

HEALING, RESILIENCE, AND EMPOWERMENT: HOW OVERCOMING ADVERSITIES FUELS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic landscape of leadership, understanding how past experiences shape leaders is essential. A recent dissertation study explored the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as abuse and neglect, on entrepreneurial intentions, focusing on how these early-life challenges influence key traits like self-efficacy, resilience, and ambition. Building on this research, the current study shifts focus to how overcoming such adversities can fuel women's leadership, emphasizing the role of healing in transforming past struggles into sources of strength.

This study highlights the critical ways in which women who have faced ACEs develop resilience and self-efficacy—two essential components of effective leadership. While ACEs can undermine one's confidence and ability to recover from setbacks, women who engage in healing practices often cultivate the resilience needed to lead with empathy, innovation, and determination. These women are able to leverage their past experiences as powerful motivators, using their ability to navigate adversity to inspire others and succeed as leaders. By focusing on how healing and overcoming hardship can empower women to become better leaders, this study demonstrates that past challenges can serve as a foundation for leadership success rather than a barrier.

KEYWORDS: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Women's Leadership, Resilience, Self-Efficacy, Healing, Empowerment, Leadership Development, Childhood Trauma, Transformative Leadership, Women Empowerment.

1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines the impact of ACEs—such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction—on women's leadership potential. While ACEs are typically associated with negative emotional and psychological outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998), recent studies suggest that overcoming these adversities can enhance resilience, self-efficacy, and leadership qualities in women (Walsh, 2016; Luthans et al., 2006). The emerging perspective indicates that the healing process fosters leadership traits like empathy and creativity, which are crucial for effective leadership.

This study shifts focus from ACEs' effects on entrepreneurial outcomes to leadership development, exploring how women who heal from trauma can lead with resilience and innovation. Despite growing interest in ACEs, there is a research gap regarding how overcoming these adversities can empower women leaders (Shuffler et al., 2019). By reviewing existing literature on ACEs, resilience, and women's leadership, the study aims to uncover how adversity can shape leadership abilities. The findings offer valuable insights for leadership development programs and workplace strategies, emphasizing resilience and self-efficacy as key drivers of leadership.

1.1 Problem Statement

The relationship between ACEs and leadership potential, especially in women, remains underexplored. Aces, including abuse and household dysfunction, are linked to negative outcomes like depression and substance abuse (Felitti et al., 1998; Anda et al., 2006). However, overcoming these adversities may also foster resilience, self-efficacy, and leadership capabilities.

while Aces have been studied mainly in the context of mental health, their impact on leadership, particularly in women, is less understood. Research typically focuses on the negative effects (Anda et al., 2006), overlooking how resilience and healing can contribute to leadership development. Masten and Reed (2002) argue that resilience enables growth through adversity, while Luthans et al. (2006) highlight it as a key resource for leaders. Yet, few studies explore how ACEs, especially in women, serve as a foundation for leadership through resilience.

This gap is significant as understanding how women harness resilience from ACEs to enhance leadership is key for creating inclusive leadership models. The study addresses the need for a deeper understanding of how overcoming ACEs contributes to women's leadership development, especially given the societal and personal barriers they face.

1.2 Significance of the Problem

This study aims to deepen our understanding of how overcoming ACEs can drive leadership development, particularly for women. While ACEs are often studied for their negative health impacts, less attention has been given to their potential to foster resilience, empathy, and leadership potential. Research suggests that individuals who face adversity develop stronger coping mechanisms, problem-solving skills, and emotional intelligence—all crucial components of effective leadership (Masten & Reed, 2002; Luthans et al., 2006).

For women in leadership, these findings are especially relevant given the unique challenges they face, such as gender-based discrimination and underrepresentation (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Women who have overcome ACEs may possess the resilience to break through these

barriers and thrive in leadership roles. This study's focus on how women use past adversities to enhance their leadership abilities offers valuable insights for both theory and practice, contributing to a better understanding of how adversity can empower women to lead with innovation, empathy, and strength. Additionally, these findings could inform leadership programs and policies, fostering more supportive environments for women facing similar challenges.

