

Strengthening Affective Commitment through Social Support: The Experience of Women Leaders in a Diaspora Organization

Received 25 March 2026

Revised 04 June 2026

Accepted 10 July 2026

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Abstract

Objective – This study examines the affective commitment of women leaders in Fatayat NU Malaysia by exploring its meaning, identifying the sources and forms of social support they receive, and explaining how such support shapes and sustains commitment in a volunteer-based socio-religious organization in a diaspora context.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative case study design was employed within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with six women leaders who had served or were serving as chair or vice chair of Fatayat NU Malaysia during the 2016–2025 leadership periods. Observation and organizational documents complemented the interviews, and the data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Findings – Affective commitment among women leaders extends beyond emotional attachment to include spiritual meaning, self-development, and a sustainability-oriented commitment. Fatayat is perceived as a second home, a learning space, and a field of khidmah (service). Social support is multi-layered, encompassing family, internal organizational administrators, and friends. This support reduces stress and role conflict, enhances feelings of competence, security, and comfort, and strengthens emotional attachment, belonging, and organizational meaning.

Research limitations/implications – The study extends the literature by showing that affective commitment in women-led volunteer-based socio-religious organizations is emotional, spiritual, and reflective, while social support operates as a multi-layered relational ecosystem.

Practical implications – Organizations need more responsive support systems through stronger family involvement, teamwork, delegation, emotional support spaces, and cadre development strategies for diaspora women leaders.

Originality/value – The study contributes by focusing on women leaders in a diaspora-based socio-religious volunteer organization and by explaining the relational mechanisms linking multi-layered social support and affective commitment.



Jurnal Manajemen dan Inovasi

©ManovaPublishing

DOI
<https://doi.org/10.15642/manova.v9i2.2496>

INTRODUCTION

Women-led social organizations play a strategic role in community empowerment, advocacy for the rights of women and children, and the strengthening of value-based communities. In many settings, women's organizations function not only as platforms for social participation, but also as spaces for learning, solidarity, and self-transformation among their members. At the grassroots level, women's organizations have been shown to contribute to greater psychological empowerment and civic participation, making them an important channel for social change (Hibbs, 2022). In this context, women's leadership is not always enacted as a formal profession supported by material rewards; rather, it often takes the form of service grounded in values, meaning, and social relationships. The sustainability of such organizations is therefore strongly shaped by the quality of the relational experiences perceived by their leaders (Paula, Ilaria, & Michael, 2020).

Developments in organizational behaviour and leadership research have shown growing interest in women's leadership experiences, particularly with regard to emotion, relational dynamics, empathy, and the complexity of the roles they inhabit. Recent scholarship emphasizes that women's leadership cannot be understood solely in terms of technical competence or formal position; it must also be seen as a process of negotiating social expectations, interpersonal relationships, and intersecting role demands (Singh, Das, & Jha, 2023a). Nevertheless, research on women's leadership remains dominated by studies of formal organizations. As a result, volunteer-based social organizations and faith-based communities have received comparatively less attention, especially in relation to leadership sustainability and the psychological mechanisms that sustain it. Yet in such organizations, women's leadership often unfolds under conditions of limited resources, weak formal incentives, and ongoing demands to preserve solidarity and collective meaning (Buss, Andler, & Tiberius, 2025).

In volunteer-based social organizations, the continuity of leaders' involvement is not determined by employment contracts, financial incentives, or formal control mechanisms, but rather by the quality of their attachment to the organization. In this regard, affective commitment becomes a crucial foundation, as it reflects emotional attachment, a sense of belonging, value identification, and the desire to remain involved in the organization. A number of studies indicate that in non-profit and volunteer organizations, positive organizational experiences, the fulfilment of participation motives, and satisfaction in carrying out one's role are closely associated with stronger affective commitment and intentions to remain (Neely, Lengnick-Hall, & Evans, 2022). Other findings show that value congruence between the individual and the organization, supportive relational experiences, and the quality of leadership as perceived by members can strengthen affective commitment and sustain volunteers' contributions (Ngh, Abdullah, Mohd Suki, & Kasim, 2023; Wymer & Najev Čačija, 2025). In volunteer organizations, therefore, affective commitment is not merely a favourable attitude toward the organization, but a psychological mechanism that sustains persistence, attachment, and leadership continuity.

