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WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN AISIYIAH ORGANIZATIONS (Study on Implementation and Challenges at The Regional Level)

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ABSTRACTS

This study analyzes the implementation and challenges of women's leadership in Aisiyiah organizations at the regional level, especially in Sukabumi Regency. The background of this study is based on the importance of women's leadership in religious organizations that still face gender stereotypes. Using a quantitative-descriptive approach, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with 20 leaders and 100 members of Aisiyiah. The results of the study show that women's leadership is considered adequate and has a positive impact on the success of the program. However, challenges such as limited resources and cultural barriers are still felt. Leaders use collaborative strategies, training, and participatory approaches to address them. These findings confirm the importance of leadership training and structural support to optimize women's contributions in religious organizations.

A. INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership has become increasingly important in management and organizational studies as more women occupy leadership positions. According to previous research, women's leadership styles are typically more collaborative, engaged, and transformational compared to men's leadership styles, which are usually authoritative and transactional (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Sheerin & Garavan, 2022; Siwiyanti & Senen, 2023). However, research on women's leadership is still limited in religious organizations such as Aisyiyah. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world in 2023, still faces many challenges in achieving gender equality, especially in leadership positions. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Indonesia is ranked 87th out of 146 countries with a score of 0.697, repeating stagnation from the previous year (World Economic Forum, 2023). This shows that the gap in economic participation, leadership opportunities, and education is still high despite improvements in several aspects (Pogrebna et al., 2024; Siwiyanti et al., 2022; Suban et al., 2023).

Aisyiyah, as a women's religious organization in Indonesia, has a unique leadership structure. The organization helps women at the grassroots level in education, health, and social services. Although the role of women in Aisyiyah leadership has existed for a long time, not much research has studied how women's leadership contributes to the success of organizational programs (Fatimah, 2018; Munawaroh et al., 2024; Siwiyanti & Suyaman, 2014). Women who hold leadership positions in religious organizations face challenges in addition to cultural barriers and complex gender roles, which impact decision-making and leadership processes (Cunha & Lúcio Martins, 2023; Ospina & Foldy, 2020; Turley et al., 2024). This study aims to analyze the application of women's leadership in Aisyiyah organizations at the regional level and the challenges and strategies used to overcome these challenges. Using a quantitative approach, this study will explore how women leaders interact with their members and how they implement participatory leadership styles. Previous research by Serafimova et al. (2025) shows that an inclusive leadership style can increase member participation, but there is still a gap between theory and practice.

In the related literature, many studies highlight the importance of social support for women leaders in order to be able to carry out their roles effectively (Brue, 2018; Dhanial & Rahma, 2023). However, very little research discusses explicitly the context of Aisyiyah as a religion-based organization. Therefore, this research will fill the gap by focusing on the real-life experiences of women leaders in the field. The object of this research is Aisyiyah leaders and members from several regions in Indonesia. Through a questionnaire survey of 200 respondents consisting of 100 members and 100 Aisyiyah leaders, data will be collected on the perception of leadership and the challenges these leaders face. This research aims to provide an overview of the current situation and offers practical recommendations for developing women's empowerment programs in religious contexts.

Women's leadership is often defined through a gender lens that considers differences in leadership styles between men and women. Research by Eagly and Heilman (2016) shows that female leaders tend to use a more participatory and collaborative approach than male leaders, who are often more authoritarian. This approach creates a more inclusive work environment and encourages team members' involvement in decision-making. By actively engaging team members, female leaders

can build mutual trust and increase commitment to organizational goals (Elkhwesky et al., 2025; Pangestuti & Sari, 2025).

In addition, other research shows that this collaborative leadership style can lead to better outcomes in an organizational context. Female leaders often have high empathy abilities, allowing them to understand better team members' needs and aspirations (Berg & Miller, 2023). This contributes to increased employee motivation and reduced turnover rates in the workplace (Eger et al., 2022). This relationship-based leadership approach has often proven effective in creating a positive and productive organizational culture (Emma, 2025; Meng & Neill, 2021).

Nevertheless, while there is strong evidence regarding the effectiveness of women's leadership, challenges remain across a wide range of sectors. Gender stereotypes still influence perceptions of the abilities of female leaders in many organizations (Erikson & Josefsson, 2023; Wild et al., 2023). Many studies show that even though they have managerial skills equal to or superior to their male counterparts, female leaders often face doubts from colleagues or superiors regarding their capacity to hold leadership positions (Mwagiru, 2019; Parham, 2024). Therefore, exploring how social and cultural factors affect the acceptance of women's leadership and its impact on the organization's overall success is important.

