



Women at the Helm: A Phenomenological Study on the Lifeworld of Female Barangay Captains in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study explored the everyday realities of female barangay captains in Leyte, Philippines. It focused on their personal identities and strategies they used to navigate the social and political spheres within their local communities. This study employed a qualitative-phenomenological method. 13 female chiefs served as informants and were purposively selected by the researchers. An interview guide was used as the primary data collection instrument. The analysis follows Braun and Clarke approach to generate themes to describe the informant's experiences. The results were categorized into experiences, coping with challenges, and aspirations. Seven themes were identified for the experiences: Impactful Service, Personal Fulfillment, Collaborative Environment, Leadership Identity, Personal Hardship, External Adversity, and Leadership Demands. Conversely, three themes were identified as the coping strategies of the female village chiefs, namely Community-Centric Action, Personal Leadership Stance, and Strategic Governance. Moreover, three themes were generated to represent the aspirations: Holistic Community Progress, Enhanced Community Harmony, and Effective Governance. This deep dive into the lifeworld of female village chiefs in the communities in the 3rd congressional district of Leyte has unveiled a myriad of noteworthy leadership stories, struggles, and triumphs, which are evidence of strategic actions and support programs from both the local government and from the community members they led.

Keywords: gendered leadership, village chief, lifeworld of captains, phenomenological study, leadership role, Philippines



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INTRODUCTION

People's security and safety remain a constant global concern, especially in communities prone to violence. Although not all regions, many globally still suffer from unstable criminal governance (Blume, 2021) and insecurity and violence (Blair et al., 2021).

Similarly, the situation in the Philippines reflects ongoing challenges to peace. While some regions have experienced declining crime rates, others continue to report persistently high levels of violence (Oreta, 2022). Mindanao, the southernmost major island region of the Philippines, remains a focal point for security concerns. For example, it continues to be affected by long-standing insurgencies,

terrorism, and various forms of violence (Baquiano, 2022). In some areas, other communities also face significant threats to local leaders, including violence and targeted killings. The 3rd congressional district of Leyte, comprising the municipalities of Calubian, Leyte, Tabango, San Isidro, and Villaba, has received considerable media attention due to a series of violent incidents (Montallana, 2024). Since 2010, this district has recorded at least 50 killings, primarily attributed to drugs, personal conflicts, and political motives (Journó Ph, 2025).

According to the reports on February 4, 2024, five barangay (village) officials have been assassinated (Montallana, 2024). Three days before this killing, one village official was also

killed in Tabango, Leyte (Meniano, 2021). Weeks later, other killings have been reported to have been committed in San Isidro, Leyte. No formal complaints and cases have been filed due to a lack of suspects and leads over the killings. This collapse of formal justice leaves women, often the primary survivors of this political violence, to navigate the dangerous intersection of state neglect and insurgent influence. Bereaved families have to mourn silently due to fear and hesitation that they might be involved and that their lives might be at stake (Journo Ph, 2025). According to the locals, other organizations also use the area as a home and training ground for fringe subversive groups working with the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, and the country's primary communist insurgent group. Some infiltrated into the settlement and have mixed with the population (Armed Conflict Survey, 2021). These 'kill zones' are defined not only by poverty and insecurity (Torri, 2016) but also by a critical governance vacuum. Lacking safe, effective state protection, women have moved from silent mourning to active participation in local governance, reflecting their efforts to negotiate safety where formal systems have failed.

While research has addressed organizational and structural factors shaping female community leadership, less is known about how these leaders personally navigate high-risk, violent environments. Existing studies, including Wolverton et al. (2023) on governance styles, Ani et al. (2021) on economic empowerment, and Moniruzzaman & Day (2020) on environmental justice, primarily focus on stable or developing contexts. This leaves a significant gap in how women lead effectively amid the conflict, uncertainty, and threats found in communities torn by land disputes or resource scarcity.

As the primary arbiters of peace at the grassroots level, Barangay Captains hold a pivotal mandate to resolve community conflicts and uphold public safety. This role, especially in violence-prone regions, is fraught with risks, and it demands that leaders manage daily

threats and mediate volatile disputes that can turn deadly. The success or failure of a Barangay Captain in these moments defines the community's stability. Although leadership in these challenging environments has traditionally been dominated by men, more women are now stepping into these frontline roles, steadily reshaping perceptions of gender and authority in local governance. The distinct experiences of these female leaders in such challenging contexts provide a significant opportunity for qualitative investigation.

