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Article The Role of Family Responsibility, Assertiveness, and Networking in Building Female Leadership Aspirations

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Abstract: Female leadership plays a crucial role in organizations through improving performance and productivity and allowing businesses to achieve better results. Unfortunately, the number of women in leadership positions in business is still behind that of men, and progress is relatively slow. This study aims to determine the effect of external factors, such as family responsibility and networking, and internal factors, such as assertiveness, on female leadership aspirations. The research used quantitative research methods, with the sample being women within the reproductive age range in Indonesia. This study involved 258 female respondents. The data analysis used the partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) approach, using SmartPLS. The results of this study show that family responsibility has a significant negative effect on female leadership aspirations, while assertiveness has a significant positive effect, as does networking.

Keywords: assertiveness; diversity; inclusivity; female leadership aspiration; female contributions; family responsibility; networking

1. Introduction

Leadership plays a key role in the success of firms. Leaders are necessary for success; they can manage resources in an organization and make changes to it. Leaders make decisions that can encourage their management team members to perform their tasks more effectively. Ref. [1] has stated that leadership is considered to be one of the most crucial factors influencing the success of a business innovation. Leadership also plays a crucial role during crises [2]. Leaders direct and motivate their teams to achieve their organizational goals.

Does gender matter in leadership? Studies have shown that diverse teams have better performances compared to homogeneous teams. Ref. [3], in the *Harvard Business Review*, refers to a 2015 McKinsey report which claimed that, of 366 public companies, those with ethnic and racial diversity in their management had a 35% greater potential to earn financial returns above their industry average. Those in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15% more likely to have returns above the industry average. Another report from Credit Suisse, which analyzed 2400 global companies, stated that organizations with at least one female board member generated higher returns on equity and a higher net income growth than organizations without any female board members [4]. Greater diversity has been correlated with higher quality work, greater productivity, and improved business solvency [5].

How is promoting female leadership aspirations linked to sustainability? The link lies in the unique perspectives and values of women, and their collaborative approaches towards decision making. Studies have revealed that female leaders prioritize long-term

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goals. They also prioritize initiatives that consider environmental and social impacts. Empowering women in leadership roles not only addresses systemic inequalities but also fosters innovation and drives positive change toward a more sustainable future for all.

The situation in Indonesia is quite similar to this. A survey conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2020 showed that 77% of most companies in Indonesia agreed that gender diversity in companies could improve their performance. This figure is slightly better compared to the rest of Asia and the Pacific, where 68% of companies agreed. The same report also states that companies recorded an increase in profits with the presence of more gender-diversified staff.

Gender diversity seems to have a positive impact on company performance. Women have the same strengths and values as men. The contributions made by women add value to the company. Based on a McKinsey study, it can be argued that several of the leadership behaviors observed among women positively impact company performance. In the same study, women were judged to exhibit five out of nine leadership behaviors that were superior to men [6–8]. These leadership behaviors include encouraging people to develop, managing their expectations, and rewarding them, being good role models, being a source of inspiration, and encouraging participatory decision making. Women leaders are more likely to act democratically, participate in situations where they are more polite and concerned with their employees/subordinates, and share "power" and emotions with others [6–8].

Research shows how gender diversity could provide companies with better performances, and that women have certain superior leadership characteristics compared to men. The world is not on track to achieve gender equality, SDG 5, by 2030. However, as stated by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. Think about it, it is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and building good governance". The gender equality goal is not bringing benefits to women themselves, but its link to other SDGs is strong [9].

According to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index, no country has yet achieved full gender parity. Across the 146 countries covered by the 2023 index, the health and survival gender gap has closed and is at 96%, educational attainment is at 95.2%, economic participation and opportunity is at 60.1%, and political empowerment is at 22.1%. In Indonesia, the Gap Index for economic participation and opportunity is 66%, still far behind those of Norway, Laos, Liberia, and Jamaica [9]. In the real world, there are still few women who hold leadership roles. Based on the data obtained, the Global Gender Gap Index shows that the share of women in senior and leadership roles saw a steady global increase from 2017 to 2022. Overall, however, the global share of women in leadership roles is only 31%, though that figure varies from country to country (International Labor Organization, 2020) [10].

Ref. [11] claims that only 15% of 500 large companies have female CEOs. Although every year there is an increase in the recruitment of women to become CEOs, it is still far from the desired number. The condition is still more profound in certain industries, such as medicine. A study from Ref. [5] shows that even though women represented 24% of fellows, only 9% held a professorship.

