

The 7th International Conference on Economics and Social Sciences
**Exploring Global Perspectives:
The Future of Economics and Social Sciences**
June 13-14, 2024
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

**The Evolution of Female Leadership Research:
A Bibliometric Review of Publications
over the Past 20 Years**

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DOI: 10.24818/ICESS/2024/034

Abstract

Recently, there has been great interest in female leadership due to the forces of globalisation and evolving dynamics in leadership influence, even beyond formal authority structures. The objective of this study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of female leadership research from the past two decades, with the aim of discerning changing trends, patterns, and prominent themes in the literature. To accomplish this, we searched relevant databases and used bibliometric methods, including tracking publication trends, analysing authorship patterns, performing keyword analysis, and examining the distribution of papers in scholarly journals. This systematic approach was designed to bring together a comprehensive collection of publications on women's leadership. The findings reveal the evolution of female leadership research, highlighting shifts in theoretical frameworks, emerging topics, and influential authors. This research contributes to the existing literature by offering information on the trajectory of female leadership research and identifying areas for future exploration. It underscores the increasing recognition of gender diversity in organisational leadership and the significance of addressing gender disparities in leadership positions. The insights derived from this study can inform scholars, practitioners and policymakers seeking to advance gender equality in leadership roles. By identifying key themes and trends, this research provides valuable guidance for fostering inclusive leadership environments and promoting opportunities for women in leadership positions.

Keywords: female leadership, woman, leadership, leader, gender gap.

JEL Classification: J16, M21.

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1. Introduction

This research paper presents a descriptive and evaluative analysis of the development of topics related to female leadership, from articles listed in the Scopus International database. It aims to provide an answer to the following questions:

- What is the distribution of descriptive information of published papers on female leadership in the scientific database Scopus?
- What is the distribution from the evaluation information of published research on female leadership in the Scopus scientific database?
- What are the main research aspects presented in the female leadership articles?

In the following sections, we will put forward the literature review, research methodology, and the outcome of our analysis about female leadership. This article will be a valuable source of inspiration on the topic of gender diversity in leadership.

2. Literature Review

Goenthal & Hoyt (2017) talk about trajectory of women's leadership in various fields of activity, concentrate on the progress of role of women in society and the barriers they meet. Their research underlined that women still suffer from problems arising from domestic duties and stereotypes, although they are very likely to exercise participative and transformational leadership styles. The paper concludes by calling for strong support of women's attempts at leadership, with an acceptance of their historical contributions; encouragement of the dismantling of structures that hinder their upward progress, as well as appreciation of their unique perspectives. Finally, it seems that the level of female representation in boardrooms is already quite high and sensitivity towards these issues is now greater. Discrimination concerns have catapulted debate on gender in leadership to the forefront. While conceptual studies into the leadership styles of men and women periodically render differences, there is a question of the nature of the significance of these differences. Certain arguments are of the view that organizational frameworks ought to assimilate objectivity that provides equal opportunities to human being irrespective of gender. For organizations to realize the aspect of gender equality, it is suggested that they should embrace ethical practices and take into account specific challenges for women, including maternity commitments and family caring responsibilities. Săseanu et al. (2019) underline the increasing interest in the concept of gender diversity in organizations, especially in Western countries, targeting the top managerial level. Not being influenced by the fact that women represent the majority of the population worldwide and a significant proportion in the workforce, their presence on management boards and among the world's prosperous individuals remains disproportionately low. It is a matter, the author underlines, of mutual esteem for the competencies of each and an acknowledgment of personal limitations across genders. From 2003 to 2022, the share of women occupying senior managerial positions has demonstrated an impressive surge, with undeniable nations experiencing exponential expansion. Norway consistently appears as a leader in female representation in superior management roles, while Malta falls behind.

In all parts of Europe, there has been a visible growth in female leadership in the last two decades, imputed in part to opposed social attitudes, and Western Europe mostly demonstrate more developing positions contrasted to eastern counterparts. In the face of regional dissimilarity, the direction towards strengthened female representation in leadership positions appears durable, reflective of developing societal rules (Ene, 2023).

Smith et al. (2022) investigate the changes of leadership within human societies, with a certain focus on the positions acted by identity and social structures. Their investigation elucidates women's influential roles in areas such as marriage, dispute resolution, and the public criticism of nonconformist response.

3. Research Methodology

In this paper, a bibliometric technique was utilised for investigation. Both the Scopus database and the VosViewer software were utilised to conduct an inclusive examination of the articles.