Navigating the complexities of barangay leadership, such as mediating volatile community conflicts, managing political risks, and navigating gendered biases, requires more than just administrative skill; it requires immense resilience. These specific challenges form the core of the leader's daily reality, yet the internal process of how they manage these pressures remains largely unexplored. To capture the depth of these experiences, this study employs a phenomenological approach, seeking to uncover how female leaders interpret and transcend the inherent dangers and duties of their office. Such an inquiry is vital for developing peace-building initiatives and policies grounded in the lived realities of those at the frontlines.

Accordingly, this study investigates the lifeworld of female village chiefs, locally known as Barangay Captains, in selected communities within the 3rd congressional district of Leyte, Eastern Visayas, Philippines. The research specifically sought to understand their experiences as leaders, the coping strategies they used to address challenges, and their aspirations to enhance the quality of their services.

Theoretical Framework. This study is anchored in the tenets and principles of Social Conflict Theory, Social Control Theory, and Intersectionality Theory. These theories are utilized to guide this study while remaining open to the participants' lived realities. Thus, the theories in this study are utilized as sensitizing frameworks rather than rigid predictive models.

Social Conflict Theory posits that society is characterized by inherent conflict and competition among social groups over resources and power. This theory can be applied to understand the dynamics of conflict within communities, particularly in regions like Leyte, Eastern Visayas, where various factors, including political groups, families, subversive organizations, and law enforcement agencies, often clash (Black, 2014).

Additionally, Social Control Theory has also laid the foundation of this research study. This theory emphasizes that people agree to give up some freedoms in exchange for the advantages of living in a legally and socially structured society. This theory encapsulates the fundamental concepts of this study: the village chief is responsible for governing and safeguarding the community's safety and development, and, in return, residents are obliged to follow the community's policies, such as norms and ordinances (Chriss, 2022).

Lastly, the concepts of this research endeavor is Intersectionality Theory. This theory is used in this study to explain how female village chiefs perform the challenging role of community female leaders while confronting several factors, including violence and gender-based expectations (Crenshaw, 1991).

Ultimately, Social Conflict, Social Control, and Intersectionality theories provide the structural map for this study. These theories are synthesized through a phenomenological lens to capture the participants' life world. This approach allows the researchers to describe the essence of being a female leader in their local communities. It shows how structural tensions and intersectional identities manifest in the everyday consciousness and decision-making of the barangay captains.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a qualitative research design, specifically transcendental phenomenology, as developed by Edmund Husserl (Meihami & Rashidi, 2022).

This study was conducted in the third congressional district of Leyte, a province in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines. Leyte's third congressional district is a complex political landscape with a history marked by significant events, including political assassinations, military and subversive encounters, violence, and social unrest. This district comprises several municipalities: Calubian, Leyte, Tabango, San Isidro, and Villaba.

The informants of this study comprised thirteen (13) female village chiefs, locally known as Barangay Captains, from the third congressional district of the province of Leyte. This cohort represents a seasoned group of local leaders, with an average age of 40; the majority are married and have completed high school. Notably, these leaders are deeply embedded in the local power structure, as most originate from established political families within their respective municipalities. Their leadership is further characterized by significant administrative experience, with most having served two to three terms (ranging from 5 to 10 years). This tenure ensures that their insights are grounded in long-term engagement with the barangay's daily risks and responsibilities. The informants were identified using a purposive sampling technique. The researchers considered the individual interview as the primary method for data gathering. As such, the researchers included the informants who are 1) female; 2) former or present village chief in the chosen locality; 3) conversant with the significant events in the locality; and 4) available and willing to participate in the study.

To analyze the gathered data, the study employed Braun and Clarke's six-phase Reflexive Thematic Analysis. While this method is a flexible approach to identifying patterns, it was applied here through a phenomenological lens to capture the essence of the informants' lived experiences. The process includes familiarization, translation, initial coding, generating themes, reviewing and defining themes, and lastly writing up. These final themes were considered to represent the

informants' experiences regarding the research topic (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

Ethical precautions were central to the research design. The researchers observed the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy (Bishop, 2016) by ensuring all participation was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was documented by having each of the thirteen female village chiefs sign formal consent forms prior to their interviews. During this process, the researchers explicitly discussed the study's goals, data collection methods, and the guarantee of confidentiality of their identities. No data were recorded until the signed informed consent forms were secured, ensuring that the informants were fully aware of their rights and the highly guarded nature of their personal information.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researchers employed stringent criteria in conducting qualitative research, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Kyngas, 2019); bracketing (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2020); and reflexivity (Von Unger, 2021).

