

## **Breaking Barriers: Experiences of Women Leaders in Guyana's Education Sector**

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### **Abstract**

In Guyana, a developing nation in South America, traditional gender norms significantly influence societal roles and expectations for both women and men. These norms often position men as primary decision-makers and breadwinners, while women are frequently relegated to supportive roles. Despite legal frameworks promoting gender equality, the impact of these norms on women's experiences in the workplace in Guyana, especially in leadership positions, remains underexplored. This study explores the lived experiences of women in leadership roles within Guyana's education sector. Employing a phenomenological approach, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven women leaders. The analysis revealed three key themes: First, participants faced significant barriers to leadership due to cultural beliefs associating leadership with masculinity. Many noted that societal perceptions portraying women as overly emotional or ill-suited for leadership reinforce expectations that they prioritize family over career, ultimately hindering professional advancement. Second, participants described ongoing conflict and marginalization from male colleagues, who frequently dismissed their contributions and reinforced the perception of leadership as a male domain. Third, resilience emerged as a central theme, with participants emphasizing the importance of familial support in resisting gendered expectations and navigating their leadership trajectories. These findings highlight the need for systemic change to address persistent gender disparities in educational leadership in Guyana and to foster an environment where women's contributions are fully recognized and supported.

*Keywords:* leadership, gender, educational leadership, Caribbean, Guyana

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## Introduction

Leadership in education plays a pivotal role in shaping institutional practices, promoting student success, and fostering equitable development outcomes (Barzilay & Vazquez, 2025; Brescoll, 2011; Leithwood, 2020; Robinson, 2008). Within this critical domain, the gender composition of leadership has emerged as a key determinant of organizational effectiveness, innovation, and representational justice (Acker, 1990; Gillard & Okonjo-Iweala, 2022; Herring, 2009; Hunt, 2015). Yet despite substantial progress in gender equity, women remain markedly underrepresented in senior educational leadership positions globally (Blackmore, 2013; Carli & Eagly, 2016; Cimene, 2024; Cozza & Parnther, 2022; Northouse, 2019; Oyewumi, 2005), even where women constitute the majority of the teaching workforce, revealing systemic barriers that disproportionately hinder their advancement.

Extensive research has illuminated the structural, cultural, and interpersonal dynamics sustaining these gender disparities in leadership. Persistent stereotypical associations between leadership and masculinity continue to shape perceptions of competence, authority, and legitimacy (Catalyst, 2020; Heilman, 2012; Heilman & Caleo, 2018; Koenig, 2011). These implicit biases are compounded by women's exclusion from informal professional networks and differential standards in evaluating behavior and performance (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Ibarra, 2010, 2013; Schnackenberg & Simard, 2021). Consequently, women leaders face greater penalties for assertive behavior or emotional expression (Moorosi, 2010; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Williams, 2000). These dynamics create a “double bind,” forcing women to navigate contradictory expectations in ways their male counterparts typically do not (Hannum et al., 2017; Hozien, 2024; Meza-Mejia, 2023; Ridgeway, 2011).

Crucially, these barriers operate within cultural norms and institutional traditions that vary significantly across contexts (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Chin, 2007; Eagly & Chin, 2010). Leadership, like gender itself, is a socially constructed phenomenon embedded in specific cultural and historical frameworks (Bailyn, 2006; Hofstede, 2001; Lauricella, 2025; Mareque, 2022; Sinclair, 2005). Therefore, constraints and opportunities women face in leadership roles must be understood through contextually grounded investigation. Generalized models often fail to account for the locally specific ways in which gender norms are enacted and contested (Fauzi et al., 2024; Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Oplatka, 2006).