The obstacles preventing women from climbing the leadership ladder comprise internal and external factors. The work in [12] argues that traditional approaches such as training and mentoring often fail to address gender equality. Ref. [12] asserts that merely focusing on changing individuals or helping is insufficient; instead, organizations must redesign systems to mitigate biases effectively. However, [12] also emphasized the significance of role models and group dynamics. Ref. [13], in the book "Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead" explores the internal and external obstacles hindering women's advancement to leadership roles. Ref. [13] compellingly argues that internal barriers like impostor syndrome, a lack of confidence, and fear of failure are often exacerbated by external factors such as gender bias, work–life balance challenges, and limited mentorship opportunities. Both studies highlight that the challenges and the systematic approaches to them often change, both within themselves and in the wider societal landscape.

External factors encompass the presence of role models. Ref. [5] states that the presence of female leadership significantly correlates with the emergence of more talented candidates for female leadership roles. The presence of other women in leadership can inspire and facilitate other women to pursue leadership roles. They act as role models and mentors. Other external obstacles are gender-based discrimination and instructional and social barriers [14,15]. Businesses are often less willing to recruit women to high positions [16]. Women also face certain expectations from society, such as being responsible for households and giving support to their partners.

Internal factors include personality features, such as assertiveness. Women are considered to be less assertive; therefore, their presence is often less known. Women also hesitate to take credit. During communication, women usually use the term "we" or "the team" rather than "I". This makes women appear to be not assertive or brave enough. Individual considerations and preferences are considered to be obstacles to the pursuit of leadership roles [5]. A lack of confidence and less perseverance are other internal factors that might contribute to the low levels of female leadership [16]. Men are promoted based on potential, yet women are promoted based on their current capabilities.

The current studies on female leadership mostly discuss the state of female leadership, including what the current situation is and what obstacles there are [5,15,17,18] There are few studies investigating the role of internal and external factors regarding female leadership aspirations. Yet, this kind of study is important for developing strategies to increase women's contributions as leaders.

This study seeks to find out the role of internal factors (personality/assertiveness) and external factors, such as family responsibilities and the presence of networks, regarding women's aspirations to be leaders. This paper comprises this introduction, followed by a literature review. Then, the methodology of the research will be described, followed by the research results. It will close with a conclusion, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) not only seeks to understand the behavioral experience of career selection and individual development but also the experiences and behaviors of individuals in terms of career development. SCCT explores career perspectives, and how academic interests, choices, and performance influence individual career decisions. SCCT was designed as a new theory aimed at explaining three interrelated aspects of career development: how basic academic and career interests develop, how educational and career choices are made, and how academic and career success is obtained. SCCT posits that individual career decisions and behaviors will be influenced by internal and external elements, including personal and background factors [19,20].

SCCT establishes that an individual's career-related behavior derives from three variables: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and interests. Self-efficacy is defined as a person's belief that they can perform a specific action in a domain [21]. Self-efficacy is regarded as the central component of SCCT. Individuals possessing self-efficacy exhibit heightened motivation, which shapes their activity selection, goal achievement, persistence, and performance maintenance [22]. When individuals harbor high self-efficacy expectations in a particular behavioral context, they are inclined to engage with it, whereas low self-efficacy expectations prompt avoidance of said context [22].

Outcome expectation refers to individuals' perceptions of the potential future outcomes resulting from specific courses of action [23]. These anticipated consequences can be either positive or negative. It represents the anticipated goals individuals have in mind when engaging in a particular behavior or action [23], encapsulating their imagined results [24]. While self-efficacy addresses the question: "Can I do this?", outcome expectation

addresses the question: "If I do this, what will happen?" [23,24]. Outcome expectations can be further classified based on the extent to which they fulfill certain values, such as anticipated social approval (from family or acquaintances), material gain (financial benefits), and self-evaluative factors (self-approval) [25].

2.2. Female Leadership Aspiration

Female leadership aspiration refers to the desire to achieve leadership goals, motivation to develop leadership skills, and the intention to take risks in the achievement of those goals. [26]. Female leadership aspiration refers to a woman's desire to achieve a leadership position and to take action to achieve that goal. Female leadership aspiration highlights two important elements: the desire to achieve a leadership position and the willingness to take the necessary actions to achieve this goal. Female leadership aspiration is seen as an active action, not just a passive desire to achieve a leadership position [27]. Female leadership aspiration includes the desire to lead, ambition to achieve goals and leadership positions, as well as a willingness to take risks in achieving those goals [28].