RESULTS

Experiences of the Female Village Chiefs. The study revealed significant experiences among the informants, as reflected in their insights into their performance of functions and duties as public officials and community leaders. These experiences, as shown in Figure 1, encompass both the positive and negative experiences that they had. Through in-depth interviews, village chiefs revealed distinct themes highlighting their positive contributions and frustrating experiences.

Impactful Service. This theme encapsulates the sense of fulfillment and accomplishment these leaders feel when their actions directly contribute to the safety, stability, and well-being of their community. This theme illustrates the informant's commitment to public safety within her jurisdiction. The sense of pride

expressed is closely linked to a strong sense of duty and accountability, as the informant emphasizes that her actions directly benefit the community. The narrative reflects a pragmatic approach to governance, where success is measured by measurable progress rather than the attainment of absolute goals. Informant 4 stated that:

"A point of pride for me as the barangay captain here is that since I took office, if we haven't completely stopped incidents of theft, public disturbances, and drunken altercations, at the very least we have significantly reduced them."

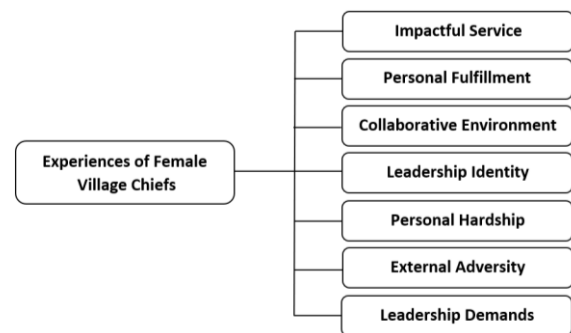


Figure 1
Experiences of the Female Village Chiefs

Personal Fulfillment. This theme describes the sense of satisfaction the informant gains from fulfilling her legal mandate to maintain peace and order. This theme explores the personal rewards she derives from her actions when they contribute to a safer community.

Personal fulfillment refers to the psychological and emotional rewards that female chiefs derive from effectively fulfilling their roles. This sense of validation is rooted in their service to the people of Leyte. Informant 2 narrated:

"I'm happy that during my time, there have been significant changes and a lot of improvement in our peace and order. Our guards are now equipped with tools. They now have flashlights, jackets, defense tools, and batons."

Collaborative Environment. The theme of a collaborative environment describes how female barangay chairpersons work with various stakeholders to maintain peace and

order. This theme encompasses their ability to coordinate with multiple sectors, other barangay officials, and community members.

One informant recounted a positive experience during a crisis response, noting that her satisfaction as a leader stem from her team's collective efforts. The active participation of barangay police, officials, and Barangay Health Workers (BHWs) exemplifies her capacity to unite diverse groups in fulfilling the mandate of maintaining peace and order. Informant 3 mentioned:

“Actually, one of my happy experiences is when we respond to a crisis or a disturbance. We, the barangay police, barangay officials, and even the BHWs, work together to help one another. We're really like that because, of course, it's easier and better when we work together.”

Leadership Identity. This theme of leadership identity in the context of a female village chief's lifeworld focuses on how the informant defines herself in her official role. It demonstrates how she perceives her authority, responsibilities, and influence as the primary official responsible for maintaining peace and order.

Consistent with this theme, the informant indicated that leadership identity is shaped by formal authority and with a governance style characterized as nurturing and approachable. This perspective encompasses actions that leverage unique strengths contributing a distinctive dimension to their roles as barangay chiefs in Leyte. Informant 2 shared:

“One of my fulfilling experiences was when my constituents told me that having a female captain is better because she has a motherly touch. It's not that I'm imposing, but my style is more passive. Especially when there's a dispute to settle, they say a woman is more effective because both sides are more open to talking, and the problem really gets solved.”

Personal Hardship. This theme of personal hardships in the context of a female village chief's lifeworld refers to the difficulties the

informant faces beyond her official duties that still impact her ability to govern. These are personal struggles that arise from her position in pursuing peace and order, as well as reducing criminality in the community.

