

Intersection of Women's Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in Pakistan: A Comprehensive Investigation of the Empowerment Theory of Change and its Practical Implications

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Abstract

Background: *Women's empowerment and entrepreneurship affect the status of women in society, decision-making in a household and control over the resources in an economy, which will strengthen the economic growth of the country.*

Research Aim: *The primary aim of this work is to study the landscape of women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan by applying the Empowerment Theory of Change.*

Methodology: *Qualitative, comprehensive literature analysis examines Pakistan's complex women's empowerment-entrepreneurship nexus. The study covers gender inequality, resource availability, and socio-cultural barriers for Pakistani female entrepreneurs. The Theory of Change is used to explore Pakistani women's empowerment and entrepreneurship.*

Findings: *It was noted that the women who are empowered are more encouraged and motivated to start their careers as an*

entrepreneurs. It was observed the multiple challenges faced the women in Pakistan, include social

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norms, lack of access to resources, low literacy rate and institutional barriers.

Conclusion: *In conclusion, with the application of the Empowerment Theory of Change, the number of entry points was found that can contribute to women's empowerment to entrepreneurship in Pakistan.*

Keywords: *Women empowerment, Women entrepreneurship, Empowerment Theory of Change, Pakistan.*

Introduction

Empowerment is defined as the process of social actions that promote the involvement of groups, communities and individuals to have control over their lives in the community and society (Page & Czuba, 1999). Women's empowerment is all about bringing positive change in society which helps women to have equal control over resources and ideology as men. According to Nasution and Rahmat (2018), physical, intellectual human, financial, self-esteem, creativity and confidence are the resources of empowerment. Whereas, ideology means the set of beliefs, attitudes and way an individual thinks regarding a situation (Srilatha, 1993)

During the era of 20th century, economic growth from the development of women's entrepreneurship has been found to have a prominent effect on the economy (Santos et al., 2018). The entrepreneurial culture in any country contributes to the enhancement of the growth of the economy (Schumpeter et al., 2003). According to Shanine et al. (2019), women's entrepreneurship is related to the study of gender-specific domains. Women entrepreneurship is providing social and economic opportunities for women to utilize their potential skills and knowledge in the growth of society.

In Pakistan, there are cultural restrictions for women in rural areas which is why empowerment and entrepreneurship remain unsuccessful among women (Williams & Shahid, 2016). According to Emmett and Alant (2007), due to cultural restrictions women living in rural areas of Pakistan are handicapped. Numerous studies have been conducted to address key factors like gender (Fischer et al., 1993), education (Türko, 2016) and government policies (Tahi Hamonangan Tambunan, 2011) which can help in emergent women's entrepreneurship on strong and sustainable grounds. In recent years, there have been observed multifaceted challenges for women when being involved in entrepreneurial activities. To overcome these challenges and empower women, this study applied the Empowerment Theory of Change in the context of Pakistan, intending to illuminate the process through which the oppressed women in the

conservative society of Pakistan can be empowered through entrepreneurship.

Research Objectives

- To examine the relationship between women empowerment and entrepreneurship in Pakistan.
- To apply the Empowerment Theory of Change to understand and enhance the empowerment of women entrepreneurship in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Women's entrepreneurship is defined as an important element in the growth of the economy (Dodescu & Badulescu, 2010). According to Fielden and Davidson (2006), globalization in Pakistan has promoted unbiased social patterns up to some extent, but the women in Pakistan do not get the same status as men which makes them deprived of several opportunities (Goffee & Scase, 2015). According to Bock (2018), due to cultural and religious restrictions in some developing countries, women entrepreneurs face problems. This showed that the major difficulty which is faced by women is based on gender discrimination (Thomas, Khan, & Ahmad, 2022; Jones & Clifton, 2018). There are a lot of challenges apart from gender discrimination which includes lack of financials, no community support or the business controlled by her partner, brother or father. It was observed that the women living in rural areas are behind in education as compared to men, and this hinders them from the information regarding capital and other resources (Jack & Anderson, 2002). In early system of tribal system defined the role of women in managing household chores, while considered the male of the family to be the breadwinner (Hurley, 2002). On the other hand, industrialized societies have replaced the joint family system with the nuclear system which has resulted in both husband and wife earning for better economic condition.

