



MAINSTREAMING GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S SITUATIONS AND ISSUES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN THE NORTH CENTRAL PHILIPPINES ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the mainstreaming of gender perspectives on women's situations and issues in the United Methodist Church within the North Central Philippines Annual Conference. It aimed to determine the demographic profile of women members, identify gender-related challenges and leadership barriers, assess existing gender inclusivity strategies, and examine significant differences and relationships among these variables. Using a descriptive research design, the study involved 250 respondents from selected UMC congregations across Isabela North District, Isabela Northwest Kalinga District, Isabela Central Mountain Province District, and Isabela Coastal Mission District. Data were gathered through validated questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, and were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, ANOVA, and Pearson's r . Findings revealed that most respondents were older women, lay members, long-term church members, and generally educated, with many belonging to modest income groups. Gender-related challenges and cultural, theological, economic, emotional, physical, and psychological barriers were generally perceived as mild, although physical and psychological concerns remained visible. Age significantly influenced perceived gender-related challenges, while age, educational attainment, and number of children significantly affected perceptions of leadership barriers. A moderate positive relationship was found between leadership barriers and gender-related challenges, while existing inclusivity strategies showed weak relationships with these variables. The study concluded that the UMC has made progress in promoting gender inclusivity through mentorship, training, participation, and policy initiatives; however,

subtle barriers persist. Strengthened gender-sensitivity education, leadership formation, logistical support, policy enforcement, and regular assessment are recommended to advance women's full participation in church leadership and ministry decision-making processes today.

Keywords: *gender mainstreaming, women's leadership, United Methodist Church, gender inclusivity, leadership barriers*

INTRODUCTION

There have been progress especially through education, advocacy, and legislation. Many women today have achieved educational success, professional accomplishments, and even leadership positions within their respective institutions. However, despite these advancements, the full realization of gender equality in rights, representation, and authority continues to be hindered by long-standing social and cultural systems that privilege male dominance. The persistent inequality between men and women—particularly in terms of perceptions of capability, access to opportunities, and acceptance of women's leadership—remains an enduring and multifaceted challenge in contemporary society. Despite the growing global movement toward gender equality and empowerment, the disparity between men and women continues to manifest in various dimensions of social, cultural, and institutional life. This issue remains especially visible within religious communities, where the principles of equality and justice are often professed but not consistently practiced. The right to equal treatment and participation, particularly for women, is frequently denied or restricted, resulting in systemic injustice that transcends national, cultural, and denominational boundaries. Consequently, women continue to experience marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion from leadership and decision-making roles.

A major factor contributing to this imbalance is the enduring presence of the patriarchal system, a socio-cultural structure that assigns authority and leadership primarily to men while relegating women to domestic and supportive roles. Within this framework, women are often perceived as inherently weaker or less capable of leadership. This cultural mindset has perpetuated gender-based stereotypes that continue to restrict women's participation in both secular and religious spheres. Such systemic inequality has become so deeply ingrained in social institutions that it is often normalized, accepted, or even justified by tradition. As a result, women remain vulnerable to various forms of violence, exclusion, and injustice. The persistence of these patriarchal norms represents not only a social issue but also a moral and spiritual concern that challenges the integrity of both society and the Church. It is important to note that gender inequality is not confined to secular contexts alone. It is also evident within the Church, where leadership structures and theological interpretations often reflect the same biases found in wider society. Although the Church is expected to be a space that upholds equity, compassion, and inclusivity, many religious communities continue to struggle with gender-based exclusion. In some cases, even women themselves internalize patriarchal ideologies, doubting their own ability to lead or to participate equally in ministry and decision-making. This internalized oppression further reinforces structural inequality,

creating a continuous cycle of discrimination that persists across generations and cultures (Wood, 2019; Musoni, 2022).

The researcher, who has long served within The United Methodist Church (UMC), has personally witnessed and experienced such gender disparities both in the Philippines and abroad. Years of service in ministry, theological study, and participation in international church programs have provided opportunities to engage with diverse cultures and ecclesial settings. A particularly formative experience was the researcher's participation in the Master of Theology program at a Methodist Church–owned university in Seoul, South Korea, where students from various Asian countries were selected to pursue advanced theological studies. Out of eight students in the program, the researcher was the only woman in the class. While this was a valuable academic and spiritual experience, it also revealed the stark underrepresentation of women in theological education and leadership. Similarly, in the Master of Divinity program, there were nineteen men and only four women, further illustrating the gender imbalance within ministerial preparation. This observation is consistent with discussions on the need for gender-inclusive theological education and the fuller participation of women in the life and leadership of the United Methodist Church (Park, 2007; General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, n.d.).

Even within The United Methodist Church, an institution globally recognized for its commitment to social justice, gender equality, and inclusion, disparities in leadership persist. Although women have been permitted to be ordained as pastors (clergywomen) since 1956, it was only in November 2022 (Mangiduyos, 2022), during a special Central Conference, that the Church appointed its first female bishop. This significant yet delayed milestone underscores the ongoing challenges that women face in attaining leadership positions within the Church. It highlights the need for a deeper examination of how gender perspectives are understood, integrated, and practiced within ecclesiastical contexts—particularly in the North Central Philippines Annual Conference (NCPAC).

The continuing issues of gender inequality and the limited leadership opportunities for women within The United Methodist Church call for intentional research and reflection. Understanding the cultural, theological, and institutional roots of these inequalities is essential to developing transformative strategies for change. Hence, it seeks to explore the underlying factors that contribute to the unequal treatment of women in the Church. It aims to examine how gender perspectives can be mainstreamed into the Church's ministries, policies, and leadership structures to promote inclusivity and justice². This study hopes to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality within faith-based institutions by analyzing both the barriers and the potential pathways toward women's empowerment in church leadership. By engaging with the lived experiences of women in ministry, theological reflection, and organizational analysis, this research endeavors to highlight the critical role of gender mainstreaming as a means of transforming both Church and society. Ultimately, it envisions a faith community where women and men stand as equals in service, leadership, and discipleship—reflecting the true spirit of God's justice and equality for all.