One informant described a negative experience that highlights the severe personal risks inherent in her official position. The threat of targeted violence and concerns for her family's safety represent significant hardships that extend beyond the usual challenges of local governance. This situation underscores the substantial personal cost of public service, as the responsibility to protect the community can increase the leader's and her family's vulnerability. Informant 3 expressed:

“One of my negative experiences as a captain here in our village is that we, the captains, are now targets for killing. It isn't very comforting because our families might also get caught up in this. We don't even know what our sin is to be killed. It's not easy because you can't just stop working just because there's a threat. So, keep working, but be very careful.”

External Adversity. This theme captures the various challenges and pressures that the barangay chairman faces that are beyond their direct control. It encompasses conflicts with other government entities, a lack of support from higher-ups, and interference from influential individuals or groups.

The informant's account underscores a significant breakdown in inter-agency cooperation. The captain fulfilled her responsibilities by responding immediately to a violent incident and promptly notifying the Philippine National Police (PNP), in line with the expectation of a timely response as part of standard operating procedures. However, the delayed arrival of the police had a direct and tragic impact on the outcome, as indicated by the informant's statement linking the delay to the loss of life. Informant 10 expressed that:

“My worst experience as a captain was when a commotion happened here, and I immediately

reported it to the PNP. Of course, I responded right away to the trouble, even though they were already hacking at each other. I was confident because I had already called the police. But gosh, it took a very long time for the police to arrive. It got to the point that someone died in the commotion. If only they had arrived sooner, the trouble would have been settled earlier, and no one would have died."

Leadership Demands. This emergent theme describes the overwhelming pressures and expectations that come with the role. It reflects the constant, round-the-clock nature of the job, the heavy workload, and the high-stakes responsibility of serving as the community's primary law-and-order figure. This theme further reflects the continuous demands placed on village chiefs, who are often required to respond to community needs at any time, thereby blurring the boundaries between their professional and personal lives. Informant 4 shared that:

"If you're a captain, you'll be woken up, especially if there's trouble, even if it's the middle of the night or early morning. You have to get up because it's your responsibility, even if you're sleeping or being intimate with your husband."

Coping Strategies of the Female Village Chiefs. Female village chiefs consistently face numerous challenges and are expected to provide both immediate and strategic solutions to address recurring issues and prevent them from recurring. This study also shows the coping strategies, as shown in Figure 2, of the village chiefs as they encounter challenges.

Community-Centric Action. This theme describes the deliberate and proactive measures taken by female barangay captains. It represents a leadership approach that prioritizes collective well-being and resident active participation, moving beyond a purely top-down enforcement model.

One informant's statement shows a coping strategy that shifts the burden of security from

an individual leader to a collective, participatory effort. The informant's approach to confronting security challenges, specifically trouble and drugs, is to empower the community through the organization of the BADAC (Barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Council). Informant 3 shared:

"My strategy to fight trouble and drugs is to organize the BADAC, which is made up of volunteers. That's the way it is now. It's beneficial because residents themselves learn and organize drug-prevention programs in the barangay."

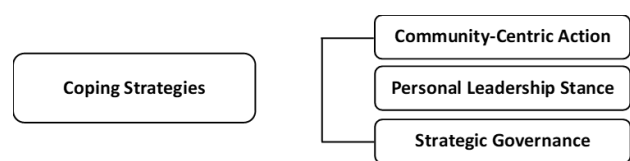


Figure 2
Coping Strategies with the Challenges Encountered as Village Chief

Personal Leadership Stance. This emergent theme reflects the individual approaches, philosophies, and attitudes that female barangay captains adopt to direct their roles in maintaining peace and order within their communities. It encapsulates how a captain's personal values, experiences, and sense of duty inform their decision-making and actions, thereby shaping the specific strategies they employ to address conflict, enforce regulations, and foster a sense of security.

In addition, the theme also underscores the courage, moral conviction, and unwavering commitment to duty of the informants. The informant's statement reveals a conscious decision to prioritize her sworn duty over personal safety in the face of perceived threats. Informant 10 mentioned:

"I will truly fight their evil plans. They are targeting the captains who have died, but I'm not affected by this because I know I haven't wronged them, and my conscience is clear. For me, I'm not affected because I know I won't accomplish anything if I keep being afraid. Why would I become a captain only to stay silent because of a problem like this?"