This imperative for contextualized understanding becomes particularly compelling when examining Guyana, a country whose distinctive sociocultural and institutional profile fundamentally challenges conventional narratives about women's educational leadership (Thomas, 2018). Although geographically located in South America, Guyana is culturally and politically aligned with the English-speaking Caribbean and shaped by complex colonial history and multiethnic social structure (Barriteau, 2001; Ministry of Education, Guyana, 2019; Mohammed, 2002). Remarkably, women in Guyana not only constitute the majority of the education workforce but have also achieved substantial representation in educational leadership positions, distinguishing Guyana from many global contexts where women's leadership underrepresentation is more pronounced (Danns, 2002; Ministry of Education, Guyana, 2019).

This context presents a compelling paradox that demands deeper investigation. Despite women's numerical dominance in the profession and their notable presence in leadership roles, their experiences continue to unfold within a sociocultural context shaped by persistent gendered expectations about authority, caregiving, and professional legitimacy that may not

be codified in formal policy but are embedded in organizational culture and community attitudes. This paradox raises fundamental questions about how gender dynamics operate in contexts where traditional narratives of exclusion may not fully capture women's lived realities.

However, despite the theoretical significance of this context, there exists a notable absence of empirical research centering the lived experiences of women leaders within Guyana's education system. While broader sociological accounts have examined gender dynamics in the Caribbean region (Barriteau, 2001; Mohammed, 2002), existing studies often treat gender as a background variable rather than a dynamic dimension of experience, thereby overlooking the subjective and psychological dimensions of leadership, such as identity negotiation, emotional labor, and the strategies women employ to navigate complex professional terrains. This gap limits both theoretical development and policy formulation that can respond authentically to the realities of women's professional lives.

The absence of phenomenological research on women's leadership experiences constrains understanding in several critical ways. Theoretically, it prevents the development of nuanced models of gendered leadership that account for contexts where women hold significant positional power yet continue to navigate cultural and institutional complexities. Practically, it hampers the formulation of policies and professional development programs that can respond to actual needs rather than assumptions about their experiences.

This study addresses these gaps through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the lived experiences of women educational leaders in Guyana's secondary and tertiary sectors. IPA is well-suited to this inquiry because it prioritizes participants' own meaning-making processes and recognizes that leadership experiences are fundamentally shaped by individual interpretation within specific cultural contexts. The aim is to explore how women make sense of their leadership experiences within a sociocultural context where traditional gender norms, institutional practices, and professional expectations intersect in ways that create both opportunities and constraints.

By centering women's own interpretations of their leadership experiences, this research will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how gender operates in educational leadership contexts where women have achieved substantial representation. The findings will inform leadership theory by revealing how traditional models may need to be reconceptualized for contexts of gender parity, and will contribute to educational policy in the Caribbean region by providing insights grounded in women's actual lived experiences.

Research Question:

- How do women educational leaders in Guyana make sense of their experiences in navigating leadership roles?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Seven women educational leaders, aged 30-55, participated in this study (see Table 1 for sample characteristics). The sample comprised three university administrators and four leaders at secondary education institutions, providing perspectives across tertiary and secondary education sectors, with four participants from the Corentyne region and three from

Georgetown ensuring diverse regional representation within Guyana's education landscape. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, initiated by an initial informant who facilitated connections with additional participants, enabling access to a network of professionals with diverse career trajectories, institutional experiences, and cultural backgrounds within Guyana's education sector.

**Table 1**  
*Sample Characteristics*

Sample Characteristics	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Indo-Caribbean	4	57.1		
Afro-Caribbean	2	28.6		
Native Caribbean	1	14.3		
<b>Education Level</b>				
Bachelors	1	14.3		
Masters	5	71.4		
Doctoral	1	14.3		
<b>Age</b>			42	6

*Note.* Participant demographic information was collected using a demographics questionnaire, which included items on age, ethno-racial identity, and education level.

## Data Collection

Data were collected between November 2024 and February 2025 through semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes each. All interviews were conducted individually and in person at locations selected by participants to ensure comfort and privacy. With participants' informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To maintain confidentiality, all identifying information was removed during transcription, and pseudonyms were assigned to participants as well as any institutions or individuals mentioned.