Similar to other developing countries, Pakistani society has been diversified in several ways but still, restriction on women's empowerment is commonly seen in almost all parts of the country (Akram, 2018). According to Sinhal (2005), self-employed units have been observed among women in Pakistan, this showed that women got fewer opportunities for business partnerships with other firms which has resulted in the restriction in their business growth. The business of women in Pakistan is limited to the household which resulted in low profit and less growth as compared to the men's business (Tambunan, 2009), also the objectives of the women entrepreneurs are observed to be limited, and because of this they mostly go for the closure of their business when not meet their short-term objectives. It was seen that women living in rural areas have an

entrepreneurial mindset but they lack access to various resources and information due to low literacy rates (Mininni, 2022). Therefore, it can be stated that many women are skilled in many different items but are unable to convert their skills into business due to cultural restrictions. In Pakistan, women learn certain skills during their childhood but before they get married (Shaheen et al., 2022), after that because of the responsibilities of household chores and children they are deprived of getting even a basic education. According to Idrus et al. (2014), women who belong to developing countries mostly live in poor families who are involved in activities that are just survival-oriental. The Government of Pakistan have now established some organizations to support women entrepreneurs but their primary objective is to earn more rather than empower women (Hyder & Lussier, 2016).

To conclude, it can be expressed that entrepreneurship in women of Pakistan is deprived mainly because of gender discrimination, low literacy rate and lack of awareness of women (Shaheen et al., 2021). In this study, the Empowerment Theory of Change is used which is the combination of complete processes applied to empower women so that they can gain the ability to make decisions for themselves, exercise power and transform their dreams into reality.

Empowerment Theory of Change

The overall process of awareness and capacity that leads to participation, decision-making control and the transformation of the actions of one's individual is known as empowerment. The term empowerment originated from a community of American psychology. The empowerment theory was proposed by social scientist Julian Rappaport in 1981. However, the background of empowerment theory is linked to Marxist sociological theory. This study focuses on Julian Rappaport's empowerment theory with the addition of forms of empowerment, the multidimensional process of empowerment (Ahmad, Ali, & Sewani, 2021; Dandekar, 1986), approaches to women's empowerment, importance and advantages of women's empowerment.

Julian Rappaport's empowerment theory proposed that empowerment is all about helping the people who have less share of power to even understand their standing in society and is all about gaining more power. This theory includes the needs, rights and choices of the people, this theory tries to address the powerlessness of individuals and groups and for this, he proposes that empowerment should be made on multiple levels.

Methodology

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Literature Review Approach

To comprehensively investigate the intersection of women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in Pakistan, a thorough literature review approach employed in the study. The literature review involved the systematic examination of existing scholarly works, empirical studies, and theoretical frameworks related to women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, and their interplay within the Pakistani context (Kabeer, 2005; Mahmood & Rizvi, 2018).

The review begin by exploring studies that examine the relationship between women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in Pakistan. Included researches that highlights the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the country, particularly focusing on factors such as gender inequality, access to resources, and socio-cultural barriers (Hussain, et al., 2023; Mahmood & Rizvi, 2018).

Key concepts such as women's economic empowerment, political participation, and social inclusion explored to understand their significance in fostering entrepreneurship among women (Kabeer, 2005). Furthermore, the literature review delve into the Empowerment Theory of Change and its applicability in the context of women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan. This study involve an in-depth analysis of the theoretical framework proposed by scholars in the field of women's empowerment, examining its core components and implications for enhancing women's agency and autonomy in entrepreneurial endeavors (Imran, et al., 2023; Zimmerman, 2000).