The aspiration of women to pursue leadership roles is influenced by external and internal factors. Previous studies have shown that the level of women's desire to pursue a career as a leader is inversely related to their economic conditions and expected family responsibilities [29]. The role of family responsibilities is one of the negative influences on or barriers to a woman's leadership career [30]. The social expectations to be in charge of the household, the primary caretaker of children, and be a supportive partner are also raised by [14,15]. The perceptions of work–life balance and becoming burned out are key factors in determining the desire to follow a higher career path [15,29]. When facing the opportunity to advance their career, personal consideration plays a significant role. Women will consider the burn-out potential of a new career since they, after work, will still have to face household-related work.

Having a role model and networks is important in leadership roles and in building an aspiration to attain such a role. Previous studies have shown the influence of networks on leadership in a company. A network is considered to have significant a potential to provide insights into the individuals in leadership practices within a company [31].

Personal identity is also a determining factor in a woman's career. Previous studies have shown that communication skills, assertiveness, and authenticity influence an individual's leadership career. In addition, assertiveness affects the relationship between employees and leaders within a company [32]. Being assertive enhances a leader's effectiveness by facilitating successful communication, influencing others, resolving conflicts, making decisive decisions, setting boundaries, building trust and respect, empowering others, and promoting fruitful problem solving. Thus, assertive women are well-positioned to seize leadership opportunities and succeed in leadership roles.

Having self-efficacy not only boosts confidence but also enhances women's belief in their ability to overcome challenges and succeed in leadership roles. Research suggests that individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to pursue leadership positions as they perceive themselves as being capable of managing the responsibilities and complexities associated with them. Therefore, by fostering self-efficacy through training and development initiatives, organizations can cultivate a pipeline of confident and aspiring leaders.

2.3. Family Responsibility

Family responsibility is a challenge for women because they can be expected to carry this great responsibility, especially in the fields of childcare and household responsibilities. An individual's family responsibilities include a wide variety of considerations concerning the needs and desires of the family members when making decisions. A person's family responsibility is a measure of the extent to which they are prepared to take care of their immediate family, including spouses, children, and parents [33,34].

Family responsibilities can sometimes prevent an employee from relocating or undergoing any form of displacement related to their career. This can happen because employees give top priority to their families which can hinder their careers. Thus, family responsibility may have a negative influence on employees' work resilience within the company [34].

The research conducted by [30] explores the gender differences in the impact of family responsibilities on doctors. The results of a survey of 73,663 doctors showed that the influence of the responsibility for children at home affected more female doctors. Female doctors would reduce their working hours by a large margin, while male doctors maintained the same working hours. Thus, the work of female doctors was hampered and their aspirations to become a leader were reduced. Therefore, family responsibilities can have a negative influence on female leadership.

Another study from [35] states that family responsibility has a negative influence on leadership aspiration. This study posits that a woman will choose the welfare of her family rather than building a career in her company. The study in [29] also shows similar results. They show that family responsibility is a barrier or obstacle to one's career development.

H1: *Family responsibility has a negative influence on and female leadership aspiration.*

2.4. Assertiveness

Assertive communication refers to a person's ability to initiate, maintain, and end conversations based on their individual goals. Assertive communicators speak for themselves, when necessary, whether it is to make a request, defend one's beliefs, or express their feelings. Being assertive implies dominant, strong, directive, competitive, and task-oriented communication, qualities often associated with masculinity [36]. This assertiveness refers to the qualities needed for leadership roles. Assertiveness is usually considered to be a male stereotype. Women are considered to be less assertive, and this is considered to contribute to the view that women are not suitable to be leaders [32,37].

Assertiveness is often overlooked in the construction of leadership traits, even though it has been shown to correlate with perceptions and aspirations [38]. In addition, research shows that assertiveness has a relationship with and contributes significantly and positively to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. That is, the higher the level of assertiveness of individuals, the greater their satisfaction and commitment to the organization in which they work [39].

A study by [32], which involved 744 employee respondents working in various startups in China, showed that there was a significant positive relationship between communication assertiveness and startup CEOs' responsiveness. Two studies from Australia showed that assertiveness had a positive and significant influence on gender leadership roles [37,40].

H2: Assertiveness has a significant and positive influence on female leadership aspiration.

2.5. Networks

Network has the same meaning as the "socio-cultural" concept, i.e., learning occurs through interaction with others (especially with others who are more skilled) and the circumstances or culture in which they reside [41]. A network is a stable pattern of social relations among interdependent actors. Specifically, a network should be defined as a web that binds together individuals and organizations working for a common goal and is governed through an interdependent structure involving many organizations, both public and private, where a single entity is not just a formal subordinate within a larger hierarchical arrangement [42].

