



Stigma of Women Leadership: The Impact on Trust and Leader Effectiveness

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Abstract

Stigma consciousness is crucial for influencing the effectiveness of female leaders, particularly in transformational leadership. Despite the increasing representation of women in the workplace, they still face significant challenges in reaching the highest organizational positions. This study explores how stigma consciousness moderates the impact of women's transformational leadership on trust and leader effectiveness, while trust in leaders mediates these relationships. The research model in this study was analyzed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM) and the AMOS 28 software. This approach allows researchers to look at multiple complex relationships at the same time and combines regression and factor analysis to obtain a full picture of how variables interact with each other. We assessed the descriptive statistics and psychometric properties of the measurement scales using SPSS 28. Data were collected from 200 team members and subordinates of female leaders at various organizations in Indonesia. The results indicate that although women's transformational leadership significantly enhances trust in leaders and leader effectiveness, this impact is moderated by stigma consciousness levels. High stigma consciousness weakens the positive effect of women's transformational leadership on trust in leaders, thus reducing leadership effectiveness. Conversely, lower levels of stigma consciousness reinforce this positive effect. This finding highlights stigma consciousness as a barrier to women leaders' trust and an obstacle to achieving leadership effectiveness. Reducing stigma consciousness is essential for the effective acceptance and recognition of women's leadership. An inclusive, supportive environment free from stigma enables women to lead more effectively and gain greater team trust.

Keywords *women transformational leadership, leader effectiveness, trust in leader, stigma consciousness, women leader*

INTRODUCTION

Stigma consciousness, or the heightened awareness of stereotypes and prejudices linked to one's social identity, dramatically impacts women's leadership experiences. Despite an increasing number of women entering various industries, women's representation in leadership positions still needs to improve. For instance, in Indonesia, only 32.26% of managerial positions and 21.74% of parliamentary seats were held by women in 2022 (BPS, 2022). This underrepresentation can be partly attributed to stigma consciousness, which affects how women leaders perceive themselves and others.

Women leaders often feel pressured by gender stereotypes, suggesting that women are less suited for leadership. Pinel (1999) defined stigma consciousness as the degree to which marginalized individuals are aware of the stereotypes and discrimination they face. For women in leadership, this awareness can be both empowering and harmful. It can motivate women to challenge stereotypes, but it can also lead to self-doubt and decreased leadership effectiveness because of internalizing societal expectations.

Research has explored how stigma consciousness influences transformational leadership, which emphasizes solid interpersonal relationships, employee development, and trust. This style aligns with stereotypically feminine traits like empathy and care (Muhr, 2011; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). Studies have suggested that women are more likely than men to adopt transformational leadership (Eagly et

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al., 2014; Bobe & Kober, 2020), but stigma consciousness can complicate this. Women who are highly aware of stereotypes may feel pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, which limits their ability to fully engage in transformational leadership.

Stigma consciousness can act both as a barrier and facilitator. Women with high stigma consciousness are more likely to interpret feedback as discriminatory, leading to increased stress and reduced performance (Pinel, 2004). Moreover, stereotypes about women as less capable in leadership roles can result in lower levels of trust from colleagues, further challenging their leadership (Burgess et al., 2012). However, some studies have suggested that women who are aware of these stereotypes can actively counter them, improving their leadership effectiveness and building trust within their teams (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Vinkenburg et al., 2011).

This study explores how stigma consciousness moderates the relationship between women's transformational leadership and their effectiveness as leaders. Although transformational leadership has been linked to positive outcomes like trust in leaders and team success (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), the influence of stigma consciousness still needs to be explored. This research will provide insights into how women leaders navigate stereotypes and how these perceptions impact their leadership effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT)

Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT) posits that people have implicit expectations about leadership traits, thus shaping their perceptions and evaluations of leaders (Phillips & Lord, 1986; Schyns & Meindl, 2005). Key ILT dimensions like strength, competence, attraction, and adaptability influence judgments of leader effectiveness (Eden & Leviatan, 1975; Schyns & Meindl, 2005). This theory helps explain how perceptions of women leaders and transformational leadership affect evaluations of leader effectiveness and trust (Eagly & Carli, 2003). This study also suggests that high stigma consciousness can weaken women leaders' perceived effectiveness by moderating their transformational leadership impact (Pinel, 2004).