Religious organizations such as Aisyiyah are essential in empowering women in Indonesia. Several studies show that these organizations serve as spiritual forums and platforms for developing social and economic skills for their members (Haris, I. A & Maulana, 2021; Munawaroh et al., 2024). In the context of Aisyiyah, women leaders play an active role in designing and implementing programs that aim to increase the capacity of members, both in terms of education and practical skills. These programs include entrepreneurship training, seminars on reproductive health, and social activities that support community welfare. Thus, religious organizations become a strategic means for women to develop their potential and contribute more to the community.

Furthermore, the existence of women leaders in organizations such as Aisyiyah provides a positive example for other members regarding women's leadership abilities. Women's leadership in religious settings can change people's perceptions of traditional gender roles and encourage women's active participation in various aspects of social life (Arifi & Fathurrohman, 2023; Kilonzo et al., 2023). Women leaders not only facilitate empowerment programs but also become agents of change who can challenge the patriarchal norms that exist in society. This shows that religious organizations give women spiritual support and opportunities to develop professionally and socially.

Although there has been significant progress in women's leadership in organizations like Aisyiyah, challenges remain. Some studies show that cultural barriers still hinder women's full participation in leadership positions (Alameeri et al., 2023). In many social contexts, traditional norms often place women in more subordinate roles, thus reducing their opportunities to take initiative and actively contribute to decision-making. This gender stereotype creates the perception that male leaders are more competent and capable than female leaders, although empirical evidence suggests that female leadership styles can be just as effective or even better in some situations (Al-Naqbi & Aderibigbe, 2024; Hansch & Janning-Backfisch, 2024).

In addition, the lack of support from male colleagues is also a significant obstacle for female leaders in Aisyiyah. Several studies have also highlighted the importance of social and networking support to improve the effectiveness of women's

leadership (Brody et al., 2015; Tlaiss, 2014). Without such support, women leaders may feel isolated and struggle to access the resources needed to effectively run their programs (Bhattacharya et al., 2024; Sharr, 2024). This affects individual performance and can hurt the overall dynamics of the Aisiyiyah organization as a forum for women's empowerment.

B. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive design to analyze women's leadership in Aisiyiyah organizations. The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to collect numerical data that can be analyzed statistically, thus providing a more objective picture of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Descriptive designs are used to describe respondents' characteristics and perceptions of women's leadership and to understand their experiences in an organizational context. Thus, this study aims to provide an in-depth insight into how women's leadership is implemented and accepted at the regional level.

The data sources in this study consist of two groups of respondents, namely Aisiyiyah members and leaders spread across several branches in Indonesia. The respondents were selected by purposive sampling, where the researcher chose individuals who were considered to have relevant information related to the research topic (Etikan, 2016). By involving the two groups, this study seeks to gain a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and successes of women's leadership in religious organizations such as Aisiyiyah.

Data collection was carried out through a structured questionnaire that was distributed to respondents online and offline. The questionnaire was designed using the Likert scale to measure members' and leaders' perceptions of women's leadership, including communication effectiveness, member participation, and the challenges faced (Hasanah et al., 2025; Wetzel, 2010). The following instruments were used in this study:

Table 1. Research Instruments

No	Instrument Name	Description	Measurement Scale	Reference Source
1	Questioner Persepsi	This questionnaire is designed to gauge members' and leaders' perceptions of women's leadership. This includes aspects such as communication effectiveness, participation, and challenges.	Likert scale (1-5)	Wetzel, (2010)
2	Semi-Structured Interviews	Interviews were conducted with Aisiyiyah leaders to gain in-depth insights into their experiences in leadership.	N/A	Researchers themselves
3	Participatory Observation	Direct observation of Aisiyiyah organizational activities to understand the interaction dynamics between members and leaders.	N/A	Researchers themselves
4	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	Group discussions with Aisiyiyah members to explore collective views on women's leadership in the organization.	N/A	Researchers themselves

Source: Processed research, 2025

Furthermore, the data is collected over a specific period and then analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS or R to produce descriptive and inferential analyses.

The data analysis in this study was carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of women's leadership in Aisiyyah organizations and the challenges faced. This analysis process involves several steps, including data processing, hypothesis testing, and interpretation of results. Here is a further explanation of each step in data analysis.

