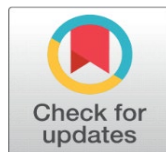


WORK LIFE BALANCE AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: CHALLENGES, GAINS, AND THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship involves the creation and management of a new business venture through strategic planning, organization, financing, and innovation, while simultaneously bearing the risks associated with the enterprise. It serves as a driving force behind a nation's industrial and economic development. The rapid emergence of start-up ventures in the contemporary business landscape significantly contributes to global economic growth. However, a key challenge remains in creating a more gender-inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. The advantages of a conducive business environment must be equitably accessible to all, regardless of social, demographic, or geographic distinctions. Women, who make up nearly half of the global population, must be integrated into the economic mainstream to achieve inclusive development. Despite several recent government policies and initiatives designed to support women entrepreneurs and address structural barriers, gender disparities in entrepreneurship persist in the modern era. Beyond socio-cultural and economic hurdles, women often struggle to manage the multiple roles they perform at home and in the workplace. Thus, addressing issues related to Work-Life Balance is essential, as doing so can help alleviate other systemic challenges. This paper is a conceptual study that explores the opportunities, challenges, and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, with a specific focus on work-life balance and its broader implications. The findings aim to provide valuable insights for both individual women entrepreneurs and policymakers, facilitating informed strategies for promoting gender-equitable economic growth.



Keywords: Gender Divide, Women Entrepreneurship, Work Life Balance, Socio-Cultural Norms, Professional and Personal Life

1. INTRODUCTION

Women play an integral and dynamic role in all spheres of life. As the saying goes, the status of a nation can often be gauged by the condition of its women. In culturally rich nations like India, men have traditionally been encouraged to engage in economic activities. However, recent societal shifts have led to increasing encouragement and support for women's active participation in economic endeavours. Globalization, in particular, has brought about a significant transformation in the roles and status of women, paving the way for many to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Yet, as their professional responsibilities grow, women often face challenges in balancing their work and personal lives. For many, self-employment provides the flexibility needed to manage both domains effectively.

Entrepreneurship, in general, involves identifying a viable business opportunity, mobilizing resources such as human capital, land, and labour, and creating a business model to operate sustainably. Entrepreneurs are visionaries who are accountable for the outcomes of their ventures (James, 1996; Sandelands, 1997). The concept of the entrepreneur was first introduced by Richard Cantillon (1680-1734), who described them as individuals willing to take risks for financial gain (Landström, 1999). This definition is gender-neutral, and in the era of globalization, women increasingly recognize the need to contribute economically both for self-empowerment and family sustenance (Marlow,

2002). However, the corporate environment is often less accommodating for goal-oriented women, prompting many to explore entrepreneurship as a more viable and flexible career path (Appelbaum et al., 2011).

Women entrepreneurship refers to the process wherein women initiate, organize, and manage a business enterprise, taking on risks and uncertainties with the goal of achieving economic success. It not only fosters financial and social independence but also contributes to the broader innovation-driven entrepreneurial ecosystem of a nation. Women's involvement in entrepreneurship is instrumental in narrowing the gender gap and fostering inclusive growth in competitive markets. According to the Government of India (2006), a woman entrepreneur is defined as one who owns and controls an enterprise with at least 51 percent financial interest and provides a minimum of 51 percent of the generated employment to women.

Vinze (1987) describes a woman entrepreneur as a visionary with the capacity to identify market opportunities, take calculated risks, and demonstrate the motivation necessary to run a successful enterprise. Modern women entrepreneurs have become significant contributors to global economic growth (Davis, 2012). Therefore, enhancing women's participation in entrepreneurial activities is crucial for the holistic socio-economic and cultural development of a country.

With increased access to education and evolving social norms, women are becoming more aware of their capabilities and potential for entrepreneurship. This shift, supported by numerous non-governmental organizations, has contributed significantly to the rise of women entrepreneurs in recent decades. However, despite this upward trend, the pace of growth remains relatively slow. The primary barriers can be traced to deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and traditional mindsets, which continue to hinder women's progress.