Special attention given to understanding how the dimensions of economic, political, social, educational, and psychological empowerment intersect with entrepreneurship and contribute to women's overall empowerment trajectory (Kabeer, 2005). The review process will utilize academic databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and JSTOR to access peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports published on the topic (Zulfiqar & Karim, 2019).

Findings

Process and Forms of Empowerment

The awareness within an individual who lacks control can make them realize to increase the sense of personal power. It is all about making the decisions of your life instead of others. Increasing empowerment at the personal level in women would help in building self-esteem and confidence. Secondly, the development of empowerment takes place at the interpersonal level which is the process of providing an environment, and resources for the accomplishment of goals. Interpersonal empowerment in women could influence the decisions of other women by guiding

and providing them with pathways to achieving their goals. Lastly, through the community empowerment programs which could take place at the individual or group level. This empowerment can be achieved by training and development programs, the community should take action in providing programs at the group level for women, the social empowerment of women would help in creating social change which can increase personal as well as interpersonal empowerment. According to Dandekar (1986), the forms of women's empowerment are multidimensional and are defined as the following;

Economic Empowerment

This involves access to the economic resources for the women which includes financial support and economic opportunities. Economic empowerment can be promoted by the government through financially supporting women who want to start their businesses (Bank & Corporation, 2011).

Social Empowerment

This process of empowerment includes the focus on enhancing the social status of women, which can be enhanced with women's participation, and involvement in the decision-making process and community activities and through addressing the such norms which could impact the women's empowerment (Meera & Gowda, 2013).

Political Empowerment

Political empowerment evolves around women's participation in political processes, their representation in governance and policy advocacy (Bari, 2005). This empowerment can be built through providing positions to women in politics which results in the enhancement of political rights for women and increase empowerment.

Educational Empowerment

Education highlights the importance of empowering women by providing them necessary knowledge and skills (McCracken et al., 2015; Hafeez, Iqbal, & Imran, 2021), that would help them women to take part in social, economic and as well as political domains. Empowerment of women is crucial because empowered women are more likely to understand their rights, and resources and make informed decisions.

Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment is related to the cognitive thinking and attitude of an individual (Ergeneli et al., 2007), which helps them feel more effective, authorized and capable of performing

various tasks. Psychological empowerment in women helps create self-motivation and augment them to participate in innovative activities (Thakur et al., 2022).

Women Empowerment Approaches

Welfare Approach to Women's Empowerment

The welfare approach contains women's involvement in the workforce, which means encouraging women to increase their talent and passion regardless of their age. This motivates the women to stand up for what they believe is right. This approach emphasizes the support, assistance and services to improve women's status. The primary objective of this approach is to address the immediate needs and concerns of the women through various social programs, by providing aid and charity.

Equity Approach of Women Empowerment

The equity approach focuses on promoting fairness, justice and equality for women like men. This approach tries to address the systematic and structural barriers that cause gender inequality, intending to create an environment where women have access to resources and opportunities. This approach aims to eliminate the societal imbalances and to promote gender parity.

Efficiency Approach of Women's Empowerment

This approach focuses on the economic benefit of the country, this approach emphasizes the idea that empowered women automatically contribute to economic growth because these women are active in entrepreneurship. The efficiency empowerment approach believes that providing education, and employment opportunities and providing them equal access to resources will lead to a more efficient and productive economy of the country.

Gender and Development Approach of Women Empowerment

This approach emerged in response to the earlier development models that ignored the needs of women. This approach focuses on the integration of gender roles in development and emphasizes that both men and women can benefit from development initiatives by providing policies and interventions that will empower women and transform the societal norms and structure that results in gender equality.

Advantage of Women's Empowerment in Entrepreneurship

Women empowerment and entrepreneurship in Pakistan bring about several advantages and hold substantial importance which include;

Economic Growth

Women's entrepreneurship and their participation in small business will lead to economic growth in the country. Women's entrepreneurship will promote a variety of job opportunities for unemployed women that would boost the economy of Pakistan.

