

## Learning from Growth-Oriented Women Entrepreneurs: A Study of Women Entrepreneurs of Karachi

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### ABSTRACT

#### Purpose:

Women contribute to economic growth. Changing global sociocultural conditions have increased interest in women's entrepreneurship research. Despite this trend, women entrepreneurs are still misunderstood, and the literature portrays them and their ventures as disadvantaged. This study presents a change in the methodology of studying women entrepreneurs by using a phenomenological research design and portraiture study on three growth-oriented women entrepreneurs. The paper describes how growth-oriented women entrepreneurs improved their knowledge, skills, and abilities and used growth enablers to start and grow their businesses.

#### Methodology:

This qualitative phenomenological study explains growth-oriented women entrepreneurs in Karachi. Karachi and women's offices were researched. In this study, women entrepreneurs met these criteria: (1) These Karachi businesswomen started their business from scratch; (2) They had been in business for at least three years to measure growth; and (4) They were willing to participate in interviews, observations, and artefacts gathering.

#### Findings:

The results of the study were summarized in five themes: (1) Women's Entrepreneurial Experience; (2) Women's Perception of Entrepreneurial Characteristics; (3) Women's entrepreneurial learning; (4) Women's entrepreneurial reflections on gender; (5) Women's Entrepreneurial Self as Knower.

#### Conclusion:

The study's findings can be used to develop a model for aspiring or struggling women entrepreneurs. Future research and policy implications are also discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is currently the most contemporary and widely discussed concept worldwide for overcoming economic challenges (A.Kalim, 2019; Betty J. Parker, 2010). It can be observed that women entrepreneurs play a vital role in contributing to the overall economic development of any nation. They denote greater capacity and potential in the overall population for economic contribution. Therefore, it becomes significant for policymakers to develop customized programs and policies and to implement strategies that not only encourage but also support entrepreneurial culture among youth (A.Kalim, 2019).

Capacities of women have transformed over time and it should be noted that women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are now no more traditionally restricted to their homes. A global transition can be observed where women have become more knowledgeable, educated, and an innovative part of the entire population. They have nurtured the ability to transform economies into thriving enterprises. Today developing and developed nations are convinced that nurturing women's entrepreneurship is critical to succeeding as economically dominant nations in the modern high-tech world. Therefore, eminent global issues are now the creation of platforms and networks for flourishing entrepreneurial culture.

Women entrepreneurs tend to be different from male counterparts in their personal characteristics, motivation to undertake enterprises, selection of industries, the challenges they face as entrepreneurs, and are more influenced by the external environment than male entrepreneurs (Kalnins & Williams, 2014; Sutter, Bruton, & Chen, 2019). However, some researchers argue that the domain of entrepreneurship is not confined to any particular gender. But it should be noted that countries have different entrepreneurship ecosystem environments in terms of culture, economics, finance, institutions, infrastructure, politics, policies, and programs, which influence the ability of women entrepreneurs to enter the marketplace. Women entrepreneurs are also highly influenced by religious considerations (Sutter et al., 2019).

Literature on women entrepreneurs, particularly of women entrepreneurs of Pakistan is fragmented and in various dimensions. Women entrepreneurs have a sizable contribution to the economy of Pakistan, yet they seem to have smaller enterprises with fewer profits thereby generating lesser jobs than their male counterparts. Literature has depicted women and their ventures as disadvantaged. Extensive studies have been conducted on challenges that women face as entrepreneurs; however, these challenges have not been successfully converted into strategies that can benefit women entrepreneurs. This has underlined a need for research that highlights a positive perspective of growth-oriented women entrepreneurs. This includes research and discussion on how these growth-oriented women entrepreneurs have enhanced their knowledge, skills, and abilities, how have they harnessed their learnings and experiences to devise strategies, and used growth enablers existing in the environment to bring growth to their businesses. Therefore, this study is intended to identify reasons /factors that enhanced the learnings and experiences of growth-oriented women entrepreneurs of Karachi.

This study attempts to investigate the following research question with two sub-questions, which are as under:

Q.1.What are the learnings and experiences of Karachi based growth-oriented women entrepreneurs in growing their businesses within a male dominated environment of entrepreneurship?

Q.1(a). How do women entrepreneurs recognize and employ enablers to grow their businesses?

Q.1(b)How do women entrepreneurs define the experience of gaining knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required to grow their businesses?

## 2. Literature Review

This paper explores the review on women entrepreneurs. The method adopted involved reviewing and analyzing secondary data from various research articles, journals, and papers. The general criterion employed for this systematic literature survey included research articles, journals and papers published in English, and in impact factor journals, belonging to the western and eastern contexts.