Data processing began with the collection of questionnaires filled out by Aisiyyah members and leaders. This questionnaire is designed to measure different aspects of leadership, such as effectiveness, communication, and challenges faced. After collection, the data obtained from the questionnaire is processed using statistical software such as Python and Excel. Incomplete or invalid data is removed to ensure the accuracy of the analysis.

Once the data is cleaned, the next step is to convert the questionnaire answers to numerical values. For example, the Likert scale used in the questionnaire was changed to a number from 1 to 5, where one indicated "strongly disagree" and five indicated "strongly agree". This process allows for more in-depth statistical analysis and facilitates comparisons between groups.

After the data was processed, the analysis continued with a t-test to compare the average score between the two groups, namely Aisiyyah members and leaders. The t-test was used to determine whether the two groups differed significantly regarding perceptions of women's leadership. In this study, a t-test was performed for each aspect of leadership measured.

The results of the t-test provide t-statistical values and p-values. The p-value is used to determine the statistical significance of the observed difference. If the p-value is less than 0.05, the difference between the two groups is considered significant. The t-test results provide insight into how Aisiyyah members and leaders view the effectiveness of women's leadership.

In addition to the t-test, variance analysis (ANOVA) tests the mean differences between more than two groups. In this study, ANOVA was used to evaluate whether there were significant differences in the perception of women's leadership among the various branches of Aisiyyah. ANOVA allows researchers to identify whether certain factors, such as geographic location or educational background, affect perceptions of leadership.

The results of ANOVA provide statistical F-values and p-values. If the p-value is less than 0.05, then it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the groups being tested. Thus, ANOVA provides a more comprehensive picture of the factors that affect the perception of female leadership in Aisiyyah organizations.

Data visualization was also carried out to clarify the results of the analysis. Bar charts and box plots illustrate the comparison of the average score between Aisiyyah members and leaders. These visualizations help understand patterns and trends in the data and make it easier to interpret the results. Using diagrams, researchers can quickly identify areas where female leadership is effective and areas that need further attention.

The data analysis conducted in this study provides in-depth insights into the effectiveness of women's leadership in Aisiyyah organizations. Through systematic data processing, t-tests, ANOVAs, and visualizations, researchers can identify the challenges faced by women leaders and provide recommendations for future leadership

development. The results of this analysis are expected to contribute to the development of better strategies in empowering women in leadership in Aisiyiah and other organizations.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data Description

The analysis showed that most respondents felt that women leaders in Aisiyiah could lead effectively, with an average score of 4.18. However, challenges such as cultural barriers and resource limitations were also acknowledged by respondents, with average scores of 3.40 and 3.33, respectively. The following is a table of the results of the calculation with t-test and variance analysis (ANOVA):

Table 2. Table of Calculation Results

Aspects	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	T-test (p-value)
Women leaders in Aisiyiah can lead effectively	4.18	0.76	0.078
Women leaders can inspire members	4.15	0.85	0.085
I feel comfortable working under female leadership	3.96	0.88	0.439
I see that women leaders often face cultural barriers	3.40	1.13	0.846
Female leaders often experience limited resources	3.33	1.11	0.220
Women's leadership contributes to the success of the program	4.19	0.76	0.000

Source: Processed research, 2025

Furthermore, the research results will be explained by data visualization based on questionnaires distributed to Aisiyiah members and Aisiyiah leaders.