1.3 Research Gap

Despite growing awareness of the long-term effects of ACEs, research on their connection to leadership, particularly for women, is limited. Most studies focus on the negative impacts of ACEs on health and behavior, with less attention given to how overcoming these challenges can empower leadership (Walsh, 2016). This gap is especially significant in women's leadership, where traditional studies often overlook personal histories in favor of organizational or structural barriers.

Furthermore, while resilience is recognized as key in leadership theory (Luthans et al., 2006), its role in helping women overcome ACEs and develop leadership skills remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining how the healing process from childhood trauma can transform adversity into leadership strength, focusing on resilience, self-efficacy, and healing practices as factors shaping women's leadership development.

1.4 Research Questions

This study examines the relationship between overcoming ACEs and women's leadership development, guided by the following research questions:

1. How Does affect women's leadership potential and capacity?
2. In what ways does resilience mediate the relationship between ACEs and leadership development in women?
3. How do women who have experienced ACEs utilize healing practices (e.g., therapy, community support) to enhance their leadership abilities?
4. What leadership strengths (e.g., empathy, innovation, risk-taking) emerge in women who have overcome childhood adversity?
5. How can leadership development programs be tailored to better support women who have faced ACEs, and what strategies can foster resilience?

These questions explore the psychological and social processes shaping leadership in women who have experienced early-life trauma, offering insights into how overcoming adversity impacts their leadership journey.

1.5 Research Contribution

This research contributes to the growing literature on women's leadership by emphasizing the positive impacts of overcoming ACEs, offering a fresh perspective that challenges traditional leadership paradigms. While much of the existing research focuses on external factors such as organizational barriers and societal expectations, this study highlights the internal processes of healing and resilience that enable women to succeed in leadership roles despite past adversity.

Key contributions of this study include:

1. Expanding the understanding of leadership development by showing how adversity can drive growth and resilience.
2. Providing empirical evidence on how overcoming ACEs shapes women's leadership, offering a more inclusive view of leadership.
3. Offering practical insights for leadership programs and policies to better support women who have faced childhood trauma, fostering more inclusive environments.
4. Opening avenues for future research on the intersection of adversity, resilience, and leadership, especially in women's experiences.

By moving beyond traditional gender barriers, this study provides a new lens on women's leadership development, advancing both leadership studies and the empowerment of women.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

The study of ACEs has highlighted the long-term effects of early-life trauma on health, mental well-being, and social outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998; Anda et al., 2006). However, the intersection between ACEs and leadership development, particularly for women, has received limited attention. While ACEs have been predominantly linked to negative psychological effects, an increasing body of research suggests that overcoming adversity can foster personal growth, resilience, and empowerment—qualities that are central to effective leadership (Luthans et al., 2006; Walsh, 2016).

Dr. Fred O. Walumbwa's work (2008) adds another layer to this understanding, particularly in relation to transformational leadership. Walumbwa emphasizes that leadership is not simply about traits or positions of power, but about the ability to inspire and empower others. He highlights the importance of self-leadership, a concept wherein individuals take responsibility for their own behaviors, development, and well-being. From this perspective, overcoming ACEs may enable women to develop a self-leadership approach that is deeply rooted in resilience and self-efficacy. By successfully navigating early-life adversity, women can not only heal but also cultivate leadership capabilities that empower them to inspire, motivate, and foster growth in others.

This section explores the relevant literature on ACEs, resilience, self-efficacy, and women's leadership, providing a foundation for this study and highlighting key theoretical perspectives, including those of Walumbwa, which frame the relationship between personal adversity and leadership development.

2.1 The Impact of ACEs

ACEs, including abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, significantly affect an individual's psychological, emotional, and social development. Felitti et al. (1998) first linked ACEs to long-term health issues like depression and substance abuse, with further research confirming their association with negative life outcomes, including relationship difficulties and employment challenges (Anda et al., 2006). These outcomes are often due to both psychological distress and maladaptive coping mechanisms developed in childhood.

However, increasing research has shifted focus to the potential for resilience in those who have experienced childhood trauma. Masten and Reed (2002) argue that resilience is a

dynamic process, enabling individuals to not only cope with adversity but also grow through it. This perspective challenges the view that ACEs always lead to negative outcomes, suggesting that, in some cases, overcoming adversity can foster personal growth and empowerment.

