

A STUDY ON BREAKING BARRIERS: CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THOOTHUKUDI

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Abstract

The study "Breaking Barriers: Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi" investigates the socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural obstacles that impede the progress of women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu. Although more women are engaging in entrepreneurship, they grapple with challenges like limited access to finances, technology, inadequate infrastructure, societal norms, and gender biases. Family responsibilities and the absence of support systems exacerbate these issues. The research examines how traditional gender roles, societal perceptions, family dynamics, and community support impact women entrepreneurs, utilizing a convenience sampling method with 35 women, gathering primary data through interviews and surveys alongside secondary data from reports and literature. Findings indicate a significant influence of traditional gender norms and cultural pressures on women's business activities; however, marital status doesn't significantly affect societal perceptions. Balancing business and family obligations is a major hurdle, with family support playing a vital role in the success of women-led ventures. The study provides insights and recommends policy changes to foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem and promote gender equality in the region.

Key words: Challenges, Barriers, Women Entrepreneurs

Introduction

Women entrepreneurs play a crucial role in advancing economic growth and enhancing gender equality within the community. In areas such as Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, women significantly contribute to diverse sectors, including small-scale industries, traditional crafts, and service-oriented businesses. Their business endeavors not only provide revenue for their households but also offer job opportunities, thus enhancing the local economy. Nonetheless, female entrepreneurs frequently face multiple obstacles that impede their progress and achievement. These difficulties arise from socio-cultural standards, financial limitations, and infrastructural deficiencies that hinder their capacity to fully achieve their potential. The research, named "Breaking Barriers: Challenges Encountered by Women Entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi," aims to investigate the difficulties that women entrepreneurs encounter and the effects these have on their business activities and personal development. Women in business frequently face challenges in obtaining financial resources, technological tools, and sufficient infrastructure. Moreover, they encounter socio-cultural obstacles, including conventional gender roles, insufficient family backing, and societal pressures, which may further hinder their capacity to succeed.

Statement of the Problem

Women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi encounter numerous obstacles hindering their business potential, despite an increase in their participation in entrepreneurship. They face socio-cultural, economic, and structural challenges, including limited financial access, inadequate infrastructure, gender bias, and cultural norms that restrict mobility. Family obligations and a lack of support systems further exacerbate their struggles, impacting motivation, business performance, and overall well-being. Additionally, the absence of effective policies and targeted interventions complicates their path to success. This research intends to analyze these challenges in detail, assessing specific barriers to business operations for women entrepreneurs. It aims to identify strategies to create a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial environment, ultimately contributing to the development of initiatives that empower women and dismantle the barriers they face.

Objectives

- ✓ To examine the socio-cultural challenges that women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi
- ✓ To examine the societal perception and attitudes towards women entrepreneurs
- ✓ To evaluate the role of family and community support systems in overcoming entrepreneurial challenges for women in Thoothukudi

Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant relationship between Influence of Gender Role factor among women entrepreneurs

H0: There is no significant relationship between marital status and Societal Perceptions and Attitude factors among women entrepreneurs

H0: There is no significant relationship between Family Responsibility Factors among women entrepreneurs

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design to explore the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi. The research focuses on understanding the socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural barriers that impact their entrepreneurial experiences and success. Both primary and secondary data were collected to address the research objectives. The study used a convenience sampling method to select participants, as it was the most practical approach given the time and resource constraints. A total of 35 women entrepreneurs from various sectors in Thoothukudi were selected for the study. This non-probability sampling technique allowed for easy access to participants and ensured a representative sample from the available pool of women entrepreneurs in the region. Data collection was carried out through in-person interviews and digital surveys to ensure a wider reach and greater convenience for the participants. Secondary data was obtained from published sources, reports, and academic literature to supplement the primary data and provide a broader context for the study. This mixed-method approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi and helped in formulating actionable insights for policy and practice.

H0: There is no significant relationship between Influence of Gender Role factor among women entrepreneurs

Chi-Square - Test					
Factors	Traditional gender roles in Thoothukudi discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurship.	Society expects women to prioritize family responsibilities over business commitments.	The perception of entrepreneurship as a male-dominated field affects women's ability to succeed.	I feel that being a woman has led to additional pressures or expectations in my entrepreneurial journey.	The local community supports women entrepreneurs equally to men
Chi-Square	6.914 ^a	11.057 ^b	25.143 ^c	13.143 ^c	26.000 ^c
df	2	3	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.032	.011	.000	.011	.000

Inference

The results of the Chi-Square test show significant relationships between the influence of gender role factors and the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi. For all the factors related to traditional gender roles, family expectations, male-dominated perceptions of entrepreneurship, and societal pressures, the p-values (Asymp. Sig.) are below the significance level of 0.05, indicating that these gender-related factors significantly influence the entrepreneurial journey of women in the region. Specifically, the factors such as societal expectations for women to prioritize family, the perception of entrepreneurship as a male-dominated field, and additional pressures due to being a woman, all show strong statistical significance. Additionally, the factor related to the local community's support for women entrepreneurs also indicates a significant relationship, albeit with a p-value of 0.032. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0), which states that there is no significant relationship between the influence of gender role factors among women entrepreneurs, is rejected. This implies that traditional gender roles, societal expectations, and community perceptions play a significant role in shaping the experiences and success of women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi. These findings underscore the need for societal and cultural shifts to create a more supportive environment for women entrepreneurs.