However, affective commitment does not emerge in a vacuum. For women leaders, especially in social organizations, engagement to the organization develops in multiple roles that must be managed simultaneously as wives, mothers, workers, and organizational actors. This situation makes them vulnerable to role conflict, emotional exhaustion, and psychological strain that can weaken the sustainability of their involvement. In such contexts, social support becomes particularly important. Social support can function as a stress buffer, a source of security, a means of sharing burdens, and a space for emotional recovery that enables women to continue carrying leadership responsibilities (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2023). Support from family, the organization, and broader social networks also helps women leaders interpret role demands as more manageable, thereby strengthening their sense of competence, appreciation, and comfort in organizational life (Pan, Aisihaer, Li, Jiao, & Ren, 2022). In other words, social support is relevant not only to individual psychological well-being, but also potentially serves as a relational condition that sustains engagement to the organization.

Although the connection between social support and affective commitment has been discussed in prior studies, most of this work has developed within formal work settings or has primarily positioned

social support as a protective factor against stress and mental health problems (Acoba, 2024a; Benevene, Buonomo, & West, 2020). Research that explicitly links the two within the context of women's leadership in volunteer-based socio-religious organizations, particularly within diaspora communities, remains extremely limited. This gap is important because diaspora settings present distinctive conditions: women simultaneously navigate domestic and public roles, live far from their extended families, move within fluid social networks, and rely on organizations as spaces of solidarity, identity, and service. This context is clearly reflected in Fatayat NU Malaysia, a women's socio-religious organization composed.

From this discussion, it becomes clear that the relationship between social support and affective commitment among women leaders in socio-religious organizations cannot be adequately explained in linear terms. Affective commitment does not simply exist as a fixed individual disposition from the outset; rather, it develops through the interaction of value orientation, organizational experience, and the social support received while exercising leadership. Accordingly, it is important to examine how social support works to shape, strengthen, and sustain the affective commitment of women leaders in volunteer-based socio-religious organizations in diaspora contexts. On this basis, the present study aims to: (1) analyse the meaning of affective commitment as experienced by women leaders in Fatayat NU Malaysia; (2) identify the sources and forms of social support received by women leaders from family, the organization, and their wider social networks; and (3) explain the mechanisms through which social support shapes, strengthens, and sustains the affective commitment of women leaders in volunteer-based socio-religious organizations in diaspora settings.

The novelty of this study lies in three respects. First, it focuses on women leaders in a volunteer-based socio-religious organization in a diaspora context, namely Fatayat NU Malaysia, that remains underexplored. Second, it goes beyond describing the sources and forms of social support and affective commitment by elucidating the relational mechanisms linking both of them. Third, it demonstrates that the affective commitment of women leaders in volunteer organizations is not only emotional-organizational, but also encompasses spiritual and reflective dimensions that emerge through multi-layered social support.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH MODEL

Social Support

Social support is defined as a social resource derived from relationships and the social environment, whether perceived as available or actually provided, that helps individuals cope with stress, role demands, and difficult situations. In the literature, social support is not defined merely as the physical presence of others, but as the subjective experience of feeling cared for, helped, appreciated, and not alone when facing challenges. Social support therefore plays an important role in maintaining psychological well-being, reducing stress, and enhancing individuals' capacity to endure demanding circumstances (Merino-Soto et al., 2023).

From a functional perspective, social support may take several forms. First, emotional and informational support involves empathy, concern, acceptance, and advice that help individuals understand situations and reduce anxiety. Second, instrumental support refers to tangible assistance such as labour, facilities, help with tasks, or financial aid that lightens role burdens. Third, affectionate support involves warmth, affection, and relational closeness that reinforce feelings of security. Fourth, positive social interaction refers to opportunities to engage in enjoyable, recreational, or emotionally restorative togetherness. This classification is important because it shows that social support is not a single, uniform construct; rather, it operates through multiple forms that may complement one another in everyday life (Cai, Huang, & Yuan, 2021; Khodabakhsh & Tan, 2021; Merino-Soto et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Fernández, Izar-De-la-fuente, Escalante, & Azpiazu, 2021).