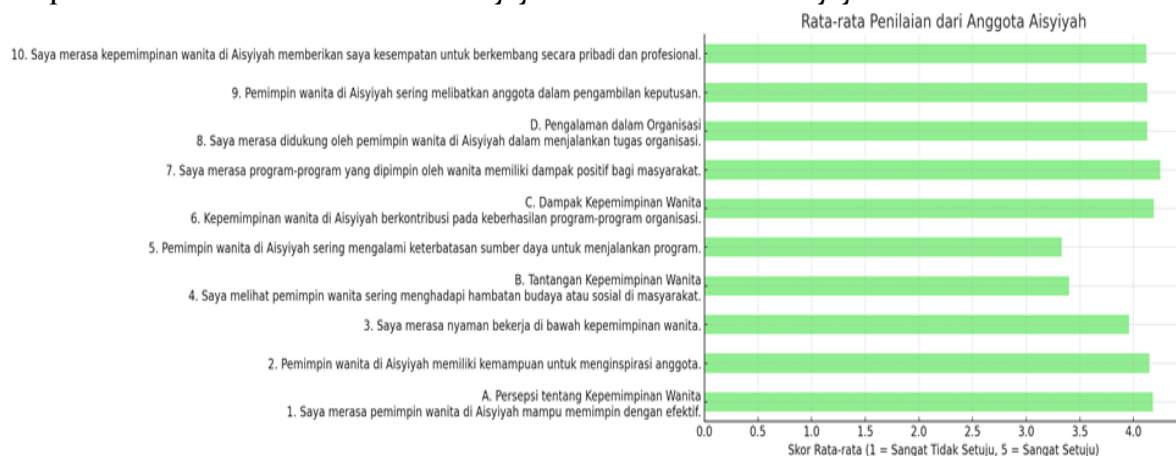


Figure 1. Average Assessment Results of Aisiyiah Members

Source: Processed Researcher, 2025

The graph shows that most Aisiyiah members consider female leadership in the organization to be good. Indicator number 10—the statement that women's leadership provides opportunities for members to grow personally and professionally—received the highest average score. Indicators 9 and 8 also scored highly, indicating that female leaders inspire and encourage members to develop, lead, and help them grow. This shows that women leaders support and involve members in decision-making. This indicates that the leadership model used is inclusive and participatory, two essential characteristics of community-based leadership. This supports the women's

transformational leadership theory that can increase member engagement and loyalty (Berg & Miller, 2023; Sharr, 2024).

In addition, scores were very positive for indicators 6 and 7, which showed the program's impact on society and the leadership contribution to the program's success. In other words, members see female leaders not only as representations, but also feel the impact of that leadership on their social lives. This shows that Aisiyiah women's leadership has a tangible impact on the community and is not just symbolic.

However, indicators 4 and 5 are at their lowest, indicating the cultural or social barriers and resource limitations women leaders face. The average score for both indicators remained above 3.3, indicating that respondents were sufficiently aware that women leaders face challenges inside and outside. However, this score is not too low, suggesting that these challenges are not dominant or damaging to the image of female leadership in organizations.

In general, this graph shows that Aisiyiah members have high trust and appreciation for female leaders regarding ability, leadership influence, and the values of involvement built. Women leaders implement a collective and value-based leadership model that their communities accept. This shows significantly that Aisiyiah culture strongly supports women's leadership and can be used as an example to enhance women's roles in other Islamic organizations.

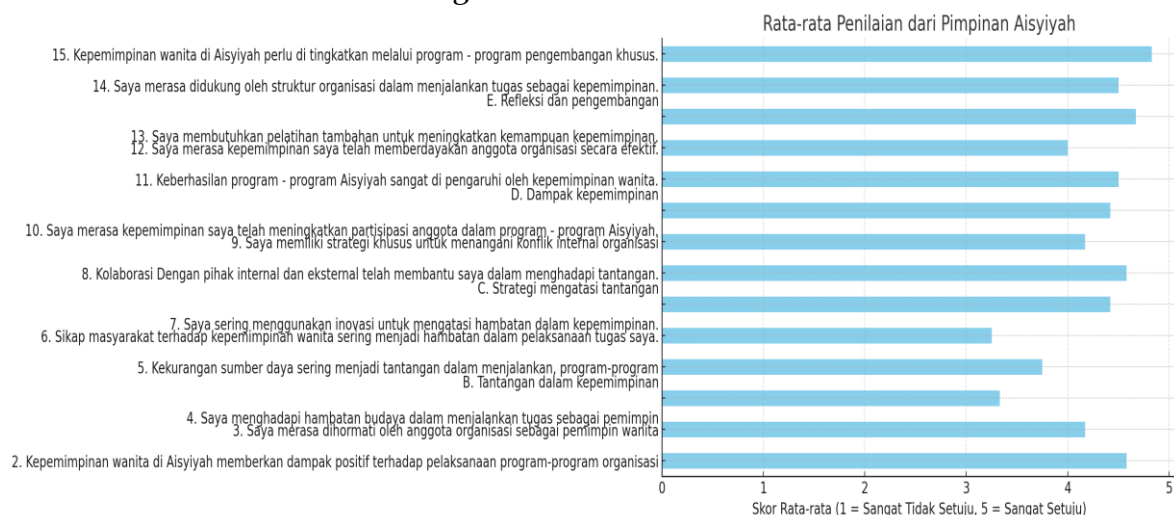


Figure 2. Average Assessment Results from Aisiyiah Leaders

Source: Processed Researcher, 2025

According to the graph above, the questionnaire results show that women leaders in Aisiyiah organizations in Sukabumi Regency greatly appreciate themselves. Statements about women leaders needing training and development programs received the highest average scores, almost five figures. This shows that leaders recognize the importance of formal training to improve leadership skills. This awareness shows a critical reflection and a strong desire to continue to move forward as a leader.