Women Transformational Leadership and Leader Effectiveness

Research on gender and transformational leadership shows mixed findings. Some studies suggest that women are more likely to use transformational leadership and be seen as more effective (Bobe & Kober, 2020; Eagly et al., 2014), while others show no significant gender differences (Brown & Reilly, 2008; Kent et al., 2010). Gender stereotypes can also impact leader effectiveness (Gartzia & Baniandres, 2019). Understanding the influence of women's transformational leadership on leader effectiveness remains crucial.

H1: Women's transformational leadership positively affects leader effectiveness.

Women Transformational Leadership and Trust in Leader

Transformational leadership is positively linked to trust in leaders, mainly through qualities like idealized influence and motivation (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Wang et al., 2016). Women are well-suited to this leadership style because of their ability to build trust through high-quality relationships and emotional intelligence, which are vital in fostering trust in creative settings (Jaskiewicz & Tulenko, 2012; Mayer, 2017). Authentic and ethical leadership by women enhances trust (Agote et al., 2016; Bedi et al., 2016).

H2: Women's transformational leadership positively affects trust in leaders.

Trust in Leader and Leader Effectiveness

Trust enhances cooperation, communication, and commitment in relationships and is a strong predictor of relationship effectiveness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; McAllister, 1995). There is a positive relationship between trust in leaders and perceptions of leader effectiveness, satisfaction, and relationship success (Driscoll, 1978; Mayer et al., 1995). Leaders who are fair and act with integrity are more trusted and perceived as more effective (Posner & Kouzes, 1993; Jung & Avolio, 2000; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

H3: Trust in a leader positively impacts leader effectiveness.

Trust in Leader as Mediating Role of Women Transformational Leadership on Leader Effectiveness

Trust is crucial for effective leadership, particularly transformational leadership, where trust and loyalty motivate followers to exceed expectations (Boal & Bryson, 1988; Yukl, 1989b; Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Women leaders who are fair and uphold integrity can foster trust, thus enhancing leadership effectiveness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Trust mediates the relationship between transformational leadership in women and leader effectiveness, thus increasing motivation and engagement.

H4: Trust in a leader positively mediates the effect of women's transformational leadership on leader effectiveness.

Stigma Consciousness as Moderator Role of Women Transformational Leadership on Trust in Leader

High stigma consciousness in women can lead to viewing feedback as biased, undermining trust in women leaders due to stereotypes (Pinel, 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Vial et al., 2016). Prejudices fostered by high stigma consciousness reduce women leaders' trust (Brescoll et al., 2010). Conversely, low stigma consciousness allows for objective assessments, thus enhancing trust. Thus, stigma consciousness moderates the relationship between women's transformational leadership and trust, with higher levels diminishing trust.

H5: Stigma consciousness moderates the impact of women's transformational leadership on trust in leaders.

Stigma Consciousness as Moderator Role of Women Transformational Leadership on Leader Effectiveness

Stigma consciousness, or awareness of group stereotypes, heightens sensitivity to gender biases, negatively affecting perceptions of women leaders (Pinel, 1999; Derks et al., 2016). High stigma consciousness can reinforce stereotypes and reduce women's effectiveness in leadership (Block et al., 2011). In male-dominated fields like STEM, high stigma consciousness can lower performance and cause career exits (Good et al., 2008; Shapiro & Williams, 2012). Consequently, stigma consciousness moderates the impact of women's transformational leadership on effectiveness, thus reinforcing negative biases.

H6: Stigma consciousness moderates the impact of women's transformational leadership on leader effectiveness.

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationships among women's transformational leadership, trust in leaders, leader effectiveness, and the moderating effect of stigma consciousness.