H0: There is no significant relationship between marital status and Societal Perceptions and Attitude factors among women entrepreneurs

Independent Test		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi are often	Equal variances assumed	1.240	.274	-.398	33	.693	-.120	.302

underestimated or not taken seriously.	Equal variances not assumed			-.454	22.658	.654	-.120	.264
There is a stigma attached to women who succeed in business in my community.	Equal variances assumed	1.960	.171	.000	33	1.000	.000	.430
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	26.392	1.000	.000	.354
People in my community generally view women entrepreneurs with respect and admiration.	Equal variances assumed	5.917	.021	.646	33	.523	.240	.372
	Equal variances not assumed			.791	26.991	.436	.240	.303
I have faced discrimination or bias from customers, suppliers, or peers due to my gender.	Equal variances assumed	2.034	.163	.381	33	.706	.120	.315
	Equal variances not assumed			.444	23.904	.661	.120	.270
Cultural norms and societal expectations have limited my opportunities for growth in business.	Equal variances assumed	.172	.681	-.296	33	.769	-.100	.338
	Equal variances not assumed			-.331	21.541	.744	-.100	.302

Inference

The results of the Independent t-test analysis suggest that marital status does not significantly impact the societal perceptions and attitudes experienced by women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi. For all the factors analyzed, including whether women entrepreneurs are underestimated, whether there is stigma attached to women who succeed in business, whether they are viewed with respect and admiration, whether they face discrimination, and whether cultural norms and societal expectations limit their growth opportunities, the p-values for each statement are greater than the 0.05 significance level. Specifically, the p-values for these factors ranged from 0.523 to 1.000, indicating that marital status has no significant relationship with societal perceptions or biases faced by women entrepreneurs. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0), which posits that there is no significant relationship between marital status and societal perceptions and attitudes, is accepted. This implies that in the context of Thoothukudi, marital status does not appear to play a role in influencing how women entrepreneurs are perceived or treated by society.

H0: There is no significant relationship between Family Responsibility Factors among women entrepreneurs

One-Sample Test						
Factors	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Balancing business responsibilities with family duties is a significant challenge for me.	24.785	34	.000	4.057	3.72	4.39
My family plays a supportive role in helping me manage my business.	25.271	34	.000	4.114	3.78	4.45
I sometimes feel that family members do not fully understand the demands of running a business.	19.852	34	.000	3.800	3.41	4.19
The cultural expectation for women to take care of household duties limits the time I can dedicate to my business.	23.001	34	.000	3.829	3.49	4.17
My family's support or opposition significantly influences the success or failure of my business.	29.251	34	.000	4.114	3.83	4.40

Inference

The results of the one-sample t-test reveal a statistically significant relationship between family responsibility factors and the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi. The p-values (Sig. 2-tailed) for all the factors are 0.000, which is well below the significance threshold of 0.05. This indicates that family responsibility factors do significantly influence the entrepreneurial experience of women in the region. The mean scores for each factor are high, ranging from 3.80 to 4.11, suggesting that women entrepreneurs generally agree with the statements regarding the challenges of balancing business and family responsibilities, the level of support from family, and the impact of cultural expectations on their business operations. The confidence intervals for the differences are narrow, reinforcing the reliability of these findings. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0), which states that there is no significant relationship between family responsibility factors and the experiences of women entrepreneurs, is rejected. Family-related challenges, including the time demands of balancing household duties and business, as well as the influence of family support or opposition, clearly play a significant role in shaping the entrepreneurial journey of women in Thoothukudi.

Conclusion

The study "Breaking Barriers: Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi" explores the socio-cultural, economic, and familial hurdles that hinder women entrepreneurs. It identifies traditional gender roles, societal expectations, financial limitations, and insufficient access to support networks as significant barriers to success. The findings reveal that socio-cultural factors drastically shape women's entrepreneurial journeys, where societal pressures often compel them to prioritize family over business. Many women experience difficulties navigating a male-dominated environment but demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination to succeed. Family support plays a crucial role in their entrepreneurial

activities; however, the need to balance business and familial obligations presents a major challenge. Although family encouragement is vital, a lack of understanding about entrepreneurial demands from family members can exacerbate their struggles. Interestingly, the study indicates that marital status does not significantly influence the societal biases faced by women, suggesting that broader socio-cultural dynamics are at play. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity for a supportive ecosystem for women entrepreneurs in Thoothukudi. It advocates for policies aimed at dismantling gender biases, improving access to resources, and enhancing community support. Empowering women in entrepreneurship not only fosters individual achievement but also contributes to gender equality, economic growth, and sustainable development within the region.

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