Female leadership attributed to fewer COVID-19 deaths
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Countries with female leaders recorded 40% fewer COVID-19 deaths than nations governed by men, according to University of Queensland research.

Associate Professor Kelvin Tan from UQ's Business School says the statistic is a key finding of a study into the impacts different country characteristics, such as leadership, have on COVID-19 infection and death rates.

"Countries where women were at the head of government outperformed countries with male leadership, with an average 39.9% fewer confirmed COVID-19 deaths," Dr. Tan said.

"This figure can be attributed to female leaders taking quick and decisive action, a broader view of the wider impact on society and being more receptive to innovative thinking.

"We found female leaders tend to act promptly and decisively and are more risk-averse towards the loss of human life, which play an essential role in pandemic prevention and outcomes," he said.

The study analyzed the pandemic response of 91 nations between January and December 2020 and determined that certain country characteristics shaped COVID-19 outcomes.

Dr. Tan said many countries adopted similar approaches to contain the spread of COVID-19, but there were drastic differences in morbidity and mortality, even among those with similar socio-economic conditions and political backgrounds like Australia and New Zealand.

"As of 31 December 2020, although the population of Australia was only five times that of NZ, Australia had reported around 13 times more infections and 36 times the number of deaths than the numbers reported by New Zealand," he said.

The study found gender ratio, population density, urbanization and political corruption all intensified the severity of a country's pandemic experience.

Conversely, female leadership, education, religious diversity and public trust in government were found to reduce rates of infection and death.

"We've identified a set of predetermined, country-specific characteristics that have significantly influenced the outcomes of the pandemic and we hope policymakers use them to manage risk during
future health emergencies," Dr. Tan said.

"Our findings highlight the importance of prevention, rather than treatment, in reducing COVID-19 morbidity and mortality."

The research is published in *Scientific Reports*.