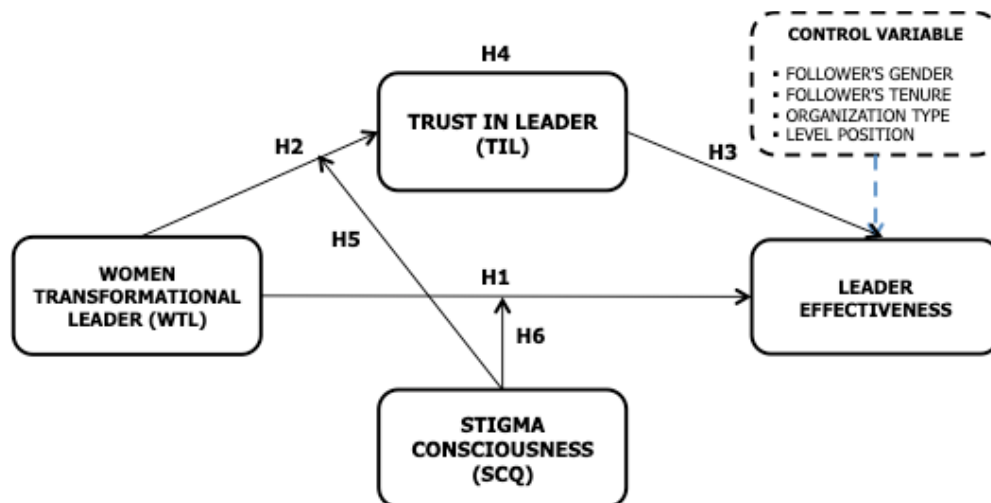


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

RESEARCH METHOD

Data Collection and Sample

Data were collected through online and offline surveys, with the online survey using Google Forms. The study focused on women's leadership in Indonesia, with a sample size determined using a 5:1 ratio of sample to indicator (Gorsuch, 1983; Hatcher, 1994; Suhr, 2006), resulting in a minimum of 185 respondents. A total of 261 respondents participated via snowball sampling, but only 200 who had direct women supervisors, were included in the analysis, yielding a valid response rate of 76.63%. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Measurement

Women's transformational leadership was assessed using a modified 20-item MLQ scale (Bass & Avolio, 1995) adapted to "women leaders." Trust in leaders was measured with a three-item scale (Podsakoff et al., 1990), stigma consciousness with a ten-item scale (Pinel, 1999), and leader effectiveness with a four-item scale (Bass & Avolio, 1996). Control variables included gender, tenure, position/title, and organizational type.

Data Analysis

Validity was tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with factor loadings ≥ 0.50 considered valid (Hair et al., 2009; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Reliability was evaluated using construct reliability (CR ≥ 0.70) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50) (Hair et al., 2009; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The Structural Equation Model (SEM) with AMOS 28 was used to analyze complex relationships by integrating regression and factor analysis. Descriptive statistics and psychometric properties were assessed using SPSS 28.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistic

Most respondents were female (67.5%). Most were aged 26-35 (40.5%). Most respondents had a bachelor's degree (56%) and worked in private companies (46%). The organizations they work for are primarily in the private sector (43.5%), with majority of the respondents being in staff/employee positions (51%). Most of their direct supervisors were first-line managers (50.5%), and the length of employment with direct supervisors ranged from 1 to 3 years (34%).

Measurement Model

CFA confirmed a good model fit, meeting eight goodness-of-fit criteria (GFI = 0.843; RMSEA = 0.048; CFI = 0.952) with at least three criteria exceeding recommended cut-off values (Hair et al., 2010). One item from the "women transformational leadership" variable was excluded because of a low factor loading of 0.491, reducing the indicators from 20 to 19. Construct reliability was confirmed as CR > 0.7 and AVE > 0.5 (Nunnally, 1978). The questionnaire items, validity, and reliability results are shown in Table 1. Fifteen outliers were identified using Mahalanobis Distance and removed, resulting in a final sample of 185. Figure 2 shows the structural model post-analysis results obtained from the AMOS application.

Table 1. Variable Items, Validity, and Reliability Results

| No | Code | Questionnaire Item | Factor Loadings | CR | AVE |
|---|-------|---|-----------------|-------|-------|
| A. Women Transformational Leadership (Our women leader...) | | | | | |
| 1. | WTLK2 | Prioritizes group welfare over personal interests | 0,689 | 0,991 | 0,987 |
| 2. | WTLK3 | Acts in ways that uplift others | 0,858 | | |
| 3. | WTLK4 | Strength and confidence | 0,680 | | |
| 4. | WTLP1 | Speaks and acts on the importance of values and beliefs | 0,796 | | |
| 5. | WTLP2 | Stressing the importance of a strong purpose | 0,793 | | |
| 6. | WTLP3 | Considers the moral and ethical implications of decisions | 0,853 | | |
| 7. | WTLP4 | Emphasizing the need for collective missions | 0,804 | | |
| 8. | WTLM1 | Speaks optimistically about the future | 0,762 | | |
| 9. | WTLM2 | Speaks enthusiastically about the goals to be achieved | 0,851 | | |
| 10. | WTLM3 | Articulates a compelling vision of the future | 0,907 | | |
| 11. | WTLM4 | Convinces others that goals will be achieved | 0,884 | | |
| 12. | WTLS1 | Reevaluates critical assumptions to ensure alignment with goals | 0,815 | | |
| 13. | WTLS2 | Seeks different perspectives when solving problems | 0,824 | | |