To identify relevant studies on female leadership, a meticulous search was conducted using the Scopus database. This search utilised an exactly crafted string that merged five key terms: female leadership, women leadership, gender, leader, concentrate on articles published between 2004 and 2024 period.

After finishing the filtering process, a total of 3,077 articles were initially fetched. Subsequently, at the second level, only documents written in English were retained, resulting in reducing in the number of documents to 3,006.

Table 1. Literature review technique: inclusion and exclusion parameters

Stage	Content	Description
Stage 1	Scientific database	Scopus
	Indexation	All
	Date	02.04.2024
	Search Period	1 January 2004 – 02 April 2024
	Searched keywords	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (female AND leadership) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (woman AND leadership) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (gender) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (leader)) AND PUBYEAR > 2004 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English"))
	Initial result	3.077 documents
Stage 2	Language	English = 3.006 documents
	Final result	3.006 documents

Source: data processing after Scopus (2024).

4. Findings and Discussion

To understand female leadership, this section evaluates the main topics and research patterns. Relevant articles were identified through the Scopus database and subjected to specific criteria for detailed analysis.

“diversity” suggests exploring strategies to support women in becoming leaders and promote inclusion in leadership position.

The green one appears to centre on quality research methods used to explore social problem, particularly those concerning gender identity, family dynamics and natural rights. The use of term like, “focus group”, “interview” and, “motivation” suggests research focus on the angle and experiences of individuals using qualitative data collection method.

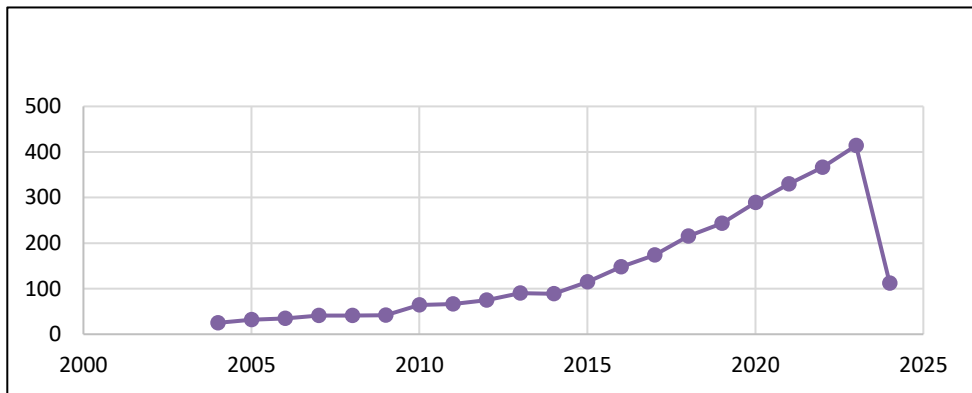
The blue cluster focus on the experiences of women in the workplace. Keywords like “education”, “career mobility” suggest a focus on professional development, while “job satisfaction”, “work environment” and “work-life-balance” indicates interest in how these factors influence women’s experiences.

The yellow cluster appears to centre on the concept of employee mind-sets within the organisational context. The cluster highlight term like “race”, “ethnicity” and “middle-ages”, suggesting an emphasis on how demographic characteristics influence employee mindsets.

Cluster no. 5 studies the effectiveness of educational strategy through research methods such as human experiments. Keywords like “teacher”, “student”, “curriculum” and “outcome assessment” suggest the research evaluates teaching methods, skill development, and formative assessment.

Last, but not least, cluster 6 highlights the interplay between psychological concepts like achievement, self-concept, emotions, and social behaviour. This graph visualisations map offers a origin for future research. It identifies the key central themes and relationship within women’s leadership, highlighting areas where emerging trends, information gaps and further investigation are needed.