Research Questions

This study aimed to identify and analyze the challenges and issues that women face within the United Methodist Church (UMC) and to examine the implications for incorporating a gender perspective into church practices and policies. Specifically, it seeks to clarify the systemic and cultural barriers that hinder women's greater participation in church leadership and in the decision-making process, considering the church's foundational principles of equality and inclusiveness.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the demographic profiles of women in the United Methodist Church in terms of:
 - 1.1 Age
 - 1.2 District
 - 1.3 Duration of Membership
 - 1.4 Highest Educational Attainment
 - 1.5 Monthly Income
 - 1.6 Stewardship Role
2. What challenges are commonly faced by women in the UMC concerning gender situations and roles?
3. Is there a significant difference between the challenges commonly faced by women in the UMC concerning gender situations and roles when grouped according to their profile?
4. What are the specific barriers faced by women in the UMC in terms of?
 - 4.1 Cultural
 - 4.2 Theological
 - 4.3 Economic
 - 4.4 Emotional
 - 4.5 Physical
 - 4.6 Psychological
5. Is there a significant difference in the perceptions of women in the United Methodist Church regarding the barriers to their leadership participation when grouped according to their demographic profiles?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the barriers to the leadership participation of women, the challenges commonly faced by women concerning gender situations and roles, and the existing strategies or initiatives that are in place currently to promote gender inclusivity within the United Methodist Church?
7. What are the existing strategies or initiatives that are in place currently to promote gender inclusivity within the UMC?
8. Is there a significant difference between the existing strategies or initiatives that are in place to promote gender inclusivity within the UMC when grouped according to their profile?
9. To what extent are the existing strategies or initiatives in gender inclusivity practiced in the church?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed the descriptive research design. Descriptive research is suitable for systematically analyzing existing conditions, trends, and relationships using numerical data. According to Nassaji (2015), this design enables researchers to quantify perceptions and patterns, making it ideal for addressing the study's objective to examine gender inequality and women's leadership challenges in the United Methodist Church(UMC).

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted within the North Central Philippines Annual Conference (NCPAC) of the United Methodist Church (UMC), focusing on selected UMC congregations within the merged districts of Isabela North District (IsND), Isabela Northwest Kalinga District (INKAD), Isabela Central Mountain Province District (ICMPD), and Isabela Coastal Mission District (ICMD). These districts collectively encompassed 88 local churches and other worshiping congregations, providing a rich and diverse context for examining gender-related challenges within the UMC.

NCPAC is characterized by a combination of urban and rural settings, and this regional diversity offered a distinctive lens through which gender dynamics within the church were examined. Despite the increasing involvement of women in lay ministries, leadership positions within the church remained predominantly occupied by men. The churches included in the study represented a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, allowing for a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of gender equality issues. By focusing on these merged districts, the research highlighted local factors influencing gender perspectives, including regional traditions, access to education, and socio-economic differences between rural and urban congregations. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by women in leadership roles within the UMC and contributed to the broader discourse on gender equality in religious institutions.

Selection and Description of Respondents

The respondents of the study consists of 250 individuals drawn from selected United Methodist Church congregations within the NCPAC. The respondents included women church members, lay leaders, clergy, church administrators, and youth members who are actively involved in church activities and decision-making processes. Among the respondents are 46 women clergy, whose perspectives were essential in understanding institutional leadership experiences and policy implementation within the church.

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique appropriate for selecting respondents with specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. This method ensured the inclusion of individuals who were knowledgeable

about church operations, leadership structures, and gender dynamics. The selection criteria included: (1) active involvement in church ministries or leadership roles; (2) representation across different age groups, educational attainment levels, socio-economic backgrounds, and rural or urban settings; and (3) inclusion of clergy and church administrators to provide insights into institutional policies and practices.

The same group of respondents was retained throughout the data collection process to ensure consistency and reliability of responses across all research variable.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data-gathering procedure for this study were systematically organized and conducted in stages to ensure the collection of accurate, reliable, and valid data. This step-by-step process began with the preparation and validation of research instruments. The questionnaire underwent content validation by subject-matter experts in theology, gender studies, and social research to confirm its relevance, clarity, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Following validation, the questionnaire was pilot tested on 20 individuals who possessed characteristics similar to those of the actual respondents but were excluded from the final sample. Results of the pilot test were used to refine item wording, improve clarity, and ensure reliability before the instrument was formally administered. This systematic process of validation and pilot testing enhanced the credibility of the data gathered and ensured that the instrument effectively captured women's perceptions of leadership barriers, gender-related challenges, and inclusivity strategies within the United Methodist Church. The validated questionnaire was administered to the selected respondents, with careful attention given to ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality. The researcher or a trained research assistant distributed the questionnaires during church-related activities, such as services or meetings. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the surveys, and any questions or clarifications needed are addressed promptly by the researcher. After the respondents have accomplished the questionnaires, they were collected by the researcher to ensure that all responses are returned. Data collection was carried out through coordinated methods that promote consistency and minimize bias. After the responses were gathered, the data underwent careful organization and verification before proceeding to analysis. Triangulation was employed to cross-validate the findings, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of gender-based challenges within the United Methodist Church. In addition to surveys and interviews, the researcher conducted a document analysis of relevant church materials. This included reviewing church policies, official statements, and other documents that address gender roles within the institution. Church administrators are contacted to gain access to these materials, and the researcher carefully analyzed the documents to determine the official stance on gender equality and leadership. In ensuring a systematic review, it aims to understand meanings, perspectives, and experiences.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistical tools to systematically present, analyze, and interpret the data gathered from the 250 women respondents of the United Methodist Church (UMC) under the North Central Philippines Annual Conference (NCPAC). These statistical treatments enabled the researcher to describe the respondents' demographic profiles, determine the extent of leadership barriers, gender-related challenges, and gender inclusivity strategies, as well as examine differences and relationships among the key variables of the study. The following measures were used:

Frequency and Percentage Distribution. These were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, district affiliation, length of church membership, educational attainment, monthly income, and stewardship role.

Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation. The weighted mean was used to determine the extent to which women experienced leadership barriers, gender-related challenges, and the presence of gender inclusivity strategies. This statistical tool was appropriate for summarizing Likert-scale responses and identifying the overall level of perception for each indicator. The standard deviation was used to measure the degree of variability or consistency in the respondents' answers, indicating whether perceptions were closely clustered around the mean or widely dispersed.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). ANOVA was used to determine whether significant differences exist in women's perceptions of leadership barriers, gender-related challenges, and inclusivity strategies when respondents were grouped according to demographic variables such as age, educational attainment, length of church membership, civil status, number of children, stewardship role, socio-economic status, and district affiliation. This technique allowed for the comparison of group means to establish whether observed differences were statistically significant.