| No | Code | Questionnaire Item | Factor Loadings | CR | AVE |
|-------------------------------|--------|--|-----------------|-------|-------|
| 14. | WTLS3 | Encourages others to view problems from multiple angles | 0,872 | | |
| 15. | WTLS4 | Suggests new approaches for task completion | 0,837 | | |
| 16. | WTLPI1 | Spends time teaching and coaching team members | 0,692 | | |
| 17. | WTLPI2 | Treats others as individuals, not just as group members | 0,611 | | |
| 18. | WTLPI3 | Recognizes individual needs, abilities, and aspirations | 0,793 | | |
| 19. | WTLPI4 | Helping others develop their strengths | 0,878 | | |
| B Stigma Consciousness | | | | | |
| 1. | WSCQ1 | Stereotypes about women do not personally affect my female leader (R) | 0,609 | 0,971 | 0,931 |
| 2. | WSCQ2 | My female leader is never concerned about being stereotyped (R) | 0,589 | | |
| 3. | WSCQ3 | When interacting with men, my female leader feels they view her behavior as typical of women | 0,526 | | |
| 4. | WSCQ4 | Most male subordinates do not judge my female leader based on gender | 0,737 | | |
| 5. | WSCQ5 | Being a woman does not influence male subordinates' attitudes toward my female leader (R) | 0,738 | | |
| 6. | WSCQ6 | My female leader rarely considers her gender when interacting with men (R) | 0,655 | | |
| 7. | WSCQ7 | Being a woman does not affect how others act toward my female leader (R) | 0,725 | | |
| 8. | WSCQ8 | Most men have more gender bias than they openly express | 0,579 | | |
| 9. | WSCQ9 | My female leader often thinks men are unfairly accused of gender bias (R) | 0,519 | | |
| 10. | WSCQ10 | Most men struggle to see women as equals | 0,599 | | |

| No | Code | Questionnaire Item | Factor Loadings | CR | AVE |
|---|-------|--|-----------------|-------|-------|
| C Trust in Leader | | | | | |
| 1. | WTIL1 | I am confident my female leader will always strive to treat me fairly | 0,821 | 0,947 | 0,924 |
| 2. | WTIL2 | Would never try to gain an advantage by deceiving workers | 0,755 | | |
| 3. | WTIL3 | I have full confidence in my female leader's integrity | 0,891 | | |
| D Leader Effectiveness (Our women leader...) | | | | | |
| 1. | WLE1 | Effective in carrying out tasks in the unit and organization. | 0,884 | 0,978 | 0,972 |
| 2. | WLE2 | Effective in team collaboration | 0,874 | | |
| 3. | WLE3 | Contributes to the effectiveness of the unit and organization. | 0,900 | | |
| 4. | WLE4 | Can represent subordinates' needs when dealing with higher management. | 0,869 | | |