Addressing these challenges requires a focus on Work Life Balance (WLB), which is essential for women striving to achieve success both at home and in business. WLB refers to the equilibrium between career aspirations and personal responsibilities, encompassing health, leisure, family, and personal development. A stable WLB helps women overcome systemic barriers and maintain sustainable entrepreneurial ventures.

Women's empowerment remains central to tackling the socio-economic and political challenges of the modern world. In the context of globalization, digitalization, liberalization, and modernization, promoting economic and financial independence through entrepreneurship contributes to individual satisfaction at the micro level and drives economic progress at the macro level.

Traditionally, women were confined to domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, with limited access to external opportunities. They were primarily seen as homemakers. However, this perception has undergone a significant transformation. Today, women play vital roles not only within households but also in professional spheres. With rising living standards, enhanced educational attainment, and expanding employment opportunities, dual-income families have become the norm, where both partners contribute economically (Ramadevi, 2015).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher undertook an empirical study to highlight the motivational factors necessary to foster women's participation in entrepreneurship. This comparative study, involving both male and female entrepreneurs, emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship as a vital tool for nation-building, which operates through a three-dimensional framework: initiation, promotion, and the equitable distribution of wealth and services. Women are increasingly engaging in entrepreneurial ventures not only to earn income but also to support their families financially. The study was based on primary data and focused on identifying the key motivators influencing women's ability to maintain work-life balance. Data collection and analysis were conducted using SPSS, and hypothesis testing was employed to examine the relationship between these factors. The author identified five core factors that enhance the efficiency of women entrepreneurs. While many studies have investigated work-life balance among employed women, few have specifically focused on women entrepreneurs—hence the relevance and necessity of this study (Bhardwaj, 2017).

Another research aimed to explore the contemporary issue of work-life balance among women employees, specifically within the service sector. A total of 360 women working in banking, IT, healthcare, and education sectors were surveyed to assess the key factors affecting their work-life balance. The service sector has gained prominence in recent times due to rising standards of living, and a significant number of women prefer employment in this domain. Consequently, the sample was drawn from women working in service-oriented professions. The findings indicated significant differences in the levels of work-life balance across the various service sectors studied (Ramadevi, 2015).

Entrepreneurship offers women the opportunity to effectively manage both business responsibilities and domestic duties. It provides a pathway to financial independence while honouring familial commitments. A study was conducted to examine the entrepreneurial journeys of 80 women, focusing on how they maintain a balance between personal and professional roles. A structured questionnaire was used to capture their lived experiences, and statistical tools were applied for analysis. Among the key recommendations was the importance of shared household responsibilities and the need for effective time prioritization between business and personal life (Monika, 2017).

A balanced and healthy work environment is essential not only for individual well-being but also for the overall growth of an organization. In today's competitive world, achieving such balance is increasingly necessary for success. However, women often face significant challenges in maintaining this equilibrium due to the dual burden of professional and personal responsibilities. One article reviewed various factors that contribute to this imbalance, identifying the primary causes of conflict between the personal and professional domains (Neha, 2018).

Historically, entrepreneurship in India was predominantly a male domain. However, shifts in socio-cultural norms and improvements in educational access have encouraged women to tap into their innate talents and business acumen. Government initiatives and policy support have further incentivized women to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. A study identified several key factors that adversely affect the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs in India, including role overload, dependent care, health-related concerns, time management challenges, and insufficient social support (Nataraj, 2011).

Entrepreneurship involves high levels of achievement, risk-taking, and the potential to generate employment for others. A study conducted in Bangladesh explored the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in balancing business demands with family expectations. The research emphasized the need to identify and address the factors responsible for this imbalance, which is critical for promoting women's entrepreneurship. It was noted that a majority of women in Bangladesh are employed in low-skilled sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. However, advancements in women's education have begun to open doors for them to explore entrepreneurial careers (Md. Mahi, 2015).