Networking plays a key role in fostering leadership aspirations for several compelling reasons. Refs. [43,44], in their books, argue that networks provide access to valuable resources, opportunities, and information that are essential for career advancement. By cultivating a diverse network of contacts, individuals can tap into a wealth of knowledge, guidance, and mentorship from seasoned professionals who can offer insights and advice on navigating the complexities of leadership roles. Networks also serve as platforms for

visibility and recognition, enabling individuals to display their skills, accomplishments, and potential to a wider audience. Building strong relationships with peers, colleagues, and industry influencers can enhance one's professional reputation and credibility, opening doors to leadership opportunities and strategic partnerships. Moreover, networks facilitate personal and professional growth by fostering continuous learning and development. Engaging with diverse perspectives and experiences within a network can broaden one's horizons, challenge assumptions, and spark innovation. Through meaningful interaction and collaboration, individuals can expand their skill sets, build confidence, and hone their leadership abilities.

Networks influence instructional leadership, organizational learning, and leader confidence. They can be used to manage relationships between organizations in a business ecosystem. Social networks are used in managing risk and developing effective collaboration strategies. Networks can influence the management of relationships between organizations in the business ecosystem, including collaboration strategies and risk management [31].

In the study Characteristics of effective leadership networks: a replication and extension, based on the results of a survey of 71 people, the influence of networks on female leadership effectiveness can be found [41,45]. The study explains that there is a positive relationship between networks and improvement. A network has the potential to provide individuals with the best insight into structural positions, to transfer knowledge, and put this knowledge into practice [31].

H3: Networks have a significant influence on female leadership aspiration.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative research method was used in this study. This method conducts a theoretical test of the problem in question. It involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to provide answers that refer to the hypotheses being tested. A cross-sectional data collection technique was used in this study [46].

3.2. Research Procedure

The data collection method used in the research was a survey, with a questionnaire used as the instrument. Using questionnaires is a method used by researchers to collect data from respondents. The researchers write a series of questions and distribute them to a set of respondents who write down their answers [46]. The type of questionnaire used in this study was an electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed using online platforms: email, social media, and websites. This is a quick way to collect respondents' answers; it is inexpensive and easy to make.

The questionnaire comprised several parts. The first part contained a description of the research conducted, the provisions provided to the respondents to fill out the questionnaire, the informal consent of the respondents to participate in the survey, and an explanation of the confidentiality measures related to the data. The second part of the survey comprised the personal data of the respondents. Section 3 contained information about the variables being studied, namely female leadership aspiration, assertiveness, family responsibility, and networking.

3.3. Measurement

For family responsibility, the respondents were asked to measure their level of family responsibility using the statements listed in Table 1. Table 2 shows other measurements modified from previous studies.

Variable	Statement	Score	Source
	Unmarried	1	
	Married but childless	2	
E	Married with children ≤ 3	3	
Family Responsibility	Married with children ≤ 3 of whom are toddlers	4	 Modified from [30]
	Married with children > 3	5	_
	Married with children > 3 of whom are toddlers	6	_

Table 1. Measurement criteria for family responsibility.

Table 2. Measurement criteria for female leadership aspiration, assertiveness, and networking.

Variable	Code	Indicator	Sources	
	FLA1	Consideration of leadership values has come to me.		
- Female Leadership Aspiration	FLA2	I strive to gather job information about improving my skills to become a leader	[47]	
-	FLA3	I strive to develop the skills of a leader		
-	FLA4	I hope to be a leader		
	AS1	I am a talkative individual		
-	AS2	I am an individual full of energy		
Assertiveness	rtiveness AS3 I am an individual who is enthusiastic		[48]	
	AS4	I am an individual who has a confident personality		
-	AS5	I am an outgoing and sociable individual (extrovert)		
	NW1	I often seek other forms of support from other people or groups		
	NW2	I have extensive relationships with people or groups who have different webs for finding new ideas	[41]	
Network -	NW3 I often network with outsiders NW4 I often strengthen networks with other people or groups		[41]	
-				
-	NW5	I often share ideas with people or groups outside my network		

3.4. Population and Samples

The population in this study comprised women within the productive age range in Indonesia. According to the Central Statistics Agency, it is said that a person's productive age range is between 15 and 64 years. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2022, the population of women of productive age in Indonesia was 94,290,165 people [49].

To determine the number of samples, this study used the rule of thumb or, as it is commonly referred to, the 10-times rule. This rule says that the minimum sample size must be 10 times the maximum number of indicators in the research framework. In this case, the number of respondents should be a minimum of 150 [50]. Non-probabilistic, convenience sampling was used to choose the respondents.