Strategic Governance. This emergent theme refers to the deliberate, calculated methods female barangay captains employ to manage the complex, often resource-constrained environments of their communities. It encapsulates a leadership approach that is forward-thinking and systematic, moving beyond reactive problem-solving to a proactive and structured management of peace and order. Furthermore, the theme also demonstrates how a female barangay captain uses formal legal mechanisms, such as ordinances, to proactively address and manage community problems that affect peace and order. It reflects an understanding that controlling the movement and activities of young people during late hours can effectively reduce their exposure to illegal substances and criminal behavior. Informant 2 expressed:

“Actually, my strategy was to create a barangay ordinance regarding the curfew. Because these young people nowadays are hard to manage. They are so persistent and want to try everything, even drugs and alcohol. Now that there's a curfew, theft and drug use have decreased.”

Aspirations of the Village Chiefs. The informants have also shared their aspirations, as reflected in Figure 3, to improve the quality of their services to the community.

Holistic Community Progress. This theme refers to the long-term aspirations of female barangay captains that go beyond immediate concerns with crime and conflict. It embodies a vision of peace and order achieved through comprehensive community development, where social, economic, and educational well-being are integral to a safe and stable environment.

This theme includes the captains' understanding that a lack of opportunities, poverty, and inadequate social services can be root causes of crime and disorder. Similarly, promoting access to health services and sanitation can lead to a more organized and resilient community, which in turn contributes

to a more peaceful environment. Informant 3 deeply expressed:

“I hope the government has a program for out-of-school youth. Because these children will ultimately lead the village, they need proper guidance while they are still young. They are a big help to the development of the barangay.”

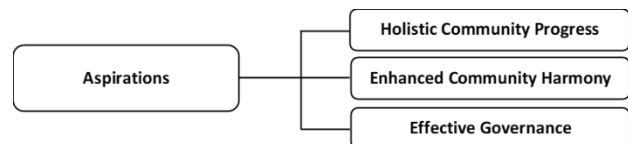


Figure 3
Aspirations of the Informants

Enhanced Community Harmony. This theme underscores a proactive, holistic approach to community well-being that goes beyond mere crime response. This aspiration is realized through initiatives that strengthen social bonds, promote mutual respect, and foster a sense of collective responsibility among residents.

Female village chiefs in the Leyte region share a fervent wish for a safe, stable, and secure community. Their aspirations include unity in the purpose of improving the lives of the people in the local community. Informant 2 expressed that:

“What I hoped for is that all of us here in the barangay, including those higher politicians, become united in the purpose of improving the quality of life for the people. The election has already been held and may those who win fulfill their promises and those who were defeated support the leadership of those who are in position.”

Effective Governance. This theme refers to the aspiration of female barangay captains to improve the administrative and procedural functions of their office. It encompasses their desire to build a more competent, transparent, and accountable barangay administration.

The aspiration for effective governance reflects the female captain's understanding that a well-managed barangay is a secure one. A captain's

aspiration to provide better training for “tanods” and to establish clearer communication protocols, which serves as a direct effort to improve the barangay’s response time and effectiveness in handling security issues. The pursuit of effective governance is therefore an aspirational coping strategy that seeks to establish a solid, procedural foundation for long-term peace and order, ensuring that the barangay can consistently and fairly serve its residents and uphold its legal duties. Informant 11 mentioned:

“My wish is for our office to be digitized. We should have a computer and a printer to expedite the release of documents, such as barangay clearances, making the process much faster and easier. It would be less of a hassle, and I hope to have my signature pre-loaded so I don’t always have to be looked upon to sign papers.”

DISCUSSION

Experiences of the Female Village Chiefs. The female village chiefs have made an impactful service. The leadership of these female village chiefs has led to measurable improvements in community stability and governance. Their service goes beyond the symbolic representation recognized by the Magna Carta of Women. It has produced tangible peace-building outcomes. For instance, these leaders prioritize root causes such as domestic discord and health insecurities (Haji et al., 2024). As a result, they have effectively de-escalated long-standing neighborhood feuds that previously bordered on violence.

In the communities studied, this “different approach” resulted in a higher reporting rate of VAWC (Violence Against Women and Children) cases. Residents felt more comfortable seeking help from a female leader. Furthermore, the leaders’ focus on health and sanitation did not merely replace security. It redefined security by reducing community stressors. This led to a more harmonious environment, where local ordinances are followed out of trust rather than fear (Aranjuez, 2022).