2.2 Resilience and Leadership

Resilience is crucial for leadership development, especially for individuals who have overcome adversity. Luthans et al. (2006) highlight resilience as a key psychological resource that helps leaders persist through setbacks. For women, resilience is particularly important as they navigate societal pressures, gender discrimination, and underrepresentation in leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Recent studies emphasize that resilience is a skill that can be cultivated through experiences and coping mechanisms (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). For women who have experienced ACEs, healing and resilience development can enhance leadership traits such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and adaptability (Masten & Reed, 2002). These qualities align with contemporary leadership models that value emotional and relational skills over traditional command and control (Goleman, 1998). Additionally, resilience can mediate the relationship between adversity and leadership, empowering women to channel their struggles into leadership strength, fostering vulnerability, authenticity, and compassion (Brené Brown, 2012).

Dr. Fred O. Walumbwa's perspective brings a unique cultural and contextual lens to the concept of resilience in leadership. Walumbwa (2013) argues that resilience in leadership is not only about individual perseverance but also about the broader organizational and societal support structures that facilitate leaders' development. He emphasizes the importance of authentic leadership, where resilience is tied to a leader's ability to remain true to their values and principles, even in the face of adversity. Walumbwa's research further suggests that leadership resilience, particularly among women, is rooted in their ability to maintain authenticity while adapting to challenges, a concept that enhances the ability to lead with integrity and trust. This perspective supports the idea that overcoming adversity can contribute to the development of leadership qualities that foster trust, connection, and long-term sustainability in leadership roles.

Incorporating Dr. Walumbwa's work into this discussion reinforces the notion that resilience, especially when linked to authenticity, is central to how women can overcome adversity and emerge as leaders capable of inspiring others and fostering inclusive environments.

2.3 Self-Efficacy and Leadership

Self-efficacy, or an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations, has long been considered a key determinant of leadership potential (Bandura, 1997). Bandura's social cognitive theory emphasizes that self-efficacy influences not only one's motivation and persistence but also their capacity to lead, take risks, and innovate. For women who have faced ACEs, developing high self-efficacy can be particularly challenging, as early-life trauma may undermine their sense of competence and confidence. However, overcoming adversity and engaging in healing processes can bolster self-efficacy, providing women with the inner strength to pursue leadership opportunities and navigate challenges.

Recent studies have demonstrated that self-efficacy is linked to resilience and emotional intelligence, both of which are crucial components of effective leadership (Luthans et al.,

2006). Furthermore, women who have successfully overcome childhood adversity may possess a stronger sense of self-efficacy, as they have already navigated significant personal challenges. This sense of mastery can empower them to take on leadership roles, even in the face of external obstacles such as gender discrimination or societal expectations.

2.4 Women's Leadership

Women's leadership has traditionally been hindered by societal norms and organizational structures favoring male leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003). However, as more women rise to leadership roles, their unique qualities—such as emotional intelligence, communication, and collaboration—align with leadership models emphasizing relational and transformational leadership (Bass, 1990).

Dr. Fred O. Walumbwa's work on **authentic leadership** highlights the importance of self-awareness, transparency, and ethical behavior for leaders, especially those who have faced adversity (Walumbwa et al., 2008). For women who have experienced ACEs, this leadership style fosters trust, enhances relationships, and empowers them to lead authentically, grounded in their personal values.

Overcoming trauma helps women develop leadership qualities like resilience, empathy, and understanding, which are key to leading with compassion and fostering inclusive environments. The healing process also encourages an authentic leadership style, fostering trust and transparency (Brown, 2012). Embracing personal experiences, including ACEs, allows women to inspire others and create organizational cultures that prioritize growth and well-being, contributing to more inclusive leadership models.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon several theoretical frameworks to understand how overcoming ACEs contributes to leadership development in women. The primary frameworks **include Resilience Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory.**

Resilience Theory posits that resilience is not a static trait but a dynamic process that enables individuals to adapt and grow through adversity (Masten & Reed, 2002). This theory is central to understanding how women who have faced ACEs may leverage their past experiences to develop leadership strengths such as empathy, creativity, and problem-solving.

Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) underscores the importance of belief in one's own abilities in achieving success. This theory helps explain how women who have overcome childhood trauma may develop the confidence needed to pursue leadership roles, even in the face of external challenges.

Finally, **Transformational Leadership Theory** (Bass, 1990) provides a framework for understanding how women who have healed from past adversities can inspire and motivate others through a leadership style that emphasizes empathy, vision, and ethical behavior.

3 HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

In this section, the hypotheses are developed based on the theoretical frameworks and literature reviewed in the preceding sections. The overarching aim of this research is to explore how overcoming ACEs influences women's leadership development. Specifically, the study seeks to understand the role of healing from adversity in fostering leadership resilience,

self-efficacy, and empowerment. Drawing upon Resilience Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory, the following hypotheses are proposed.

3.1 The Role of Resilience in Leadership Development

Resilience has long been recognized as a crucial factor for successful leadership (Luthans et al., 2006). In the context of women who have faced ACEs, the process of overcoming adversity is often accompanied by the development of resilience, which allows individuals to face new challenges with greater fortitude and adaptability (Masten & Reed, 2002). Resilience, particularly when developed through the healing process, is linked to the ability to adapt, recover from setbacks, and innovate in response to adversity (Luthans et al., 2006).

Hypothesis 1:

Women who have overcome ACEs will exhibit higher levels of leadership resilience compared to women who have not experienced ACEs.

The development of resilience through overcoming ACEs is expected to be a key mechanism in leadership development. As women face adversity and heal from trauma, they build a capacity to recover from challenges that is foundational to leadership. This hypothesis is grounded in the idea that resilience serves as a psychological resource that enables individuals to thrive in leadership roles, even in the face of challenges (Luthans et al., 2006).

3.2 The Influence of Healing on Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1997), is an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific tasks or situations. The development of high self-efficacy is often essential for individuals to pursue leadership roles, as they must believe in their own competence to inspire others and make decisions. Research has suggested that overcoming adversity and engaging in healing mechanisms can enhance self-efficacy, as it helps individuals develop a belief in their ability to navigate and surmount challenges (Bandura, 1997; Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

Hypothesis 2:

Women who have healed from ACEs will demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy in leadership situations than women who have not experienced ACEs.

This hypothesis is grounded in the notion that healing from adversity helps build self-efficacy, as women who have faced and overcome trauma are likely to have gained a sense of personal mastery over difficult situations. This enhanced self-belief is anticipated to translate into greater leadership confidence and effectiveness.

3.3 The Link Between Adversity, Healing, and Leadership Empowerment

Empowerment in leadership involves the ability to inspire, motivate, and guide others through a vision that includes growth, support, and a sense of community. Empowerment often arises from personal experiences that have shaped a leader's sense of purpose and ability to relate to others (Spreitzer, 1995). For women who have overcome ACEs, healing from past trauma may provide the inner strength and empathy required to empower others, thus facilitating transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). Overcoming adversity may deepen women's understanding of resilience, self-efficacy, and empathy, which are essential characteristics of an empowered leader.

Hypothesis 3:

Women who have healed from ACEs will exhibit higher levels of leadership empowerment, characterized by increased empathy, motivation, and a transformational leadership style.

Healing from childhood adversity is expected to provide women with a strong sense of purpose and emotional intelligence, which are key components of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). Women who have successfully navigated adversity may draw upon their healing journey to foster empowerment in themselves and others, creating a leadership style that is both compassionate and visionary.

3.4 The Healing Process as a Catalyst for Leadership Innovation

Innovation in leadership involves the ability to think creatively and challenge the status quo in order to drive positive change. Women who have faced and healed from adversity may develop a unique capacity for innovation, as they are more likely to approach challenges with creative problem-solving strategies (Luthans et al., 2006). The process of overcoming childhood trauma may encourage women to develop new ways of thinking, which can subsequently translate into leadership innovation and vision.

Hypothesis 4:

Women who have healed from ACEs will demonstrate higher levels of leadership innovation, characterized by creative problem-solving and visioning for change.

This hypothesis builds upon the premise that overcoming adversity can foster creativity and innovation by providing women with a broader perspective on challenges. The ability to innovate and approach problems from diverse angles is an essential component of effective leadership, particularly for women who have experienced ACEs and engaged in healing practices.

