PERCEPTIONS, CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the experiences of females in political leadership positions in the Sunyani West District. Qualitative approach was adopted with a case study design to explore the experiences of the women leaders. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select 14 participants comprising eight (8) political party executives, four (4) Assembly women and two (2) women who were parliamentary candidates. The data were collected using interview and analysed through thematic procedure. The findings indicated that females in political leadership positions perceive leadership in three different ways as task-oriented, goal-oriented and people-oriented. Whatever way they perceived political leadership; they faced several challenges related to their personal lives, family and community. However, the main challenge facing females in political leadership positions in Sunyani West District is misconceptions about their capabilities as females. Females in political leadership positions cope with their challenges through self-motivation, creation of cordial relationship with male chauvinists and concentration on their potentials. The study recommended that female political leaders should focus on their output and achievements to show their capabilities in contributing meaningfully to society. There is an urgent need for opinion leaders such as chiefs, queen mothers, district chief executives and the public in general to discourage the unfair, unjust and unequal treatment sometimes meted out to women who occupy political leadership positions.*
KEYWORDS: challenges, coping strategies, Ghana, leadership, politics, political leadership, women

INTRODUCTION

Females are not legally prevented from active participation in political leadership, yet it seems several systemic factors including culture, physiology, social role stratification and religious beliefs have been advanced to limit their participation. For over three centuries, females have not been offered adequate opportunities for seeking and assuming positions of leadership and public authority due to culture and other factors (O'Neil & Domingo, 2015). The apparent limited involvement of females in political leadership positions reflect and perpetuate societal assumptions. In the pre-colonial era, women played important roles in top decision-making levels in African societies (Attom & Akromah, 2018). Some were princesses, queen mothers, land owners, occasional warriors, farmers and traders who were very influential in their societies. During the period of colonization in Africa, political exclusion of women started when the colonial educational system placed emphasis on

education of males (Majanja & Kiplang'at, 2003). Later, when females were enrolled, they were restricted to learn how to be good wives limiting their capabilities to the private arena (Manu, 1991). Consequently, most females were left out of decision-making processes, especially in the public domain because formal education is the prerequisite to obtain formal sector job.

Paternalistic ideologies on gender roles particularly among traditionalists and conservative communities seem to produce prejudices toward female leaders. From birth, people start to recognize women with domestic responsibilities such as household duties and caring for home with little exposure to public domain (Majanja & Kiplang'at, 2003). Women are therefore, considered as having less leadership abilities than men and their leadership is thus, perceived less favourably (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Today, though evidence suggests that the proportion of women in management is increasing in most parts of the world, doubts about women's leadership skills still exist and some organisations still define and perceive leadership in masculine terms (Brenner, Tomkiewicz & Shchein, 1989).

A critical part of leadership discussions has been gender contestations, especially in terms of the limitations placed on women based on their biology, culture and social role stratifications (Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2009). Women appear to suffer discrimination, deprivation, oppression and all forms of inhuman treatment on account of biological characteristics, cultural beliefs and practices. Sex role stereotypes, occupational stereotypes and discrimination seem to define females' involvement in leadership positions.

Women involvement in politics and political leadership have been a matter of international discussion for many years (Curtin, 2008). Discussions of women leadership received impetus when the United Nations organized several successive world conferences on women. These conferences include the international women conferences which took place in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. International discussions have also been supported by the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979. An important development was the establishment of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women as the body of independent experts that monitor implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Countries who have become party to the treaty (States parties) are obliged to submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights of the Convention are implemented. During its sessions the Committee considers each State party's report and addresses its concerns and recommendations are given in the form of concluding observations.

In recent years, women's place in parliament has become 'accepted' across the world. Nations have encouraged women participation in elective positions. There has been a significant increase in the number of women political leaders around the globe. The US ranks 68th of 134 nations worldwide with only 16.8% of women elected to the House of Representatives and 16.0% elected to the Senate. In October 2003, Rwanda became the country closest to reaching parity between men and women of any national legislature. Rwanda had 48.8% of Lower House seats held by women and 34.6% held in the Upper

House. From 1945 to 1995, the number of sovereign states with parliaments increased seven-fold but the percentage of women members in parliament worldwide increased only four-fold. From 1945 to1997, only 42 of the 186 states with a legislative institution had at one time or another selected a woman to preside over Parliament or a House of Parliament; 18 European, 19 of Americas, 3 Africa, 1 Asia, and 1 Pacific. Women ministers remain concentrated in social areas (14%) rather than legal (9.4%), economic (4.1%), political (3.4%) and executive areas (3.9%) and there are only 13 women in the highest positions of State out of 189 (Paxton & Hughes, 2007). Currently, only 3 countries have 50 percent or more in their parliament either single or lower houses or these countries are; Rwanda 61.3 percent, Cuba 53.1 per cent and Bolivia 53.1 per cent (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019).

In Africa, Tripp (2001) noted that women became very vocal and active in parliamentary debates but had difficulty pushing through legislation that would provide key supports to them. Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda are said to have succeeded because they recognized the importance of equity between women and men in decision-making and they instituted changes in their electoral and parliamentary processes.

In recent times, the situation in some African countries has improved despite persisting inequalities. It is common to find women in different professions and at different levels competing with their male counterparts. Women have access to education which has broadened the scope and horizons and given them many job options and opportunities. However, there is significant gap in the participation of women in political leadership positions. Renowned authors in gender studies explained that women political leadership depended on at least: selection to a safe seat to ensure incumbency over time; professional development through strategic service within party executives and caucuses; practiced performances in parliamentary committees and the debating chamber; party in government; intra-party political or factional manoeuvres and, possibly, the visibility of one's own 'feminist' positioning (Curtin, 2008). They argue that a mix of factors, individual, structural and politico-cultural constrain the opportunities for women politicians to enter the executive positions of government where there is arguably considerable potential to act for women (Curtin, 2008).