In addition to its forms, social support can also be understood in terms of its sources. The literature on perceived social support emphasizes that support generally comes from three main sources: family, friends, and significant others. For women who perform multiple roles simultaneously, these three sources are especially relevant because each contributes in a distinct way. Family often becomes a

source of legitimacy, protection, and practical assistance; friends provide space for sharing experiences, emotional reinforcement, and a sense of togetherness; while significant others may serve as important figures offering security, advice, or meaningful recognition. Social support, therefore, should be understood as a relational network that sustains individuals psychologically, emotionally, and practically (Koğar & Yılmaz Koğar, 2024).

In the context of women's leadership, particularly in social organizations, social support becomes even more important because women frequently perform public roles while still bearing domestic expectations. This condition makes them vulnerable to role conflict, emotional exhaustion, and layered pressures. When women leaders have a space to share their experiences, receive guidance, obtain tangible assistance, and gain recognition from those around them, such pressures are more likely to be perceived as manageable. Social support thus functions not only as protection against stress, but also as a source of psychological energy that enables women to sustain leadership roles over time. Within this framework, social support can be understood as a relational resource that helps individuals maintain emotional stability, resilience, and continuity of involvement in the organization (Acoba, 2024a).

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is one of the core components of the three-component model of organizational commitment, alongside continuance commitment and normative commitment. Unlike these other two forms, affective commitment refers to an individual's emotional engagement to the organization, identification with organizational values, and active involvement in organizational life. Individuals with high affective commitment remain in an organization not because they feel compelled to do so or obligated to stay, but because they genuinely want to remain part of it. In this sense, affective commitment represents the deepest quality of the psychological bond between the individual and the organization (Agegnehu, Abdissa, & Alemayehu, 2022).

Empirically, affective commitment is associated with a range of positive organizational outcomes. Numerous studies show that affective commitment is linked to lower turnover intention, higher engagement, and the emergence of extra-role behaviours that support organizational continuity. In many studies, affective commitment is also understood as a psychological mechanism explaining why positive organizational experiences can be translated into loyalty, a sense of belonging, and a willingness to contribute beyond formal role requirements (Chernyak-Hai, Bareket-Bojmel, & Margalit, 2024; Moreira, Tomás, & Antunes, 2024). Affective commitment, therefore, is not merely a passive attitude toward the organization, but a form of engagement that motivates individuals to continue showing up, participating, and sustaining the organization.

Conceptually, affective commitment is often described through several indicators, such as loyalty to the organization, pride in being part of the organization, a sense of belonging, emotional engagement, and comfort in being within the organization (Agegnehu et al., 2022). These indicators suggest that affective commitment involves not only cognition, but also emotional experience and the subjective meaning individuals attach to organizational membership. A person with high affective commitment not only recognizes the organization's importance, but also experiences it as part of the self. Therefore, Affective commitment is highly relevant for explaining the sustainability of involvement in organizations grounded in relationships, values, and service.

In volunteer organizations, affective commitment may be understood as the psychological foundation that sustains persistence, a sense of belonging, and the continuity of individual contributions in organizational resource constraints. However, affective commitment should not be viewed as an individual disposition that automatically and stably appears from the beginning. In organizational contexts that rely heavily on social relationships, affective commitment is better understood as something that grows through organizational experience. In other words, affective commitment is the outcome of experiential processes unfolding within a particular social context. This perspective is important for explaining why two individuals who equally hold positive value orientations toward an organization may nevertheless express different levels of affective commitment.