3.5 Conclusion of Hypothesis Development

In summary, this study posits that the experience of overcoming ACEs serves as a key factor in the development of leadership qualities in women. Specifically, it is hypothesized that healing from these adversities leads to increased resilience, self-efficacy, empowerment, and innovation—key attributes that contribute to effective leadership. Each hypothesis draws on established theories and existing literature on resilience, self-efficacy, and leadership, setting the stage for the subsequent empirical investigation.

The next step in this research will involve testing these hypotheses through data analysis, examining the ways in which ACEs and healing processes contribute to women's leadership capacities. By understanding the mechanisms through which adversity and resilience intersect with leadership, this study seeks to contribute to the broader conversation on leadership development, particularly in the context of women who have faced significant challenges.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology outlines the approach used to address the research questions and test the hypotheses of the study. Given the secondary nature of the study, the methodology focuses on selecting relevant literature, establishing inclusion criteria, and analyzing the findings. This section describes the secondary research design, data collection, and analysis

techniques employed to examine how overcoming ACEs influences women's leadership development.

4.1 Research Design

The study utilized a secondary research design, which involved synthesizing and analyzing existing literature to build a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between ACEs, resilience, healing, and women's leadership. This approach allowed for the integration of findings from various sources, enhancing the depth of analysis. The study also explored theoretical frameworks, such as Resilience Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, and their relevance to leadership development. By focusing on secondary research, the study built on existing empirical findings without the need for primary data collection.

Although the inclusion of visual aids like graphs or flow charts could have further illustrated thematic patterns, the decision was made to focus on a qualitative synthesis of the literature. Thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software, effectively identified and interpreted key themes from the data, making additional visuals unnecessary for conveying the findings.

Secondary research provided notable advantages, including time and cost efficiency, as well as the ability to analyze a broad range of studies that addressed similar topics from multiple perspectives. This approach allowed for a well-rounded understanding of the topic and was well-suited to developing theoretical insights, rather than testing new variables through original data collection (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.2 Data Sources and Literature Selection

The data for this secondary study was sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, reports, and dissertations, focusing on the relationship between ACEs, resilience, self-efficacy, healing, and leadership in women. The study also incorporated literature on transformational leadership, aligning with the emphasis on empowerment and innovation in leadership roles.

Inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. **Relevance:** Studies that addressed ACEs, resilience, self-efficacy, and leadership in women, particularly the role of overcoming adversity in leadership development.
2. **Publication Type:** Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reputable dissertations.
3. **Time Frame:** Studies published between 2000 and 2024 to ensure the research reflects current trends.
4. **Geographic Focus:** Primarily studies from the U.S. and Western countries, with relevant international studies included.

Data was gathered through databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect using keywords like "ACEs," "women's leadership," "resilience," "self-efficacy," "healing," "empowerment," and "transformational leadership." Each study was reviewed for relevance and cataloged using reference management software to ensure proper citation.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Since this is a secondary research study, data collection involved sourcing and gathering relevant studies that had already been published. A systematic search was conducted using databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect, employing specific keywords like "women's leadership," "resilience," "self-efficacy," "healing from trauma," "empowerment," and "transformational leadership." The search was comprehensive, including a review of abstracts, keywords, and reference lists to ensure all relevant literature was included.

Each relevant study was carefully reviewed for its applicability to the research questions and hypotheses. The collected data included the study design, methodology, sample size, findings, and conclusions of each paper. This information was cataloged and organized using reference management software (such as EndNote or Zotero) to ensure proper citation and avoid duplication.

4.4 Data Analysis Methods

Once the literature was gathered, a thematic analysis approach was used to synthesize and interpret the findings. Thematic analysis helped identify key themes and patterns across studies, particularly regarding the impact of ACEs on leadership development. This method provided a deeper understanding of how healing from ACEs contributes to the development of leadership strengths in women.