### 2.1. Difference between Male and Female Entrepreneurs

Researchers have attempted to indicate that male and female entrepreneurs possess different characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses and these have influenced their performance as entrepreneurs (Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007; Veena & Nagaraja, 2013; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007). It has been observed that female entrepreneurs are comfortable with the small size of business even though they now get better support than in the past (Veena & Nagaraja, 2013). This is mainly because they want to strike a work life balance which is influenced by their household and family responsibilities. Entrepreneurship as a profession gives them greater flexibility with time (Veena & Nagaraja, (2013; Suárez-Ortega & Gálvez-García, (2017).

Motivation and preferences for women entrepreneurs have been suggested to be different than male entrepreneurs (Buttner & Rosen, 1989; Bardasi, Sabarwal, & Terrell, 2011; Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007). Women are different from male entrepreneurs in terms of their personal characteristics and their self-perception is also very important to their performance as entrepreneurs(Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007).

However, researchers have also argued that entrepreneurship is a gender neutral profession and women can adopt it if policies are devised to promote them by changing the mindsets, usage of media, education, and training especially of families (Shahriar, 2018). Women's limitation to access to finance or start-up capital has been an aggressively discussed topic. And researchers have argued that women entrepreneurs are not preferred by financiers due to gender bias. This, however, has been refuted by both (Shahriar, 2018) and (Buttner & Rosen, 1989). They argued that women need to work on their presentation skills and self-confidence to acquire finance. (Chrisman, Carsrud, DeCastro, & Herron, 1990) also supports the fact that both men and women are equal in terms of their assistance needs and women do not require extra assistance.

### 2.2. Motivating Factors for Women Entrepreneurs

Motivation for women entrepreneurs is derived both internally and externally (A.Kalim, 2019). It has been observed that women work largely out of necessity, to raise their living standards, provide financial support to the family, and attain a work-life balance (A.Kalim, 2019; Azmi, 2017; Suárez-Ortega & Gálvez-García, 2017). This remains the main reason for a smaller size of business (Veena & Nagaraja, 2013).

Women also prefer to undertake their own enterprises for enhanced empowerment and freedom (A.Kalim, 2019). They may also want status in society and in family (A.Kalim, 2019; Pérez-Pérez & Avilés-Hernández, 2016). Motivation is also derived from the freedom to work by religion and family and also to continue with the family business (Azmi, 2017; Suárez-Ortega & Gálvez-García, 2017).

### **2.3. Industries Preferred by Women Entrepreneurs**

It has been observed that women entrepreneurs tend to adopt traditional types of businesses mainly related to clothing, gifts, services, education etc. and also affected by geographic location (Kalnins & Williams, 2014). Researchers have questioned for a long if women entrepreneurs are cornered by the type and size of industries. They prefer to keep the size of business limited and adopt more traditional types of businesses (Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007; Anna, Chandler, Jansen, & Mero, 2000).

However, recent studies suggest that women entrepreneurs are now more keep to grow their businesses and explore newer industries (Kalnins & Williams, 2014; Anna et al., 2000). (Kalnins & Williams, 2014), found that female-owned businesses out-survived male-owned businesses in a wide variety of industries. Also, female-owned businesses consistently out-survived male-owned businesses in the largest cities. Women in non-traditional industries had higher efficacy for planning than in traditional industries (Anna et al., 2000), and surprisingly the importance of emotional and financial support was negatively related to sales for the non-traditional groups (Kalnins & Williams, 2014). Recent studies suggest that high-growth women entrepreneurs are structurally more organized and have better planning for market expansion, technological advancement, utilization of a vast range of financial resources, team based approach, and strong leadership (Gundry & Welsch, 2001).

### **2.4. Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs**

Women entrepreneurs are confronted with a variety of challenges hailing from both internal and external environments (Almubarak, 2016; Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007). However, these challenges may vary from region to region according to the entrepreneurship ecosystem (Sutter et al., 2019).

The most widely discussed challenge is access to finance or start-up capital. Researchers have argued that women entrepreneurs are not preferred by financiers due to gender bias. This, however, has been refuted by both (Shahriar, 2018) and (Buttner & Rosen, 1989). They argued that women need to work on their presentation skills and self-confidence to acquire finance. (Chrisman et al., 1990) also supports the fact that both men and women are equal in terms of their assistance need and women does not require extra assistance. However, in developing countries ,it is still considered a major challenge as supported by (Agarwal & Lenka, 2016; Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Nawaz, 2018; Jawad, 2016).

Internal challenges faced by women entrepreneurs were classified as women's own entrepreneurial orientation, skills and education, family obligations and support, their own beliefs, opinions and behaviors and motivations (Agarwal, S & Lenka, 2014; Pérez-Pérez & Avilés-Hernández, 2016; Nawaz, 2018; Adeel, Khan, Naz, Raza, & Fatima, 2012; Jawad, 2016). Women are also largely affected by the social and cultural environment, which is more male dominated. They suffer from structural immobility imbibed in the environment, where interactions may become difficult for business progress (Pérez-Pérez & Avilés-Hernández, 2016; Bushra & Wajiha, 2013; Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Agarwal, S & Lenka, 2014).