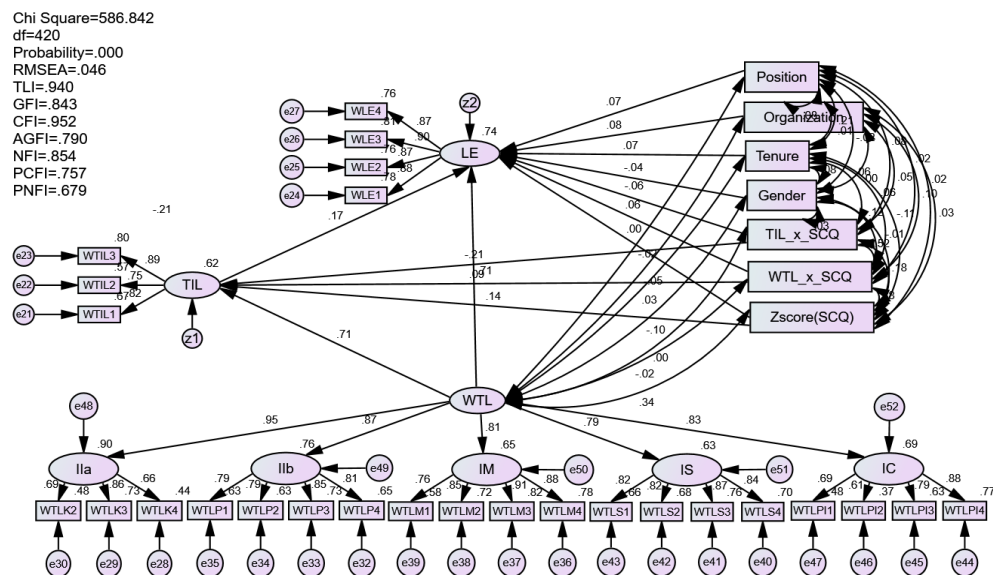


Figure 2. Structural Model

Result

Hierarchical regression analysis tested the hypotheses, revealing that women's transformational leadership (WTL) significantly and positively impacted leader effectiveness (LE) ($\beta = 0.722$, CR = 4.465, $P = 0.000$) and trust in leaders (TIL) ($\beta = 1.185$, CR = 8.234, $P = 0.000$) so H1 and H2 were supported. Trust in leaders (TIL) also significantly affects leader effectiveness (LE) ($\beta = 0.220$, CR = 2.348, $P =$

0.019); thus, H3 is supported. Sobel's test confirmed that TIL mediated the relationship between WTL and LE ($t = 2.251$, $p = 0.024$), supporting the fourth hypothesis (H4). Moderation regression analysis showed that stigma awareness (SCQ) negatively moderated the effect of WTL on TIL ($\beta = -0.122$, $p = 0.048$), supporting the fifth hypothesis (H5). However, SCQ did not significantly moderate the relationship between WTL and LE ($\beta = 0.029$, $p = 0.532$), so the sixth hypothesis (H6) was not supported. The analysis found that the control variables were not significant and were excluded from the final analysis. Table 2 presents a summary of the results described above, and a discussion of the theoretical model.

Table 2. Summary of The Proposed Results for The Theoretical Model

| No. | Hypothesis | Path | Estimate | S.E | CR | P | Description |
|-----|------------|--|----------|-------|--------|-------|---------------|
| 1. | H1 | WTL \rightarrow LE | 0.722 | 0.162 | 4.465 | *** | Supported |
| 2. | H2 | WTL \rightarrow TIL | 1.185 | 0.144 | 8.234 | *** | Supported |
| 3. | H3 | TIL \rightarrow LE | 0.220 | 0.094 | 2.348 | 0.019 | Supported |
| 4. | H4 | WTL \rightarrow TIL \rightarrow LE | 2.251 | 0.024 | | | Supported |
| 5. | H5 | TIL_x_SCQ \rightarrow TIL | -0.122 | 0.062 | -1.977 | 0.048 | Supported |
| 6. | H6 | WTL_x_SCQ \rightarrow LE | 0.029 | 0.046 | 0.625 | 0.532 | Not Supported |

Discussion

The novelty of this research is that stigma consciousness negatively moderates the relationship between women's transformational leadership and trust in leaders, which is consistent with studies on gender stereotypes in male-dominated environments (Brescoll et al., 2010; Samo et al., 2019; Vial et al., 2016). However, unlike previous research, this study shows that stigma consciousness does not significantly impact the effectiveness of women's leadership, suggesting that women's leadership remains effective despite gender stigma (Pramudita et al., 2021; Kassels et al., 2022). This challenge the assumption that gender bias always harms women's leadership outcomes. Additionally, the study confirms that women's transformational leadership positively affects leader effectiveness and emphasizes the importance of trust in enhancing relationships (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Gillespie & Mann, 2004; Lee et al., 2010). The findings suggest that inclusive leadership can mitigate the adverse effects of stigma consciousness, an area that has not been fully addressed in prior research.

Figure 3 shows that when stigma consciousness is low, strong women transformational leadership increases trust in the leader, whereas weak leadership decreases it. When stigma consciousness is high, trust in the leader still increases although it is lower than in the low stigma consciousness condition. This supports the fifth hypothesis that high stigma consciousness reduces trust in leaders. Brescoll et al. (2010) also supported this finding, suggesting that gender stereotypes influence the perception of female leaders in areas of male dominance.