The interviews followed a participant-led, conversational format designed to facilitate reflective and detailed accounts of experience. A flexible interview protocol, informed by relevant literature on women's leadership, gender equity in education, and the sociocultural context of the Caribbean, guided the discussions. This protocol incorporated strategic prompts to support the emergence of nuanced themes and enable participants to elaborate on complex issues. Key areas of inquiry included leadership trajectories, challenges encountered and adaptive strategies employed, access to and utilization of support networks, and participants' reflections on identity, authority, mentorship, institutional dynamics, and work-life integration.

Key interview questions included

- “Tell me about your journey to leadership in education”
- “Tell me about your experiences with support throughout your career”
- “Tell me about your experiences in the leadership roles you've had”

Follow-up prompts such as “Can you give me a specific example of that?” “How did that make you feel?” and “Tell me more about that experience” were used to elicit deeper reflection and concrete illustrations of participants' experiences.

Interviews were supplemented by brief demographic questionnaires to capture relevant background information without compromising anonymity. Field notes were recorded immediately following each interview to capture contextual observations and initial researcher reflections. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. All audio recordings were stored securely and will be destroyed following completion of the research project in accordance with institutional data retention policies.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), in accordance with the approach outlined by Willig (2013). The analysis aimed to explore how participants made sense of their lived experiences, with close attention to the contextual and subjective nuances of each narrative. Transcripts were examined through multiple readings, during which detailed notes were made on descriptive content, language use, and emergent conceptual insights. Themes were developed inductively, progressing from in-depth engagement with individual transcripts to the identification of shared patterns across the dataset. To enhance analytic rigour, each author conducted an independent analysis before collaboratively reviewing and refining interpretations. Consensus on key themes was achieved through iterative discussion, ensuring that the findings were both conceptually robust and grounded in participants' accounts.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research was conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2021) and received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the International Executive School in Strasbourg, France. All participants provided written informed consent after being fully briefed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their unconditional right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Strict confidentiality protocols were maintained throughout, with all data immediately anonymized using pseudonyms and any personally identifiable information systematically removed from transcripts and reports. Data security was ensured through encrypted, password-protected storage systems with restricted access limited to authorized research team members only, and all data handling procedures complied with relevant regulations.

## **Results**

The interpretative phenomenological analysis of the interview data revealed four overarching themes that encapsulate the leadership experiences of women educational leaders in Guyana. These themes emerged through a rigorous, iterative process, reflecting both shared patterns and individual nuances in participants' narratives. Together, they illuminate the complex realities and contextual factors shaping women's pathways and practices in leadership across secondary and tertiary education sectors. An overview of these themes and their defining characteristics is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Summary of Themes From Women Leaders' Experiences*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example Excerpt</b>
Challenging Cultural Norms*	Navigating traditional gender expectations that position women as unsuitable for leadership roles.	“In our culture, people still believe that women should be in the home, taking care of children, and that leadership is for men.”
Gendered Power Dynamics in the Workplace*	Experiencing various forms of gender bias and resistance to female authority in professional settings.	“I would present an idea, and it would be dismissed or ignored. Then a male colleague would say the same thing ten minutes later, and suddenly everyone thought it was brilliant.”
Resilience and the Power of Support Networks**	Drawing strength from family support and mentorship relationships to persist through challenges.	“My husband and my mother-in-law actually encouraged me to take this position. They said, 'If you don't try, you'll never know what you can achieve.'”

*Note.* \* Endorsed by all (n = 7) participants; \*\* endorsed by fewer than 7, but no fewer than 5 participants.

### **Theme 1: Challenging Cultural Norms**

Participants reported facing deeply rooted cultural norms in Guyana that challenge the perceived legitimacy of women occupying leadership positions in education. They explained that these norms reflect broader societal expectations within Guyanese communities, where women are primarily seen as responsible for domestic duties, while leadership and public authority are traditionally reserved for men.

Camille, a headteacher at a secondary school, articulated this prevailing mindset: “In our culture, people still believe that women should be in the home, taking care of children, and that leadership is for men.”