External challenges originating from the environment which affected women entrepreneurs may be classified as support from the Government, social and cultural influences, networking opportunities, economic opportunities and SME development (Adeel et al., 2012; Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007; Nawaz, 2018; Almubarak, 2016). Limited access to markets and technology and

lack of communication about available opportunities also affects the performance of women entrepreneurs (Agarwal, S & Lenka, 2014; Adeel et al., 2012).

Women in Pakistan are largely influenced by socio-economic factors leading to a gender biased environment (Bushra & Wajiha, 2013; Jawad, 2016). They also suffer from a lack of capital lack of education, family responsibilities, and lack of structural support systems (Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Nawaz, 2018).

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach and attempts to explain the learnings and experiences of growth-oriented women entrepreneurs of Karachi. Since the focus of the study was on exploring learnings and experience of how these women entrepreneurs used growth enablers in society and how they defined their experiences in building their knowledge, skills, and abilities, a qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed. A qualitative design was used since this research is exploratory in nature; it attempts to identify the variables that can be measured; describe the lived experiences of participants by reaching out to them directly; getting involved with the participants; writing of report needs to be flexible and literary; cannot separate people from their context; quantitative measures do not fit the problem; need to develop a workable framework whose mechanisms and linkages can further be explained by quantitative research (Creswell, 2013).

There are various types of qualitative researches available; however, since this research attempts to answer questions from the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs, a phenomenological approach was applied. And in particular, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was undertaken to conduct this research.

In this study, the ontological assumptions were based on the perspective of constructivism. Since this study attempts to explore the lived experiences of women entrepreneur multiple realities were contextually constructed through experience and interaction, testing and modification, and socio-cultural or historical dynamics (Brodio & Manning, 2002; Creswell 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2000).

Since this study focused on how the women entrepreneurs interpret their learnings and experiences of starting and growing their business in a male dominated environment, the epistemological perspective of this study is based on Belenky et al.'s (1986) Women's Ways of Knowing. Belenky et al. (1986) has defined five categories of women's development or growth which gives us an opportunity to comprehend the learnings and experiences of women entrepreneurs. These five categories are (1) Silence: which is where a woman lives under the authority and confronts difficulties in expressing personal thoughts. She views decisions as either right or wrong with no space for reasoning. (2) Received Knowledge: women try to match their opinion with that of the knowledge provider and have no confidence in expressing their own thoughts and feelings. She as a receiver of knowledge will reply to what other individuals have stated. (3) Subjective Knowledge: when women start to realize that their opinion can be different from authority and when she realizes their inner strength in forming their own opinions but does not express it due to fear of deteriorating association with other. (4) Procedural Knowledge: By this time women realize that there are multiple sources of knowledge other than intuition and experience. They start to evaluate through observation and reasoning. It is of two types: separate knowing and connected knowing. Separate knowing is when women learn through formal instructions, do not express feelings, and speaks only when requested. Connected knowing is when women learn through

empathizing with others and also guiding them with decision making. (5) Constructed knowledge: This is when women start to speak and listen to others as well and speaking and listening are now not limited to themselves only. At this stage, women start to speak, listen, explore, question, and share ideas. Now women want better quality of life for themselves and other.

Phenomenological approach suits best in the scenario of this research as it describes the essence of lived phenomenon and draws data from philosophy, psychology and education (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology involves the study of individuals who have communal experiences as in case of this study (Creswell, 2013), where women entrepreneurs selected were all growth oriented. Also profiling of women entrepreneurs was done to develop a comprehensive understanding as to how they had gained experiences and knowledge and converted these successfully into growth-oriented strategies. Women entrepreneurs were studied comprehensively for their context including their educational and family backgrounds, financial arrangements, their own personalities and perceptions, sources and types of motivation, handling of external influences and utilization of networks and other support systems. Such a comprehensive study was only efficiently possible through a phenomenological approach as it involved study of documents, observations and artifacts (Creswell, 2013). Also, the data was analyzed using significant statements and textural and structural description to derive essence out of the description (Creswell, 2013). Finally, the data was analyzed for themes to comprehensively describe the phenomenon. From this description variables extracted were used to develop a workable model for women entrepreneurs to enhance the phenomena of growth in their enterprises.

Central to this research which involves IPA is the concept of Hermeneutics and Double Hermeneutics which enabled the interpretation and analysis of data. Creswell (2013), referred to Hermeneutics as interpretation of text of the lived experiences. While Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), suggested Hermeneutics as the "theory of interpretation". They presented it as methods and purposes of interpretation. Considering this theory, the data of women entrepreneurs was penned down verbatim along with observations and artifacts which were later interpreted to derive meaning out of the text. However, it should be noted that in this case double hermeneutics was applied as suggested by (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), where participants and researcher have reflective engagement of the participants account and the end result of the interpretation is how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking.