Following years of work, research on the representation of women has burgeoned in recent years, with considerable attention given to the links between the descriptive and the substantive positions. Many of these analyses focus on women's preferences and performances as legislators, and the constraints and opportunities they face in seeking to advance women-friendly positions. Gendering the legislature is a desirable end in itself but is also seen to be a means by which women's interests can become more visibly represented. While there is a body of evidence to suggest this may occur, more tenuous is the causal link between the number of women elected and the substantive representation of women (Sawer, Tremblay & Trimble, 2006).

Studies globally have found that women are grossly underrepresented in leadership positions. According to Khadair (2012), women have limited ambitions, lack confidence and their work is affected by discontinuity in the work place. Khadair argues that other schools of thought tried to justify the under-representation of females in leadership on the grounds

that females do not have what it takes to assume leadership positions; females lack support of their subordinates and community; females do not want the job; females have no training and experience. Other scholars suggest females have been apparently reluctant to peruse and contest for political leadership positions because they lack confidence (Majanja & Kiplang'at, 2003).

Some religious groups such as Christianity and Islam highlight subordination of women. For instance, societies especially in Arab states who believe in patriarchal theology, compel females to be subordinate and submissive to men. The patriarchal politics suggest that the man is the "natural" head of the household and that their decision-making role naturally extends to public domain. They therefore, occupy most of the leadership positions in institutions in all walks of life. Although men dominated various societies, some females were able to play roles traditionally reserved for men. Examples of such females are Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana, Indira Ghandi of India, Hilary Clinton of U.S.A, Golda Meir of Israel, Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Angela Merkel of Germany and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia.

In Ghana, no law bans females from participating actively in various sectors of the economy and in social life. Upon the attainment of self-government in 1957, the CPP government consciously encouraged the participation of women in politics and appointed some to high political offices as members of parliament, deputy ministers and district commissioners as recognition of their abilities, and "not acts of tokenism" (Allah-Mensah, 2005, p. 4). Ghana is noted as one of the first African countries to introduce a quota system for women in 1960 by the passage of the Representation of the People's Act (Women Members) Act No.8 of June, 1960. The CPP passed this law to allow for the nomination and election of ten women to the National Assembly (Tamale, 1999).

However, women's representation and participation in decision-making continues to be low in Ghana. Out of the 275 members of the Ghanaian Parliament sitting at the end of 2015, only 29 were women. This ranks Ghana 111th on the global Inter-Parliamentary Union's ranking, far below Rwanda (1st), Seychelles (4th) and Senegal (6th) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019). This study, therefore sought to explore experiences of female political leaders in the Sunyani West District with a view to understand their challenges and coping strategies they adopt in political leadership positions. The following research questions guided the study: How do females political leaders in Sunyani West District perceive leadership?, What are the challenges facing women in political leadership positions in Sunyani West District? and How do women in political leadership positions in Sunyani West District cope with their challenges?

CONCEPTUALISING LIBERAL FEMINISM, LEADERSHIP AND COPING STRATEGIES

The theoretical framework which was adopted to underpin this study is the liberal feminism theory because it reveals the nature of inequality, gender politics, power relations, sexuality and how empowerment can propel women from lower level of society to the top. Popular liberal feminists such as Betty Friedan, Hillary Clinton, Gloria Steinem, Rebecca Walker,

Naomi Wolf, Martha Nussbaum and Eleanor Roosevelt believe that equality in pay, job opportunities, political structure, social security and education for women need to be guaranteed for all to reach their full potential.

Liberal feminists insist on freedom for women on the basis of freedom for individuals (Schwartzman, 2010). Whereas there is disagreement among liberals about what freedom means, and thus liberal feminism takes more than one form, it conceives of freedom as personal autonomy-living a life of one's own choosing and political autonomy-being co-author of the conditions under which one lives. Classical-liberal feminism, or sometimes 'libertarian feminism' conceives of freedom as freedom from coercive interference (Young, 2006). They hold the view that the exercise of personal autonomy depends on certain enabling conditions that are insufficiently present in women's lives, or that social arrangements often fail to respect women's personal autonomy and other elements of women's survival (Parpart, Connelly & Barriteau, 2000). Liberal feminists also believe women's needs and interests are insufficiently reflected in the basic conditions under which they live, and that those conditions lack legitimacy because women are inadequately represented in the processes of democratic self-determination (Stafford, 2004). Proponents of this theory believe that the state should be the women's movement ally in promoting women's autonomy (Gerson, 2004).

According to liberal feminists, women should enjoy personal autonomy through a broad range of autonomy-enabling conditions. These conditions include a) being free of violence and the threat of violence that violates women's dignity (Cudd, 2006), being free of the limits set by patriarchal paternalistic and moralistic laws that restrict women's options on the grounds that such limits are in women having access to options as entitlements (Alstott, 2004). Liberal feminists in general believe that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance to and success in the public arena. They work hard to emphasise the equality of men and women through political and legal reform (Tong, 1998). The theory was relevant in this study, because a cursory look indicates that most women do not actively take part in politics because they are impeded by socio cultural and religious factors at the grassroots level. These are the challenges liberal feminists attempt to tackle by creating and supporting acts of legislation that remove the barriers that prevent women from having equal opportunities with men in society (Thurschwell, 2008).

