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## Women Entrepreneurship and Support Systems: A Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

This review elucidates the evolving paradigm of women's entrepreneurship worldwide, particularly in developing and emerging nations. Despite recent advancements, women entrepreneurs still encounter hurdles that significantly surpass those faced by their male counterparts. This study compiles modern studies in four important areas: the theoretical background of women's entrepreneurship, the special possibilities given to female entrepreneurs, and the infrastructure and support networks created to give them the higher success rate, and the challenges they continue to face. Through an extensive review of the literature, this synthesis brings forth issues common to a variety of geographical settings along with highlighting considerations unique to various regions. The findings indicate that, despite a conceptual recognition of the economic influence of women entrepreneurs, considerable deficiencies remain in the execution of targeted policies, access to funding, and socio-cultural support. The review emphasizes that effective treatments must simultaneously address structural and cultural constraints. Further policy ideas encompass the creation of inclusive support networks tailored to the distinct requirements of women entrepreneurs, the promotion of gender sensitive policies, and the advocacy for further research into.

**Keywords:** women entrepreneurship, economic development, entrepreneurial support systems, business challenges, policy development, gender barriers.

### Introduction

Female entrepreneurship serves as a vital engine for economic growth and social progress; nonetheless, women often encounter substantial barriers that hinder their entrepreneurial success (Bashir, 2024). The rising count of women-owned businesses worldwide points to women's increasing involvement in global economic development (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015 a.).

Emerging as a transforming tool in global economic development, women entrepreneurship is changing labor markets, innovation ecosystems, and community resilience (Kitole & Genda, 2024). Women's participation in entrepreneurial activities has skyrocketed within the previous 10 years; the latest statistics show that one in ten women globally started startups in the year 2023, compared to one in every eight men (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2024). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's 2023/24 report reveals that women's startup activity rates surged from 6.1% during 2001–2005 to 10.4% in 2021–2023 across 30 economies, marking a 70% increase in entrepreneurial

participation over two decades (GEM, 2024). The economic impact of women entrepreneurs is becoming increasingly apparent, especially in developing economies.

Employing over 27 million people, women-led companies accounted for 18% of the entrepreneurial scene in India by 2023, a notable increase from 10% in 2017 (GEM, 2024). Compared to Poland and Denmark, where rates remain below 10%, Chile and Colombia lead OECD countries with female entrepreneurship rates of 30% and 26%, respectively. (Statista, 2024). High-income countries, despite their advanced economies, report the lowest rates of women's startup activity and the widest gender gaps, suggesting that economic development alone cannot dismantle systemic barriers (GEM, 2024; World Bank, 2024). For instance, only 5.9% of women in high-income nations manage established businesses—defined as ventures operational for over 3.5 years—compared to 15.7 million women-run enterprises in India alone (GEM, 2024; Babar et al., 2021). These variations underscore the need for context-specific support systems aimed at addressing regional challenges, including legislative frameworks and public views. With investors generally seeing women-led businesses as riskier or less scalable, female-founded enterprises get fewer than 2% of worldwide venture funding (GCIC, 2022).

Notwithstanding data showing women-owned companies average 20% more income per dollar invested than male-owned companies, this discrepancy remains (World Bank, 2024). In Sub-Saharan Africa, where women comprise 50% of the population and lead in entrepreneurial activity, their contributions account for only a third of regional GDP due to undercapitalization (GCIC, 2022; World Bank, 2024). Efficient support systems have demonstrated their efficacy in closing gender gaps in entrepreneurship.