Women's Leadership in Social Organizations

Women's leadership in social organizations unfolds within a distinctive sociocultural context. In addition to meeting organizational demands, women often have to navigate gendered expectations, domestic responsibilities, and evaluative standards that are not always neutral. Recent scholarship suggests that women's leadership experiences cannot be understood solely in terms of technical competence; rather, they must also be seen as a process of negotiating the social norms, relationships, and emotional dynamics that surround leadership roles. Accordingly, discussions of women's leadership need to attend to the broader life context in which women leaders operate, rather than focusing only on their individual attributes (Paustian-Underdahl, Smith Sockbeson, Hall, & Halliday, 2024).

In line with developments in leadership theory, attention to the relational and emotional dimensions of women's leadership has grown stronger. Numerous studies have associated women's leadership with empathy, relationship-building, emotion management, member empowerment, and collaborative orientation. This does not mean that all women lead in the same way; rather, it indicates that women's leadership experiences are often shaped by the need to maintain relationships, build trust, and manage social dynamics with sensitivity. In social organizations, these dimensions become especially important because leadership effectiveness depends not only on formal authority, but also on the ability to cultivate togetherness, solidarity, and collective meaning (Singh, Das, & Jha, 2023b). In volunteer-based socio-religious organizations, involvement is driven not only by social objectives, but also by values, moral identity, and even spiritual dimensions. For women leaders, the organization may become a space of service, learning, togetherness, and self-formation. The sustainability of their leadership, therefore, cannot be explained solely through formal management approaches; it must also be understood through the relational experiences and meanings they feel while being in the organization. This perspective opens view for understanding social support not as a merely external factor, but as part of the conditions that enable women's leadership to be enacted and sustained (Pulido-Martos, Gartzia, Augusto-Landa, & Lopez-Zafra, 2023).

Conceptual Synthesis

Based on the discussion above, the relationship among social support, affective commitment, and women's leadership in social organizations can be understood in a more integrated way. Social support functions not only as a stress buffer or a form of interpersonal assistance that is momentary in nature, but also as a relational resource that enables women leaders to manage role pressures, feel secure, and remain capable of carrying out leadership responsibilities. At the same time, affective commitment is not merely an individual psychological state that exists from the beginning; rather, it develops through relational experiences that make individuals feel accepted, appreciated, supported, and empowered.

In volunteer-based socio-religious organizations, especially those led by women, emotional engagement to the organization is better understood as a process shaped by value congruence, meaningful organizational experiences, and the quality of support received from family, the organization, and wider social networks. Support from one's immediate environment gives women leaders space to manage domestic and public role conflict, preserve psychological energy, and build a sense of competence and belonging toward the organization. Therefore, in this context social support can be understood as a relational condition that enables affective commitment to develop. This formulation is important because it positions affective commitment not as something that emerges instantly, but as a form of attachment that grows through the interaction of values, leadership experience, and the social relations that sustain it.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design focused on Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Malaysia, a socio-religious organization, within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm.

A case study design was chosen because the research concentrated on one specific context: Fatayat NU Malaysia as a women's socio-religious organization within a diaspora community. This setting was considered distinctive because it is volunteer-based, led by women who navigate both domestic and public roles, and grounded in religious values and the spirit of *khidmah* (service).

The participants consisted of six women leaders who were currently serving or had previously served in the core leadership structure as chair or vice chair of Fatayat NU Malaysia across the 2016–2025 leadership periods. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: (1) they had held or were holding a core leadership position within the organization, and (2) they had served for at least one leadership term, or approximately three years. These criteria ensured that participants had sufficient experience to reflect on the dynamics of social support, role-related challenges, and attachment to the organization.

The primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with all six participants. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was conducted online via Zoom and Google Meeting. This technique enabled the researcher to explore participants' experiences, meanings, and reflections in depth while remaining aligned with the focus of the study. The interviews explored the meaning of affective commitment, the forms and sources of social support, and the role of social support in helping participants manage multiple roles and sustain their involvement in the organization. In addition to the interviews, the study also used observation of activities and organizational documents as supplementary data sources to enrich the analytical context.

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This approach was selected because it is well suited to identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across participants' experiences while also elucidating the relational mechanisms linking social support and affective commitment. The analysis followed six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing. During this process, the researcher also kept reflective memos to maintain interpretive consistency and awareness of the researcher's positionality in theme development.