Proponents of the theory believe that individuals should be free to develop their own talents and pursue their own interests irrespective of their gender, cultural or religious background. They also demand that everyone receive equal consideration without discrimination on the basis of sex, as enshrined in Article 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In terms of political autonomy, liberal feminists by John Rawls' contractualist liberal theory of justice (Smith, 1998), argue that the state should ensure that the basic structure of society distributes the benefits and burdens of social cooperation fairly, that is, in a manner that women as well as men could endorse (Alstott, 2004). Liberal feminists argue that the basic structure currently distributes benefits and burdens unfairly, in part due to the gender system, or the patriarchal nature of inherited traditions and institutions (Barclay, 2013; Gheaus & Robeyns, 2011).

Another aspect of political autonomy is that women should have space in public deliberation and electoral politics. Some liberal feminists emphasise the importance of political autonomy to enable women be co-authors of the conditions under which they live with focus on participation in the processes of democratic self-determination (Barclays, 2013). These processes include both political deliberation in the many arenas of public political discourse, and electoral politics (Peters, 2006). Authors such as Green (2006), argued for guaranteed equal representation of both sexes in political leadership.

Leadership as a complex sociological concept is the principal dynamic force that motivates and coordinates the organisation in the accomplishment of its objective (Anderson et al., 2015, Heilman 2012; Wakoko & Labao, 2009). There are several issues of gendered perspectives on leadership. The work of Anderson et al. (2015) and Heilman (2012) indicates that understandings of leadership include interpersonal influence, directed through communication toward goal attainment. In leadership research, gender has been distinguished from sex, especially in feminism (Connell, 2009). Marshall (1995, p. 484) states that "the feminists" paradigm grew from the dominant male and structural-functionalist perspective. Feminists' reconstruction of leadership would involve women in meaningful discourse of organisational life and values as autonomous individuals rather than objects of patriarchal discourse, with the focus on relationships between individuals and leadership (Blackmore, 1989). The researchers are of the opinion that at least the view should be empowering others rather than power over others.

In West Africa, Brock, Dada and Jatta (2006) highlight that gender and religion play a major role in women political leadership. Adegun and Akomolafe (2010) advanced a view that there is a gender difference in leadership and that women bring different qualities to leadership and leadership positions, which help organisations maintain a competitive advantage. Rosener's (1990) study of female and male executives with similar backgrounds concluded that women tended to manage in different ways than men. The study found that female executives were more interested in transforming people's self-interest into organisational goals by encouraging feelings of individual self-worth, active participation, and sharing of power and information. What is imperative is that women in leadership provide a different view and interpretation of leadership. Some argue that women's participation in, and their access to senior leadership positions is defined by cultural and belief systems in a society (Shah & Shah, 2012). There are some broadly shared factors such as gender power relations, role stereotyping, role socialization, public/domestic divide and others leading to this phenomenon (Shah, 2008).

The explanation exists that the factors that work against women are not similarly constructed and enacted across cultures and societies (Shah & Shah, 2012). There are situational contexts that have consequences for how women participate in leadership. Shah and Shah explained further that situated cultural and belief systems, and social patterns of behaviour determine the discourses shaping the concepts and practices in each context. In their argumentation, they proffered that roles are socially constructed, enmeshed with religion, socio-cultural practices and linguistic codes to the extent that it disentangles and identify the discourses as problematic. Gender role socialization, therefore, seems to be an important

factor that limits women participation in leadership positions. The influence by socio-religious discourses, structural constraints such as segregated education system, and gendered discourses of veiling, izzat, and family honour as part of the power dynamics availed to marginalize and depower women leaders (Shah, 2006; Shah & Shah, 2012). Socialization and culture influence perceptions of women's leadership qualification and effectiveness.

Leadership has generally been associated with men and male traits of behaviour. Consequently, the perception of a leader is dominated by male stereotypes (Klenke, 1996). Past theories of leadership have been dominated by one gender, the male, and have taken the instance of the male as the norm. In constructing a feminist critiqued of leadership, Blackmore (1989) has undertaken a critical analysis of the way women have been displaced from or submerged in both organisational and political theory, and how much of this visibility has permeated the everyday common-sense notions of leadership. According to Strachan (2007), women in developing countries face barriers in accessing leadership and their experiences are not the same as that of women in developed countries. This is also true especially when looking at the different contexts that women operate in and the cultures that are embedded in those societies. Hence, the need for women to develop appropriate coping mechanism to access political leadership opportunities, cope and progress in such endeavours.

Based on the work of Folkman and Lazarus (1988) the coping styles of female leaders can be classified as internal and external strategies. The internal strategies mainly involve cognitive aspects of passive appraisal (e.g. avoidance response) and reframing (e.g. redefining the situation) while external coping strategies involves more behavioural repertoires, including seeking social and spiritual support. Folkman and Lazarus also documented that female leaders may employ either one of the following types of coping strategies when faced with challenges in course of performing their duties: adjustment or adaptive coping strategies. Adjustment strategies are usually short-term and are often unable to meet the demands of female leaders' encounter. Folkman and Lazarus (1988) further explained that if female leaders are unable to cope with their challenges by utilizing adjustment strategies, they have to employ adaptive strategies.

Heilman (2012) has identified two main types of coping patterns: adaptive coping methods (e.g. information seeking and problem solving) and palliative coping strategies (e.g. efforts to deny, minimize, or escape the stressful situation). Adaptive coping strategies are directly aimed at coping with the source of challenges, whereas palliative strategies indirectly help reduce a person's awareness of the challenges. Shah (2008) and, Van Vianen and Fischer (2002) explained that palliative strategies include a person's unconscious defence mechanisms, which are spontaneous reactions to challenging situations. Individuals often use these defence mechanisms to help protect themselves from excessive threat, painful awareness, or from becoming overwhelmed by psychological challenges. Defence mechanism may be helpful when used for a short amount of time; however, excessive reliance on them prevents personal growth.