Up to 258 respondents matching the criteria, namely women in Indonesia who were between the ages of 15 and 64 years, filled out and returned the questionnaires. Therefore, with such a response, the data could be further analyzed. The findings show that out of 258 respondents, 9.3% were born between 1965 and 1980, as Generation X, 20.9% were born between 1981 and 1996, as Generation Y, and 69.8% were born between 1997 and 2012, as Generation Z. Of the respondents, 53.1% held bachelor's degrees, 1.6% held master's degrees, 0.4% held a doctoral degree. The remaining 45% educated to a lower level. Concerning the status of respondents, 81% were single and 19% were married. Considering

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the work background of the respondents, 47.3% were students, 29% were staff, 3.5% were managers, 0.4% were directors, and 19.8% held other positions.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data analysis method used in this study employed the partial least squares (PLS) software. PLS version 4.1.0.2 is a data analysis tool used to develop and explore theories in research and confirm research findings on the variance in dependent variables There are two categories of models in [50]: the outer model in the form of a measurement model analysis and the inner model in the form of a structural model analysis.

3.5.1. Analysis of the Measurement Model

Validity is a measure of how well an instrument can evaluate a particular concept. Validity is concerned with whether the concepts used by researchers and the measurements used are appropriate. Valid data are data where there are no differences between the data reported by the researcher and the data that have been gathered as the object of research [46]. There are two types of validity used in PLS-SEM: convergence and discrimination validity [50].

Convergent validity determines the extent to which positive correlation measurement conforms with alternative measures of the same construct. Two aspects can evaluate convergent validity based on relative constructions: outer loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE). The value of outer loadings indicates how much variation within the item has been described by the construct, and the extent of variance that has been extracted from the item used. Outer loadings have a standard of 0.70. If an indicator has an outer loadings value of >0.70, it can be concluded that the indicator has met convergent validity and has a high value. Meanwhile, AVE has a standard of 0.50. This threshold means that, on average, the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Specifically, an AVE > 0.5 implies that the construct accounts for at least 50% of the variance in its manifest variables, suggesting that the indicators reliably represent the underlying construct [50].

Discriminant validity is used as a method to compare the value of loadings of a parameter with the value of loadings of other latent variable construct parameters. Two types of parameters are used in measuring discriminant validity: the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. HTMT is a statistical method used to assess discriminant validity in the context of structural equation modeling (SEM) or confirmatory factor analysis. This test evaluates whether the correlations between the constructs (traits) within a measurement model are significantly different from the correlations between constructs across different traits. If the HTMT is significantly less than 1, it suggests discriminant validity; if it approaches or exceeds 1, there may be issues with the discriminant validity. Researchers use this tool for the validation of measurement models before conducting further analyses. Meanwhile, the Fornell–Larcker criterion compares the square root of the AVE value with the correlation between latent variables [50].

Reliability is an indication of the stability and consistency of instruments that measure concepts and help assess the correctness and error of measurement when conducting reliability [46]. Cronbach's alpha is used as a criterion to provide reliability estimates based on the intercorrelation of the observed indicator variables. Cronbach's alpha is a conservative measure of reliability, i.e., it results in low reliability. It assumes that all indicators are equally reliable. However, due to its limitations, composite reliability is needed to measure the consistency of reliability. Therefore, it can be concluded that, in this study, the minimum limit is 0.70 and the maximum limit is 0.90 for the number of recommendations, with the desired range being between 0.80 and 0.90 [50].

3.5.2. Analysis of the Structural Model

Inner model testing, or what is known as structural model testing, aims to describe the relationship between latent variables. This study involves several research factors, such as

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collinearity research, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and path coefficients [50].

The coefficient of determination (\mathbb{R}^2) is the most used measuring tool for evaluating structural models. This coefficient predicts the model and is calculated as a quadratic correlation between the actual value and the predicted endogenous construct based on the number of exogenous constructs connected to it. The value of this coefficient is in the range of 0 to 1. The value of the coefficient of determination is divided into three parts: the value of 0.75 (substantial), 0.5 (medium), and 0.25 (weak). The higher the value of the coefficient of based on the study.

The effect size (f^2) measurement is conducted to assess the presence of a form of change in the value of R^2 before and after removing exogenous constructs from the model. Therefore, it aims to show the extent to which exogenous constructs affect the endogenous constructs substantively used in research. The f^2 assessment guide establishes values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 as representations of small, medium, and large effects of latent exogenous variables. If the f^2 value is smaller than 0.02, it indicates that there is no significant effect of the latent exogenous variable.

