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Gendered Pathways to Enterprise: Obstacles in Women-Led Business Development

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1 Introduction

Men and women both play an important role in the society. Women are a crucial part of the society. When it comes to the economy, women share an imperative role globally. A person who risks his finances by establishing a business or business in the hope of profit is called an entrepreneur. There might be different conditions based on gender because the predictions might be different for women entrepreneurs. Although the participation rate of women in entrepreneurship is less, they are an untapped source of economic growth (LEHTONEN, 2023). Women entrepreneurs are the employment creators in several sectors. Although women face more obstacles to having access to the same opportunities as men. The unemployment rate is reduced due to increased labor participation in women-run businesses (Mirza, 2023).

1.1 Background of the study

Women play an important role by participating in the business community. They significantly contribute to job creation, innovation, and economic development. An overview of the history reveals that women face numerous challenges in entrepreneurship. Many sociocultural norms and legal barriers affect women's participation in entrepreneurship. However, their engagement in entrepreneurship leads to many benefits in the society. In terms of global trade and export, the participation of women leads to innovations and market expansion in the market, thus contributing to economic growth. Women entrepreneurs lead to enhanced economic development when they undertake businesses by attracting domestic and foreign investors. Women entrepreneurs allow empowerment and gender equality thus leading to social transformation. Everyone faces hiccups while establishing a business but the challenges women encounter are greater in number and different than men.

The positive aspect is that all these issues can be solved. Women lack opportunities as compared to men. Women encounter various challenges in the case of entrepreneurship including sociocultural factors, lack of capital, lack of education, balancing duties, gender inequality, accessing funding, lack of information, and government initiatives. The number of women entrepreneurs has been steadily rising despite the challenges encountered by them. In a comparison of developed and developing countries, women own 40% of the businesses in developed countries like the US, while in developing countries the rate of women entrepreneurs is rising rapidly. This contributes to poverty alleviation and resilience. In recent years, the need for recognition of women entrepreneurs has been growing (PARROTT, 2011). Governmental, non-governmental organizations and private sectors are putting efforts to develop environment or women-led

businesses. Despite these efforts, there are significant challenges faced by women entrepreneurs that hinder their potential.

1.2 Problem Statement

In a comparison of men and women, when women enter entrepreneurship, they have to deal with numerous challenges in the field of self-employment. They face problems like fewer financial assets and less experience in management (Eastwood, 2020). Numerous factors impede the sustainability and business growth of women entrepreneurs. Various barriers such as limited access to financial resources, sociocultural constraints, financial resources, and gender bias. These challenges limit the total utilization of an important segment of the business community. With the introduction of women entrepreneurs in the field of entrepreneurship, a big societal and traditional change has occurred in society. Women entrepreneurs promote sustainable practices in the business community. Major challenges such as poverty, healthcare, and education in society can be dealt with by women. One big problem is the access to education and diversity in cultures in different regions of a country. It can affect the growth of women entrepreneurs. Access to support systems and networks is also a big factor in this case. It may vary from place to place which can reduce the ability of women to perform in business. Moreover, women who are housewives also have to manage their households together with their businesses. This may create chaos in both sectors of life if their family systems are not supportive (Mirza, 2023).

1.3 Objectives

The main objectives of the study are:

- To observe various factors affecting the growth of women-owned businesses.
- To analyze the challenges faced by women while setting up their businesses and continuing to run them on their own.
- To assess the strategies and policies and give future directions to cope with the issues faced by women entrepreneurs.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions of the study are:

- What are the actors that affect the growth of businesses run by women?
- What challenges do women face when they aim to set up a business on their own?
- What are the best possible solutions to these problems and how can they be implemented in a systematic way that may tend to lessen the issues faced by women as entrepreneurs?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study aims to highlight the challenges faced by women while playing their role as entrepreneurs. Many problems emerge based on gender while working as entrepreneurs. Gender-based problems affect the entrepreneurial qualities of an individual. This study aims to go through the obstacles in the way of women as entrepreneurs in depth. This will be helpful as we tend to provide the solutions to the problems. The study also addresses the needs of female entrepreneurs that influence their performance. The study catalogs the obstacles that hinder the role of women as entrepreneurs. It proposes practical methods to foster the potential of women to play their role in the business community and stand well with men in the field of entrepreneurship. To stand up as a well-rounded person, several barriers need to be addressed that women face. After the recognition of these actors, there must be some suitable strategies that should be implemented to help women increase their performance in the business community (PARROTT, 2011).