Heilman (2012) states that, adaptive coping strategies are found to be more effective than palliative coping strategies. This is, however, a contested view. Arguments suggest, even though, some strategies have been found to be more effective than others, it is difficult to assess the outcomes of coping because some people strive for different means, and some approaches may be helpful in the short-term, but problematic in the long-run. This means that effective coping strategies are based on many different factors than a simplistic assumption of what works better or best. When coping efficacy beliefs are high, it is hypothesized that, individuals will focus efforts on actively rectifying pressing environmental and emotional demands through the use of active strategies (Best & Khan, 2007).

However, when coping efficacy is low, it is anticipated that, greater energy will be directed toward avoidant coping strategies. In social cognitive theory, the perception that one coping strategy will be efficacious in exercising control over potentially threatening events plays a crucial role in anxiety levels. Research on gender-specific use of natural coping strategies and their perceived effectiveness revealed that females use many coping strategies. The common strategies include: eating, cleaning, shopping, crying, praying, sex and masturbation. More females than males identified the following strategies as helpful: relaxation, shopping, crying and screaming (Best & Khan, 2007). The study also found that ignoring others, ignoring the problem and doing nothing are not useful coping strategies. Previous studies argued that females resort to informal helping system (e.g. spiritual leaders and family) rather than to formal helping systems such as talking to therapists or counsellor. This may be due to the fact that some females may have a natural difficulty with disclosing problems or sharing emotions.

Coping was associated with all four types of emotions; disgust and anger; pleasure and happiness; confidence; and to a lesser extent fear and worry. Folkman and Lazarus (1988) suggest painful problem solving has improved emotional state, which make people often feel better when they directly focus on finding solutions to the problem. They further state that confrontive coping and distancing had a negative effect on emotions because it failed to diminish the distress. The authors further asserted that positive reappraisal improved emotional states in the younger group, but seemed to contribute to a worsened emotional state in the older group. The explanation supports the hypothesis that certain coping strategies are related to varying emotional states and one form of coping may be more effective than another in increasing positive emotions. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1988) the relationship between coping and emotions has a bi-directional effect. The way a person feels in stressful situations will determine his or her choice of coping mechanism. Some forms of coping strategies are associated with positive results, whereas others are associated with increases in negative results.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted qualitative approach. According to Flick (2006), qualitative research is useful in uncovering the understanding of the nature of a person's experience with a phenomenon about which little is known since it allows those who are studied to speak for themselves rather than respond to categories predetermined by the researcher. Hence, the

study was designed not only to provide more meaningful weight to the challenges that confront female leaders but more importantly to examine the coping strategies they adopted in solvimg those challenges. The researchers also adopted the case study design to understand and be conversant with complexities of female political leaders' challenges and their coping strategies. The female political leaders were seen as one social group or entity (Kwabia, 2006), hence the case study design.

The population for this study comprised females who were involved in political party leadership, female assembly members and parliamentary candidates. In all, fourteen (14) female political leaders comprising eight (8) political party executives, four (4) Assembly women and two (2) women who were parliamentary candidates in political parties in the constituency were sampled for the study. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed for the study. Criteria for inclusion of the case were (1) The female leader had to be occupying political leadership position; (2) The female should have occupied that position for a minimum of one year; (3) The leader should be willing to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect naturally-occurring data (Silverman, 2006) to explore participants' views in more depth manner by keeping open mind about the group and cultures being studied to do in-depth analysis (Flick, 2006).

Trustworthiness including transferability, dependability, credibility and confirmability was ensured. The context of the study was clarified, characteristics of the participants, processes by which they were selected and methods of data collection were indicated. Details of the context of the fieldwork, steps taken to demonstrate that the findings emerged from the data and data management reflected social constructivism philosophical position of the study. Member checking was done by returning findings to the participants to determine if they reflected their experiences. Thematic procedure was used to analyse the data collected. The analysis involved processes of listening, transcribing, reading and re-reading, inductive reasoning, reflecting and coding the interview transcripts and drawing out major themes and patterns of experiences to obtain a comprehensive view of the participants. These were supported by excerpts of the data.

Ethical standards were observed to prevent the risk of violating participants' rights; and to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality. Consent were sought from the participants before the interviews were conducted. Confidentiality was observed in the data collection and analysis. Each participant was given assurance on safety of the data and the entire research report in ways that cannot be linked to them. Pseudonyms were used to code the data to ensure anonymity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Biographical Information on Participants

There were fourteen women involved in the study. Biographic data were collected on the ages, educational background and marital status of the participants. Data were also collected on the number of children, number of years in political leadership and their political

positions. There were several generations of women involved in politics in the Sunyani West District. They cut across various age groups. Three were within the age range of 20-29, and another three were within the age range of 30-39. Also, three were within the age range of 40-49, while four were found in the age range of 50-59. Only one participant was 60 years and above. Thus, the participants in the study included the young adults and the middle-aged women. Majority of the participants had first degree. Only two had diploma. The implication is that the women involved in political leadership in the Sunyani West District were highly educated. Therefore, these were people who, arguably, are informed and know the implications of their choices and decisions.