Pearson's r . This was employed to examine the relationships among the three major variables of the study: barriers to women's leadership participation, challenges concerning gender situations and roles, and existing gender inclusivity strategies. This statistical measure determined both the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. Positive correlation coefficients indicated a direct relationship, while negative coefficients indicated an inverse relationship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the demographic profile of women in the United Methodist Church in terms of:

a. Age

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Age

AGE	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18	11	4.4
18-25	39	15.6
26-35	34	13.6
36-45	54	21.6
46-55	50	20.0
56 and above	62	24.8
Total	250	100.0

The table shows that most or 44.8% of the respondents are aged 46 and above, followed by those 36–45 years old (21.6%). This indicates that the population of women in the UMC-NCPAC is composed mainly of older members, suggesting that many of them have had long-standing involvement in church affairs. The smaller percentage of younger respondents who are under 18 years old may imply a need to encourage youth engagement and participation in church gender initiatives. This supports the finding of Harris (2022), who noted that church leadership and ministry participation are often dominated by older women due to their longer spiritual formation and experience.

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to District Affiliation

Districts of the NCPAC	Frequency	Percent
Isabela North District (IsND)	182	72.8
Isabela Northwest Kalinga District (INKAD)	25	10.0
Isabela Central Mountain Province District (ICMPD)	32	12.8
Isabela Coastal Mission District (ICMD)	11	4.4
Total	250	100.0

Table 2 shows that the majority or 72.8% of respondents belong to the Isabela North District, followed by 12.8% from the Isabela Central Mountain Province District and 10% from the Isabela Northwest Kalinga District. Only 4.4% are from the Isabela Coastal Mission District.

This reveals that the Isabela North District serves as the central representation of women members in this study, which could reflect its larger church membership base or

greater accessibility. According to Dela Cruz and De Leon (2023), participation in church programs is often higher in districts with stronger administrative structures and accessibility, which may explain the dominant representation of certain areas.

c. Duration of Membership

Table 3
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Duration of Membership

Tenure of Membership	Frequency	Percent
Since Birth	50	20.0
0-10 years	34	13.6
11-20 years	166	66.4
Total	250	100.0

Majority or 66.4% of the respondents have been members of the church for 11 to 20 years, indicating a well-established commitment and familiarity with church programs, ministries, and leadership systems. Only 13.6% have been members for 0 to 10 years, and 20% since their birth. The data imply that most women have sufficient experience to provide informed insights into the gender-related practices and issues of the UMC.

This finding aligns with the observation of Ndekia et al. (2022), that long-term church membership strengthens women's confidence, institutional knowledge, and familiarity with organizational processes, thereby enhancing their capacity to participate meaningfully in church leadership and engage in gender-related advocacy. Prolonged involvement in church life also provides women with sustained exposure to ministry practices and decision-making structures, which may further empower them to contribute to discussions on inclusivity and leadership within the ecclesial context.

d. Educational Attainment

Table 4
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percent
Elementary	2	.8
High School	48	19.2
College	102	40.8
Graduate/Post Graduate	98	39.2
Total	250	100.0

The data show that the largest portion of respondents (40.8%) are college graduates, followed closely by graduate or post-graduate degree holders (39.2%). This indicates a highly educated population of women in the UMC, capable of critical thinking

and leadership participation. The presence of a few elementary-level respondents (0.8%) suggests inclusivity across different educational backgrounds. As noted by Violon and Prado (2024) higher educational attainment among women in faith-based organizations contributes to greater leadership readiness and advocacy for inclusivity.

e. Monthly Income

Table 5
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Monthly Income

Monthly Income	Frequency	Percent
No Income	31	12.4
Low Income (P12,030.00 per month and below)	88	35.2
Lower-Middle Income (P24,060.00 per month and below)	101	40.4
Upper-Middle Income bet P48,120.00-P84,210.00	30	12.0
Total	250	100.0

Most or 40.4 % of the respondent belong to the lower-middle income bracket, while 35.2% fall under the low-income category. Only 12.0% belong to the upper-middle income group, and 12.4% reported having no income. The income categories in this study are conceptually aligned with socio-economic groupings referenced in Philippine social protection programs, such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) Ayuda sa Kapos ang Kita Program (AKAP) , which targets individuals whose earnings are insufficient to meet basic needs and may fall below the statutory minimum wage (Department of Social Welfare and Development [DSWD], n.d.). These results indicate that the majority of women in the UMC come from modest economic backgrounds, a condition that may affect their capacity for sustained leadership engagement and financial participation in church initiatives. Consistent with this finding, George (2025) noted that socio-economic constraints can limit women's opportunities for leadership involvement and active participation in community and faith-based organizations.

f. Stewardship Role

Table 6
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to their Stewardship Role

Stewardship Role	Frequency	Percent
Clergy	46	18.4
Lay Membership	204	81.6
Total	250	100.0

Majority or 81.6 % of the respondents are lay members, and 18.4% are clergy. This suggests that many women have taken formal steps in their spiritual commitment

and are active participants in church life, making their perspectives crucial in the discussion of gender mainstreaming and leadership participation. This finding supports the view of Flores (2021) that active church membership among women strengthens their sense of belonging and motivates engagement in ministries and gender-related discussions.

2. What challenges are commonly faced by women in the UMC concerning gender situations and roles?

Table 7
Challenges Commonly Faced by Women in the UMC In terms of Gender Situations and Roles

	Gender Situations	Mean	Description
1	Gender-based discrimination in the United Methodist Church discourages women from actively participating in church activities.	1.83	Disagree
2	Unequal treatment of women in leadership roles affects their motivation to engage in the United Methodist Church programs.	1.99	Disagree
3	Cultural expectations of women's roles limit their ability to be active members of the United Methodist Church.	2.03	Disagree
4	The lack of support for women in addressing gender issues impacts their involvement in United Methodist Church ministries.	2.07	Disagree
5	Experiences of gender inequality make women hesitant to take on leadership roles in the United Methodist Church.	2.11	Disagree
6	Women facing gender-based challenges are less likely to volunteer for the United Methodist Church initiatives.	2.13	Disagree
7	Gender stereotypes within the United Methodist Church community hinder women's participation in church activities.	2.13	Disagree
8	Gender issues discourage women from pursuing active roles in the United Methodist Church outreach programs.	2.00	Disagree
9	Women who experience gender inequality in the United Methodist Church less likely to attend church events regularly	2.10	Disagree
10	Women become less active in The United Methodist Church leadership due to unresolved gender-related concerns.	2.13	Disagree
	Mean	2.05	Disagree

The results reveal that the respondents disagree that gender-related challenges strongly affect women's participation and leadership in the United Methodist Church, as shown by the overall mean of 2.05. This indicates that while some gender issues exist, they are not perceived as serious obstacles to women's involvement in church activities and leadership.