1.6 Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study may include a lack of knowledge about the scope, potential biases, and methodology of these issues. There might be a lack of data sources which may lead to a less detailed analysis of the issue. We might face challenges in generalizing findings across the market. Problems such as lack of experience, role models, time, capital, and networks may significantly influence women as entrepreneurs (LEHTONEN, 2023).

2 Literature Review

Various studies enlighten various problems in different regions that women encounter. Problems vary with regions. For example, problems in rural areas might be different from those in urban areas which might affect the performance of women-owned businesses. Research by Jyoti Rani & Sanjay Kumar Sinha aims to highlight the challenges in Haryana (India). The study revealed that non-cooperation of male counterparts, lack of family support, less experience, the weak position of bargaining, absence of community support, lack of knowledge, insufficient awareness about loan services for women, harassment, difficulties in getting loans to set up a business, strict regulations and policies, lack of infrastructure facilities, unfavorable market behaviors, lack of marketing skills, and attracting customers are the major problems that women face as entrepreneurs. According to a comprehensive overview of the problem in 1998, the major problems found were cultural and societal values that influence women outside their homes which makes it complicated for them to survive in male-dominated areas of work. To improve their performance and stand beside men in the business community, they need a pleasant and comfortable environment to work. After a deep analysis of the influence put by social, organizational, and personal partialities on fostering women entrepreneurs in 2000 conducted by Nath, it was found that the Indian environment is suitable for women entrepreneurs to earn success. In 2000, Thomas studied the performance and strengths of female entrepreneurs as homemakers and entrepreneurs. According to this study, the main problems encountered by women while playing a dual role are a lack of professionalism, hesitancy to improve their knowledge of entrepreneurship, policy-practice gaps, obedient nature, low risk-bearing capacity, time constraints, and conservative attitudes (Sinha, 2016).

A study by Amer Hamzah, Jantan, Md Asadul Islam, Abigail Hunt, Mirza Manirajah Abdullah, and Md. Ferdausur Rahman explored the obstacles in the way of women as entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. This study bridges the gaps in the literature on the obstacles or women in the field of entrepreneurship. According to the research, it is found that graduated and educated women face more challenges than uneducated or non-graduated ones due to their educational background. Bangladeshi women faced barriers such as corruption, biased, lengthy, and costly loan facilities, a lack of support from their families and partners, operating in a conservative culture, and risks to their security. They also observed that women in Bangladesh working as entrepreneurs lacked confidence and pitching skills. They had less access to institutional training and courses (Md Asadul Islam, 2019).

According to a study by Petra Dickel, Linda Kleemann, and Tarun Kanti Bose, a recognized entrepreneurship environment has a significant influence on the impact of entrepreneurship education in Germany. He also observed that the strengths and obstacles for women as entrepreneurs differ with differences in countries (Petra Dickel, 2019). A study by Nicholas Harkiolakis, Daphne Halkias, Sylva M. Caracatsanis, and Chinedum Nwajiuba reveals that the complete life cycle of the growth of women entrepreneurs' businesses should be assessed in detail and their dependencies on variables must be examined separately (Daphne Halkias, 2011).

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The design of the research is qualitative. In this research, we will conduct semi-structured interviews to collect detailed information from the participants of the interviews. Conducting interviews helps us in gathering nuanced data from various people with different perspectives. This research is used for the analysis of barriers encountered by women while playing their role as entrepreneurs. This research method is selected to capture highly conceptualized experiences and perspectives of various women related to business. It will take help through the experiences of experts in the business community by conducting semi-structured interviews to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. This study will focus on a systematic review of the literature. We will go through the analysis of the obstacles and try to find their solutions. The data will be collected by conducting these interviews and suitable strategies will be applied to specific problems for their solution. The results of the study will help us in overcoming the problems by implementing suitable policies.