The Q^2 measurement is an indicator of predictive relevance which measures the accuracy of an unsampled research model. In a structural model, if the value of Q^2 is greater than the value of 0, this indicates that the relevance has satisfied the predictive relevance testing of the path model for a given dependent construct.

Path coefficients can be used to test relationships between constructs that are part of a research hypothesis. Assessment-standard path coefficients range from -1 to +1. If the test results obtained are close to or reach a value of +1, then there is a strong and positive relationship. However, if the test result is close to the value of -1, then the test shows a weak and negative relationship. Conversely, as the value moves closer to zero, it indicates a weakening of the relationship between these constructs [50].

Model fit analysis can be performed to evaluate the extent to which the proposed model structure conforms to the available empirical data and it helps to identify model specification errors. One index that is often used in fit model analysis is the normalized impact factor (NIF) index. NIF is a simple method for evaluating the quality of previous research journals when conducting analyses.

After running the PLS-SEM algorithm, to test the hypothetical estimates obtained for structural model relationships, the researcher uses path coefficients, which can represent the relationships among constructs that are being hypothesized. A significant coefficient depends on the standard error obtained by bootstrapping. Bootstrapping is applied to assess whether indicators have contributed significantly to the corresponding construct. The standard error makes it possible to perform calculations using t-values and *p*-values for all structural path coefficients. When the value of t is greater than the critical value, it can be said that the coefficient is statistically significant at the probability of a particular error [50].

Hypothesis test analysis is carried out to reveal if the estimated hypothesis has been accepted or rejected in making a decision. One of the indices used in testing hypotheses is critical t-values which, in these circumstances, can determine the significance of the coefficient. If the empirical t-value is greater than the critical t-value, then the hypothesis has no effect or is rejected. A typical critical t-value used is >1.65, for a significance level of 5% each, with one-tailed tests [50].

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model Analysis

Validity tests can be performed to find out and prove how effective the instrument that has been used to measure certain concepts has been [46]. To conduct an outer loading analysis, one must first perform a convergent validity test. Convergent validity is the extent to which the measure of positive correlates with other measures of the same construct using different indicators. In this case, two aspects should be taken into consideration when

evaluating the convergent validity of relative construction based on outer loading and the AVE. An indicator can be said to meet convergent validity if it has an outer loading value of >0.7 and an AVE value of >0.5 [50].

This study used fifteen indicators consisting of four female leadership aspiration indicators, one family responsibility indicator, five assertiveness indicators, and five networking indicators. The following are the results of testing the validity of the fifteen indicators which can be seen in Table 3.

** * 11	τ.	Outer Loadings			
Variable	Item –	Female Leadership Aspiration	Assertiveness	Networking	- AVE
	FLA1	0.792			
- Female Leadership	FLA2	0.842			-
Aspiration	FLA3	0.866			- 0.684
-	FLA4	0.806			_
	AS1		0.789		- - 0.682 -
-	AS2		0.889		
Assertiveness	AS3		0.855		
-	AS4		0.787		
-	AS5		0.803		
	NW1			0.732	
Networking	NW2			0.876	_
	NW3			0.877	0.700
	NW4			0.896	_
	NW5			0.873	_

Table 3. Validity test.

Based on the results obtained, it could be concluded that each variable had an outer loading value greater than 0.7 and an AVE exceeding 0.5. Therefore, it can be stated that all the indicators used in the study were valid and appropriate for use, and can be further analyzed.

A reliability test is an indication of the stability and consistency of an instrument that measures concepts and can be used to assess the correctness and error of a measurement [46]. Reliability refers to the degree of consistency in a measurement. A measurement is considered to be reliable if it produces consistent results under consistent conditions. One commonly used method for measuring reliability is to test the internal consistency reliability. This method assumes that the indicators used have the same level of load. In the context of SmartPLS, composite reliability methods are considered more suitable as reliability criteria. However, Cronbach's alpha is still considered to be a conservative measure of internal consistency reliability. To ensure a satisfactory level of internal consistency reliability, the composite reliability value must exceed 0.70, taking Cronbach's alpha as the lowest limit and the composite reliability as the highest boundary [50].

Based on the data shown in Table 4, it can be seen that the values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability in all the variables exceeded 0.7. Therefore, as all the indicators showed a high degree of internal consistency, they could reliably measure the associated constructs.

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Table 4. Reliability test.