Seven of the participants were single, one preferred not to declare her marital status, while six were married. This implies that both married and unmarried women were involved in politics in the Sunyani West District. The involvement of women in political leadership spanned various lengths of time. There were those who recently entered into politics and those who have been involved for many years. As the results showed, one (7%) of the participants had been involved for more than 10 years, whilst six (43%) were involved between 6-10 years. The remaining seven (50%) were involved for between 1-5 years. Eight of the participants were in party leadership positions. Two were parliamentary candidates, whereas four were District Assembly Members. This suggests that women are getting involved in all aspects of political leadership in the Sunyani West District. It can be argued further that the views of women from various aspects of political leadership have been sought and discussed as part of the data analysed for this study.

Conceptualizing Political Leadership

On the theme of conceptualising political leadership, it was revealed that participants hold different views on political leadership. The common conceptions described by the participants were: political leadership provides opportunity to serve, create avenues for people to manage resources, and to ensure equitable distribution. Some of their views were as follows:

Sarfo: *Political leadership provides opportunity to lead and serve people…You lead people from all walks of life* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 6, 2020]

Akos: *Political leadership involves directing political activities* [Interview with party executive, January 20, 2020]

Ana: *Political leadership ensure resources are effectively utilised for the benefit of all. It is about managing the resources and equitably distribution to ensure that all citizens can benefit* [Interview with party executive, January 10, 2020]

From the views expressed by the participants, it was well noted that political leadership is about serving people. Others see it as directing and managing people. The participants also indicated that political leadership is a social experience that involves leading and serving. These explanations focused on the people. Another group held the view that political

leadership was about resource allocation for development. Political leadership was explained in terms of its purpose, viewing it as a way of ensuring that resources are effectively utilised for the benefit of all. These views of political leadership are not so common in political leadership literature explored. However, their views showed that political leadership is understood differently by political actors. The various conceptions lead to confirmation of the view that leadership is a complex sociological concept (Wakoko & Labao, 2009). Similarly, the understandings of leadership in terms development sees leadership as the principal dynamic force that motivates and coordinates organization in the accomplishment of its objective (Anderson et al., 2015, Heilman 2012; Wakoko & Labao, 2009). Overall, the data fits well into the views of Anderson et al. (2015) and Heilman (2012) that leadership understandings include many things such as interpersonal influence, directed through communication toward goal attainment.

Defining effective political leader
The next sub-theme that was generated from the interview data concerning how females in leadership positions perceive political leaders is who they define as an effective political leader. From the interviews, typical comments included the following:

Peace: *A person who is committed and has consecrated him/herself to serve people irrespective of the challenges at hand* [Interview with party executive, January 5, 2020]

Addo: *Effective political leader manages responsibilities and duties effectively* [Interview with assembly woman, January 17, 2020]

Sarfo: *A person who discharges her responsibilities well.* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 6, 2020]

The comments revealed that they consider leadership effectiveness to be commitment to perform tasks despite challenges. Within this view, the leader is committed to serve people by performing leadership tasks irrespective of challenges. These views on an effective leader depict task-oriented leader because the focus is on managing responsibilities and duties effectively and not how well the people are served. This is a traditional view of leadership used in appraisals where the effectiveness of the leader is assessed based on pre-set tasks and how well they are performed. Within this idea, the effective leader is one who is focused on performing his/her duties. Therefore, dedicated and committed leadership is not about service to the people, it is about performance of responsibilities.

A second set of conceptions that emerged from the interview data were expressed by Esi, Amy and others.

Esi: *An effective leader is one who is dedicated and committed to set goals… Such a leader focuses on achieving their goals.* [Interview with party executive, January 11, 2020]

Amy: *Achieving set goals is the aim. You are not effective if you have not achieved your goals. Effective leader must achieve stated goals of the institution.* [Interview with assembly woman, January 17, 2020]

From these conceptions, an effective leader is someone who is goal-oriented. Perception of leadership as goal-attainment is common within the works of Anderson et al. (2015) and Heilman (2012). Another conception of effective leadership among the females in political leadership were people-oriented. Examples of that conception were the comments from Aba and Eunice.

Aba: *An effective leader is someone who listens to the grassroots. ...Someone who seeks the interest of the community and advances the welfare of the people.* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 21, 2020].

Eunice: *I will say an effective leader is someone who makes positive impact on people's lives as he/she leads. It is about serving the people* [Interview with assembly woman, January 21, 2020].

The views expressed by the female leaders at the grassroots level give credence to the fact that they believe effective leaders are agents of change and they work to bring desirable change in the lives of the people. As Eunice noted, an effective leader is one who makes positive impact on people's lives. Thus, it can be argued that leadership to the females in political leadership in the Sunyani West District can be understood from different perspectives. One perspective is about commitment and dedication to achieving set goals. The second view is about serving the interests of the people and making meaningful impacts on their lives. These views emphasize service to the community. In summary, there are three different conceptions of effective leaders. One view sees effective leaders as task-oriented people, another sees effective leaders as goal-oriented people. A third view sees leaders as people-oriented.

Challenges Associated with Personal Lives of Women in Political Leadership Positions

The first set of challenges identified affected the individual and personal lives of the females in political leadership positions. From the analysis of the interview data, several opinions emerged.

Esi: *Marriage is affected badly. You find it difficult to make time for your marital responsibilities ... your marriage can break up if you are not careful.* [Interview with party executive, January 11, 2020]

Addo: *Quality time for the family is lacking. Sometimes, you have no time to take up family responsibilities. It affects child care ... You are not able to attend to some extended family programmes.* [Interview with assembly woman, January 17, 2020]

These comments relate to family level challenges that females in political leadership face. The effects are in two folds. The first is the effect on marriage of the female leaders. It indicates that leadership positions can break marriages. The second is the effect it has on their larger families. The participants indicated that it has effect on performance of child care responsibilities and participation in extended family programmes. It affects their social life and commitments to siblings and parents.