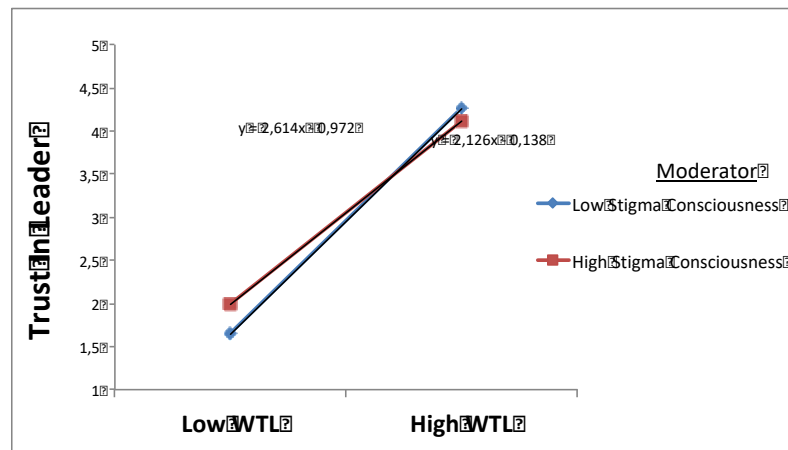


Figure 3. Moderating Role of Stigma Consciousness on the Relationship Between Women Transformational Leadership and Trust in Leader

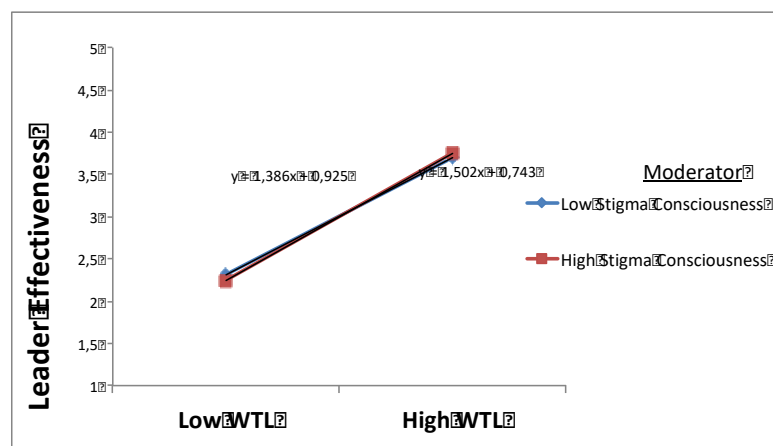


Figure 4. Moderating Role of Stigma Consciousness on the Relationship Between Women Transformational Leadership and Leader Effectiveness

Figure 4 shows that the distance between the interaction lines remained constant. The relationship between women's transformational leadership and leader effectiveness is the same regardless of the level of stigma consciousness. This relationship indicates that women's leadership remains effective despite gender stigma, which does not support the sixth hypothesis. This finding is in line with the research of [Pramudita et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Kassels et al. \(2022\)](#), who found that stigma consciousness does not moderate leadership effectiveness or organizational attractiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that stigma consciousness weakens the impact of women's transformational leadership on their trust in leaders, indicating that gender stereotypes influence perceptions of women leaders. However, stigma consciousness does not significantly moderate the relationship between women's transformational leadership and leader effectiveness. Women's transformational leadership positively affects leader effectiveness and trust in leaders, with trust mediating this relationship. Theoretical implications emphasize the need to overcome gender stigma to enhance women's leadership effectiveness. Managerial implications include the notion that organizations should foster inclusive work environments and design policies that promote gender

equality, considering these factors in leader recruitment and development.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that future research can address. First, the low response rate and limited representation of women leaders hinder data collection, which is exacerbated by ineffective online surveys. Future studies should optimize both online and offline data collection. Second, the five-point Likert scale may not capture nuanced responses, suggesting a shift to a seven-point scale. Third, the study's focus on diverse organizational types may limit insights into gender stigma in male-dominated fields. Future research should target such industries. Fourth, the study's cultural context in Indonesia may limit ecological validity, necessitating cross-cultural analysis. Finally, individual-level analysis limits insights into organizational-level leader effectiveness, warranting further research at the organizational level.

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