Nadira’s experience as a newly appointed headteacher in a Guyanese secondary school exemplifies the direct community skepticism women leaders face:

When people found out I was appointed headteacher, some of them asked if there wasn't a man more suited for the job. They said it out loud, like it was a logical question. It made me realise they didn't see women as leaders.

Her experience highlights how, within this cultural context, women’s leadership is often treated not as a norm but as an anomaly. It is something to be questioned or justified, rather than accepted.

Beyond public skepticism, participants emphasized the emotional and psychological toll of navigating persistent gendered expectations. Many spoke of facing a “double bind” in which their behavior as leaders was constantly scrutinized and often judged through conflicting standards. Alina, a University Dean, explained: “If I’m firm, they say I’m too aggressive. If I

show empathy, they say I'm too soft. Unlike my male colleagues, I'm constantly navigating what version of myself will be tolerated, and it's exhausting."

This tension illustrates how broader cultural expectations, intertwined with gender norms, create an environment where women are required to perform ongoing emotional labor. They must constantly balance authority with approachability in ways their male counterparts rarely face.

The internal impact of these external pressures was evident in participants' self-monitoring and diminished confidence. Simone, a department chair at a university, reflected: "It feels like I have to prove myself twice as hard to be taken seriously. Sometimes I catch myself holding back because I worry how others will judge my decisions or my demeanor as a woman."

Her words reveal the deep psychological burden of leading in a context where legitimacy is never taken for granted but must be continuously earned. For the participants, the challenge went beyond simply obtaining leadership positions; it involved maintaining their authority while navigating cultural expectations that consistently questioned their right to lead.

## **Theme 2: Gendered Power Dynamics in the Workplace**

Participants described persistent gender-based resistance within their professional environments, even after securing formal leadership roles. Despite their qualifications and positions, many found their authority questioned, their input minimized, and their leadership constrained by deeply embedded gender norms. These challenges were particularly evident within the workplace cultures of Guyana's education system, where informal power dynamics often undermined formal structures of leadership.

A common experience shared by participants involved the consistent dismissal or undervaluing of their ideas. Shanice, a department manager at a secondary school, recalled:

I would contribute suggestions during team planning, but there was always silence after I spoke. A few minutes later, a male colleague would repeat the same idea, and suddenly everyone would support it. It wasn't accidental. It was a pattern.

Her account reveals how gendered power operates in subtle yet systematic ways. Even when women occupy senior positions, their voices can be rendered invisible in environments where male contributions are more readily affirmed.

Other participants reported more overt forms of resistance, often from male colleagues who challenged their legitimacy. Camille shared: "The men would bypass me entirely and go straight to the ministry's male representative. It was their way of saying, 'We don't accept your authority.' I had to assert myself, formally and informally, to stop that."

Such behavior illustrates how institutional practices can reinforce gender hierarchies. The act of bypassing a female leader is not merely a personal slight, but a broader expression of gender-based power that seeks to delegitimize her role.

In addition to formal exclusion, participants highlighted how informal male-dominated networks influenced key decisions and limited their access to leadership influence. Simone reflected: "Often, key decisions were made during informal meetings or casual conversations

among male leaders. I was left out of these spaces, which made it harder to influence outcomes or feel fully part of the leadership team.”

These dynamics reflect a hidden layer of organizational life, where informal relationships and gendered social norms determine who holds real power. By being excluded from these networks, women leaders in Guyana often found themselves operating at a disadvantage, even when they held positions of authority on paper.

These accounts reveal that leadership for women in Guyana’s education sector is not solely defined by title or position, but by their ability to navigate and challenge the persistent gendered structures that shape daily professional life. The exclusion from informal networks, the questioning of their authority, and the minimization of their contributions all point to a deeper issue: power in the workplace remains gendered, and for many women, leading means constantly pushing against invisible barriers that others do not have to face.