The lowest mean of 1.83 indicates that most women do not feel discriminated against, reflecting the church's progress in promoting inclusivity. However, items with slightly higher means, such as the lack of support for women (2.07) and the influence of cultural expectations (2.03), suggest that subtle barriers still exist. Traditional views and limited encouragement may affect women's confidence and participation in leadership roles. The highest means of 2.13 are found in statements about reduced involvement due to unresolved gender concerns and stereotypes, implying that minor issues of gender imbalance persist within some congregations. These may discourage women from volunteering or taking on leadership responsibilities.

Overall, the findings suggest that gender-related challenges are minimal but still present in subtle forms. The United Methodist Church has made significant progress toward equality, but continued efforts in gender-sensitivity programs, leadership training, and supportive policies are needed to ensure women's full and active participation in all areas of church life.

Consistent with the United Methodist Church's continuing advocacy for the full and equal participation of women, this study found that gender-related challenges within the UMC are present but relatively mild, reflecting gradual cultural adaptation toward inclusivity (General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, n.d.; The United Methodist Church, 2024). This also aligns with Ndekia et al. (2022), who found that organizational culture and gender-sensitive policies influence women's participation in church leadership.

3. Is there a significant difference between the challenges commonly faced by women in the UMC concerning gender situations and roles when grouped according to their profile?

Table 8
Results of the Test of Significant Difference in the Challenges Commonly Faced by Women in the UMC Concerning Gender Situations and Roles When Grouped According to Profile

Profile	Significance F	Decision	Remarks
Age (Between 18 – 35)	.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Educational Attainment	.076	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Tenure of Membership	.318	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Civil Status	.242	Accept Ho	Not Significant

No of Children if Married	.051	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Stewardship Role	.892	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Socio-economic Status	.191	Accept Ho	Not Significant
District of the NCPAC	.131	Accept Ho	Not Significant

Table 8 presents the results of the Analysis of Variance (F-test) at a 0.05 level of significance to determine whether the challenges commonly faced by women in the United Methodist Church (UMC) regarding gender situations and roles vary according to their socio-demographic and ecclesial profiles.

The analysis shows that the F-values for educational attainment, tenure of membership, civil status, number of children (if married), stewardship role, socio-economic status, and district of the NCPAC exceed the 0.05 significance threshold. Consequently, the null hypothesis is accepted for these variables, indicating that these profile characteristics do not significantly influence the challenges women face in gender-related situations and roles. This finding suggests a certain uniformity in women's experiences across different educational levels, marital status, economic conditions, and church districts, implying that structural or cultural factors within the UMC may affect all women similarly, regardless of these personal or socio-economic differences.

In contrast, the F-value for age is 0.001, which is well below the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, indicating a statistically significant difference in gender-related challenges based on age. Younger women specifically for respondents aged 18–35 appear to encounter or perceive gender challenges differently compared to older members. This may be attributed to generational differences in awareness, expectations, and sensitivity toward issues of gender equity and leadership. Younger members may be more informed about gender equality discourse, more attuned to subtle forms of bias, or more likely to expect inclusive leadership practices, which could explain the heightened perception of challenges within this group.

These results highlight that, while most demographic and ecclesial profile variables do not significantly affect women's experiences, age emerges as a key differentiating factor. This finding corroborates the observation of Poushter and Fetterolf (2019), who noted that younger church members tend to perceive gender bias more critically than older generations, often expressing greater concern for equitable participation and representation. The implication is that programs and interventions aimed at addressing gender-related challenges in the UMC may need to consider generational perspectives, tailoring approaches to better engage younger women while also addressing systemic challenges experienced across all age groups. The findings suggest avenues for further research. For instance, exploring why younger women perceive gender challenges more acutely could inform the design of targeted leadership development initiatives, mentorship programs, and gender-sensitivity workshops. By recognizing the specific needs and experiences of younger women, the Church can foster more inclusive leadership structures that respond to both generational and institutional dynamics.

4. What are the specific barriers faced by women in the UMC in terms of?
a. Cultural Barriers

Table 9
Cultural Barriers Faced by Women in the UMC

	Cultural Barriers	Mean	Description
1	Traditional gender roles within the UMC emphasize male authority and discourage women from pursuing leadership.	1.72	Disagree
2	Women are often expected to serve in support roles rather than decision-making roles within the church.	1.75	Disagree
3	Cultural norms in The United Methodist Church prioritize male leadership over female leadership.	1.76	Disagree
4	The resistance to women’s leadership is deeply rooted in the cultural practices of the United Methodist Church.	1.87	Disagree
5	The Cultural traditions in the United Methodist Church make it harder for women to voice out their opinions in leadership meetings.	1.83	Disagree
	Mean	1.79	Disagree

The results indicate that respondents generally disagree that cultural barriers significantly hinder women’s leadership participation in the UMC. The lowest mean score of 1.72 for item #1 suggests that traditional gender roles discouraging women from pursuing leadership positions are not strongly perceived by most respondents. Similarly, slightly higher mean scores of 1.83–1.87 indicate a mild recognition that resistance to women’s leadership and difficulty voicing opinions in meetings still exist but are not dominant issues.

These findings imply that, while traces of traditional gender expectations remain, the United Methodist community in the North Central Philippines Annual Conference (NCPAC) appears progressively open to women’s active participation and leadership, reflecting a gradual cultural shift toward inclusivity. This observation aligns with Aguilar’s (2021) , that traditional church culture continues to shape women’s leadership aspirations, although incremental changes are enabling greater engagement of women in leadership roles.

b. Theological Barriers

Table 10
Theological Barriers Faced By Women in the UMC

	Theological Barriers	Mean	Description
1	Traditional readings of scripture within the UMC continue to shape negative perceptions about women’s spiritual leadership.	1.65	Strongly Disagree

2	Theological resistance to women in leadership remains strong in more traditional or conservative UMC congregations.	1.78	Disagree
3	UMC members sometimes interpret God's design for leadership as being male-centered based on scripture.	1.65	Strongly Disagree
4	Theological debates within the UMC continue to create uncertainty about the full acceptance of women in church authority roles.	1.78	Disagree
5	The lack of theological education that affirms gender equality in leadership hinders women's inclusion in UMC leadership.	1.94	Disagree
	Mean	1.76	Disagree