The researcher served as the primary instrument in both data collection and analysis. Reflexivity was therefore an integral part of the research process. To ensure trustworthiness, source triangulation was employed through comparison of interview, observational, and documentary data. The quality of the analysis was further strengthened through repeated reading of the data, the preparation of analytic memos, and the revisiting of emerging themes. All participants took part voluntarily after receiving an explanation of the study's purpose and the use of the data. To protect confidentiality, participants' names were anonymized using codes N1 to N6. The data were used solely for academic purposes and were analysed with careful respect for the context of participants' experiences.

RESULTS

This study was conducted in Fatayat NU Malaysia, a women's socio-religious organization composed of diaspora women, most of whom were wives of migrant workers, students, or workers themselves. The six main participants were chair and vice chair of Fatayat NU Malaysia from three periods: 2016–2019, 2019–2022, and 2022–2025. Through reflexive thematic analysis, four major themes were identified and grouped into three focal areas of the study: the meaning of affective commitment, the forms and sources of social support, and the mechanisms through which social support strengthens the affective commitment of women leaders.

The Meaning of Affective Commitment among Women Leaders

The findings show that affective commitment among women leaders in Fatayat NU Malaysia is understood not only as emotional engagement to the organization, but also as a spiritual experience, a process of self-formation, and a form of commitment oriented toward sustainability. Fatayat was perceived as a second home, an emotional family, a space for learning, and a field of *khidmah*. For participants, the organization was not simply a place for carrying out programs, but a space that offered acceptance, comfort, and meaning.

At the emotional level, participants described Fatayat as a place that made them feel “at home,” “comfortable,” and “not alone” while living abroad. The organization became a social space that provided warmth and a sense of belonging. In terms of self-development, involvement in Fatayat was understood as a place to learn leadership, manage emotions, understand other people’s characters, cultivate patience, and negotiate priorities among family, work, and organizational responsibilities. Spiritually, Fatayat was understood as a space of worship, khidmah, and the continuation of Nahdlatul Ulama values in the diaspora.

In addition, the affective commitment of these women leaders was evident in their loyalty to the organization, even after they no longer held formal leadership positions. Several participants remained actively supportive of organizational activities, continued attending certain events, or still felt a strong emotional bond with Fatayat even after they no longer held formal leadership positions. This commitment was also reflected in their concern for regeneration, leadership succession, and resistance to possessive forms of leadership. Thus, affective commitment in this context carried emotional, spiritual, and reflective characteristics.

Source and Forms of Social Support for Woman Leaders

The findings indicate that the social support sustaining women’s leadership in Fatayat NU Malaysia was multi-layered and derived from several main domains: the family, the organization’s internal administrators, and friends or external networks. Each source provided different forms of support, but these forms were mutually reinforcing.

The family, especially husbands and parents, emerged as a highly important source of support. Husbands were positioned as key actors in both the initial decision to accept leadership responsibilities and in sustaining women’s continued involvement in the organization. For all participants, their husbands’ permission and blessing were major considerations before accepting the position of chair or vice chair. Beyond approval, husbands provided emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support. This support took the form of being someone to confide in, offering advice, helping with domestic work, caring for children, providing transportation, supporting activity-related facilities, and occasionally contributing financially. Parents, meanwhile, provided support mainly in the form of prayers, blessing, and understanding of the participants’ involvement in the organization.

The organization’s internal administrators also constituted a very strong source of support. Participants viewed these administrators not merely as organizational coworkers, but as “friends,” and an “organizational family.” Their support was manifested through mutual cooperation, task sharing, funding, substituting for one another’s roles, providing input in deliberative meetings, and cultivating trust in carrying out programs. Participants felt that they were not carrying the organizational burden alone because there was always a team willing to help and be present when needed. This internal support combined emotional, instrumental, and informational dimensions.