Innovation

Women entrepreneurship will bring a variety of innovative and creative ideas that lead to the development of new innovative products and services in industries.

Social Development

Women's empowerment can positively influence social growth by promoting gender equality and by altering the historical norm which considers women to only manage the household. This will encourage more women to pursue their careers as entrepreneurs resulting in a more inclusive and equitable society.

Community Growth

Women entrepreneurs will not only result in the development of society but will invest in the community as well. Empowered women focus on fulfilling the community needs, and supporting local initiatives, this will lead to the development and improvement of the well-being of their regions (Ahmad, Sewani, & Ali, 2021).

Inspiration For Others

The women who are successful in their careers and their household as well serves as an inspiration for other women. This will encourage other women to set themselves free from the cultural and societal barriers in pursuing their entrepreneurial careers.

Increased Household Income

Empowered women can increase the income of the household leading to improved financial situation of the family, improved standard of living and results in greater decision-making power in the household.

Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted nature of women's empowerment and its intersection with entrepreneurship in Pakistan. The process and forms of empowerment identified, ranging from personal to community levels, emphasize the complexity of empowering women within different contexts (Dandekar, 1986).

Process and Forms of Empowerment

The study highlights various levels of empowerment, including personal, interpersonal,

and community empowerment. At the personal level, empowerment involves individuals taking control of their lives, enhancing self-esteem, and building confidence (Dandekar, 1986). Interpersonal empowerment focuses on providing support and resources to individuals, enabling them to guide and mentor others towards achieving their goals (Meera & Gowda, 2013). Community empowerment, on the other hand, emphasizes collective action and training programs to foster social change and increase overall empowerment (Dandekar, 1986).

Each form of empowerment, whether economic, social, political, educational, or psychological, contributes to the overall empowerment of women in Pakistan (Bank & Corporation, 2011; Bari, 2005; McCracken et al., 2015; Ergeneli et al., 2007; Thakur et al., 2022). Economic empowerment involves providing access to financial resources and opportunities, while social empowerment focuses on enhancing women's social status and participation in decision-making processes (Bank & Corporation, 2011; Meera & Gowda, 2013). Political empowerment aims to increase women's representation in governance and policy advocacy, while educational empowerment emphasizes the importance of knowledge and skills for women's participation in various domains (Bari, 2005; McCracken et al., 2015). Psychological empowerment, meanwhile, relates to individuals' cognitive thinking and attitude, influencing their motivation and participation in activities (Ergeneli et al., 2007; Thakur et al., 2022).

Women Empowerment Approaches

The study also identifies different approaches to women's empowerment, each with its own focus and objectives. The welfare approach emphasizes addressing immediate needs and concerns through social programs and assistance (Dandekar, 1986). The equity approach aims to promote fairness and justice by addressing structural barriers to gender equality (Meera & Gowda, 2013). The efficiency approach emphasizes the economic benefits of empowering women, highlighting the role of entrepreneurship in driving economic growth (Bank & Corporation, 2011). Finally, the gender and development approach focuses on integrating gender perspectives into development initiatives to promote gender equality and empower women (Bari, 2005).

Advantages of Women's Empowerment in Entrepreneurship

The study underscores the importance of women's empowerment in entrepreneurship, highlighting its numerous advantages for individuals and society as a whole. Women's entrepreneurship contributes to economic growth by creating job opportunities and fostering innovation (Bank & Corporation, 2011). Moreover, it promotes social development by challenging

traditional gender norms and creating a more inclusive society (Meera & Gowda, 2013). Additionally, women entrepreneurs invest in their communities, leading to community growth and development (Dandekar, 1986). Successful women entrepreneurs also serve as role models, inspiring other women to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations (Ergeneli et al., 2007). Furthermore, empowered women contribute to increased household income, leading to improved living standards and greater decision-making power within households (Thakur et al., 2022).