Portraiture is a qualitative research method that combines ‘aesthetic and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics and subtlety of human experience and organizational life’ (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.xv). It uses phenomenological data collection and analysis methods to create portraits based on subjects’ (i.e., participants’) experiences.

### **3.1. Research Setting**

This research was conducted in Karachi and in the offices of the women entrepreneurs. Research location was determined in accordance with the thinking of Bogdan and Taylor (1993). Interviews were conducted in the premises of women entrepreneurs and the location fulfilled the following criteria as suggested by Bogdan and Taylor (1993); (1) it was aligned with the substance of research which was to be examined; (2) the study site provided sufficient data about the problem to be studied such as observations, artifacts and answers to interviews; (3) provided an opportunity to the researcher to be present for a long time, making it easier for the researcher to gather sufficient information required

to address the research problem. The researcher had known and developed a rapport with the participants before the interview and the participants were well explained about the objectives of the research beforehand. Care was taken to protect their confidentiality.

### 3.2. Research Sample

Since this is a phenomenological study which focuses on exploring the experiences and learnings of women entrepreneurs with respect to the growth of their business, purposeful sampling method with criterion sampling strategy was adopted for selection of participants in the study. It involves individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Criterion sampling can be considered as a quality assurance approach that permits the researcher to study cases that meet certain predetermined criterion of significance.

As with this study the women entrepreneurs studied were selected on the following criteria: (1) These business women resided in Karachi; (2) They had established the business themselves from the scratch i.e., from idea conception till its current status; (3) Had been in business for a minimum of three years and more so as to measure growth; (4) Were willing to participate in interviews, observations and artefacts gathering. Three women entrepreneurs were selected for this study as it was a challenging task to find "growth oriented" women entrepreneurs as compared to "successful" women entrepreneurs. Growth can be measured as a subset of success. However most successful women entrepreneurs may not be growth oriented. It was a challenging task identifying business women meeting these criteria and were identified using contacts of the researcher and through networking with various business / industrial associations. Since it is a phenomenological study employing IPA, sample size was considered to be appropriate as two in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants to extract maximum details from them on the five themes of the study: (1) Women's Entrepreneurial Experience; (2) Women's Perception of Entrepreneurial Characteristics; (3) Women's entrepreneurial learning; (4) Women's entrepreneurial reflections on gender; (5) Women's Entrepreneurial Self as Knower.

### 3.3. Participants

All three women entrepreneurs who qualified as participants fulfilled the sampling criteria set for this research. They belonged to Karachi and were categorized in the SME sector. Participants were detailed on the objectives of the study and were given both the questionnaires before interviews. All participants demonstrated appropriate levels of understanding and linguistic capabilities to describe their experiences for the fulfillment of this study. All three participants were members of business / industrial associations and had appropriate levels of recognition with the local business community based on their business growth as women entrepreneurs. Their identities have been replaced with Participant A, Participant B and Participant C. Profiles of the participants is tabled as under:

**Table.1. Profile of Participants**

Participants Characteristics	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C
Type of Business	Manufacturing of Dairy products such as packaged milk, yoghurt, cheese, and cream and now expanding to sauces and mayonnaise. In business for twenty years now and operating	Started from home bakery with innovative bakery items and twenty-one outlets across the city. Expansions into catering services and two café's. In business	Chemical imports and fumigation services. Catering to both residential and corporate customers. Expansion into lawn care and pesticide products for

	on a national scale	for nineteen years.	consumers. In business for last fifteen years.
Educational Background	Bachelors in Engineering	Graduate	Master's in Business Administration
Family	Unmarried, living with mother and brother. Was supported by her father initially before he died	Married with four children. Supported by husband and parents	Married with three children and supported by husband and parents
Aspirations for Business	Want to become exporter of dairy products	Aspiring to move to a national level	Aspirations to expand into the agricultural sector and replace MNCs
Understanding of Success	Success comes with business growth	Success is work life balance and recognition	Success is winning through knowledge and ability
Motivation to Start Business	Independence, Financials and Passion	Passion and Recognition	Independence and passion

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

### 3.4. Sample size

Glaser & Strauss (1967), elaborated that in a majority of qualitative studies sample size should generally adopt the concept of saturation; which is that collection of new data does not add further value to the investigation.

In accordance with Creswell (2013), who suggested that the number of participants in a study using phenomenology could range from three to ten in number; three participants were selected for the study. Since this is an IPA based study quality and depth of data is more important than the number of participants from whom the data is collected. According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), IPA research aims to write detailed account of the participants perceptions and understandings of a specific phenomenon through small samples by analyzing individual transcripts, case by case, which is a time-consuming exercise. IPA studies, the intensity of the analysis and therefore suggests that a relatively small sample size should be used (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this study it should also be noted that choice of sample size is governed by the constructivist / interpretive philosophical assumptions. Ponterontto (2005) described hermeneutic method to reflect meanings, which are something hidden, as deep reflections stimulated by interactive dialogue between the researchers and participants. Creswell (2013), suggested that qualitative researchers work with smaller number of participants to conduct extensive research.