There are additional effects. These include among others the following concerns expressed by the participants in the study.

Eunice: *People think you are disrespectful woman. They think your husband is suffering or that he is not able to contain you.* [Interview with assembly woman, January 21, 2020].

Eda: *Some men perceive women in political leadership to be disrespectful; some make unfair criticisms and comments that you have to live with* [Interview with party executive, January 6, 2020]

Abena*: Men mostly see women as not fit or capable of executing leadership duties. You always have to live your life proving to them that you are capable in that position all the time.* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 8, 2020]

The comments mainly show that a principal challenge that females in political leadership are concerned about is that they are disrespected. The findings showed that they are undermined as incompetent to lead. As Eda's comment indicates, the disrespect produces unfair comments that female political leaders need to bear. The undermining is so severe according to the women that it affects the ways in which females in political leadership do their work. Some of the participants revealed that they live their lives proving that they are capable. This could be stressful for females in political leadership. Another direction of the disrespect is visible in the comments that people think it is difficult to stay with female leaders because they are domineering. This stereotyping has negative consequences as a powerful barrier, impacting societal culture, specifically, persisting gender stereotyping of politics as exclusively as men's activity (Watuka, 2017). It can affect the family life of the females and undermine their social status within the community. In one breadth it provides the reasons why many females are not very successful in their political ambitions. Given the patriarchal nature of Ghanaian society, it would be difficult for people to rally behind a female when positioned as disrespectful to the husband. Also, the psychological effects of being tagged as disrespectful to the husband and ridiculed as such can be frustrating. This makes some of the females in political leadership positions feel demeaned, undermined, unappreciated and frustrated. The implication is that females need to be openly supported by their husbands. This will take away some of the negative perceptions that position them as people who cannot be controlled by their husbands or are disrespectful in their homes.

From the findings, it was clear that females in political leadership are not assessed in their own rights. They are defined by their marital status and the implications of leadership on their marital homes. Also, they are not assessed based on their competencies. They are simply defined by their biological positioning as women and the marital commitments. Their submission to their husband which should be understood as personal and private issue is invoked as a measure in the public domain. Surprisingly, the females involved in the study did not mention that they have challenges from their homes or from spouses. This is something that contradicts most of the studies that suggest that females are constrained from

occupying leadership positions because husbands are restrictive in allowing them to do so (Laff, 2006; Searby & Tripses, 2006; Oplatka & Hertz-Lararowitz, 2006).

Challenges related to community recognition of females in political leadership
One sub theme on challenges generated focused on how females in political leadership positions are recognized within the communities in which they lived. In that regard, the data brought up various comments suggesting that the women are not effective, capable and are proud. Some of the views about females in political leadership indicate that they are not defined by their competencies. The female leaders shared their experiences and said:

Sarfo: *Being a woman, some people feel I can't be effective, especially when it comes to the issue of dealing with people in a male dominated society* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 6, 2020]

Ana: *They recognise me as a capable leader however, sometimes. they make you feel you are not capable. At times people say things that impute that a male would have done better. ... What is important is that some people in the society also believe in women because of our matrilineal inheritance system.* [Interview with party executive, January 10, 2020]

Akos: *Sharing views with subordinates and taking decisions with them has been a challenge especially when majority in party leadership are males. They think your election was a mistake ... Sometimes ... they openly say a man would have been better. I get frustrated many times when people look at me from the gender perspectives rather than what I am capable of doing and can do* [Interview with party executive, January 20, 2020]

The arguments that can be derived from the comments of the various females in political leadership are many. One thing is however clear. They face challenges at various levels. One level is the perceptions of male chauvinists who think that women are incompetent or not born to lead. These concerns speak to the need to ensure that women can gain needed confidence and contribute to the politics of the country by getting involved effectively in political activities (Allah-Mensah, 2005). The second level is where traditional adherent's views of social normalisations think that women are not supposed to lead. The third level of challenges comes from the political groups to which females in political leadership belong. These challenges are frustrating to the females in political leadership who read it as an undermining of their competencies and as a severe form of gender stereotyping and bias. The literature is replete with such stereotyping and their effects on female participation in politics.

Surprisingly, the women did not locate financing as a challenge confronting them even though lack of finance has partly been blamed for women's disinterest in political leadership and other equally important roles in the public sphere (Allah-Mensah, 2005). One participant was clear that finance was not the major problem.

Weila: *There are many positions that do not require money to occupy. The problem is with the cultural beliefs and mind-set that women cannot lead properly. That's what we have to address.* [Interview with party executive, January 15, 2020]

Given this exposition, it seems that discussions about the challenges facing female participation in political leadership need to be framed differently. Arguably, the issue of economic factor needs to be replaced by socio-cultural factor to address persistent prejudices and stereotyping of women in politics as indecent people. The consequences of such stereotyping are many and unhealthy. Some advocates support the numerous views on the power of education to change the stereotyping of women to particular confines, which has affected their interests and willingness to participate in politics (Allah-Mensah, 2005).

Overall, the argument can be made that the challenges espoused by the females seemed to be more of socio-cultural than legal and economic. The views highlight gender stereotypes and that support previous studies (Obonyo, 2013; Rudman & Phelan, 2010; Abagi, 2000). As much of their experiences are contextualised, the social image projected reflects their cultural environment and this supports the argument on gender stereotypes proposed by Obonyo (2013).

