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SUMMARY

IMPACT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL VALUES AND TRADITIONS ON THE GROWTH OF WOMEN-OWNED ENTERPRISES IN PAKISTAN

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Principal Topic

Internationally, research suggests numerous gender differences among business owners at personal, professional, and institutional levels (Young, 1997; Carter and Anderson, 2001; Brown et al., 2002; Brush and Hisrich, 2002; Orser and Riding, 2003). By implication, these differences become manifold in some Islamic societies where women are further discriminated against and subjugated due to socio-cultural values and traditions in the name of religion (Roomi and Harrison, 2008). The unequal status of women in Islamic societies is due in part to the connection of gender with various forms of exclusion. Religious prescriptions, cultural norms and actual practices related to a woman’s status and role vary widely and are sometimes highly contradictory.

Method

Initial data was collected through 767 completed questionnaires from all over the country. The key factors influencing the growth of these enterprises were grouped into five categories i.e. entrepreneur’s personal resources, entrepreneur’s mobility, nature of business, human resource strategy, and informal networks. Multiple regression analysis was performed to test the hypotheses that these groups of factors influence the business growth independently and significantly. In addition to quantitative findings, an explicatory method was applied as well involving a process of analytic induction by face to face in depth interviews of 50 women entrepreneurs. The qualitative data collected was inductively analysed and interpreted in response to open-ended questions.

Results and Implications

In addition to mobilise scarce resources, most of the successful women entrepreneurs termed their ability to extract value from social networks as another important factor in the growth of their enterprises. This has negative implications for most of the Pakistani women entrepreneurs as their competition is systemically high (vis-à-vis men), their markets small, and their production assets limited; moreover, their access to networks of social capital is greatly impeded, specifically by the cultural norm of ‘Pardah’(veil) and the notion of ‘Izzat’ (honour)—which in turn limits their access to other forms of capital. The research also finds that moral help of male family members, effective informal networking, technical or business training, management experience, and effective use of websites and other online selling tools are the key factors which have made a considerable difference in their growth / performance. One of the implications of the research could be a ground breaking guideline for business development agencies/organisations to have a greater understanding of the factors influencing the growth of women-owned enterprises in Pakistan. It also provides a comprehensive analysis of reasons why women in Pakistan are not achieving business celebrity in numbers proportionate to their start-up activity.

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