### 3.5. Procedure

Data collection was performed through semi-structured interview questions, observations and collection of artifacts. Questions were designed to fulfill the main objectives of the study. The interviews comprised of open-ended questions and were conducted in a conversational style with each interview lasting from between 40 to 55 minutes. Participants were encouraged to share their subjective learnings and experiences in their own way by means of open-ended questions. As suggested by the idea of asking open ended questions was to further develop a thematic structure and to reveal the complex meanings through the experiences of interviewees. Data was collected through: (1) Semi structured interviews – since it was an in-depth analysis the questionnaire was divided into two sittings and each participant was interviewed twice; (2) Observation – these included observations about the participants physical environment and ambiance, participants presence and participants interactions; and (3) Collection of artifacts – it

included published materials or recorded media presence of the participants such as website contents, press releases, magazine articles etc.

## 4. Results and Analysis

This research study undertook Creswell's (2009) six steps during the data analysis phase which included: organizing and preparing the data for analysis; reading through the data; coding the data; establishing the categories of the data; describing the themes; and interpreting the data. The data was also triangulated through artifacts, observations and interviews. The interviews for this research were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis 1998). The interviews were then analyzed using NVIVO 12 for thematic analysis, whereby the transcribed data was coded, categorized for themes and memos were used to translate the data into the researcher interpretation. According to Ozkan (2004), NVivo is very effective tool for data arrangement and analysis but it is still the researcher' effort for data organizing, coding and analysis. Along with themes portraits (appendix) were also drawn out of the data.

### 4.1. Findings & Discussion

This qualitative study focused on how growth-oriented women entrepreneurs defined their learnings and experiences of starting and growing their business in a male dominated environment; how they utilized enablers around them and how they acquired knowledge, skills and abilities required for growth in their businesses.

Although the experiences and backgrounds of all women were different from each other, many similarities were also drawn from the data analyzed. Findings were generated from candid sharing of the lived experiences of three growth-oriented women entrepreneurs. After a process of selective coding data was sorted, organized and synthesized. Findings from the data were structured to answer the research questions and sub-questions and organized under five themes, which are as under:

- i. Women's Entrepreneurial Experiences: Journey, growth, and leadership
- ii. Women's Perception of their Entrepreneurial Characteristics: Learning to be innovative and risk-tolerance
- iii. Women's Entrepreneurial Learning: Role models and mentors
- iv. Women's Entrepreneurial Reflections on Gender: Industry, bank financing, socio-cultural norms
- v. Women's Entrepreneurial Self as Knower: Confirmation as a thinker and membership in a community of thinkers

Findings and discussion from the themes is summarized in tables below with sub-themes and summarized quotes.

**Table.2. Women's Entrepreneurial Experiences**

Sub - Themes	A	B	C
Journey	I did it all alone with some of my very senior employees. Doing business was a passion and a dream and after the job this is all that I wanted to do.	I started from home and reached here applying various strategies and making use of opportunities in the environment.	Started it from scratch and with the help of Allah things rolled out themselves. It all came easy due to my contacts.
Growth	We used our knowledge and when we entered there was a lot of room for growth in the Karachi market. There was	Innovations in Bakery were a unique experience when I entered the market. There was market	I was able to create my niche based on my knowledge and cost-effective pricing for

	little competition and many new products could be introduced.	readiness and I had a passion and innovative products. I was able to sell them at a higher price also and people liked them.	my customers.
Leadership	I get involved with the labor myself and they know they can't cheat me as I know more than them. I do give them space but have to be strict in getting work done.	I care for them but you know you have to maintain the discipline to get work done. We have implemented systems to control labor though I care for them and their needs.	It's more of a participative style where I get involved with them as a team. Guide them educate them, and solve their problems yet focus on maintaining deadlines.

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

This section describes how the women entrepreneurs started their journey of becoming entrepreneurs and how they experienced growth in their businesses along with their leadership styles, which are critical to the growth of their businesses.

It is evident that all three women entrepreneurs started as Jacks-of-all-trades (Lazear, 2005). They gave a rich account of how their journeys started and the fact that was common in all three accounts was that the journeys were pillared on their sound knowledge which could not be challenged easily by their employees. Also, they all had a passion and will to do their work. These women defied the fact that female entrepreneurs are comfortable with the small size of business even though they now get better support than in the past (Veena & Nagaraja, 2013).