The respondents generally disagree that theological barriers significantly limit women's participation. The lowest means of 1.65 are given to statements#1 and 3 suggesting that scripture or beliefs about divine male leadership discourage women's leadership—indicating that most women do not feel restricted by doctrine or biblical interpretation. Although a few respondents acknowledged some resistance to reinterpretations of theology, the overall results reveal that the United Methodist Church's evolving theology has become more inclusive, and restrictive doctrines have minimal influence on women's leadership participation today. Cruz (2020) emphasized that evolving interpretations of scripture have contributed to greater inclusivity.

c. Economic Barriers

Table 11
Economic Barriers faced By Women in the UMC

	Economic Barriers	Mean	Description
1	Limited financial resources prevent many women from pursuing theological education or leadership training.	1.84	Disagree
2	Women in the church have fewer economic opportunities to attend leadership conferences or workshops.	1.89	Disagree
3	Economic responsibilities at home often limit women's time and energy to serve in leadership roles.	1.87	Disagree
4	Women often lack institutional support or resources that are more readily available to men in leadership pathways.	1.83	Disagree
5	Women are underrepresented in paid leadership positions within the church due to systemic economic barriers.	1.94	Disagree
	Mean	1.87	Disagree

Table 11 presents the respondents' perceptions of economic barriers affecting women's participation in leadership within the United Methodist Church (UMC). The mean

scores for the five statements range from 1.83 to 1.94, with an overall mean of 1.87. This indicates that, overall, respondents do not perceive economic barriers as a significant hindrance to women's leadership involvement.

Specifically, the lowest mean score of 1.83 pertains to the statement that women often lack institutional support or resources that are more readily available to men in leadership pathways, suggesting that some respondents recognize minor inequities in resource allocation. The highest mean score of 1.94 relates to women's underrepresentation in paid leadership positions due to systemic economic barriers, indicating a slightly stronger acknowledgment of economic limitations in formal leadership roles. However, the scores remain below the midpoint of the scale, implying that these barriers are not viewed as dominant factors in limiting women's participation. The findings suggest that, while economic factors such as limited financial resources, domestic responsibilities, and restricted access to training opportunities exist, they are not perceived by the respondents as the primary impediments to leadership engagement. This may reflect the church community's provision of support systems or the respondents' ability to navigate economic constraints in pursuing leadership roles. Similar to Naranjo et al. (2025) findings, economic limitations were viewed as minor but still present factors. Overall, these results indicate that economic considerations, although present, are secondary to other potential barriers in influencing women's active participation and leadership development within the UMC.

d. Emotional Barriers

Table 12
Emotional Barriers Faced By Women in the UMC

	Emotional barriers	Mean	Description
1	Fear of criticism discourages many women from stepping into leadership roles within the church.	2.04	Disagree
2	Women often feel emotionally overwhelmed by the pressure to prove themselves in church leadership settings.	2.06	Disagree
3	Anxiety about being judged prevents some women from voicing their opinions in leadership discussions.	2.06	Disagree
4	Frustration with being overlooked or dismissed makes some women hesitant to continue pursuing leadership roles.	2.03	Disagree
5	Emotional exhaustion from repeated resistance can lead women to withdraw from leadership involvement.	2.03	Disagree
	Mean	2.04	Disagree

Table 12 presents the respondents' perceptions of emotional barriers that may influence women's participation in leadership within the United Methodist Church (UMC). The mean scores for the five items range from 2.03 to 2.06, with an overall mean of 2.04,

interpreted as “Disagree” on the 4-point Likert scale. This indicates that, generally, respondents do not perceive emotional barriers as a major impediment to women’s leadership engagement. The statements with the highest mean values of 2.06 pertain to women feeling emotionally overwhelmed by the pressure to prove themselves and anxiety about being judged in leadership settings. These slightly higher means suggest that some respondents recognize minor emotional challenges, such as fear of judgment or stress associated with leadership roles. Flores (2021) observed that emotional discouragement often arises from subtle gender biases rather than overt discrimination. Meanwhile, the lowest mean scores (2.03) reflect concerns about frustration from being overlooked and emotional exhaustion, indicating that these factors are acknowledged but not viewed as dominant deterrents to participation. The findings suggest that, while emotional pressures such as fear of criticism, anxiety, and frustration may exist, they are not significant obstacles for women assuming leadership roles within the UMC. This implies that the church environment in the North Central Philippines Annual Conference (NCPAC) may provide sufficient support, encouragement, or coping mechanisms to mitigate emotional barriers, enabling women to participate confidently in leadership activities.

e. Physical Barriers

Table 13
Physical Barriers Faced by Women in the UMC

	Physical Barriers	Mean	Description
1	Health concerns (e.g., chronic illness, fatigue, pregnancy-related issues) prevent women from regularly participating in church leadership roles.	2.20	Disagree
2	Church leadership meetings or events are often scheduled at times that conflict with women's caregiving or household responsibilities.	2.10	Disagree
3	Inadequate child-care facilities at church restrict women, especially mothers, from engaging in church activities.	2.00	Disagree
4	Lack of accessible transportation prevents women from attending church functions or leadership meetings regularly.	1.98	Disagree
5	Church buildings lack basic facilities (such as ramps, elevators, or accessible restrooms) for women with physical disabilities.	2.19	Disagree
	Mean	2.10	Disagree

Among all barrier dimensions examined, physical barriers obtained the highest mean, indicating that respondents are closest to agreement that these issues affect women’s participation in leadership within the United Methodist Church (UMC). The statements with the highest mean scores of 2.19–2.20 suggest that gender-based discrimination and unresolved gender concerns can discourage some women from fully engaging in leadership roles. Although the overall mean remains within the “Disagree”

range, it is notable that physical or situational constraints appear more prominent compared to cultural, economic, or emotional barriers.

Physical barriers in this context may include caregiving responsibilities, household obligations, scheduling conflicts, and accessibility limitations that make it challenging for women to participate in church activities and leadership programs. These situational constraints highlight how practical considerations, rather than purely attitudinal or cultural factors, can influence women's engagement. The findings imply that the Church could enhance women's participation by adjusting meeting schedules, providing accessible facilities, and creating more flexible structures that accommodate the varied roles and responsibilities of female members.