### **Theme 3: Resilience and the Power of Support Networks**

In navigating the cultural and institutional barriers in Guyana, participants emphasized the essential role that support networks play in sustaining their leadership journeys. Rather than viewing resilience as an innate personal quality, they described it as something actively cultivated and strengthened through relationships with family, mentors, and peers.

Supportive domestic arrangements emerged as particularly crucial. Camille explained: “My husband shares everything at home, like school runs, meals, laundry. Without that partnership, I couldn’t manage the demands of this job. Leadership is not just what happens at work; it’s everything around it too.”

Her experience highlights how equitable support at home enables women’s full participation in professional life, challenging the traditional assumption that domestic responsibilities fall solely on women.

Mentorship from other women leaders also played a transformative role in building confidence and shaping authentic leadership identities. Roshni, a department manager at a secondary school, shared: “She told me, ‘You don’t have to lead like a man. You lead like yourself, and that’s enough.’ That gave me permission to stop imitating others and to trust my own style.”

This kind of mentorship helped participants resist pressures to conform to male leadership norms and allowed them to lead in ways that align with their values and personalities.

Participants further emphasized the importance of peer support, even when informal or infrequent. Nadira reflected: “We don’t have many women in leadership roles here, but when we do meet, even informally, it feels like a safe space where we can be honest about the struggles and share advice without judgment.”

These gatherings provided much-needed affirmation and solidarity within an otherwise isolating professional environment.

Together, these support systems were framed as essential not only to surviving but also to thriving as women leaders in Guyana's male-dominated educational landscape. Camille expressed this powerfully:

There were times I wanted to give up, but having people I could talk to, people who understood what I was facing, made all the difference. It reminded me that I wasn't alone, and that gave me strength to keep going.

### **Discussion**

This study represents one of the first investigations to examine the leadership experiences of women within Guyana's education sector. The findings reveal a complex leadership terrain in which women navigate layered cultural expectations, gendered institutional barriers, and persistent power asymmetries, while drawing upon individual agency and relational resources to sustain their professional roles. By foregrounding participants' interpretive processes, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of educational leadership in underexplored sociocultural contexts and offers significant theoretical and practical implications for addressing gender inequities in leadership systems (Cimene et al., 2024; Cozza & Parnter, 2022; Smith et al., 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

A central finding of the study is the tension participants experience between establishing professional legitimacy and contending with institutional and cultural discourses that implicitly position female leadership as atypical. Participants engaged in what is conceptualized as "adaptive cultural reasoning" - that is, a strategic process in which systemic challenges were interpreted not as reflections of personal inadequacy but as embedded within wider sociocultural and organizational structures (Ely, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Mnzile & Ceylan, 2025). This strategy enabled participants to maintain self-efficacy while navigating professional environments where implicit gender biases and male-normed expectations remained pervasive. These findings extend identity development theories by illustrating how marginalized professionals mobilize meaning-making processes as protective mechanisms in response to social devaluation (Fletcher, 2004; Phinney, 1990; Sue & Sue, 2015).

Relationality also emerged as a critical dimension of participants' leadership practice. Consistent with Caribbean cultural norms that emphasize collectivism and interconnectedness (Barriteau, 2001), participants described support from peers, mentors, and equitable domestic partners as central to their resilience and leadership continuity. These relationships functioned not merely as sources of emotional support but as foundational elements in the formation of leadership identity. This insight aligns with relational-cultural theory (Ely, 2010, 2011; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Yahya, 2024), which emphasizes that growth-fostering relationships are essential to psychological development and professional thriving. The centrality of these relational structures challenges dominant Western leadership models that privilege individualism and hierarchical control (Nkosi & Maphalala, 2025; Northouse, 2019), and instead highlights the importance of community-based and collaborative leadership approaches. Leadership development initiatives should therefore prioritize cultivating supportive professional networks and institutionalizing mentorship structures, particularly for women at mid-career levels, where attrition often intensifies due to compounded work-life pressures (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Fletcher, 2004; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Mareque, 2022).