They undertook entrepreneurship not out of necessity but to enhance empowerment and freedom as suggested by A.Kalim, (2019). They also wanted status in society and in family (A.Kalim, 2019; Pérez-Pérez & Avilés-Hernández, 2016). Motivation for them was derived from freedom to work by religion and family (Azmi, 2017; Suárez-Ortega & Gálvez-García, 2017).

As suggested by recent studies these women entrepreneurs were keen to grow their businesses and explore newer industries (Kalnins & Williams, 2014; Anna et al., 2000). They were able to grow their businesses based on the knowledge of related processes, machines, and use of resources along with strong management of labor and market issues. Their education, networking, and international exposure through various channels such as conferences, web search, and national and international memberships of related organizations played a vital role in enabling them to devise intelligent market strategies, handle competition, exploit opportunities in the market, bring product innovation and product diversification.

It was observed that these women entrepreneurs maintained high growth by being structurally more organized and had better planning for market expansion, technological advancement, utilization of a vast range of financial resources, team based approach, and strong leadership as reasoned by Gundry & Welsch, (2001). These women entrepreneurs demonstrated themselves to be strong leaders, where leadership was founded on profound professional knowledge. Though they indicated that it was difficult to control the male labor force and interaction with vendors and clients, they led through a participative/collaborative style of leadership. They were able to develop their employees, help them through their problems and bring out results through consensus building. Yet they were authoritative with deadlines and were result-oriented.

**Table.3. Women's Perception of Their Entrepreneurial Characteristics**

Sub - Themes	A	B	C
Belief Systems	I had a strong belief in myself and my will to do something big.	I believe if you have confidence in yourself and faith in God then nothing can stop you from achieving results.	I had a strong faith in Allah and believed in my skills and knowledge. I don't know how I sailed through but it happened!
Learning to be Innovative	It's all about being receptive to your customers' needs, and opportunities that come in the environment and keeping an eagle eye on your competition. I used a lot of networking especially from our vendors and prospective employees etc. and participated in international conferences, to come up with market innovations.	For me customer tastes were important. If I don't develop new tastes, and shapes and add variety to my products my novelty would die. I did a lot of it through professional education, participation in international events, and memberships in global professional organizations.	Networking played a major role along with the enhancement of knowledge through various international learning programs.
Risk Tolerance	Risks have to be managed but I was very cautious with every step I took. First investigated, test-marketed and then invested in the products.	Without taking risks no business can survive. However, due to limited capital, I made calculated investments.	I think I am quite a risk-taker. I have lost some of my investments trying to add diversification. It was quite a learning experience, though not financially.

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

Women are different from male entrepreneurs in terms of their characteristics and their self-perception is also very important to their performance as entrepreneurs (Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007). Women's perception of entrepreneurial characteristics included their belief systems, how they learned to be innovative, and discussion on their risk tolerance. From the above findings, it can be concluded that these women entrepreneurs had a strong belief in their capabilities and also had a strong will power to succeed. They were also spiritually sound and stood strong on their religious beliefs, and perceived their faith to be a source of empowerment for them. This characteristic compelled them to move forward.

Agarwal, S & Lenka, (2014); Pérez-Pérez & Avilés-Hernández, (2016); Nawaz, (2018); Adeel, Khan, Naz, Raza, & Fatima, (2012); Jawad, (2016), highlighted that women entrepreneurs are challenged by their entrepreneurial orientation, skills and education, family obligations and support, their own beliefs, opinions and behaviors and motivations. However, the studied women entrepreneurs' defied claims of these studies and not only held a high opinion of them but also accepted changes in the environment with a positive attitude and captured opportunities desired for business growth. This demonstrated that due to their strong and relevant networking skills and desire to keep themselves abreast with the latest local and international trends they were able to keep their businesses alive and growing. They all grew businesses by introducing both product and process innovations.

Innovation is also dependent upon the capability to tolerate risks. A & B took very calculated and affordable risks to innovate and grow. However, C demonstrated higher levels of risk tolerance and even lost some investments. A major reason for calculated risks was the limited availability of finance and other resources and the fear of losing business. However, this fact is refuted by Shahriar, (2018) who implied that financial opportunities are equally available to women. Since they grew on what they had and were not opting for external finance they can be termed as risk-averse.

**Table.4. Women's Entrepreneurial Learning**

Sub – Themes	A	B	C
Role Models	Frankly speaking, I had none as it was just a passion and internal drive.	I had always admired successful women entrepreneurs and the independence that they enjoyed. But no specific role model.	No specific role model but wanted to be different from the women around me.
Mentors	My father was a great source of support and guidance for me.	My father and husband guided me a lot in situations where I found myself stuck. Also, my network of friends was a source of professional support for me.	I think mentoring doesn't come from one source as I had many ranging from my family, friends, and professional associations.