Women entrepreneurs make significant contributions to innovation, job creation, and overall economic vibrancy across various economies worldwide (Borisov & Vinogradov, 2022; Roy et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025). Considering their increasing prevalence and notable achievements, women entrepreneurs are still facing distinct hurdles, such as limited access to funding, entrenched prejudices based on gender, and insufficient integration of work and life. (Marlow, 2002; Mitra, 2002; Damwad, 2007; Day-Hookoomsing & Essoo, 2007; Lall & Shikha, 2008; Cohoon et al., 2010; Jayammal, 2012; Ferreira et al., 2017; Kamunyu & Theuri, 2017; Nasri & Muhammad, 2018; Al-Kwif et al., 2020; Franzke et al., 2022; Hillman & Radel, 2022). Supporting mechanisms are therefore crucial in leveling the playing field and empowering women to surmount these challenges. These institutions encompass a comprehensive range of assets and events, such as grants and loans, mentoring programs, opportunities to network, and family support systems. (Coleman & Robb, 2009; Minniti & Naudé, 2010; Field et al., 2010; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Ramadani et al., 2015; Sajilan et al., 2015; Sharif, 2015; Thebaud, 2015; Agarwal & Lenka, 2015a; Agarwal & Lenka, 2015b; Baker & Ahmad, 2016; Anggadwita et al., 2017; Kemper et al., 2019; Ghose et al., 2021a; Ghose et al., 2021b; Zhang et al., 2025). The efficacy and availability of these support networks can significantly impact the performance and sustainability of women-owned enterprises. (Hillman & Kunwar, 2024).

Existing literature reveals several key themes such as access to capital remains a key concern for women entrepreneurs. Conventional financial institutions exhibit bias, making it challenging for women to secure the necessary cash to initiate and expand their own businesses. (Franzke et al., 2022). Government-sponsored initiatives and microfinance institutions have become significant sources of financing, with their reach and effects differing by region and sector. (Ahl, 2006; Aidis et al., 2007; Croson & Gneezy, 2009; Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Field et al., 2010; Bruton et al., 2013; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Bakar & Ahmad, 2016; Boermans & Willebrands, 2017; Addati et al., 2018; Erten & Keskin, 2018; Cho et al., 2020; Cooke & Xiao, 2021; Borisov & Vinogradov, 2022; Chatterjee, 2022). Furthermore, mentorship and access to networks are crucial for providing women entrepreneurs with the assistance, information, and contacts required to navigate the complexities of the entrepreneurial environment. (Franzke et al., 2022). Meanwhile, family support and work-life balance are of particular concern to women entrepreneurs (Zhang et al., 2025). Work and family responsibilities can be difficult to balance, and support from family or access to cheap childcare can play a significant role in the success of women's small businesses (Field et al., 2010; Heath & Mobarak, 2015; Agarwal et al., 2020; Poggesi et al., 2020; Mahajan & Bandyopadhyay, 2021; Chatterjee, 2022; Hillman & Kunwar, 2024).

This literature review seeks to integrate previous studies on women entrepreneurship and support systems to pinpoint gaps in existing knowledge and propose directions for future research. This study examines the various forms of support available to women entrepreneurs and their impact on business

performance and life satisfaction (Chatterjee et al., 2022). This review aims to guide policy and practice to foster more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial environments (Agarwal & Lenka, 2018.). Comprehending the complex workings of support systems is essential for fostering an atmosphere conducive to the success of women entrepreneurs, as well as for promoting revenue generation and social advancement (Bashir, 2024). Furthermore, understanding the intricacies of formalization, as put forward by Karki is crucial in coming up with suitable support systems (Karki et al., 2020). The current literature review aims to consolidate existing research on women's entrepreneurship, focusing specifically on four main areas: (1) women entrepreneurship: concept and development; (2) women entrepreneurs' opportunities; (3) policies, support mechanisms, resources, and training programs fostering women's entrepreneurship; and (4) challenges faced by women entrepreneurs.

This review employed a convenience sampling method, primarily drawing from publications available on Google Scholar, with an emphasis on materials pertinent to women's entrepreneurship. The review focused on four primary variables, which are (1) the notion and evolution of women's entrepreneurship, (2) opportunities available to women entrepreneurs, (3) policies, support structures, resources, and training programs that support women's entrepreneurship, and (4) challenges to women entrepreneurs. For this study, inclusion criteria were set. Only English-language, peer-reviewed articles that mentioned at least one of the four selected variables were included. Articles focusing on other variables were excluded. References from the selected articles were also reviewed to identify additional relevant studies and ensure comprehensive coverage of the selected domains.