Beyond family and internal administrators, friends from external organization also emerged as important sources of support. External friends were perceived as a space for “healing,” sharing, and emotional refreshment. Recreational activities such as dining together, going out, or simply spending time with friends helped participants reduce fatigue resulting from domestic routines and organizational pressures. In some cases, friends also provided instrumental support in the form of sponsorship or assistance for activities. These findings suggest that women leaders’ social support extended beyond the family and the organization to broader social networks.

Social Support Mechanism in Strengthening Affective Commitment

The findings show that social support does not remain merely a standalone form of assistance, but works through a recurring experiential mechanism. This mechanism can be summarized as follows: social support → reduced stress and role conflict → increased sense of competence, security, and comfort → stronger emotional engagement, sense of belonging, and meaning → the development of strong and sustainability-oriented affective commitment.

Social Support as Buffer against Multiple Roles and Stress

The women leaders of Fatayat NU Malaysia simultaneously fulfilled multiple roles as wives, mothers, workers, and leaders of a volunteer organization. These role demands often overlapped and had the potential to create tension. Family support helped reduce domestic burdens and provided moral legitimacy. Support from internal administrators helped alleviate organizational burdens through task distribution, delegation, and flexibility in program implementation. Support from friends offered space for emotional recovery. In this way, social support functioned as a buffer against the pressures associated with multiple roles demands.

From Feeling Supported to Feeling Capable and Comfortable

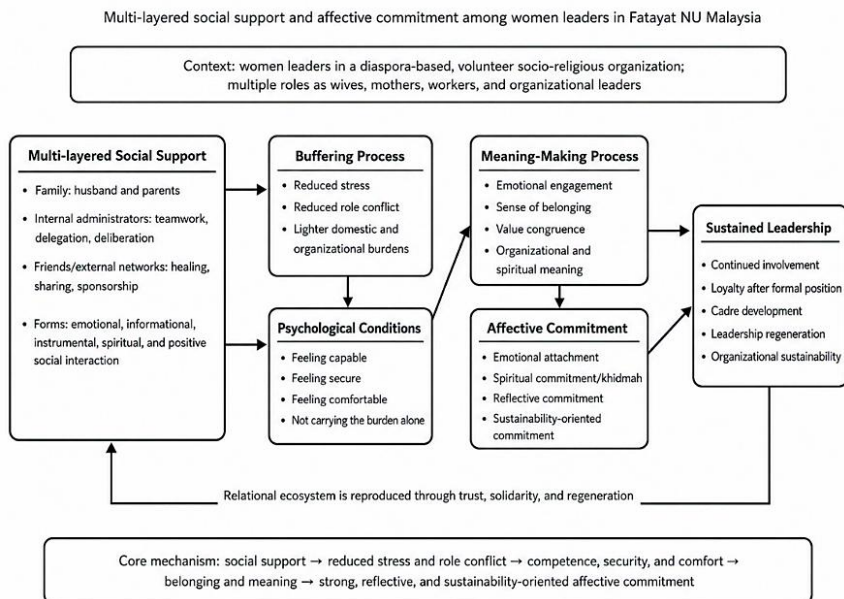
When these leaders felt supported, they also felt more capable of carrying out their organizational responsibilities, more secure because the responsibility was not borne alone, and more emotionally comfortable within the organization. These feelings of capability, security, and comfort became important psychological conditions for sustaining their involvement. Social support did not simply make the work easier; it also fostered confidence that leadership responsibilities could realistically be managed under conditions of constraint.

Strengthening Emotional Engagement, Sense of Belonging, and Meaning

Experiences of feeling supported, appreciated, and not alone contributed to the strengthening of emotional engagement to Fatayat. Participants saw the organization as a meaningful place where they could contribute, grow, and live out the values they believed in. In this context, a sense of belonging and a sense of needing the organization developed simultaneously. The organization was no longer understood merely as a site of activity, but as a space that generated personal and spiritual meaning.

Reflective and Sustainability-Oriented Affective Commitment

The final finding shows that the women leaders' affective commitment was not possessive in nature. They demonstrated a strong concern for organizational sustainability, cadre development, and leadership regeneration. Participants did not understand the organization as a personal possession, but as a collective trust that had to be safeguarded and passed on. Accordingly, the affective commitment identified in this study may be understood as a form of commitment that is not only strong, but also reflective and oriented toward sustainability.