In their study, Sivakumar and Usha (2011) examined the psychological well-being of women entrepreneurs, particularly the role of family support networks in mitigating stressors such as role overload and dependent care. They highlighted that women often receive comparatively less support in their pursuit of career ambitions. The study identified five major factors affecting work-life balance: role overload, dependent care, quality of health, time management, and the availability of a support network.

To effectively address role conflict, women must strive for a harmonious balance between their professional and personal lives. Entrepreneurship offers women greater flexibility and control over their schedules, allowing them to meet both career and domestic obligations. In doing so, women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to job creation, innovation, and the broader economic development of the nation.

2.1. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To provide a comprehensive overview of the work-life balance experienced by women entrepreneurs.
- 2) To highlight the key factors—both supportive and challenging—that influence women's participation in entrepreneurship.
- 3) To examine the specific work-life balance challenges faced by women during the initiation and management of business ventures.
- 4) To propose effective solutions for addressing the multifaceted issues women entrepreneurs face in balancing professional and personal responsibilities.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design, aiming to provide a practical perspective on the factors influencing the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs within the Indian professional context. To achieve the stated objectives, an extensive review of secondary sources—including books, scholarly journals, and official reports—was conducted.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review has been analysed to understand the reasons why women entrepreneurs transition from the corporate sector to entrepreneurial ventures. A key motivation is the pursuit of flexibility, allowing them to better manage both professional and personal responsibilities (Ward, 2007). Women often take on entrepreneurial roles to ensure the well-being of their children while maintaining a balance between work and family life (Platske, 2007). In today's competitive landscape, women demonstrate increased confidence, possess strong entrepreneurial capabilities, and tend to adopt a relational approach within the workplace. They emphasize building effective communication and fostering strong relationships with employees and customers, recognizing that challenges in either domain—business or family—can impact overall performance. As a result, women entrepreneurs often approach issues with both emotional intelligence and practical problem-solving strategies. Establishing healthy communication and relationships in both spheres is seen as a vital means of reducing stress and achieving a sustainable work-life balance.

5. PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Women entrepreneurs face numerous economic, social, and cultural barriers that significantly hinder their ability to establish and sustain business ventures. The development of entrepreneurial activity within a society is deeply influenced by economic, cultural, religious, psychological, and social contexts. Although global trends indicate a growing acceptance of entrepreneurial culture, persistent challenges—particularly those related to Work-Life Balance —continue to impede women's participation in entrepreneurship.

Role Overload: Women entrepreneurs often carry the dual burden of managing business responsibilities while simultaneously fulfilling multiple roles within the family—as spouses, parents, caregivers, and homemakers. The constant negotiation between domestic and professional spheres can blur boundaries, making it difficult to maintain distinct identities and responsibilities. This role conflict frequently leads to burnout, underperformance in business, or even premature abandonment of entrepreneurial pursuits.

Dependency Issues: Patriarchal norms and economic dependence on male family members often restrict women's autonomy in initiating business ventures. Throughout different stages of life, women commonly rely on their fathers, husbands, or sons for financial and social support. This dependency limits their ability to independently navigate the entrepreneurial landscape.

Societal Attitudes: Cultural norms, gender-based stereotypes, and psychological barriers—such as fear of failure, lack of confidence, and a perceived inability to take risks—further constrain women's involvement in entrepreneurship. Many women internalize societal biases and experience self-doubt, which negatively affects their entrepreneurial aspirations and outcomes.

Health Challenges: Domestic responsibilities and the expectation to prioritize family obligations often compromise women's physical and mental well-being. The demanding nature of household chores, child-rearing, and elder care limits their availability for business travel, long work hours, or evening commitments. These health-related constraints reduce mobility and stamina required for managing entrepreneurial ventures effectively.

Financial Constraints: Traditional gender roles often limit women's control over financial resources. A significant number of aspiring women entrepreneurs have minimal access to personal capital and are dependent on male family members for monetary support. Additionally, lack of collateral and gender bias in financial institutions further hinder their ability to secure credit or loans, making it difficult to initiate or expand business operations.