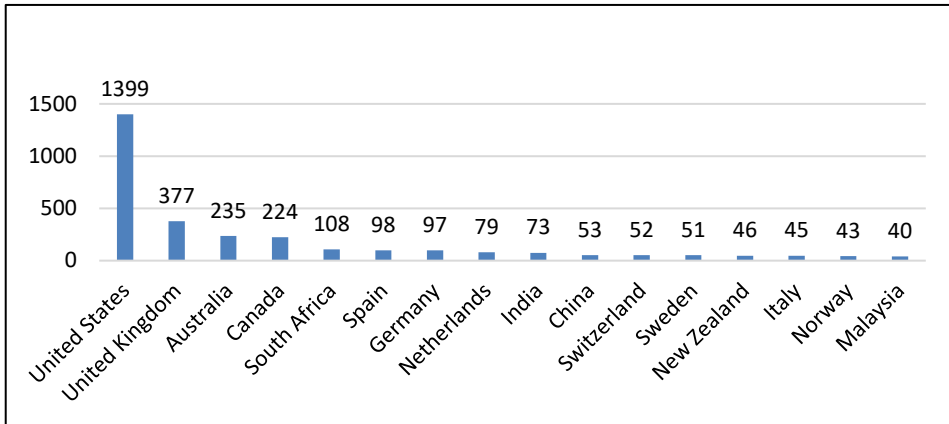
Figure 2. Editorial trends over time



Source: data processing after Scopus (2024).

The growth in the number of articles published in the examined period is highlighted in Figure 2, marking a growing educational attention and research productivity in the domain of female leadership. The fall in 2024 can be attributed to the small time frame investigated, rather than implying declining interest.

Figure 3. Country-level academic output



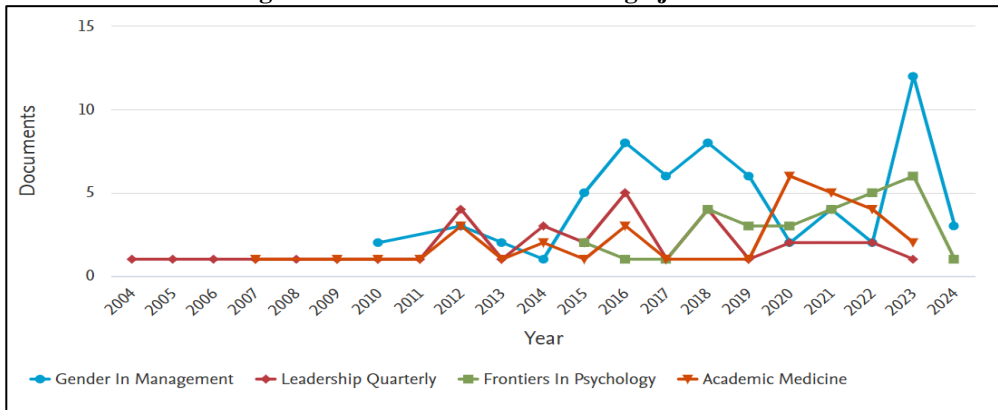
Source: data processing after Scopus (2024).

This chart reveals the geographic distribution of research articles on female leadership.

Regardless the fact that some nations, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, stand out as significant producers based on publication output, the interest in this subject is still intense across the world, in countries like Germany, Spain, India, Italy, Malaysia, Sweden, etc.

The concentration on women's leadership subject in a variety of areas indicates a partnership study perspective in which academics from around the world look for learning more regarding women's leadership.

Figure 4. Publication trends through journals



Source: Scopus (2024).

The journal allocation demonstrates the comprehensive kind of women's leadership, reaching fields such as management, medicine, sociology, psychology, and more. This heterogeneous image accentuates the complex approach needed to figure out and address women's leadership topics in various fields of work.

Moreover, the large variety of journals publishing on female leadership displays the validation of its value and relevance over academic subjects.

This approach aims to understand the obstacles and benefits managed by women in leadership positions, contributing to the promotion of gender balance and organisational productivity.

Table 2. Allocation of articles in academic journals

Position	Journal name	Number of documents
1	Gender in Management	64
2	Leadership Quarterly	34
3	Academic Medicine	33
4	Frontiers in Psychology	30
5	Sex Roles	30
6	Plos One	27
7	Gender Work and Organization	24
8	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	24
9	Journal of Women’s Health	22
10	Educational Management Administration and Leadership	20

Source: data processing after Scopus (2024).

Table no. 2 offers a hierarchy of journals based on their publication count, focussing on those that have made major contributions to the research of female leadership.

Managing journals in this domain play a central role as fundamental platforms for spreading research, underscoring their conceptual target and influence within the academic sector.