3.2 Setting of the Study

The study will be conducted by interviewing experts in entrepreneurship. The interviews will be open-ended to allow the participants so the interviews to answer the questions comprehensively. Semi-structured interviews are properly suited for qualitative studies as they offer flexibility and intensity. The semi-structured interview ensures that specific topics are protected at the same time as permitting members to specify their minds and stories freely. Each interview lasts about one hour and includes open-ended questions designed to elicit targeted responses about the participants' business strategies, demanding situations, successes, and perceptions of gender-associated problems in entrepreneurship. The interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and facilitate complete analysis.

3.3 Population

The sample size for this study includes 4 interview participants, comprising 4 women-owned commercial enterprise owners. This purposive sampling ensures an adequate representation of women, allowing a comparative analysis. The participants are decided on primarily based on unique criteria. The population or the interviews will include women entrepreneurs with vast amounts of experience and perspectives. The main purpose of the study will be to gather women entrepreneurs, especially from different backgrounds and industries with different business sizes.

3.4 Sampling

The sampling method adopted for the selection of participants is persuasive and helps us gain a comprehensive knowledge of barriers encountered by women while playing their role as entrepreneurs. The choice of this method will prove to be useful in selecting individuals who can provide comprehensive knowledge and insights that relate to the objectives of the study. The number of 4 participants is selected for a purpose. These participants will include experts in entrepreneurs, businesswomen, and policymakers.

i. Inclusion Criteria

The criteria for the inclusion of participants are as follows:

- They ought to have owned and operated their corporations for at least 5 years.
- They must have extensive entrepreneurial experience, and their agencies need to be in comparable industries to control for area-specific variations.
- Female entrepreneurs from various industries.

ii.Exclusion Criteria

The criteria for the exclusion of participants are as follows:

- Entrepreneurs who have just started their businesses (less than a year).
- Male entrepreneurs.

Implementing these inclusion and exclusion criteria, we select 4 participants for this study. The size of the sample is accurate and is chosen to maintain the depths of the perceptions of data collection.

3.5 Instruments:

The primary data collection methods are semi-structured interviews. Interviews are a very helpful source of gathering persuasive data by taking reviews of various individuals. Interviews are a flexible method to gather information as they allow participants to express their thoughts and perceptions to the full. They help maintain consistency.

3.6 Data analysis

The data analysis method employed in the study is thematic analysis, which entails identifying, studying, and reporting styles (topics) inside the statistics. Thematic evaluation is conducted in several degrees: preliminary familiarization with the statistics through repeated analysis of the transcripts, coding vast quantities of the text, attempting to find themes in most of the codes, reviewing and refining the topics, and defining and naming the themes This systematic method permits the emergence of key topics that spotlight the challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Primary challenges you encountered while starting your business

Participant 1 said that I did not have support from my family and my partner. It took me a week to convince my parents to let me work. After resolving that issue, my partner was not supportive enough to help me manage both household and business. I found it difficult to balance my duties as a housewife and an entrepreneur. Participant 2 said that I had financial issues. I found it difficult to gather enough amount to start the business. I appointed fewer staff to save money at the beginning which increased the workload. Participant 3 said that I did not have enough knowledge and training due to which I had to hire more trained staff and pay their wages according to their education and skills which cost me expensive. Participant 4 answered that networking was hard initially because of the male-centric nature of enterprise occasions and gaining help from men became an obstacle because of gender stereotypes.

Theme 2: Financial issues you encountered during the business

Upon asking the participants about the financial issues encountered by them, all of them discussed their issues. Participant 1 said that I did not encounter many financial issues. I had enough savings and also got informal loans. However, I faced challenges in maintaining cash flow. Participant 2 said that I faced many problems in collecting capital amounts. I had difficulty in gaining loans in the financial sector due to gender bias. Participant 3 said that I faced issues with high interest rates. Moreover, the loan terms were less favorable as compared to male counterparts. Participant 4 answered that I did not have much knowledge about financial plans and bank loans. I had a small amount of money and had to manage it.