Beyond administrative success, being a female village chief brings a profound sense of personal fulfillment rooted in the exercise of agency. For many informants, this satisfaction stems from challenging and transcending the gendered skepticism of their constituents. There is a deep psychological reward in successfully de-escalating a volatile situation, such as a heated land dispute or a violent domestic altercation, that others assumed required a firm male hand. This fulfillment is not merely about holding a title; it is the moral satisfaction of proving that a collaborative, inclusive leadership style (Smith, 2025) can achieve peace where traditional, aggressive methods failed. As Caruso et al. (2022) suggest, the tangible change they create, such as a safer street or a functional health center, acts as a mirror reflecting their own competence and resilience back to them.

Furthermore, the village chiefs have also shared that they experienced a collaborative environment. Studies in the Philippines and other parts of the world show that women in leadership roles tend to favor a facilitative, democratic, and collaborative approach (Cornejo-Abarca, 2025). This study contrasts with more traditional, top-down leadership styles often associated with men. Instead of simply issuing orders, female leaders frequently engage with community members, local government units (LGUs), and other organizations to find solutions.

This study revealed that female village chiefs possess a distinct leadership identity. While nurturing, empathy, and relationship-building are established tenets of Relational Leadership (Jian, 2022), this study reveals a distinct evolution of these traits within the context of high-conflict governance. What is new in the experiences of these female village chiefs is the use of strategic relationalism, where empathy is not merely a soft skill, but a deliberate tool for de-escalating local violence. Unlike traditional relational leaders who focus on organizational harmony, these informants use deep community immersion to anticipate triggers of conflict before they escalate. Their

leadership identity is therefore distinct. It is a hybrid of maternal care and tactical mediation, demonstrating that in violence-prone areas, relational approaches serve as a primary security infrastructure rather than merely a management style.

Furthermore, the motherly approach emerged as a unique and potent dimension of leadership among the informants, transcending the standard definitions of servant leadership. Rather than being a passive trait, this approach functions as a form of cultural authority, enabling female village chiefs to navigate high-tension spaces. In the Filipino context, the "*Nanay*" (Mother) archetype carries a specific moral weight; it grants the leader a unique soft power to reprimand, mediate, and discipline constituents in a way that a male leader, often perceived through the lens of macho rivalry, might not be able to do without triggering further aggression. This unique approach transforms the leadership mandate from a cold, bureaucratic exercise into a relational commitment. By adopting this motherly lens, the village chiefs utilize 'maternal' mediation to resolve deep-seated conflicts, treating the community as an extended household. This result aligns with Ezeaku and Okoye (2025), but adds a unique cultural layer, as their democratic participatory style is not just a management choice but a nurturing strategy that leverages the cultural respect for mothers to secure buy-in from even the most volatile community members. Consequently, the motherly approach is not the absence of power, but a redefinition of it, using care and moral suasion as primary tools for maintaining security and safety in high-risk environments.

Aside from the positive experiences female village chiefs have walked through, they have also experienced personal hardship. Studies and human rights reports confirm that politicians and local officials, including barangay captains, are frequently the targets of violence due to political rivalries, their stance against illegal activities, or their work on contentious development projects. When these leaders are women, the violence often has a

gender-specific dimension. Recent research studies have highlighted the alarming number of assassinations and violent attacks against local officials (Flom, 2024). Therefore, the risk of being targeted for assassination is a real and confirmed hardship for these female leaders, showing the extreme personal cost they can face in their service to the community.

Being the leader of a community also means facing external adversity. This study revealed that female village leaders also face difficulties. Academic studies and government reports have acknowledged that the PNP struggles with response times due to various systemic issues. The survey by Dio et al. (2021) found that the responses were among the primary problems experienced by community members with PNP services. Bureaucratic procedures further compound this problem and, as some researchers have termed them, organizational challenges, leading to delays in action. Therefore, the experience of female village chiefs with late PNP response is a verifiable hardship rooted in the operational realities and resource constraints of the national police force.

The female village chiefs have also experienced leadership demands. Studies confirm that female leaders are often expected to be both effective public officials and primary caregivers at home (Asuquo, 2021). This expectation can create significant stress and blurred boundaries between their work and personal lives. For instance, a barangay chief's personal time may be constantly interrupted by calls from constituents seeking help, mediation, or assistance, turning her home into a de facto community service center.

Coping Strategies of the Female Village Chiefs.