Lack of Entrepreneurial Skills: Educational disparities and lower literacy rates among women negatively affect their decision-making and strategic planning capabilities. Many women also face skill gaps in areas such as digital literacy, language proficiency, marketing, and business networking. Limited access to technical training, mentorship, and modern technological tools creates additional hurdles, preventing them from fully capitalizing on entrepreneurial opportunities.

6. SUGGESTIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Despite the considerable challenges affecting the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs, India is gradually witnessing positive developments through various start-up initiatives, government schemes, policies, and programs.

Technological advancement, coupled with a shift in societal mindsets, is essential to fostering a robust entrepreneurial and democratic ecosystem for women. Based on these observations, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed to enhance the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs:

Reducing the Gender Gap in Economic Participation: Narrowing the gender disparity in economic engagement can help women overcome systemic barriers and establish innovative start-up ventures. Strengthening women's income-generating capacities by nurturing an inclusive entrepreneurial environment is crucial to addressing gender inequality.

Implementation of Women-Friendly Government Initiatives: Government agencies can support women entrepreneurs by introducing targeted schemes that address WLB challenges. Organizing technical and business training workshops, offering simplified loan facilities for women-led start-ups, and easing the processes of registration and licensing are potential measures.

Promoting Health and Well-Being: Improving the physical and mental health of women entrepreneurs should be a government priority. Health awareness campaigns and stress management programs can significantly contribute to enhancing women's overall well-being and entrepreneurial performance.

Fostering Societal and Perceptual Change: A shift in societal attitudes towards women entrepreneurs is vital. Encouraging women to reassess and positively redefine their entrepreneurial identity can help. It is important to develop innovative solutions that recognize individual, collective, social, and business needs across families, communities, and workplaces where work-life conflicts arise.

Strengthening Self-Help Groups and Support Networks: Expanding, monitoring, and actively managing self-help groups (SHGs) and promoting the use of telecentres and startup helpdesks can enhance women's accessibility to entrepreneurial opportunities. Outreach programs targeting rural and remote areas through SHGs can offer training, workshops, and demonstrations highlighting the benefits of entrepreneurship.

Digital Upskilling and Awareness Initiatives: Conducting digital literacy campaigns, promoting online learning through initiatives like Saathi (a collaboration between Google and Tata Group), and offering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) can empower women with essential entrepreneurial skills. Both government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have a role in implementing these programs to make women entrepreneurs more digitally competent and business-ready.

7. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a crucial sector in today's competitive business environment, driving employment creation and supporting the sustainable economic growth of nations. With globalization, the expansion of women-owned enterprises has gained widespread recognition, positioning women entrepreneurs as key contributors to national development. They play a vital role in boosting income levels and generating employment opportunities. Many women have ventured into entrepreneurship, leaving behind traditional career paths to overcome gender-based discrimination and work-life balance challenges.

However, their entrepreneurial journey often encounters barriers such as lack of mentorship, insufficient government training, limited technical knowledge, inadequate family support, and weak professional networks. Balancing professional responsibilities and family commitments remains a significant aspect of women's lives. As a result, many women entrepreneurs choose to operate home-based businesses to better manage their work and personal obligations. Through entrepreneurship, women gain confidence, recognition, and independence, applying essential skills like effective communication, organization, planning, leadership, and delegation to maintain work-life balance.

This study highlights that women's equal and active participation in society is vital not only for advancing women's rights but also for fostering a just, inclusive, and rights-based information society. Entrepreneurship serves as a powerful tool for women's empowerment, offering direct access to financial resources and enhancing their personal incomes, thereby increasing their independence. To mitigate role conflicts, women must find a balance between their professional and personal lives. By establishing their own businesses, women gain greater flexibility and control over their obligations, while also contributing to job creation, innovation, and the broader economic development of the nation. Equipping women with entrepreneurial opportunities and financial management tools can transform not only their lives but also those of their families.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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