Coping Strategies of Women in Political Leadership Positions

The fourth main theme from the data was on coping strategies adopted by female political leaders in dealing with challenges they face. From the findings, their coping strategies were varied and contingent.

Self-motivation as coping strategies of females in political leadership
Motivation emerged as one of the coping strategies of women political leaders. They indicated that they rely on self-motivation and do not wait for people to encourage them. Intrinsic motivation is not dependent on external factors and it can be deduced that they were guided by their experiences with their constituents. Some of the views expressed include:

Abena: *I cope through motivation. I mean self-motivation. I just tell myself that I have to do my best.* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 8, 2020]

Ana: *I look at my abilities and not my gender* [Interview with party executive, January 10, 2020]

Sarfo: *I learnt from my challenges, gather enough information to deal with them and don't repeat my mistakes* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 6, 2020]

Addo: *The challenges help me to develop good planning habit* [Interview with assembly woman, January 17, 2020]

From the comments, females in political leadership positions have several coping strategies. They relied on self-encouragement and self-motivation. This meant that they depended on their inner strength to carry on. Their inner strength helped them to deal with much of the emotional stress they experienced. Another strategy was good planning. They tried to be organised and ensured that they were able to work towards achieving goals. Another strategy they also employed was to learn from previous mistakes and improve upon. They avoided repeating previous mistakes. According to the women, they turned their challenges into opportunities for a transformative agenda. Some of the participants tried to overwork and ignore the challenges. This was to help avoid being distracted. This might be the reason some claimed that the challenges produce stress. They get themselves overworked as a coping strategy. In a nutshell, most women in political leadership positions adopted lifestyle that works better or best in their current circumstances by seeking information and solving problems. This fits into Heilman (2012) assertions that, adaptive coping strategies are found to be more effective than palliative coping strategies. This is, however, a contested view. This means that effective coping strategies are based on many different factors than a simplistic assumption of what works better or best. According to Best and Khan (2007) when coping efficacy beliefs are high, it is hypothesized that, individuals will focus efforts on actively rectifying pressing environmental and emotional demands through the use of active strategies.

Dealing with male chauvinist
Another sub-theme that emerged on how females in political leadership positions deal with challenges was the ways in which they handle situations related to male chauvinists. There were several ways they achieved this. Some participants revealed that they understand the males from patriarchal perspective and establish cordial relationship with them, listen to their views and work very hard to impress them. These strategies may demand conscious efforts but to them they were able to surmount their challenges through that means. These are some of the views expressed by the participants.

Esi: *When the males try to undermine my work, I try to understand them from the male perspective. I Listen to their views on certain issues. I am able to cope with my challenges through hard-work* [Interview with party executive, January 11, 2020]

Addo: *It is difficult dealing with the male counterparts but having a cordial relationship with them makes my work easy* [Interview with assembly woman, January 17, 2020]

Eunice: *I try to deal with males who create problems by proving them wrong. I give them the necessary respect and perform my duties* [Interview with assembly woman, January 21, 2020].

The simplest way in which the challenges were dealt with was to understand them within male chauvinism perspectives. Some female leaders in political leadership positions try to understand the perspectives of male chauvinists and to limit the cause of their challenges to that frame of mind. That idea seems very helpful because it prevents personal attacks but

then the society is seen as accountable for such social structure. It is believed that social change is a process that takes time. A related strategy was to give them the attention they deserve but move on to focus on tasks to be performed. Another strand of coping strategies was to give male chauvinists a listening ear. In other words, females in political leadership positions took time to be consultative. This is a good attribute that helps to understand different opinion on issues to make the best judgement in the interests of community and national development.

Dealing with societal misconceptions
How females in political leadership deal with social misconceptions was another sub-theme that emerged. These misconceptions are mainly about the social perception of females as not people who should lead. As noted earlier, this emerged as the main challenge females in political leadership positions face.

Ada: *When people make negative stereotypic comments about female leaders, I just ask them to concentrate more on my potentials* [Interview with political party executive, January 25, 2020].

Abena: *Society has several stereotypes about female in political leadership. I just concentrate on doing things to prove them wrong. I just focus on my goals.* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 8, 2020]

Sarfo: *I don't worry about misconceptions. I just act professionally when it comes to execution of duties. That's the antidote. That's the way to go* [Interview with parliamentary candidate, January 6, 2020]

From the comments, the societal misconceptions make some women try to do what they described as the 'impossible'. This implies that they try to do things to prove a point that they are able to perform leadership responsibilities. Some of the participants have to prove society wrong and this seemed problematic because it puts undue pressure on them. Other participants comfort themselves that they are capable leaders. Most of the women noted that they exhibit professionality in execution of tasks, whilst few indicated that they ignore all societal misconceptions and just focus on tasks. Thus, while some engage, others ignore.

It is clear that to be successful in political leadership positions, females need to focus on their output and achievements as political leaders. In that context, the goal of women active participation in political leadership will be achieved if women show that they are capable of contributing meaningfully to society as leaders. This will erase the erroneous misconceptions about women within the society. Conscious of social misconceptions, females in political leadership positions should be ready to consider the stigmatization, insult and other related offences as occupational hazards.