This study revealed that one of the essential strategies female village chiefs adopt is community-centric action. Studies confirm the vital role of these councils. They serve as the first line of defense against drugs, focusing on prevention, education, and the identification of drug-affected areas and individuals. These studies have found that the success of the

BADAC is directly tied to the active participation of barangay leadership and the community's willingness to get involved, confirming that creating and leading this council is a proactive, highly effective coping strategy for female village chiefs (Valdez, 2024).

Another strategy the female village chief utilized is a personal leadership stance. This strategy aligns with existing literature on leadership ethics, moral courage, and servant leadership. This finding demonstrates a high degree of moral responsibility, where the leader's sense of duty transcends self-preservation. This act of prioritizing the community's safety over one's own is a core tenet of servant leadership, a model in which the leader's primary motivation is to serve the community rather than to gain personal power or security (Badura et al., 2020). These findings are a profound example of altruism in a leadership context.

Furthermore, this strategy relates to the concept of moral courage, which is the ability to act rightly in the face of fear or danger. The prioritization of duty over personal safety can be seen as a strategic move to build legitimacy and trust within the community (Fenton, 2020). When a leader demonstrates this level of commitment, it inspires confidence and encourages community members to take collective action, ultimately strengthening the village's overall security and safety.

Furthermore, female village chiefs also used strategic governance as one of their strategies. This approach aligns with existing literature on community policing, local governance, and gendered approaches to leadership. This strategy demonstrates a proactive and authoritative approach to risk management, a departure from the more passive or motherly leadership styles sometimes associated with female leaders (Akkaya & Ustgorul, 2020). Furthermore, this approach can be viewed through the lens of gender and governance. While women in leadership are often stereotyped as being more collaborative and less confrontational, the creation of a curfew

ordinance demonstrates a willingness to enforce strict rules for the collective good. This strategic governance tactic can be a powerful tool for building a sense of collective responsibility and establishing a leader's commitment to community welfare (Yang & Ren, 2020).

Aspirations of the Village Chiefs. Female village chiefs aspire for holistic community progress. Several studies on youth development and local leadership have highlighted that women in positions of power tend to focus on social issues that have long-term impacts on community safety and stability (Maqbool et al., 2024). It showed that providing educational and livelihood opportunities for out-of-school youth is a key strategy for preventing them from engaging in crime or other illegal activities (Kiknavelidze, 2021). The Comprehensive Barangay Youth Development Plan (CBYDP) often includes specific objectives for out-of-school youth. These plans outline concrete actions such as providing skills training, establishing partnerships with vocational schools like TESDA, and organizing sports or arts programs to keep them engaged.

Additionally, female village chiefs strived to achieve greater community harmony. The 1991 Local Government Code of the Philippines is based on the principle that local government units, including barangays, should be autonomous and empowered to address their own problems. This effort is impossible without strong cooperation between elected officials and the people they serve. Research confirms that female leaders, in particular, often excel at fostering this unity. Studies have shown that women in leadership roles tend to use a more participative and democratic style, which involves listening to and consulting with constituents (De Smedt et al., 2025). This program is directly supported by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)'s guidelines on community participation, which mandate the inclusion of civil society organizations (CSOs) and ordinary citizens in local special bodies, such as Barangay Peace and Order Council.

Effective governance of female local community leaders is also one of the aspirations of the informants of this study. Both the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) have been actively promoting the use of technology to enhance public service delivery and improve the efficiency of local governments (Cagas et al., 2022). These agencies have implemented programs such as the Local Government Unit Support System (LGUSS) and the Barangay Information Management System (BIMS). The very existence of these programs confirms the recognized need for basic technological tools at the barangay level.

Conclusion. This study examined the diverse experiences of female village chiefs in Leyte, particularly their efforts to maintain community safety. These leaders strike a balance between personal commitment and strategic decisions, all while facing considerable challenges. The findings show that their achievements stem from proactive, resilient leadership. They also look ahead, working toward a safer and better future for their communities.

Recommendation. The study suggests that government and community leaders should adopt more collaborative safety strategies, drawing on the approaches of female village chiefs. Agencies like the DILG and LGUs can offer training in mediation and conflict resolution and help fund gender-sensitive programs. The PNP and AFP are encouraged to work closely with local leaders and respect their community-based methods. Local officials should focus on working with the community instead of relying on strict enforcement. Community members are also encouraged to get involved in local governance and use their networks to improve safety. Future research could compare these results with those of male leaders to help develop more effective policies.

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