While participants demonstrated acute awareness of structural inequities within their professional environments, their interpretive frameworks emphasized the immediate institutional and cultural dynamics shaping leadership practice in Guyana, rather than attributing challenges solely to historical legacies. This form of situated gender consciousness reflects a critical understanding of how current organizational norms and entrenched gender expectations intersect to influence access, authority, and recognition. Their ability to resist internalizing these constraints and instead frame their experiences through culturally informed and relationally grounded strategies aligns with models of culturally responsive leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hozien, 2024; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012; Santamaria, 2014).

In the Guyanese context, where education systems often reproduce informal hierarchies and gendered assumptions, these findings highlight the urgent need for systemic reform. Policy efforts should move beyond individual capacity-building to address institutional cultures and practices. This includes reviewing promotion practices to eliminate informal gatekeeping, implementing transparent and equitable evaluation criteria, and embedding cultural reflexivity, mentorship, and relational skills into leadership preparation programs. Such reforms would more effectively support women's advancement by aligning leadership development with the cultural and institutional realities faced by educational leaders in Guyana.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

These findings carry important theoretical implications by challenging universalist leadership models and advancing culturally responsive and relational frameworks that better capture the lived realities of women educational leaders in Guyana (Ely, 2010; Schnackenberg & Simard, 2021; Smith, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006). By emphasizing adaptive cultural reasoning, situated gender consciousness, and communal leadership practices, this study enriches leadership scholarship with nuanced, context-sensitive perspectives that account for the complex interplay of culture, identity, and institutional structures.

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the urgency of institutional reforms aimed at dismantling systemic gender biases within leadership pipelines. Research suggests that effective strategies to promote gender equity in leadership include revising promotion practices to eradicate informal gatekeeping (Chung, 2003; Yahya, 2024), implementing transparent, equity-driven evaluation criteria (Patton, 2015), and embedding cultural reflexivity and relational mentorship into leadership development programs (Smith, 2009; Yousefi et al., 2025). Additionally, formalizing peer support networks and fostering inclusive organizational cultures that recognize diverse leadership styles have been identified as critical for advancing gender equity in educational leadership. These theoretical and practical insights offer a foundation for designing interventions that are responsive to the cultural and institutional specificities of Guyana's education sector.

### **Broader Contributions to Leadership Theory**

Extending beyond the immediate context, the findings contribute to broader theoretical debates on the cultural grounding of leadership identity. By demonstrating how leadership is negotiated through interactions with cultural expectations, institutional norms, and interpersonal dynamics, this study challenges dominant universalist models that conceptualize leadership as a fixed set of traits or competencies divorced from sociocultural

context. The experiences of women educational leaders in Guyana reveal leadership as a contextually embedded and relationally sustained practice shaped by local values, gendered norms, and systemic constraints (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Eggins, 2017). This perspective reinforces calls for more localized, culturally responsive leadership models that better reflect the realities of non-Western and underrepresented contexts (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012).

By centering the interpretive frameworks of women navigating complex cultural and institutional environments, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that advocates for a more pluralistic, situated approach to leadership theory and development (Fauzi et al., 2024; Nkosi & Maphalala, 2025; Schnackenberg & Simard, 2021; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The findings call for a fundamental reconceptualization of leadership as a culturally mediated and relationally sustained practice, highlighting the necessity of policies and organizational practices that reflect this understanding.

From a policy and institutional reform perspective, the study underscores the need for multifaceted interventions that recognize the sociocultural specificity of leadership experience. Educational leaders and policymakers should implement contextually relevant strategies that both dismantle systemic barriers and enhance relational support structures. These include formalizing peer mentorship programs, integrating equity-focused leadership criteria into promotion frameworks, and fostering inclusive leadership cultures that affirm diverse leadership styles and pathways. Such interventions are particularly vital in settings like Guyana, where leadership development has historically lacked attention to gendered dynamics and cultural specificity (Chung, 2003; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Mnzile & Ceylan, 2025).