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

Two sub-themes discussed under Women's Entrepreneurial Learning are: learning through Role Models and learning with Mentors. All participants viewed Role Model as someone who could be admired and could be sought as a source of inspiration although no relationship with the Role Model is mandatory. However, they described a mentor as someone who they knew personally and viewed them as a source of advice.

Researchers have argued that entrepreneurship is a gender-neutral profession and women can adopt it if policies are devised to promote them by changing the mindsets, usage of media, education, and training especially of families (Shahriar, 2018). Women entrepreneurs conformed to this thought and, if not totally, they disregarded the idea of a role model. They adopted entrepreneurship out of an internal drive rather than impersonating any personality. Participants A & C showed no desire for Role Models and were more driven by their passion and will to succeed. However, participant B was inspired by established and stable women around her. All these women sought mentoring from close family and friends, whom they trusted highly and were also dependent on emotionally. However, they expressed mixed results regarding learning from and getting support directly or indirectly from their mentors. They had a wider belief in learning from experience and wisdom (i.e., learning from others in the overall business community) and discussions with various people at various occasions such as conferences and events.

This showed that their learning and decision-making was not just limited to their role models or mentors but they were smarter and acquired various other sources to consider when making decisions.

**Table.5. Women's Entrepreneurial Reflections on Gender**

Sub - Themes	A	B	C
Industry	My choice of the industry was by fortune. I started it when my employer sold it out and went abroad for good. Since I had knowledge and capital I took a humble start in this male-dominated business.	Being a woman baking was my passion, even though professionally this industry is mostly dominated by men in our country but I entered it out of my choice and passion.	My selection of industry is based on my professional knowledge and family background and support.
Banking Finance	I don't believe in loans. I built a business on my own and hard-earned capital. I have seen people going bankrupt or ending up with minimal profits due to increased liabilities.	I had a humble start from savings and then built on it. There were times when I needed finance from banks but I made smart and manageable schedules to pay off debts. By the grace of God, no more debts.	First of all, I don't have much knowledge about banking finance and secondly, there's a strong belief in slow and steady growth without debt. Therefore, I never went for external financing.
Socio-cultural Norms	Yes, it requires a great deal of effort to make your space in a male-dominated environment. But I think it's your confidence and strategic planning which leads you through. Being a woman, you are very limited in your interactions but with age and time, people accept you and things become easier.	It's quite difficult to get work done out of male laborers and many times difficult to deal with vendors as well. But I think one's knowledge and confidence work out best.	These can be disturbing but, in the strata, where we live things can be easy due to education, our knowledge, and financial standing. Also, with changes in time, our environment has become more acceptable to women entrepreneurs.

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

Women's entrepreneurial reflections on gender include the sub-themes of choice of industry, access to banking and finance, and how they dealt with the socio-cultural norms.

Research have attempted to indicate that male and female entrepreneurs possess different characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses and these have influenced their performance as entrepreneurs (Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007; Veena & Nagaraja, 2013; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007). They prefer to keep the size of business limited and adopt more traditional types of businesses (Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007; Anna, Chandler, Jansen, & Mero, 2000). However, these women entrepreneurs behaved contradictory to the literature available on a choice of industries and size of business they would prefer. Even though participants A & B were working in the food industry of Dairy products and Bakery items respectively, they were working at an SME level where their firms were manufacturing on massive commercial scales. Participant A was reaching out to markets on a national scale while participant B had established several outlets and online sales in the economic hub of Pakistan – Karachi. Participant C was also associated with the chemical industry where women are unlikely to work. They were working comfortably in their industries and in line with the recent studies which suggest that women entrepreneurs are now keener to grow their businesses and explore newer industries (Kalnins & Williams, 2014; Anna et al., 2000); due to technical knowledge and sound family and educational backgrounds.

Another surprising thing highlighted by (Kalnins & Williams, (2014) is that the importance of emotional and financial support was negatively related to sales for a non-traditional group of women entrepreneurs. This was also reinforced in our study as the women studied were not willing to opt for external finance as a source of business expansion. Except participant B who took a careful loan enough to be paid back easily both participants A & Chad were reservations in acquiring external finances. This was because they had strong beliefs in growing on their earnings; they had seen businesses dying out due to external debts and also due to a lack of knowledge about the types of finances available. This behavior was contradictory to the literature which suggests that financing women entrepreneurs in developing countries is still a major challenge (Agarwal & Lenka, 2016; Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Nawaz, 2018; Jawad, 2016).

Researchers indicate that women in Pakistan are largely influenced by socio-economic factors leading to a gender-biased environment (Bushra & Wajiha, 2013; Jawad, 2016). They also suffer from a lack of capital, lack of education, family responsibilities, and lack of structural support systems (Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Nawaz, 2018). The experience of these women was coherent with the studies conducted, except education and family support, where they stood strong. They showed great strength in facing a male-dominated society especially when it came to starting and growing their businesses successfully. They all acknowledged that it was difficult to operate in a male-dominated environment yet they were able to come out of it successfully mainly due to their confidence which came from their knowledge and family support.