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)
FLA	0.846	0.851
AS	0.884	0.899
NW	0.888	0.899

The data shown in Table 5 show the results of the reliability and validity tests using the HTMT method. If the HTMT matrix score is less than 0.9, it indicates the discriminant validity of the variable. In Table 5, the overall HTMT score in the matrix was lower than 0.9, which means that all the variables successfully passed the discriminant validity test. Discriminant validity testing using the Fornell–Larcker criteria method also supported the results and showed that the data met the requirements for further analysis. The he results of the discriminant validity test using the Fornell–Larcker criteria method can be seen above.

Table 5. HTMT.

	FLA	AS
AS	0.544	
NW	0.575	0.744

Based on the data shown in Table 6 below, which are the results of testing using the Fornell–Larcker criteria method, it could be concluded that the value of the female \sqrt{AVE} leadership aspiration correlation variable was 0.827. This value was higher than the correlation between the female leadership aspiration variable and the assertiveness (0.48), family responsibility (-0.003), and networking (0.502) variables. This also applied to the assertiveness, family responsibility, and network variables, which had values of 0.826, 1, 0.883, and 0.837, respectively. Considering that the values for each variable were higher than the correlation between the variables, it could be concluded that the discriminant validity condition using the AVE square root value was met for all the variables.

 Table 6. Fornell–Lacker.

	FLA	AS	NW
FLA	0.827		
AS	0.480	0.826	
NW	0.502	0.655	0.837

4.2. Structural Model Analysis

It was found that the R^2 value for the female leadership aspiration variable was 0.294. Thus, it could be concluded that the assertiveness, family responsibility, and networking variables contributed to 29.4% of the female leadership aspiration, while the other variables comprised the remaining 70.6% of influences. The f^2 value for the assertiveness variable for the female leadership aspiration was 0.061, while the family responsibility variable measured 0.004, and the networking variable measured 0.081. From these values, it could be concluded that the size of the effect of the assertiveness variable meant that it had only a small or weak influence on female leadership aspiration, as did the family responsibility variable, and the networking variable. The Q^2 of the female leadership aspiration variable was 0.263, which is greater than zero. Therefore, the conclusion obtained was that the path model's prediction of the dependent construct was relevant. The findings show that the results of the fit model test obtained an NFI of 0.868, so it could be said that the model used was an 86.8% fit.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing can be carried out by testing the structural (inner) model. Hypothesis testing can identify whether a hypothesis can be accepted or should be rejected. This can be performed by noting the results obtained regarding the value of significance and the coefficient of relationships between the variables in the research model. Testing the structural model and the values can be executed with the help of software calculations, namely the SmartPLS 4.0 module in the bootstrapping section. The conditions that were used in testing this structural model were the values of t-statistics > 1.645, with significance values (*p*-values) < 0.05 and the positive coefficients between these variables. The results of the structural model tested in this study can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Standard Coefficient	T- Statistics	p-Values	Result
H1: $FR \rightarrow FLA$	-0.054	0.753	0.451	Rejected
H2: AS \rightarrow FLA	0.280	3.653	p < 0.001	Supported
H3: NW \rightarrow FLA	0.319	4.049	p < 0.001	Supported

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the role of internal factors, in this case, assertiveness, and external factors, such as family responsibility and the presence of networking, in female aspirations to become leaders. Of the three hypotheses proposed, the results show that hypotheses 2 and 3 can be accepted. However, the study failed to show the influence of family responsibility on female leadership aspirations.

5.1. The Influence of Family Responsibility on Female Leadership Aspiration

Table 7 shows that the value of the t-statistic for the family responsibility variable was 0.753 at the significance level (*p*-value) of 0.451 and the value of the standard coefficient was -0.054. Because the value of the *p*-value of 0.451 was greater than 0.05 and the value of the t-statistic of 0.753 was smaller than the value of the t-table of 1.645, it can be concluded that family responsibility has a negative influence. However, it transpires that the influence on female leadership aspiration was not significant. The results of these tests have shown that this relationship does not have a significant influence on the family responsibility variable regarding female leadership aspiration. Consequently, hypothesis 1 is rejected.

The results of this study do not support the results of [30,33–35]. This finding can be explained. The research in [51] shows that female workers who have families, especially female workers who have more than two children, can still achieve a work–life balance. This is because a good level of self-control helps female workers to remain calm when facing a problem in the company. In addition, it shows that work pressure may be reduced if female employees have a good social support network, which can be obtained from their family among other sources. Their environment and social support play an important role in helping women execute their roles as workers and wives by maintaining their psychological and physiological conditions. In Indonesia, as a collectivist society, the family is a close-knit unit, and social support is easy to obtain. In Indonesia, it is also relatively easy to find domestic helpers and nannies to help women fulfill their household responsibilities.