The thematic analysis process involved the following steps:

1. Familiarization with the Data: Initial reading of all selected studies to become acquainted with the content.
2. Coding: Identification of key concepts related to resilience, self-efficacy, leadership empowerment, and healing, which were coded from the selected studies.
3. Theme Development: Organizing the coded data into broader themes and sub-themes, such as "Resilience as a Driver of Leadership Development," "Self-Efficacy and Empowerment," and "Trauma-Informed Leadership and Empathy." Sub-themes will include "Resilience in Leadership" and "Empowerment Through Healing."
4. Synthesis and Interpretation: The findings were synthesized to understand how overcoming adversity contributes to leadership development in women. This analysis was framed within existing theories, such as Resilience Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, to address the research questions.

The thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo, qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated the organization and analysis of large volumes of text.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

While this study is based on secondary data, ethical considerations are crucial for maintaining the integrity of the research. All sources used have been properly cited following APA 7th Edition guidelines to avoid plagiarism and ensure proper acknowledgment of original authors. The studies reviewed were assessed for their adherence to ethical standards, including informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality, ensuring the reliability and ethical foundation of the data used.

The research also emphasizes the diversity of women's experiences with ACEs, ensuring a balanced and respectful representation of different perspectives. By including studies from various backgrounds, the research provides a nuanced understanding of how women overcome adversity in leadership roles.

Throughout the analysis, care was taken to present findings accurately and sensitively, particularly when discussing the impact of ACEs. This ensures that the research is both ethical and mindful of the diverse experiences of women facing childhood adversity.

4.6 Conclusion of Research Methodology

In conclusion, the research methodology is designed to comprehensively review and synthesize existing studies on the impact of ACEs on women's leadership development. By using a secondary research design, the study aims to build upon existing knowledge, employing thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes related to resilience, self-efficacy, healing, and leadership. The study will also be conducted with a high level of ethical rigor, ensuring accurate representation and citation of the literature reviewed.

5 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The Analysis and Results section is the heart of the research study, as it presents the findings derived from synthesizing the existing literature. In this section, we will present a thematic analysis of the data extracted from the studies reviewed in the secondary research. The analysis will focus on how overcoming ACEs contributes to women's leadership development, specifically in terms of resilience, self-efficacy, and empowerment. We will also examine how different types of adversity may lead to different leadership outcomes and identify key patterns and themes emerging from the reviewed literature.

5.1 Thematic Analysis of the Literature

Thematic analysis was applied to the literature gathered through secondary research, focusing on key themes related to the impact of ACEs on leadership development in women. Following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the data was first coded to identify recurring concepts and themes. The analysis aimed to identify how ACEs affect women's leadership potential, particularly in the context of resilience and self-efficacy.

5.1.1 Theme 1: Resilience as a Driver of Leadership Development

A significant body of literature supports the notion that resilience—defined as the capacity to bounce back from adversity—plays a pivotal role in shaping leadership abilities. Studies consistently show that women who have faced ACEs, including childhood abuse and neglect, develop enhanced resilience, which contributes to their ability to lead effectively (Walsh, 2016; Luthans et al., 2006). Resilience allows these women to confront challenges with greater mental fortitude, which enables them to persevere in leadership roles that demand adaptability and innovation.

For instance, women who have experienced significant adversity often develop strong problem-solving abilities and a deep understanding of the importance of persistence in the face of difficulty (Werner, 1995). This resilience is not only an internal strength but also allows them to lead with empathy, as they have developed a keen awareness of the challenges others may face. This finding supports the work of Shuffler et al. (2019), who argue that

resilience developed through adversity enhances leadership qualities by fostering empathy, adaptability, and determination.

5.1.2 Theme 2: Self-Efficacy and Empowerment

Self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to accomplish specific tasks, is another key theme that emerged from the literature. Women who have experienced ACEs often report a strong sense of self-efficacy despite past adversities. This is particularly relevant to leadership, where belief in one's capabilities is crucial for effective decision-making, taking risks, and inspiring others. Women who successfully heal from childhood trauma often experience an increase in self-efficacy, which in turn strengthens their leadership capacity.

A key study by Bandura (1997) suggests that self-efficacy develops through successful experiences and overcoming adversity, which builds confidence. Women who have faced early-life challenges and have engaged in healing processes often experience higher self-efficacy, which empowers them to take on leadership roles. This idea is supported by previous findings that overcoming personal hardships can lead to a sense of empowerment, where women believe they can influence and effect change in their environments (Luthans et al., 2006).