Leaders also feel supported by organizational structure, a statement with a high score. With this support, people feel safe, and women's leadership at the regional level is recognized. In addition, effective women's leadership is recognized as the key to the success of the Aisiyiah program and increased member participation. This shows that they make a contribution that is not only administrative but also transformative in driving organizational progress.

The collaboration factor and strategy to deal with conflicts also scored high. Leaders demonstrate their ability to build practical cooperation with external and internal parties. In addition, they can respond to challenges through simple contextual innovations, such as utilizing daily learning activities to communicate. This shows that effective leadership is flexible, engaged, and rooted in the community.

Nevertheless, some indicators show intermediate scores, which indicate internal problems, especially regarding limited human resources and communication difficulties. In addition, several leaders stated that they continue to face cultural challenges from the part of society that values women leaders. Although it is not the main obstacle, it is still a concern and requires a special strategy to increase the role of women in the public and religious spheres.

In general, the findings of this questionnaire support the idea that women's leadership in Aisyiyah organizations has been well implemented and widely accepted. Leaders feel valued, have room to contribute, and have the ability to drive organizational progress through appropriate programs. This portrait of leadership shows the extraordinary capacity of women to lead community- and faith-based organizations. This is despite technical challenges and additional training needs.

Based on the table and graph above, the results of the study show that the majority of Aisyiyah members have a positive perception of female leadership in organizations. 59% of respondents agreed that women leaders in Aisyiyah can lead effectively, and 63% believe that women's leadership contributes to the success of the organization's programs. These findings align with the view of Eagly and Heilman (2016), who stated that female leaders tend to use a more participatory and collaborative leadership style, creating an inclusive work environment where members feel valued and listened to.

Furthermore, data from the questionnaire showed that many members felt an increase in their engagement when led by a woman. This can be attributed to the ability of women leaders to build strong interpersonal relationships and effective communication, as discussed by Northouse (2018). Female leaders are often more responsive to their members' needs, increasing their motivation and commitment to the organization's goals.

In addition, this positive perception is also supported by the results of questionnaires from Aisyiyah leaders themselves. They report a high level of confidence in carrying out their leadership duties and in the positive impact of their leadership style on achieving organizational goals. This indicates an alignment between members' perceptions and leaders' first-hand experiences of women's leadership effectiveness.

Thus, the findings of this study confirm the importance of women's roles in leadership positions in Aisyiyah. With the support of an organizational culture that supports the active participation of all its members regardless of gender, the full potential of women's contributions can be maximized to achieve a shared vision and mission more efficiently and harmoniously.

Discussion

1. Perceptions of Women's Leadership

The study results showed that most Aisyiyah members positively perceived female leadership in the organization. 59% of respondents agreed that women leaders in Aisyiyah can lead effectively, and 63% believe that women's leadership contributes to

the success of the organization's programs. These findings reflect a growing view of the capabilities and effectiveness of women leaders, which were previously often underestimated in traditional leadership. This aligns with the findings of Eagly and Heilman (2016), who stated that women leaders tend to use a collaborative and participatory approach, thus creating a more inclusive work environment.

This positive perception can also be seen from how Aisiyiah members feel the direct impact of this leadership style on group dynamics. Women leaders in Aisiyiah are not only considered decision-makers but also facilitators who encourage the active participation of their members in every program or activity of the organization. Thus, they build trust among members and increase motivation to contribute even more to the organization's progress.

Furthermore, the results of the study show that there is a collective awareness among members about the importance of women's roles in leadership positions. When asked about the specific contributions of women leaders to the success of certain programs, many respondents identified concrete examples such as increased community involvement in social and educational activities initiated by women leaders. This shows that positive perceptions are theoretical and based on the members' real experiences.

Finally, this positive attitude towards women's leadership is an essential foundation for developing internal organizational policies to support more women in taking on strategic roles in the future. With the support of all levels of members and recognition of their significant contributions, Aisiyiah can continue to strengthen its position as one of the leading religious organizations that empower women through innovative and effective leadership models.

2. Challenges Faced by Women Leaders in Aisiyiah at the Regional Level

While there are many positive aspects of women's leadership, challenges remain. Sari et al. (2021) identified cultural barriers as the main factors hindering women's full participation in leadership positions. In the context of Aisiyiah, these barriers often appear in the form of gender stereotypes that discredit women's ability to lead effectively. Society is still influenced by traditional norms that place men as key leaders, thus creating the perception that women do not have the same capacity to make strategic decisions.