This study demonstrates that women's leadership in Guyana's education sector is sustained through a complex interplay of individual meaning-making, relational support, and cultural navigation. Future research should continue to build on context-sensitive methodologies, particularly in Global South settings, to ensure that leadership theory and practice more fully reflect the diverse realities of those working within them.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting these findings. First, the study's sample size of seven participants, while appropriate for phenomenological research, limits the generalizability of findings to the broader population of women educational leaders in Guyana (Smith, 2009). The use of snowball sampling may have introduced selection bias, potentially overrepresenting women leaders who are well-connected within professional networks and may have more positive experiences than those who are more isolated (Patton, 2015). Additionally, the study focused exclusively on women's perspectives, which provides valuable insights into their lived experiences but does not capture the full complexity of gendered dynamics that would emerge from including male leaders' perspectives (Bryman, 2016; Schnackenberg & Simard, 2021).

The geographic concentration of participants in Georgetown and the Corentyne region may not fully represent the experiences of women leaders in other areas of Guyana, particularly more remote regions where cultural norms and institutional contexts may differ significantly (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Clark, 2018). The study's focus on current leaders also means that the experiences of women who may have left leadership positions or been unable to

access them are not represented in the findings, potentially creating a survival bias in the data (Gillard & Okonjo-Iweala, 2022; Maxwell, 2013).

The cross-sectional nature of the study provides a snapshot of participants' experiences at a particular point in time but does not capture how these experiences may evolve over career trajectories or in response to changing social and institutional contexts (Saldaña, 2003). Furthermore, the study's reliance on self-reported experiences, while valuable for understanding subjective meaning-making, may not capture unconscious biases or structural barriers that participants may not be fully aware of (Fauzi et al., 2024; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Future research should expand the geographical and demographic scope of inquiry to include women leaders from additional regions and ethnic communities within Guyana, as well as those working in different educational contexts such as primary schools and vocational institutions (Stake, 2005). Comparative studies examining women's leadership experiences across different Caribbean nations would help identify both shared patterns and unique cultural influences, contributing to broader theoretical understanding of gender and leadership in postcolonial contexts (Yin, 2018). Additionally, longitudinal research tracking women's leadership trajectories over time would provide valuable insights into how experiences and strategies evolve across career stages and in response to changing social contexts (Fauzi et al., 2024; Saldaña, 2003; Yousefi et al., 2025).

Research incorporating male educational leaders' perspectives would offer a more complete understanding of gendered power dynamics and could inform interventions that engage men as allies in promoting gender equity (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fauzi et al., 2024; Flood, 2019). Mixed-methods approaches that combine phenomenological insights with quantitative measures of organizational climate, leadership effectiveness, and career outcomes would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence women's leadership success (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Finally, intervention studies testing the effectiveness of different approaches to supporting women's educational leadership, such as mentorship programs, institutional policy changes, or community engagement initiatives, would provide crucial evidence for developing effective practices and policies (Patton, 2015; Yousefi et al., 2025).

## Conclusion

This study represents one of the first empirical investigations of women educational leaders in Guyana, revealing how participants successfully navigate masculine leadership norms and workplace challenges through adaptive cultural reasoning and strategic relational networks. The findings show that women leaders demonstrate resilience by recognizing barriers as embedded within organizational and cultural structures, while actively leveraging family support, mentorship, and peer networks to sustain and advance their leadership roles. These results challenge universalist leadership theories by demonstrating that effective leadership in Guyana emerges through culturally situated resilience mechanisms and collaborative practices that reflect Caribbean values of collectivism and interconnectedness. The study contributes to broader debates about culturally grounded leadership identity and advocates for pluralistic, situated approaches to leadership theory that honor diverse leadership styles. These findings underscore the urgent need for institutional interventions that dismantle systemic barriers and enhance relational support structures, including formalizing mentorship programs, integrating equity-focused evaluation criteria, and fostering inclusive

organizational cultures that affirm diverse leadership pathways in postcolonial educational contexts.

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