Table 3. Top 10 authors and institutions making outstanding input in female leadership

Authors			Rank	Institution		
Author name	Papers	%		Institution name	Papers	%
Mavin, S.	12	0.40%	1	Gender in Management	64	2.13%
Carnes, M.	10	0.33%	2	Leadership Quarterly	34	1.13%
Jagsi, R.	10	0.33%	3	Academic Medicine	33	1.10%
Ryan, M.K.	10	0.33%	4	Frontiers in Psychology	30	1.00%
Cook, A.	9	0.30%	5	Sex Roles	30	1.00%
Glass, C.	9	0.30%	6	Plos One	27	0.90%

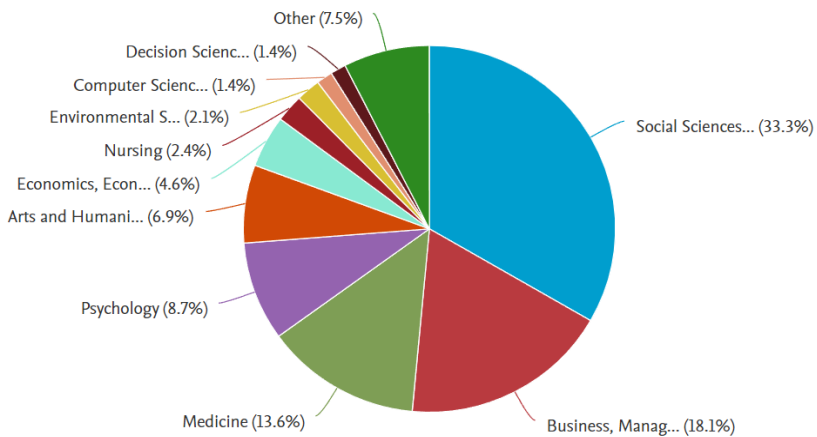
Authors			Rank	Institution		
Author name	Papers	%		Institution name	Papers	%
Hoyt, C.L.	9	0.30%	7	Gender Work and Organization	24	0.80%
Khosa, F.	8	0.27%	8	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	24	0.80%
Spector, N.D.	8	0.27%	9	Journal of Women's Health	22	0.73%
Baxter, J.	7	0.23%	10	Educational Management Administration and Leadership	20	0.67%

Source: own processing after Scopus (2024).

Table 3 presents profound results on the prominent researchers and universities at the forefront of exploration in female leadership. Although no one writer is dominant, scholars such as Mavin S. and Hall C.M. differentiate themselves with remarkable participations, each having created over 10 papers. In particular, universities appear as meaningful research centres, presenting substantial research results in this branch.

The collective side of research in female leadership is underlined by the table's outcomes. In spite of certain authors generating a higher publication number, the percentages stay humble, suggesting that expertise share is characterized by a collaborative circuit of specialists.

Figure 5. Papers by domain



Source: Scopus (2024).

The diagram represents a network chart illustrating the interest fields about female leadership.

The largest area of interest is related to social sciences, with 33.3%. This indicates a focus on social problems and their impact on society about women leaders. The next area of interest is business and management, consisting of 18.1%. This shows an involvement in leading and managing organisations for women leaders. A major interest is also found in medicine at 13.6%. This shows concern for health and prosperity among female leaders. Psychology comes to light as another important area of interest with 8.7%. This points out interest in the understanding of interpersonal relationships for female leaders. Economics and econometrics are also exemplified with a combined 4.6% share. Arts and Humanities are presented similarly with 6.9%. The residual 7.5% includes.

Diversified fields of interest, like engineering, environmental, and computer science.

5. Conclusions

The paper is initiated with a network visualisation map showing the most commonly co-occurring keywords in articles about female leadership. Six different thematic clusters emerge, giving the key area of research in this field.

Those clusters emerge from themes directly related to female leadership and gender equity, to qualitative research methods, workplace events, employee opinions, educational support, emotional concepts.

Visualisation thereupon provides an important sense of the thematic emphasis and range of topics within research into female leadership, providing a signpost for future research and focussing for future exploration.

The collaborative nature of research is thus apparent, as evidenced by the small quantities of individual author contribution, pointing to a network of collaboration in it identifies academic circles within female leadership. It presents the diversified area of interest within the investigation of female leadership. Social Sciences come as the main focus, denoting a concern for social problems. Business & Management stays close, showing an interest regarding organizational leadership. Medicine also attracts much attention, suggesting a priority on public health. Psychology is significant in its emphasis on understanding the social factors.

Economics & Econometrics, Art & Humanities and several other fields contribute to the multidisciplinary study of female leadership. In general, the visualisation underlines the interdisciplinary kind of research in this area and highlights many and varied interests among female leaders.

To sum up, research into female leadership carried out with the reputable Scopus international database has provided significant findings on numerous facets of this critical domain. In the course of researching descriptive information such as publication years, institutions, authors, journals, and countries, we have established comprehensive understanding of the academic landscape surrounding female leadership.

Acknowledgment

This paper was co-financed by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies during the PhD program.

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