P3)

This approach aligns with the principles of collaborative leadership, which emphasize shared decision-making and collective problem-solving. By actively engaging with constituents, leaders can build trust and ensure that community needs are effectively addressed.

“Within our barangay, through the cooperation of my constituents and fellow barangay officials, nothing is too difficult to handle.” (P4)

“It really has to be teamwork. I always remind my council that each of us has a role to fulfill, and everyone has opinions or suggestions that we need to hear especially during our meetings. I really don’t like it when someone is always absent, because if there’s something important to discuss, everyone needs to be committed and able to contribute.” (P5)

This reflects the collaborative leadership practice of building and maintaining relationships, which is essential for creating a shared purpose and fostering a sense of collective responsibility (Ansell et al., 2023). By cultivating a collaborative environment, responsibilities are distributed, and fellow officials are well-disciplined, thereby allowing for effective consensus-building. This approach not only enhances the efficiency of governance but also empowers community members and leaders alike, leading to more resilient and cohesive communities.

Good Relationship with Higher Authorities.

Positive relationships with higher authorities are vital for local leaders to ensure smooth governance and resource access (Roxas, 2021). For female barangay captains, mutual respect and collaboration with officials help navigate political complexities and align local goals with national priorities (Santos, 2022; Torres et al., 2023). These partnerships strengthen advocacy, secure resources, and promote unified

governance for effective community development (Pangilinan & Garcia, 2021).

"With regards to the higher authorities as well, I do not have any problems with them. We treat each other with respect. Respect is really important." (P1)

"With the higher authorities, especially the mayor, we have no problem at all." (P2)

Fostering respectful relationships with higher authorities ensures effective communication, collaboration, and support for community programs (League of Cities of the Philippines, 2024). Such alignment provides access to resources, training, and assistance essential for addressing local needs, as emphasized by P3 and P4.

"As a woman, we can't really say that the higher authorities disregard female leaders. In fact, they give high regard to women barangay captains because they've seen that we truly work diligently and sincerely." (P3)

"When I approach the higher authorities, so far, they have never turned down any of my requests." (P4)

Political alignment with higher authorities is crucial for securing resources, fostering collaboration, and implementing community programs effectively. This strategy enhances local leaders' capacity to address community needs, promote sustainable development, and ensure well-coordinated governance (Ansell et al., 2023). Collaborative partnerships also improve service delivery, resource allocation, and community trust, leading to more inclusive and effective solutions (Collaborative Leadership, 2024).

Leadership Values and Aspirations

This theme highlights that leadership is rooted in personal meaning, values, and fulfillment. For female barangay captains, leadership reflects core values like compassion, integrity, and responsibility, guiding decisions and fostering trust (Wang & Chen, 2020; Liu & Zhang, 2021). Their sense of purpose grows from community impact and constituent respect, with

values-driven leadership enhancing authenticity, resilience, and effectiveness (Northouse, 2022).

Being Happy with the Responsibility

Participants expressed deep joy and fulfillment in their roles, finding motivation in daily challenges and the tangible impact of their work on communities (Leiter & Maslach, 2020; Lyons & Júnior, 2021). Their satisfaction stemmed from service rather than authority, aligning with the principles of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2021). This highlights the link between personal fulfillment and effective, committed leadership.

"As a barangay captain, I'm happy with my job. Honestly, it's a fulfilling and enjoyable role despite the challenges, just imagine, almost every day you get to meet different kinds of people." (P1)

"Despite the challenges, however, I am happy with my role as a barangay captain. This role has also helped me financially, and as a barangay captain, I've had the opportunity to visit different places." (P2)

While the role brings fulfillment, it is not without its challenges. P3 acknowledged the stress associated with the responsibilities.

"Being a barangay captain is full of stress, so I can't really say that I'm happy all the time. There are times when, because of the problems in the barangay, I can't sleep from constantly thinking about them." (P3)

However, P1, P2, P4, and P5 emphasized that despite these challenges, the positive experiences and the sense of purpose derived from their roles outweigh the difficulties. This perspective is supported by research indicating that individuals who find personal meaning in their work are more resilient and better equipped to handle stress (Steger et al., 2012).

Female barangay captains ground their leadership in values like compassion, integrity, and service, fostering an ethical and effective style aligned with servant leadership principles (Spears, 2020). Prioritizing constituents' needs builds trust and provides personal fulfillment, creating a balance between service and achievement (Van

Dierendonck, 2021). This values-driven approach promotes transformative community development and strengthens leaders' resilience.

Patience

Patience emerged as a vital value for female barangay captains, enabling them to manage stress, resolve conflicts, and maintain credibility in leadership (Keller, 2020). Linked to emotional intelligence, patience allows them to navigate complex dynamics and make thoughtful decisions (Goleman et al., 2020). By modeling composure and resilience, these leaders foster trust, respect, and collaboration, promoting ethical and emotionally intelligent governance (Côté & Miners, 2021).

My sincere advice to other women who serve as barangay captains is that, as women, we must carry patience and humility in our hearts." (P2)

"You must be patient because this job is not as easy as most people think it is." (P5)

Leadership at the barangay level requires not only technical skills but also emotional intelligence and resilience. Self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation enable leaders to manage stress, resolve conflicts, and build trust, fostering harmony within their communities (Goleman, 2020; Mayer et al., 2021). For female barangay captains, emotional strength, patience, and humility act as coping mechanisms against pressures and stereotypes, proving that effective governance depends as much on emotional stability as on administrative competence (Côté & Miners, 2021; Côté, 2022).

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that gender stereotypes continue to undermine the legitimacy of female leadership, yet female barangay captains demonstrate resilience and adaptability in overcoming these barriers. Their positive outlook and sense of fulfillment strengthen their commitment to public service, turning challenges into opportunities for growth and effective governance. These findings highlight the critical role of emotional strength, resourcefulness, and values-driven leadership in promoting gender-inclusive local governance.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that agencies like the Philippine Commission on Women and DILG implement gender mentoring sessions to support women leaders. LGUs should organize community dialogues and leadership learning sessions featuring successful female barangay captains to inspire and mentor future leaders. Peer mentoring networks among female leaders should also be strengthened, while future research should explore broader qualitative studies on women's contributions and challenges in community leadership.

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