This observation is consistent with Ndekia et al. (2022) findings that church logistics, coupled with cultural expectations regarding women's roles, can restrict their full participation in ministry and leadership activities. The results suggest that addressing physical barriers is a practical and actionable strategy for promoting gender inclusivity in church leadership, as these obstacles are tangible and can be mitigated through organizational adjustments.

f. Psychological Barriers

Table 14
Psychological Barriers Faced by Women in the UMC

	Psychological Barriers	Mean	Description
1	I sometimes doubt my qualifications or abilities to serve in a church leadership role, even when I am capable.	2.00	Disagree
2	I have hesitated to share ideas in leadership settings out of fear of being dismissed or undervalued.	2.08	Disagree
3	Fear of failure has discouraged me from pursuing leadership opportunities in the church.	1.97	Disagree
4	Internalized stereotypes about women's roles in the church have affected my willingness to lead.	1.94	Disagree
5	I often feel that I have to be perfect or overprepared to be taken seriously in a church leadership role.	1.96	Disagree
	Mean	1.99	Disagree

Respondents generally disagree that psychological barriers strongly affect their leadership participation. Nonetheless, the relatively higher means around 2.00–2.08 indicate that some women experience self-doubt, fear of failure, or hesitation when expressing ideas in leadership contexts. These findings suggest that while external theological and cultural barriers are minimal, internal confidence and self-perception may still subtly influence women's willingness to lead. Leadership training and gender-sensitivity programs may therefore help build self-efficacy and empowerment among women in ministry.

Santos (2020) reported that self-doubt and fear of judgment remain internal hurdles for aspiring women leaders.

5. Is there a significant difference in the perceptions of women in the United Methodist Church regarding the barriers to their leadership participation when grouped according to their demographic profiles?

Table 15
Results of the Test of Significant Difference in the Perceptions of Women in the UMC Regarding the Barriers to Their Leadership Participation When Grouped According to Profile

Profile	Significance F	Decision	Remarks
Age (Between 26 – 45)	.006	Reject Ho	Significant
Educational Attainment (Elementary)	.012	Reject Ho	Significant
Tenure of Membership	.833	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Civil Status	.544	Accept Ho	Not Significant
No of Children if Married (1)	.031	Reject Ho	Significant
Stewardship Role	.225	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Socio-economic Status	.384	Accept Ho	Not Significant
District of the NCPAC	.256	Accept Ho	Not Significant

Table 15 reveals the result of the test of significant difference in the perceptions of women in the United Methodist Church regarding the barriers to their leadership participation when grouped according to their demographic profiles using the Analysis of Variance F-test at .05 level of significance. The table shows that the significance F - values for tenure of membership, civil status, stewardship role, socio-economic status and district of the NCPAC are greater than .05 which resulted to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This means that the perceptions of women in the United Methodist Church regarding the barriers to their leadership participation do not significantly differ regardless tenure of membership, civil status, stewardship role, socio-economic status and district of the NCPAC.

For the age, educational attainment and number of children if married, the significance F -values are less than .05 resulting to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies that there is significant difference in the perceptions of women in the United Methodist Church regarding the barriers to their leadership participation when grouped according to their age, educational attainment and number of children if married.

The results indicate the perceptions of women in the United Methodist Church regarding the barriers to their leadership participation are influenced by their age, educational attainment and number of children if married particularly those with ages from 26 - 45 years old, those who are with elementary education and respondents who are married with one child.

The finding that age and educational attainment influence women's perceptions of leadership barriers aligns with the observations of Anderson and White (2021) and Santos (2020) that younger and less formally educated members often experience leadership differently due to differences in generational perspectives, socialization, and exposure to formal educational opportunities. Younger women may be more aware of gender equality discourses and more sensitive to subtle forms of bias, yet they may also lack extensive experience navigating church leadership structures, which can shape their perceptions of barriers differently from older, more seasoned members. Similarly, women with lower levels of formal education may have limited access to leadership training, theological studies, or professional development opportunities, influencing both their confidence and expectations regarding participation in decision-making roles.

6. Is there a significant relationship between the barriers to the leadership participation of women, the challenges commonly faced by women concerning gender situations and roles, and the existing strategies or initiatives that are in place currently to promote gender inclusivity within the United Methodist Church?

Table 16
Results of the Test of Significant Relationship Between the Barriers to Leadership Participation of Women, Challenges Commonly Faced by Women in the UMC and Concerning Gender Situations and Roles, and Existing Strategies

Variables	Pearson's R	Significance r	Decision	Remarks
Barriers to Leadership Participation of Women and Challenges Commonly Faced by Women in the UMC and Concerning Gender Situations and Roles	.524 (Moderate)	.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Barriers to Leadership Participation of Women and Existing Strategies or Initiatives that are in Place Currently to Promote Gender Inclusivity within the UMC	-.150 (Negligible)	.017	Reject Ho	Significant
Challenges Commonly Faced by Women in the UMC and	-.030 (Negligible)	.642	Accept Ho	Not Significant

Concerning Gender Situations and Roles and Existing Strategies or Initiatives that are in Place Currently to Promote Gender Inclusivity within the UMC				
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Table 16 presents the result of the test of relationship between the barriers to women’s leadership participation, the challenges commonly faced by women concerning gender situations and roles, and the existing strategies or initiatives currently in place to promote gender inclusivity within the United Methodist Church (UMC) using the Pearson’s *r* test at the 0.05 level of significance.

The results indicate that there is a moderate positive correlation ($r = .524, p = .000$) between the barriers to leadership participation of women and the challenges commonly faced by women concerning gender situations and roles as indicated by the computed *p*-value which is less than 0.05. This suggests that as the barriers to women’s leadership increase, the challenges they experience in terms of gender situations and roles also tend to increase. The moderate strength of this relationship implies that these two variables are meaningfully interrelated—systemic barriers within the church directly contribute to the persistence of gender-related difficulties faced by women.

On the other hand, the relationship between the barriers to leadership participation of women and the existing strategies or initiatives promoting gender inclusivity yielded a negligible negative correlation ($r = -.150, p = .017$), which is still statistically significant. This means that although there is a statistically detectable link between the two variables, the strength of association is very weak. Practically, this suggests that while gender inclusivity initiatives exist within the UMC, they have only a minimal direct impact on reducing the barriers that women encounter in leadership participation. This may reflect that existing programs, though present, are not yet strong or comprehensive enough to address structural inequalities. Meanwhile, the relationship between the challenges commonly faced by women concerning gender situations and roles and the existing strategies or initiatives to promote gender inclusivity resulted in a negligible correlation ($r = -.030, p = .642$), which is not significant since the *p*-value exceeds 0.05.

This means that the level of challenges women face in the UMC is not significantly related to the extent of gender inclusivity strategies being implemented. In other words, despite the church’s initiatives toward gender equality, these have not yet sufficiently influenced or alleviated the gender-related challenges faced by women. The weak link between strategies and challenges echoes Williams and Ramos (2023), who suggested that inclusivity policies may not always translate into effective outcomes without strong implementation.