Theme 3: Social and cultural barriers faced during the establishment

Participant 1 said that I faced numerous social and cultural barriers in my journey. Balancing the responsibilities of family with the burden of the business was a big issue for me. Participant 2 said that I faced a negative societal attitude towards my business. I had to keep my morale up and bear the negative remarks of people as a woman entrepreneur. Participant 3 said that I did not encounter much negativity. However, I had limited support from the business community and local business networks. Participant 4 answered that I faced discouraging behavior of the family and society as I did not have much knowledge and skills.

Theme 4: Strategies to overcome the barriers

We asked the participants about the strategies they implemented to overcome the issues they encountered. Participant 1 said that to convince my family or business, I showed them my skills in the related field and told them about the benefits of setting up my own business. To overcome the issue of cash flow, I started noting down all the details of the expenses. I began keeping track of the money I invested. To cope with the obstacle of balancing my household and business, I hired a full-time maid for my house. Participant 2 said that I somehow managed to get a small amount of loan from the bank. For more money, I asked a friend of mine to lend me some money and return it afterward. I gave myself the motivation to keep up doing the work I'm doing. My partner was supportive enough to help me get through the negative attitude of society. Participant 4 answered that I enrolled myself in women-focused entrepreneurial training programs. There I improved my skills and got most of the knowledge about getting loans. They also encouraged me to ignore the negative attitude of society and keep going.

4.2 Discussion

The study explores the increase, performance, and success of women-owned agencies with the aid of examining number one demanding situations, investment acquisition, key overall performance indicators (KPIs), work-life stability, and the function of mentorship and networking. The responses from the members highlighted distinct gender-related boundaries faced by women marketers. One of the primary demanding situations encountered using girls while beginning their groups turned into skepticism approximately their management abilities and technical abilities, in addition to difficulties in establishing credibility inside male-ruled industries. Many women also faced societal expectancies and had to balance their family responsibilities, which compounded their demanding situations.

Funding acquisition was some other extensive location in which gender differences have been obtrusive. Women frequently trusted non-public savings, circle of relative's value range, or crowdfunding to steady preliminary investment, and confronted greater scrutiny and slower processes when searching for external funding (Sinha, 2016). Key overall performance indicators (KPIs) tracked using both women and men enterprise proprietors were pretty comparable, specializing in metrics that include sales increase, patron retention, income margins, and marketplace proportion. However, girls also emphasized employee delight and consumer feedback as essential KPIs, indicating a holistic approach to measuring enterprise success. This shows that even as financial performance is important to all marketers, girls might also place extra value on the great place of business way of life, and customer relationships.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded that there are similarities with the present studies in the challenges and barriers faced by women. Most of the challenges are the same. However, many of them have been overcome still most of them need to be considered to deal with them. Women entrepreneurs come upon skepticism about their management abilities, societal expectancies, and heightened inspection of investment techniques. All these

factors together discouraged them and ward off their fulfillment. Despite those limitations, women's commercial enterprises emphasize universal success measures, reflecting their resilience and multifaceted methods of entrepreneurship. They also established customer relationships and made the employees proud.

5.1 Recommendations

According to past research, various strategies are carried out by so many companies to overcome the hurdles. They include innovation strategies, network strategies, and entry strategies. Women own a large number of small businesses. These businesses generate numerous employment opportunities. The government needs to take more realistic initiatives. It will help in reducing the barriers in the journey of female entrepreneurs. The study claims that the logistic issues, unfair, sophisticated, and expensive financial resources of the government, and lack of family support are the main issues. The government should restrict the banks to offer easy loans to women entrepreneurs. This plan must be designed according to the business plans. They must provide interest-free loans, especially to women to establish their businesses. Family members such as parents and husbands must be convinced about the importance of women entrepreneurs. They must be informed about the need for women entrepreneurs in the business community (Md Asadul Islam, 2019).

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