Although positive and encouraging, it seems females in political leadership positions do not envisage significant social changes that will produce positive attitudes towards female leadership in the nearest future. When interpreted within liberal feminist theory, the findings reveal the nature of inequality, gender politics, power relations and sexuality and how women empowerment can propel them from lower level of society to the top (Gheaus &

Robeyns, 2011). As the findings showed, women political leaders did not seem to have the degree of freedom to do politics the way men would have done it because of social misconceptions about female political leadership (Schwartzman, 2010). As critical liberal feminist thought, there are some coercive interference (Young, 2006) on the political leadership of females to the extent that some of them suggested their challenges had effects on their families, friends and the community. Also, it seems that females in political leadership positions have limited personal autonomy (Held, 1987) because they are always trying to prove people wrong by overworking themselves. Thus, it may be argued that social arrangements often fail to respect women's autonomy and to support them to flourish as distributive justice requires. Women's needs and interests are inadequately addressed in the democratic process in terms of ways that should promote positive social attitudes towards female leadership (Stafford, 2004). It seems that Ghanaian society operates a patriarchal system rooted in inherited traditions and institutions, and that needs to be identified and remedied. As liberal feminists argue, it is the appropriate role of the state to develop systems that will promote women's autonomy so that they can be respected as capable of serving in political leadership positions (Gerson, 2004).

Overall, it can be argued that the four autonomy enabling conditions that are required to support females' political leadership are essentially absent in the Sunyani West District. As Liberal feminists indicate the conditions include a) being free of violence and the threat of violence that violates women's dignity (Cudd, 2006) free of the limits set by patriarchal paternalistic and moralistic laws that restrict women's options on the grounds that such limits are in women's having access to options as entitlements (Alstott 2004). There are several elements in the findings that support this argument.

As the findings suggest, female political leaders constantly navigate through misconceptions put in place as a result of societal expectations and arrangements. These include social role expectations of females as housewives which works in such a way that even if the enabling conditions such as husband allowing the wife to take up political leadership positions are in place, women become disadvantaged because of what other social interlocutors say (Smith, 1998). Society expects female subordination which is deeply rooted in customary and legal practice in the Sunyani West District. As Tong (1998) would argue, these conditions have not yet been challenged by any legal process. Thus, if conditions for women are to be improved, there is need for significant disruptions in Ghanaian cultural repertoire, thinking and theorisation of womanhood at all levels. Otherwise, it seems that for now creating and supporting acts of legislation that remove the barriers that prevent women from having equal opportunities with men in society have not had any significant effect at the Sunyani West District (Thurschwell, 2008). Thus, realisation of the hope that individuals should be free to pursue their own interests irrespective of their gender; and equal consideration without discrimination on the basis of sex, as enshrined in Article 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is limited for females in the Sunyani West District.

As liberal feminists (Smith, 1998) argued, in terms of political autonomy, there is the need for the state to ensure that the basic structure of society distributes the benefits and burdens of social cooperation fairly, that is, in a manner that women as well as men could endorse (Alstott, 2004). Otherwise, the current gender system's basic social structure distributes

benefits and burdens unfairly against females in political leadership (Barclay, 2013; Gheaus & Robeyns, 2011). Whereas females are legally not limited from participating in political leadership positions; and although they have space in public deliberation and electoral politics, the social system at the grassroot cultural level has not evolved sufficiently to the level where women can be considered as co-authors of the conditions under which their participation in political leadership positions can be understood and discussed (Barclays, 2013). Principles of guaranteed equal representation of both sexes in parliament has not been espoused and females' political leadership lack supporting efficacy mechanisms (Peters, 2006). The argument is that the liberal feminists' belief that both sexes should have equal rights under the law may have been realised. However, the conditions that need to exist to promote equality is absent in the social and cultural ethos. As such, there is the need for significant social re-organisation that seek to expand the rights and opportunities of women to the same level enjoyed by their male counterparts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Females in political leadership positions perceive leadership in three different ways as task-oriented, goal-oriented and people-oriented. Whatever way they perceived political leadership, they faced several challenges in their leadership roles. The challenges take various forms and come from various sources. Females in political leadership positions face challenges related to family and community. Further, the main challenge facing females in political leadership positions is misconceptions about their capabilities and participation in political leadership positions.

The effects of the challenges confronting females in political include emotional breakdown of the females in political leadership to the extent that some consider quitting. Further, their family members and supporters experience several emotional challenges emanating from insults and stigmatisation. The main effect of the challenges faced by females in political leadership positions is retardation in community development.

Despite their challenges, females in political leadership positions should not react negatively to the challenges they face. In order to be successful in political leadership positions, females need to focus on their output and achievements to show their capabilities in contributing meaningfully to society. In order to challenge misconceptions, females in political leadership positions should develop resilience towards stigmatization, insult and other related abuses. Females in political leadership positions do not envisage significant social changes that will produce positive attitudes towards female leadership in the nearest future.

It is therefore recommended that, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection needs to provide much psychological support to females in political leadership positions. Given the challenges they face, there is the potential for them to breakdown psychologically and emotionally.

In terms of national development planning, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection should collaborate with women networks of international and national level non-

governmental organisations to develop systems for social behavioural change communication. This should be aimed at developing a long-term national campaign to change negative misconception about female participation in political leadership. This is important to encourage females who dare to contribute to political and public life. This would come in as an urgent need to discourage the unfair, unjust and unequal treatment sometimes meted out to women when they aspire to occupy political leadership positions. Women leaders should be encouraged to face their challenges squarely in order to take their rightful place in political leadership arena.

National affirmative action plan should be adopted and signed by all registered political parties in Ghana to affirm their commitment to its implementation. District assemblies in Ghana should organise programmes to conscientize people on capabilities of women and the need for women to get safe space in the political arena. The assemblies should also empower women with leadership skills to whip up their interest in politics at all levels. There is an urgent need for opinion leaders such as chiefs, queen mothers, district chief executives and the public in general to discourage the unfair, unjust and unequal treatment sometimes meted out to women when they aspire to occupy political leadership positions.

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