Another explanation can be seen in the study in [52]. The results of the study state that the demand for meeting economic needs requires more of the role of women and requires women to be more flexible in the division of roles in the family. Generally, one breadwinner in a family is not enough to cover all the family expenses. Therefore, women need to help and work as much as possible to contribute. That way, the income generated will cover all of the family's daily needs. Women's career aspirations can provide increased income for the family and fulfill basic needs.

5.2. The Influence of Assertiveness on Female Leadership Aspiration

The value of the t-statistic of the assertiveness variable was 3.653, with a significance level (*p*-value) of 0.000 and a value of the standard coefficient of 0.280 (Table 7). It could be concluded that the variable of assertiveness had a positive influence and a significant value on female leadership aspiration. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is supported.

The results of this study are in accordance with the research that has been conducted in [32–34]. Assertiveness enhances leadership aspirations through demonstrations of confidence, clarity, and decisiveness in communication and decision making. Assertiveness enables people to navigate challenges and conflicts with composure and resilience, fostering a culture of accountability and collaboration within their teams. By embodying assertiveness, women signal their readiness for leadership roles and position themselves as capable and effective leaders, thus increasing their aspirations for leadership positions. Assertive women have enough confidence to hold leadership positions. They have effective communication skills and are direct and competitive [36].

5.3. The Influence of Networking on Female Leadership Aspiration

The value of the t-statistic variable network was 4.049, with a significance level (*p*-value) of 0.000 and a value of the standard coefficient of 0.319 (Table 7). Because the *p*-value of 0.000 was less than 0.05 and the value of the t-statistic of 4.049 was greater than the t-table of 1.645, it can be concluded that networking had a positive and significant influence on female leadership aspiration.

The results of this study were in accordance with research which shows that networking has a significant and positive influence on female leadership aspiration. This is because networks have the potential to provide insight into individuals' best structural positions and allow knowledge to be transferred into practice [31]. In addition, the results were also in accordance with research which shows that there is a positive relationship between networks and changes and improvements in women's leadership policies [41]. Overall, the results showed that the results of this study signify a positive and significant influence [45].

Having a network enhances leadership aspirations by providing access to valuable resources, support, and opportunities for professional growth. Networks expose individuals to diverse perspectives, ideas, and experiences, broadening their understanding of leadership and expanding their skill sets. Furthermore, networks facilitate mentorship and sponsorship relationships, allowing aspiring leaders to learn from established professionals and gain insights into effective leadership practices. By leveraging them, individuals can increase their visibility, build credibility, and cultivate relationships that may lead to career advancement and leadership opportunities.

5.4. Conclusions and Implications

This research has investigated the dynamic between internal and external factors and female leadership aspirations. The findings place specific emphasis on the importance of having good networks and being assertive in encouraging women to pursue leadership roles. The factors are both external and internal; however, regarding [12,13], a systematic approach by organizations (either in the workplace or in education) is needed to facilitate more opportunities for women and encourage them to be more socialized and assertive. Our PLS-SEM analysis uncovered compelling insights, demonstrating the insignificant role of family responsibility in female leadership aspiration. This finding underscores the fact that there has been a cultural shift in women's roles in the family in Indonesia. It also highlighted the importance of strong social support.

The findings from this research make several contributions to the current literature and practice. One prominent finding was that internal and external factors (assertiveness and networking) play roles in female leadership aspiration. Being dominant, strong, and task-oriented and having good networking skills are key drivers. Another insight from this study is that stereotypical gendered family responsibilities do not play a significant role in female leadership aspirations. The outcomes of this study endorse the notion that, to narrow the gender gap in leadership roles, practitioners need to ensure that women should be able to build their networks unhindered. Women also need to be encouraged to exercise their assertiveness while carrying out their daily tasks.

5.5. Study Limitations and Further Recommendations

This study has several limitations. First, it only evaluates three variables, of which two are external and one is internal. A further study to investigate other internal factors, such as self-efficacy, confidence level, resilience, and creativity, could be explored. Second, this study evaluates the influence of external and internal factors on women at all stages of professional work. Yet, each stage might offer different internal and external challenges. A further study to see the differences in factors for various stages could be recommended. Another recommendation is to conduct a qualitative study to gain more insight into the challenges and drivers. A study which reviews contextual factors, such as education, family background, socio-economic stature, etc., could be fruitful in showing how these contextual factors play roles in the development of leadership aspirations.

6. Conclusions

The results of the research show that assertiveness and networking have positive impacts on female leadership aspiration. Of the two, networking has a stronger impact. This study also shows that the role of family responsibility is insignificant regarding female leadership aspiration.

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