Overall, the findings suggest that barriers to women’s leadership and gender-related challenges are moderately and meaningfully connected, while the existing gender inclusivity strategies show weak or negligible relationships with both. This implies that although the UMC has ongoing programs promoting gender inclusivity, they may not yet

be fully effective in addressing the deeper systemic and cultural barriers that continue to limit women’s leadership participation.

7. What strategies or initiatives are in place to promote gender inclusivity within the UMC?

Table 17
Current Strategies That Are in Place to Promote Gender Inclusivity Within the UMC

	Current Strategies	Mean	Description
1	The United Methodist Church provides adequate training programs to promote gender equality among its members and leaders.	3.37	Fully Practiced
2	There are policies addressing gender inclusivity in the United Methodist Church which are effectively implemented at all levels.	3.24	Moderately Practiced
3	The United Methodist Church leadership actively encourages the participation of women in decision-making roles.	3.50	Fully Practiced
4	Gender inclusivity is a core priority in the United Methodist Church ‘s mission and vision statements.	3.43	Fully Practiced
5	In the United Methodist Church events and activities, they are designed equally to involve both men and women.	3.58	Fully Practiced
6	The women in the United Methodist Church are supported through mentorship programs to prepare them for leadership roles.	3.67	Fully Practiced
7	The United Methodist Church actively engages in discussions and workshops to address gender-related issues.	3.53	Fully Practiced
8	The outreach programs of the United Methodist Church aim to empower women in marginalized communities.	3.43	Fully Practiced
9	Effective reporting mechanisms in the United Methodist Church aim to addressing gender-based discrimination that are evident.	3.39	Fully Practiced
10	The United Methodist Church provide financial or logistical support to initiatives that promote gender inclusivity.	3.34	Fully Practiced
	Mean	3.45	Fully Practiced

Table 17 presents the respondents’ assessment of the current strategies implemented by the United Methodist Church (UMC) to promote women’s leadership

participation and gender inclusivity. The overall mean score of 3.45, interpreted as “Fully Practiced,” indicates that respondents generally perceive the Church’s strategies for advancing women’s leadership as well-established and actively implemented across various levels of church life.

Among the individual indicators, the highest mean score of 3.67 corresponds to the statement that women in the UMC are supported through mentorship programs to prepare them for leadership roles. This suggests that mentorship is viewed as a particularly strong and effective strategy in fostering women’s leadership development. Similarly, high mean scores for active engagement in discussions and workshops addressing gender-related issues (3.53) and the design of church events and activities that equally involve both men and women (3.58) reflect a deliberate institutional effort to mainstream gender inclusivity in both formal and informal church activities. The respondents also strongly agreed that gender inclusivity is embedded in the Church’s mission and vision (3.43) and that leadership actively encourages women’s participation in decision-making roles (3.50). These findings imply that gender equality is not merely addressed through isolated programs but is integrated into the Church’s overarching organizational values and leadership practices. Furthermore, the presence of effective reporting mechanisms to address gender-based discrimination (3.39) and the provision of financial or logistical support for gender-inclusive initiatives (3.34) indicate that structural and resource-based measures are in place to sustain these efforts. However, while most strategies were rated as “Fully Practiced,” the implementation of policies addressing gender inclusivity received a slightly lower mean score (3.24), interpreted as “Moderately Practiced.” This suggests that, although gender-inclusive policies exist, their consistent and uniform implementation across all church levels may still require strengthening. This gap highlights the need for improved monitoring, clearer accountability mechanisms, and more consistent enforcement to ensure that policy intentions translate into practice. Nguyen and Dela Cruz (2021) also emphasized that family responsibilities can influence women’s leadership involvement.

It suggests that the United Methodist Church has made substantial progress in promoting women’s leadership participation through comprehensive strategies encompassing training, mentorship, policy development, and institutional support. While these strategies are largely perceived as effective, continued attention to policy implementation and evaluation is essential to sustain and further enhance gender inclusivity within the Church.

8. Is there a significant difference in the respondents’ perception of the existing strategies or initiatives that are in place to promote gender inclusivity within the UMC when grouped according to their profile?

Table 18
Results of the Test of Significant Difference in the Existing Strategies or Initiatives that are in Place Currently to Promote Gender Inclusivity within the UMC When Grouped According to Their Profile

Profile	Significance F	Decision	Remarks
Age	.931	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Educational Attainment	.557	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Tenure of Membership	.145	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Civil Status	.612	Accept Ho	Not Significant
No of Children if Married	.192	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Stewardship Role	.578	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Socio-economic Status	.001	Reject Ho	Significant
District of the NCPAC	.334	Accept Ho	Not Significant

Table 18 reveals the result of the test of significant difference in the respondents' perception of the existing strategies or initiatives that are in place to promote gender inclusivity within the UMC when grouped according to their profile using Analysis of Variance F-test at .05 level of significance.

The table above shows that the significance F -values for the profile age, educational attainment, tenure of membership, civil status, number of children if married, stewardship role, and district of the NCPAC are greater than .05 which resulted to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This means that there is no significant difference in the respondents' perception of the existing strategies or initiatives that are in place to promote gender inclusivity within the UMC when grouped according to their to age, educational attainment, tenure of membership, civil status, number of children if married, stewardship role, and district of the NCPAC.

However, when grouped according to socio-economic status, results show a significant F -value which is less than .05 resulting to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies that there is significant difference in the respondents' perception of the existing strategies or initiatives that are in place to promote gender inclusivity within the UMC particularly those receiving P24,000 and above monthly .

Williams and Ramos (2023) similarly found that middle-income participants often perceive institutional initiatives differently due to resource disparities.