5.1.3 Theme 3: Trauma-Informed Leadership and Empathy

Another important theme that emerged from the literature was the concept of trauma-informed leadership. Trauma-informed leadership refers to the practice of leaders being aware of the effects of trauma and creating environments that are supportive for those who have experienced adverse experiences. Women who have undergone ACEs often develop heightened empathy as a result of their own healing journeys. This empathy becomes an integral part of their leadership style, as they are better able to understand and support individuals dealing with their own challenges.

The intersection of trauma-informed leadership and women's leadership has been discussed by several scholars who argue that those who have overcome adversity often become more emotionally intelligent and aware of the emotional needs of others (Goleman, 2006). Leaders with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics, create supportive work environments, and foster inclusivity—traits that are critical in leadership roles.

5.2 Summary of Results

The thematic analysis reveals several key findings on the impact of ACEs on women's leadership development:

1. Resilience is a crucial driver of leadership, enabling women who have overcome adversity to adapt, innovate, and persevere in complex environments.
2. Self-efficacy grows through healing from ACEs, empowering women with the confidence to lead effectively, influencing their decision-making, risk-taking, and goal setting.
3. Trauma-informed leadership, marked by empathy and emotional intelligence, enables women with ACEs to create inclusive, supportive environments, enhancing their effectiveness in leading diverse teams.

5.3 Discussion of Results

The findings suggest that overcoming ACEs can significantly enhance women's leadership development, with resilience, self-efficacy, and trauma-informed leadership identified as key themes. These results align with Walsh (2016) and Luthans et al. (2006), who emphasize the positive impact of adversity on leadership traits. Healing from ACEs not only mitigates trauma but also empowers women to lead with greater empathy, emotional intelligence, and understanding of others' challenges, qualities essential for effective leadership. However, the development of these leadership traits is complex, shaped by factors such as the type of adversity, available support systems, and an individual's healing capacity.

5.4 Conclusion of Analysis and Results

The analysis of this secondary research study highlights that overcoming ACEs can significantly enhance women's leadership capabilities by fostering resilience, self-efficacy, and trauma-informed leadership. These qualities enable women who have faced adversity to excel as leaders, contributing to the growing literature on women's leadership and offering a foundation for future research and practical applications. The findings underscore the importance of resilience, self-efficacy, and trauma-informed leadership in leadership development, emphasizing how overcoming adversity can positively shape women's leadership potential.

6 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study examines the link between ACEs and women's leadership, showing how overcoming adversity can cultivate resilience, self-efficacy, and empathy—critical leadership qualities. The findings suggest that women who've faced ACEs develop resilience that helps them overcome challenges, lead with creativity, and build confidence. Healing from past trauma also boosts their leadership potential, while heightened empathy supports trauma-informed leadership. The research highlights the need for leadership development programs to focus on building resilience and self-efficacy, while acknowledging its limitations and the need for more diverse, culturally inclusive research. Ultimately, the study underscores the transformative power of overcoming adversity for leadership growth.

6.1 Discussion of Findings

The present study explores the connection between ACEs and women's leadership, with a particular focus on how overcoming these adversities can contribute to the development of leadership strengths. This secondary research study synthesizes findings from previous literature, offering insights into the complex interplay between resilience, self-efficacy, and leadership.

6.1.1 The Role of Resilience in Women's Leadership

A key finding of this study is the critical role resilience plays in the leadership development of women who have overcome ACEs. Resilience, defined as the ability to adapt and recover from adversity, has long been recognized as essential for effective leadership (Luthans et al., 2006). This research affirms that women who have faced childhood trauma or hardship often develop heightened resilience, equipping them with coping mechanisms to navigate leadership challenges. In line with Walsh (2016), women with ACEs approach difficulties with creativity and determination, offering a unique perspective and the ability to manage

stress and uncertainty—key traits for effective leadership in today's complex environments. By overcoming early-life adversity, these women build resilience that supports and strengthens their leadership capabilities.