Source: Research findings processed by the researchers (2026)

Figure 1. RESEARCH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED FROM THE STUDY FINDINGS

DISCUSSION

Women Leaders' Affective Commitments are Emotional, Spiritual, and Reflective

The findings of this study show that the affective commitment of women leaders in Fatayat NU Malaysia is not limited to emotional engagement and identification with the organization, but also includes spiritual and reflective dimensions. This extends conventional understandings of affective commitment, which typically emphasize a sense of belonging, emotional engagement, and the desire to remain in the organization. In the context of Fatayat, the women leaders indeed displayed these classic components of affective commitment, but they also understood the organization as a space of worship, *khidmah*, and self-formation.

Theoretically, these findings align with research showing that affective commitment is strengthened when individuals experience value congruence with the organization and perceive their involvement as meaningful. The study by Ficapal-Cusí, Enache-Zegheru, and Torrent-Sellens suggests that perceived organizational support and affective commitment can be linked to prosocial behaviour when individuals attach positive meaning to the organization (Mondo et al., 2022). These findings are also consistent with the volunteerism literature emphasizing the importance of meaningful organizational experiences for sustaining volunteer involvement. Some studies of non-profit organizations, showed that positive leadership experiences are associated with volunteer satisfaction and commitment (Benevene et al., 2020; Tsai, Newstead, Lewis, & Chuah, 2024; Wymer & Najev Čačija, 2025).

A particularly noteworthy aspect of this study is the emergence of a reflective dimension: these leaders loved the organization but did not position it as a personal possession. This is an important contribution, as it shows that in women's socio-religious organizations, affective commitment does not stop at loyalty, but develops into an orientation toward safeguarding the collective trust and long-term continuity of the organization.

Social Support as a Multi-layered Relational Ecosystem

The discussion further underscores that social support for women leaders in Fatayat NU Malaysia was not merely incidental assistance, but a multi-layered relational ecosystem involving the family, organizational administrators, and friends. This finding is important because it shows that women's leadership in volunteer organizations cannot be understood individualistically. Leadership is enacted within relational networks that provide legitimacy, practical help, emotional reinforcement, and space for psychological recovery.

From the perspective of social support theory, these results fit the argument that social support shapes how individuals appraise pressures and determine whether a situation is manageable. Some recent studies showed that social support is related to mental health through the mediation of perceived stress, especially when support from family and significant others reduces experienced stress (Acoba, 2024b; An, Zhu, Shi, & An, 2024; Park & Lee, 2022). A similar pattern was found in this study: family support, particularly from husbands and parents, provided the foundational basis for involvement; support from internal administrators became a source of collective effort; while friends provided "healing" spaces that expanded the support network. These findings also enrich the literature because many organizational studies still focus narrowly on perceived organizational support, whereas in women's volunteer organizations, meaningful support often comes from outside the formal organization itself.

Social Support Mechanism in Strengthening Affective Commitment

The findings reveal a fairly consistent pathway: social support helps leaders manage role conflict and pressures, which then nurtures a sense of competence, security, and comfort, ultimately strengthening emotional engagement, a sense of belonging, and spiritual meaning toward the organization.

These findings are in line with Pan et al. who showed that work-family conflict among professional women is negatively associated with organizational citizenship behaviour, while family support weakens this negative effect (Pan et al., 2022). This resonates with the present study, in which

husbands' approval, domestic assistance, and parents' understanding emerged as important preconditions for women to continue carrying organizational responsibilities. More broadly, Luo demonstrated that perceived social support and self-efficacy mediate the relationship between work-family conflict and mental health (Luo, 2025). This mechanism helps explain why, in the context of Fatayat, social support not only made leaders "feel helped," but also preserved the psychological conditions that allowed affective commitment to endure.