In conclusion, study underscore the importance of addressing the challenges faced by women in Pakistan, particularly gender inequality and lack of access to resources. Women's empowerment is crucial for fostering entrepreneurship and driving socio-economic development in the country. The Empowerment Theory of Change provides a valuable framework for promoting empowerment at various levels and addressing the complex interplay between empowerment and entrepreneurship. By implementing targeted interventions and policies, Pakistan can harness the potential of women entrepreneurs to achieve sustainable development and create a more equitable society.

Conclusion

To sum up, this study concludes that there are several challenges faced by women, the most common is gender inequality in the system and lack of information in utilizing the access resources in empowerment and entrepreneurship in Pakistan. It was observed that social and cultural environments restrict women from entrepreneurship because the literacy rate of women is low in Pakistan which results in a lack of education and skills in conducting business.

Women's empowerment will enable women to understand their status, identity, power and potentiality in the dimensions of economic, political, social, educational and psychological. These dimensions have been discussed in the Empowerment Theory of Change, each of these dimensions plays an important role in empowerment because the actual empowerment of women is only possible when the women utilize the economic resources which include financial support and economic opportunities, women's participation, and involvement in the decision-making process, equal participation in political processes and policy advocacy as men would create self-motivation and confidence in them. Empowered women not only benefit the country but society and community as well. Women empowerment results in increasing the literacy rate and indorse more employment opportunities.

The application of the Empowerment Theory of Change would help rural communities in

developing awareness regarding women's empowerment. This theory will promote self-efficacy, self-confidence, inspiration for others, critical consciousness, personal and societal growth and development in the economy of the country.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to promote women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in Pakistan:

Policy Interventions: Implement policies that address gender inequality and promote women's access to resources, including financial support, education, and training programs. Governments should also focus on increasing women's representation in decision-making processes and providing support for women-owned businesses.

Education and Training: Invest in educational initiatives aimed at enhancing women's skills and knowledge in entrepreneurship. This includes providing training programs, mentorship opportunities, and access to business development resources.

Financial Support: Create mechanisms to facilitate women's access to capital and financial services, including microfinance programs tailored to women entrepreneurs. Financial institutions should also offer support for women-owned businesses through grants, loans, and investment opportunities.

Community Engagement: Foster community-based initiatives that empower women and promote entrepreneurship at the grassroots level. This includes establishing support networks, women's cooperatives, and community-led entrepreneurship programs.

Awareness Campaigns: Launch awareness campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and promote the value of women's participation in entrepreneurship. These campaigns should highlight the economic, social, and cultural benefits of empowering women in business.

Partnerships and Collaboration: Foster partnerships between government agencies, non-profit organizations, academia, and the private sector to develop comprehensive strategies for women's empowerment and entrepreneurship. Collaboration is essential for leveraging resources and expertise to address complex challenges.

Future Directions

Moving forward, future research in this area should consider the following directions:

Longitudinal Studies: Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of empowerment interventions on women's entrepreneurship outcomes. Tracking women's progress over time can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of empowerment strategies.

Intersectionality: Explore the intersectionality of gender with other social identities, such as ethnicity, class, and religion, to better understand how multiple forms of discrimination intersect and shape women's experiences in entrepreneurship.

Technology and Innovation: Investigate the role of technology and innovation in promoting women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan. This includes examining the impact of digital platforms, e-commerce, and technological advancements on women-owned businesses.

Policy Evaluation: Evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and programs aimed at promoting women's empowerment and entrepreneurship. Identify barriers to implementation and areas for improvement to inform future policy development.

Global Perspectives: Compare and contrast women's entrepreneurship experiences in Pakistan with other countries to identify best practices and lessons learned. Cross-cultural comparisons can provide valuable insights into the contextual factors that influence women's empowerment and entrepreneurship outcomes.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Align research efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). By addressing the targets outlined in these goals, researchers can contribute to global efforts to empower women and promote inclusive economic growth.

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