**Table.6. Women's Entrepreneurial Self as Knower**

Sub - Themes	A	B	C
Confirmation	After gaining work experience, I intended to start my own business. I was very clear about my intentions of running an enterprise and had the confidence and a clear path in my mind about my way forward.	I had no experience but was a homemaker. But I never thought of doing a job as it didn't suit my lifestyle or my temperament. I like the idea of being my boss and enjoy doing things my way. I knew if I'd do something it would be my own business.	I had gained work experience before becoming an entrepreneur. I had gained that confidence and talent for making people work. After leaving the job for personal reasons I didn't want to look for another one as I enjoy my independence and like the idea of doing my work my way.
Community	Though I am not associated with women's chambers or associations I still use networking through various other trade bodies and associations. I want women to be confident and see confidence as a key to success. It's easy to interact with men than with women due to a high factor of respect embedded in our culture. Also, they are more willing to help.	I like interacting and mixing with aspiring and existing women entrepreneurs. I am not a part of any women's chamber or association but I play my role in society as a guest / inspirational speaker at various events. From my own experience, I can say that it's difficult to work with other women entrepreneurs due to certain elements such as those recognition, competition rather jealousy....	I am also associated with trade bodies but not specifically women's chambers or bodies. This is because of the kind of reputation they carry also because of dominance by certain elements and the fact that these chambers work more for personal recognition than service to women's communities. However, I would like to share my experience and help those who are struggling to set up their own enterprises.

**Source: Author's own elaboration**

Women's entrepreneurial self as knowers is explained by the sub-themes of confirmation and community. The community was understood as to how they interacted with the community especially for networking as women entrepreneurs.

Participants A & C had prior job experiences and were clear on how to undertake entrepreneurship for their benefit. They had work experience, gathered capital, and desire for independence which was also present in participant B. When this was coupled with family and friends' support and acceptance they converted into entrepreneurs. They had a deep sense of knowledge about their entrepreneurial self and were able to recognize their talents and passion as entrepreneurs. They were not entrepreneurs out of necessity but out of knowledge and passion. These were the major reasons for their growth.

Studies imply that women entrepreneurs require support from the Government, social and cultural influences, networking opportunities, economic opportunities, and SME development (Adeel et al., 2012; Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Wendy Ming-Yen, Teoh, Dr. Siong-Choy, 2007; Nawaz, 2018; Almubarak, 2016). The women entrepreneurs studied interestingly were able to realize and harness networking and environmental opportunities to grow their enterprises. It was very interesting to note that none of the women entrepreneurs were part of any women's chamber or association. They did have memberships of other trade-related bodies and fully harnessed networking from these bodies. The major reason for this defined by them was that these exclusive women's chambers and associations are backed by men for their benefit and are for publicity purposes only. In reality, they rarely support the cause of developing and assisting women entrepreneurs. Also, these places are notorious for the kind of women entrepreneurs associated with them. Also, interestingly even in a male-dominated environment they found it easier to interact with men than women. This was because advices from men were found to be more meaningful and elements like those of jealousy etc. were not common in men, who extend a better helping hand considering the gender difference.

## **5. Discussion, Limitation, and Future Recommendations**

It was a comprehensive study that investigated in detail the learnings and experiences of growth-oriented women entrepreneurs of Karachi. Findings of the study suggest that these women entrepreneurs braved the situations and established examples for aspiring and struggling women entrepreneurs. The first and foremost point to be noted is that they worked out of their own will, knowledge/education and family support and not out of necessity. This type of motivation empowered them and loaded them with the desired level of confidence to confront the socio-cultural barriers.

Also important is the fact that they were not looking for external financing as a source of business expansion and survival, instead were building on existing capital. They were also able to identify networking and knowledge-enhancing opportunities which played a vital role in the growth of their businesses. These women entrepreneurs were role models to themselves and looked for mentorship with well-trusted kin. It is important to note that they worked in non-traditional industries mainly dominated by men, yet they were able to pave their way forward. The major reasons for the success and growth of these women entrepreneurs were: their belief in themselves, education, knowledge, the realization of networking and economic opportunities present in the environment and support from family and friends.

These findings imply that both policymakers and academia should provide resources and opportunities to build programs that augment the confidence of these women through

education and personality building. Better networking opportunities and efficient use of chambers and associations for both national and international exposures should also be encouraged. Government can also arrange for better collaborative opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Also if more families become educated a better social support system can emerge for women entrepreneurs.

Further research can be carried out in understanding these factors so that the results can be generalized into developing an implementable framework for women entrepreneurs on the whole. Also, another interesting area of research could be how these women entrepreneurs were able to expand without a desire for external financing. And how successful can they be in non-traditional industries as the trend shows a shift from traditional to non-traditional?

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