These findings are also consistent with the study by Mondo et al. which found that perceived social support and self-efficacy are related to turnover intention through the mediation of interpersonal conflict and affective commitment (Mondo et al., 2022; Pratama, Sawitri, & Purwati, 2025). In other words, social support does not exert only a direct effect, but also works through particular psychological pathways. In the context of Fatayat, this pathway was evident in the reduction of role burdens, the emergence of a sense of competence, and the strengthening of meaningful organizational experience.

The Contribution of Diaspora Context to the Study of Women's Leadership

The findings are also significant because they situate women's leadership within a distinctive context: a volunteer-based socio-religious organization in a diaspora community. Recent literature emphasizes that women's leadership is closely tied to relational and emotional dimensions, yet research remains more heavily concentrated in formal organizational settings. Singh, Das, and Jha showed that scholarship on women's leadership and emotions has largely revolved around emotional expressions and emotional competence, while also highlighting the need for more context-specific research (Singh, Das, & Jha, 2023c).

In this study, that contextual specificity is highly visible. These leaders were not only managing programs, but also nurturing a diaspora community, creating a sense of safety for migrant women, and sustaining NU values abroad. For that reason, their leadership appeared deeply relational: they positioned themselves as "leader," "friends," and connectors of solidarity. This pattern is consistent with findings from the non-profit sector showing that relational leadership and positive volunteer experiences contribute to commitment and the sustainability of involvement (Benevene et al., 2020). This study makes a twofold theoretical contribution. First, it expands the study of affective commitment by showing that in women's socio-religious organizations, commitment may be emotional, spiritual, and reflective. Second, it demonstrates that social support for women leaders is better understood as a relational ecosystem that enables leadership to continue in amid multiple roles demands, limited resources, and the mobility of diaspora life.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the affective commitment of women leaders in Fatayat NU Malaysia develops through the interaction of organizational experience, value congruence, and the social support they receive. In this context, social support functions as a relational condition that allows engagement to the organization to grow and endure. Based on these findings, the study's conclusions can be summarized as follows:

The affective commitment of women leaders in Fatayat NU Malaysia is not only emotional, but also spiritual and oriented toward sustainability. Fatayat is understood as a second home, a place for learning, and a field of *khidmah*, such that involvement in the organization is sustained not merely because of comfort, but also because of value congruence, spiritual meaning, and a sense of belonging. Social support strengthens affective commitment through a processual mechanism. It helps reduce stress and role conflict, increases feelings of competence, security, and comfort, and then reinforces emotional engagement, a sense of belonging, and meaning toward the organization.

Women's leadership in a diaspora socio-religious organization does not operate individually, but is sustained by a relational ecosystem. This finding underscores that the continuity of women's leadership in volunteer organizations depends heavily on the quality of the social relationships that support their leadership experiences.

Overall, this study highlights that social support within the context of Fatayat NU Malaysia is not merely a supplementary factor, but a relational condition that fosters, strengthens, and sustains women leaders' affective commitment to the organization.

IMPLICATION

This study extends the study on affective commitment by showing that among women leaders in volunteer-based socio-religious organizations, affective commitment is expressed not only through emotional attachment and organizational identification, but also through spiritual dimensions and an orientation toward sustainability. The study underscores the importance of understanding social support as a multi-layered relational ecosystem encompassing family, organizational, and community support, rather than reducing it to organizational support in a narrow sense. The study enriches the literature on women's leadership by showing that relational, empathetic, and cadre-oriented leadership patterns are closely associated with the formation of affective commitment and the sustainability of organizations. Fatayat NU Malaysia and similar organizations need to develop support systems that are more responsive to women leaders, not only through work programs, but also through the strengthening of the social relationships surrounding them. Family involvement, especially husbands, should be considered as part of organizational strengthening strategies. At the internal level, organizations need to strengthen delegation mechanisms, teamwork, deliberation, and clear role distribution so that leadership burdens do not become concentrated in a single figure. Organizational programs should also be designed as spaces for emotional strengthening and psychological recovery, especially for migrant women who simultaneously navigate domestic and public roles. Cadre development needs to be designed with greater sensitivity to the mobility of diaspora members, including the preparation of backup leaders and leadership.

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