In a questionnaire conducted on Aisiyiah members, as many as 46% of respondents stated that women leaders often face societal cultural or social barriers and limited resources to accomplish their leadership duties optimally. These barriers can be a lack of support from male peers and organization members, who may feel more comfortable following male leaders. This shows the urgent need to raise awareness of the importance of women's roles in leadership and encourage attitude change among the organization's members.

Another challenge faced by women leaders is limited access to training and self-development. Many respondents felt less likely to participate in leadership training programs than their male counterparts. These limitations can hinder their ability to thrive and adapt to the demands of modern leadership roles, weakening their position in the organization.

Therefore, Aisiyiah and similar organizations must formulate concrete strategies to overcome these challenges. This includes providing specific training

programs for women leaders, creating a more inclusive work environment, and supporting women's active participation at all levels of management. Thus, it will increase the effectiveness of leadership and empower women as a whole in the current socio-cultural context of Indonesia.

3. Leadership Strategies Used to Overcome Challenges

Women leaders in Aisiyah face various challenges in their leadership roles, but they use several effective strategies to overcome them. One of the main strategies is to build networks and establish cooperation with other organizations, both inside and outside Aisiyah. Through this collaboration, leaders can obtain much-needed additional resources and expand the reach of their empowerment programs. Cross-organizational cooperation also opens up opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and experience that strengthens their leadership capacity.

In addition to building external networks, women leaders focus on internal capacity building through continuous training and self-development. They recognize the importance of practical managerial and communication skills to lead better and inspire other members. This training program not only improves technical competence but also strengthens the confidence of women leaders in dealing with cultural and social barriers.

Another strategy applied is a participatory approach in decision-making. Women leaders encourage the active involvement of organizational members so that a democratic and inclusive atmosphere is created. Strategic decisions become more representative by directly involving members and receiving broad support from the entire Aisiyah community. This approach also helps reduce resistance to change and increase solidarity among members.

Lastly, women leaders also use information technology as a supporting tool in carrying out their leadership duties. The use of social media and digital platforms allows for faster and more efficient communication between leaders and members in even remote areas. This technology helps maintain program continuity and facilitates coordination of activities despite geographical or time constraints.

4. The Impact of Women's Leadership on the Success of Aisiyah Programs

The positive impact of women's leadership is also evident in the results of this study; Around 55% of respondents feel that women-led programs have a positive impact on the communities around them. This shows that women leaders not only focus on the organization's internal achievements, but also pay attention to the needs and well-being of the surrounding community. With a more inclusive and collaborative approach, women leaders can create programs that are relevant and beneficial to society.

Furthermore, Aisiyah leaders reported a high average score (4.58) regarding the positive impact of implementing their organization's programs. This score reflects the effectiveness of their leadership style in achieving organizational goals and making a tangible contribution to members and the wider community. Women leaders tend to adopt a participatory approach that allows members to actively participate in program planning and execution, thereby increasing a sense of shared belonging and responsibility.

In addition, the success of these programs can be seen from the increase in the participation of Aisiyah members in various social and economic activities.

Empowerment programs initiated by women leaders often attract the attention of many parties, including government and private institutions, to collaborate. This strengthens Aisyiyah's position as a religious organization and increases the positive image of women's ability to lead.

Thus, the impact of women's leadership in Aisyiyah is not only limited to the internal aspects of the organization but also extends to significant social influence. This research emphasizes supporting women's leadership as a strategic step to drive greater social change in Indonesian society. These successes show that with the right opportunities and support, women leaders can make an outstanding contribution to the betterment of their communities.

D. CONCLUSION

This research shows that women's leadership in the Aisyiyah organization in Sukabumi Regency has been running effectively and is widely accepted. Women leaders can drive da'wah, social, and economic empowerment programs through a collaborative and participatory approach. The results of the questionnaire and interviews reflect that members appreciate their leadership style and that it contributes significantly to increased participation and the success of the program. There has also been a positive change in the perception of the public and members towards women's leadership that cultural norms may have previously limited.

However, some leaders still face challenges such as limited resources and communication barriers. However, leaders have developed innovative strategies and demonstrated awareness of the importance of training to enhance their capacity. Therefore, strengthening training programs, increasing structural support, and expanding participation space are urgently needed so that women's leadership in religious organizations such as Aisyiyah can continue to develop and have a broader impact.

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