9. To what extent are the existing strategies or initiatives in gender inclusivity practiced in the church?

Table 19
The Extent to Which the Existing Strategies or Initiatives in Gender Inclusivity Are Practiced in the Church

No.	Implementation	Mean	Description
1	Leadership positions are assigned based on competence and calling, regardless of gender.	3.44	To a very High Extent
2	Gender equality policies are actively enforced, not only formally stated.	3.34	To a very High Extent
3	Gender equality is reflected in everyday interactions among church members.	3.31	To a very High Extent
4	Gender inclusivity topics are integrated into sermons, Bible studies, or teaching sessions.	3.20	To a High Extent
5	Women are given equal speaking time during meetings and consultations.	3.24	To a High Extent
6	Traditional gender roles are not imposed on women during church activities.	3.21	To a High Extent
7	Follow-up actions are taken after gender-related complaints are filed.	3.36	To a very High Extent
8	Church policies are revised when they are found to disadvantage women.	3.12	To a High Extent
9	Women are empowered to challenge decisions they perceive as discriminatory.	3.21	To a High Extent
10	Violations of gender equality principles result in corrective action.	3.20	To a High Extent
	Mean	3.26	To a very High Extent

Table 19 presents the respondents' assessment of the extent to which existing strategies and initiatives promoting gender inclusivity are practiced within the United Methodist Church (UMC). The overall mean score of 3.26 indicates that gender inclusivity measures are widely and consistently implemented in the Church's leadership practices, policies, and daily interaction. Among the indicators, the highest mean score (3.44) corresponds to the assignment of leadership positions based on competence and calling rather than gender. This finding suggests a strong commitment to merit-based leadership selection, reflecting an inclusive approach that values capability and vocation over traditional gender distinctions. Similarly, high mean scores for the active enforcement of gender equality policies (3.34) and the implementation of follow-up actions after gender-related complaints (3.36) indicate that gender inclusivity is not merely symbolic but is supported by concrete accountability mechanisms. The results also show that gender equality is reflected in everyday interactions among church members (3.31), suggesting that inclusivity is embedded not only in formal structures but also in the Church's social and relational dynamics. Integration of gender inclusivity topics into sermons, Bible

studies, and teaching sessions (3.20) further demonstrates that gender awareness is incorporated into the Church's instructional and spiritual formation activities.

Indicators related to participation and empowerment—such as providing women with equal speaking time during meetings (3.24), avoiding the imposition of traditional gender roles during church activities (3.21), empowering women to challenge potentially discriminatory decisions (3.21), and taking corrective action in response to violations of gender equality principles (3.20)—are practiced to a high extent. These findings suggest that women are afforded meaningful opportunities to participate, voice concerns, and influence decision-making processes within the Church. According to Linonge-Fontebo and Baloyi (2023) who examined gender dynamics in church leadership, while some inclusivity practices exist, women's advancement into leadership roles is still constrained by cultural and institutional barriers, underscoring the complexity of implementing gender-inclusive strategies in ecclesial contexts.

The overall findings indicate that the United Methodist Church has made substantial progress in institutionalizing gender inclusivity across leadership selection, policy enforcement, participation, and accountability. While most strategies are practiced to a very high extent, continued attention to policy review and consistent implementation remains essential to sustain and further strengthen gender-inclusive practices. These results underscore the Church's active role in promoting an environment where women are recognized, empowered, and supported in leadership and ministry.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

Women in the United Methodist Church continue to experience barriers to leadership, but these barriers are generally perceived as slight to moderate, indicating meaningful progress toward gender inclusivity. Cultural and theological influences persist, yet their restrictive impact has weakened as acceptance of gender equality increases. Barriers such as economic, emotional, physical, and psychological remain present, though they tend to manifest subtly through limited opportunities, family responsibilities, and self-doubt rather than overt exclusion.

Further, leadership barriers and gender-related challenges are moderately related, suggesting that these factors reinforce one another. While women do not view these challenges as overwhelming, lingering stereotypes and limited institutional support still affect their leadership experiences, highlighting the need for continued structural and cultural reform. The study also confirms that the UMC has established gender-inclusivity strategies such as mentorship and leadership development programs. Although these initiatives are positively perceived, their limited impact on reducing barriers indicates that stronger implementation and sustained institutional commitment are necessary. The United Methodist Church has made commendable strides toward gender-inclusive leadership. However, addressing the subtle yet persistent barriers identified in this study remains essential for achieving genuine equality in leadership and ministry.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented based on the study.

1. **Strengthen gender-sensitivity education among clergy and members.** The study found that cultural and theological barriers continue to exist and influence women's leadership participation. These lingering biases suggest the need for sustained gender-sensitivity education to further weaken traditional stereotypes and restrictive interpretations that subtly affect women's roles in church leadership.
2. **Enhance mentorship and leadership training programs for women.** Findings revealed that emotional and psychological barriers—such as self-doubt, fear of criticism, and pressure to prove competence—still affect some women leaders. Although current strategies such as mentorship are perceived as practiced to a high extent, their impact remains limited, there is a need to strengthen and deepen these programs to better support women's leadership development.
3. **Allocate equitable financial and logistical support for women's leadership development.** The study identified economic and physical barriers as among the more noticeable constraints faced by women, including limited access to opportunities and competing responsibilities. With this, there is a need to provide financial and logistical assistance to ensure women can fully participate in leadership training, theological education, and church activities.
4. **Review and reinforce the consistent implementation of gender equality policies.** While respondents rated gender inclusivity policies and strategies as largely practiced, the negligible correlation between these strategies and the reduction of barriers and challenges suggests gaps in implementation. This supports the need for regular policy review and stronger enforcement mechanisms across all levels of the church.
5. **Encourage participatory leadership practices that actively include women in decision-making.** The findings showed a moderate relationship between existing barriers and the challenges women experience in leadership roles which suggests the need to expand women's participation in planning, budgeting, and policy-making which may help mitigate these interconnected issues.
6. **Conduct regular assessments of gender inclusivity strategies.** Despite high ratings for existing strategies and initiatives, their limited impact on reducing barriers highlights the need for continuous evaluation. Regular assessments can help determine whether these initiatives translate into actual behavioral, cultural, and structural change within the church.
7. **Expand future research to include broader perspectives and contexts.** The study focused primarily on women's perceptions within a specific church context. To deepen understanding of gender inclusivity dynamics, future research may include male perspectives and comparative studies across different United Methodist Church conferences, as suggested by the study's scope and limitations.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study complied with ethical standards in the conduct of research involving human participants. Prior to data gathering, the respondents were properly informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to voluntarily participate or withdraw at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents, and confidentiality was strictly observed by ensuring that personal identities and individual responses were not disclosed. The data gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis were used solely for academic and research purposes. The researcher also ensured that the questions were respectful, non-discriminatory, and aligned with the study's objective of examining gender-related challenges, leadership barriers, and inclusivity strategies within the United Methodist Church. Since the study dealt with women's experiences, church participation, and gender-related issues, sensitivity and objectivity were maintained throughout the research process. The findings were analyzed honestly and presented accurately without manipulation or bias. Overall, the study upheld the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, respect for persons, integrity, and responsible use of data.

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