6.1.2 Self-Efficacy and Leadership Potential

This study highlights the relationship between self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to achieve goals—and leadership potential, particularly for women who have experienced ACEs. Research by Bandura (1997) has established self-efficacy as a critical factor for personal achievement, and it plays a significant role in leadership, especially for women. Women who have faced ACEs often struggle with internal barriers like low self-esteem, but healing from these traumas can boost their self-efficacy, enhancing their confidence and leadership abilities. This finding aligns with Shuffler et al. (2019), who emphasize that self-efficacy not only empowers individuals but also strengthens a leader's ability to inspire and motivate others. Overcoming adversity builds self-efficacy, enabling women to take risks, make decisions, and foster environments of psychological safety, where trust and resilience are key components.

6.1.3 The Intersection of Trauma-Informed Leadership and Empathy

A key finding of this study is the emergence of trauma-informed leadership as a significant aspect of women's leadership. Trauma-informed leadership involves understanding the psychological impact of trauma on oneself and others and using that awareness to guide leadership. Women who have experienced ACEs often develop heightened empathy and emotional intelligence—key components of trauma-informed leadership. Goleman (2006) highlights emotional intelligence as one of the most important traits of effective leaders, enabling them to manage relationships, navigate conflicts, and inspire others. This study found that women who have faced adversity bring a deep understanding of hardship to their leadership roles, fostering empathy for others in similar situations. This leadership style, based on emotional intelligence and empathy, improves team morale, increases trust, and creates supportive work environments (Goleman, 2006). The healing process for these women often involves cultivating self-empathy, which in turn allows them to exhibit greater compassion toward others.

6.2 Implications for Leadership Development and Practice

This study highlights key implications for leadership development programs, particularly in supporting women who have experienced childhood adversity. First, resilience training should be emphasized to help women recover from setbacks and thrive in leadership roles. Integrating exercises like mindfulness, stress management, and problem-solving can foster resilience, which Dr. Walumbwa (2008) identifies as essential for leaders to succeed in challenging environments.

Self-efficacy also plays a critical role in leadership development. Programs should focus on building women's confidence and belief in their leadership abilities through tailored interventions, such as mentorship, positive reinforcement, and goal setting. Additionally, trauma-informed leadership practices are vital, acknowledging the impact of past trauma. Dr. Walumbwa (2008) highlights that leaders who understand trauma foster trust and psychological safety, helping women transform adversity into strength. Trauma-informed programs provide the support necessary for women to harness their resilience and lead effectively.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights into the role of overcoming ACEs in women's leadership development, several limitations must be acknowledged. As a secondary research study, the findings are based solely on existing literature, and therefore, cannot account for the lived experiences of individuals. Primary data collection, such as interviews or surveys with women who have experienced ACEs, would provide a richer understanding of the personal and contextual factors that influence their leadership development.

Additionally, the studies reviewed in this research were primarily conducted in Western, industrialized contexts. As such, the findings may not fully capture the experiences of women from different cultural backgrounds or socioeconomic statuses. Future research should explore the intersection of ACEs and leadership development in diverse populations, including women from non-Western countries, to better understand the role of culture and context in shaping leadership outcomes.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should focus on the following areas to build on the findings of this study:

1. **Primary Research on Women's Leadership:** Interviews with women leaders who have experienced ACEs can provide deeper insights into how adversity shapes their leadership style, resilience, and self-efficacy.
2. **Cross-Cultural Research:** Exploring how ACEs impact leadership across different cultural contexts will help understand how these factors vary globally and inform leadership development programs tailored to diverse populations.
3. **Longitudinal Studies on Leadership Development:** Tracking women's leadership growth over time can reveal how healing from ACEs influences leadership in the long term and how resilience and self-efficacy evolve in their careers.
4. **Impact of Specific Types of ACEs:** Future studies should investigate how different forms of ACEs—such as physical abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction—affect leadership development and the role of various healing processes in enhancing leadership potential.

6.5 Final Thoughts and Implications

This study highlights how overcoming ACEs can drive women's leadership development. Resilience, self-efficacy, and empathy that emerge from healing trauma empower women to lead with compassion and innovation. As women increasingly occupy leadership roles, understanding how adversity transforms into leadership strength is essential.

The findings emphasize the need to support women who have faced ACEs and recommend integrating resilience, self-efficacy, and trauma-informed practices into leadership development programs. This research lays the foundation for future studies that can cultivate more inclusive, empathetic, and effective leaders.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author declare no conflict of interest.

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