## **Debates on Women Entrepreneurship and Support Systems**

### **Women's Entrepreneurship**

The notion of women's entrepreneurship has been essentially reconstituted over the past few decades, from a limited interest in women's business ownership per se to a broader appreciation of the complex entrepreneurial endeavors of women and their extensive social contributions. Women entrepreneurs are now acknowledged to be a diverse group whose motivations, actions, and influences differ greatly due to a range of personal, social, and environmental circumstances (Solesvik et al., 2019).

The literature presents several perspectives on women entrepreneurship. Panda (2018) references Vinze's characterization of a woman entrepreneur as "an entrepreneurial person in pursuit of chances with exceptional foresight, possessing business acumen, remarkable determination, and, most importantly, a person who is adventurous enough to take risks with the unknown due to the adventurous spirit she has. The definition emphasizes the characteristics and attributes that culminate in entrepreneurial behavior rather than the ownership of a business.

Academic literature has also grown to stress the necessity of understanding the reasons driving women into entrepreneurship. These reasons are generally identified as "push" or "pull" determinants (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Push factors compel women to exit their existing occupation due to economic imperatives, gender disparities, or conflicts between work and home responsibilities (Cho et al., 2020). Alternatively, pull determinants draw women into entrepreneurship because of promises of career growth, autonomy, self-efficacy, and family business legacies (Durrah et al., 2024).

The prevalence of such motivational drivers varies across contexts. In emerging economies, necessity entrepreneurship is more common among women who pursue entrepreneurial ventures as a means of survival and not so much as an opportunity to exploit (Minniti & Naudé, 2010). Despite unfavorable economic circumstances, therefore, women demonstrate remarkable resilience and ingenuity in developing sustainable businesses that support their families and communities (Kitole & Genda, 2024).

Female entrepreneurs possess distinct traits in comparison to male entrepreneurs (Franzke et al., 2022). The literature suggests that women-led firms are more likely to be situated in service sectors, emphasize social returns alongside financial returns, and practice participative leadership styles (Eddleston & Powell, 2008). As Zhang et al., (2023) note in their study of women entrepreneurs in China, many women also feel strongly committed to environmental sustainability and social responsibility, incorporating "green knowledge" and practices into their business models. The economic contribution made by female entrepreneurs is significant and growing. Globally, it has been estimated that women own and manage millions of firms across the world, making significant contributions to job creation,

innovation, and general economic development (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). In Jamaica, for instance, women head close to 42 percent of all households and own approximately 38 percent of female-owned businesses (Saner & Yiu, 2019).

Despite its economic significance, research on women's entrepreneurship remains relatively scarce compared to other entrepreneurship research. Jennings and Brush (2013) point out that merely approximately 10 percent of entrepreneurship research explicitly addresses women entrepreneurs. The existing research gap indicates a necessity for a more thorough and comprehensive examination of women's entrepreneurial activities across various situations (Chávez-Rivera et al., 2024).

Current literature has demanded the application of intersectional theories to women's entrepreneurship, in the realization that women entrepreneurs' experiences are not only shaped by gender, but also by other factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and geography (Ramadani et al., 2015). This enables the identification of diversity among women entrepreneurs and prevents the generalization of their needs and challenges. Women's entrepreneurship needs to be understood by paying attention to individual characteristics and situational circumstances, such as personal motivations and abilities, social and cultural processes, and economic and institutional environments (Zhang et al., 2023). As scholarships in this area progress, increasingly sophisticated theoretical frameworks are being developed to capture this multidimensionality and provide more nuanced explanations of women's entrepreneurial experiences and outcomes (Menon & Shekhar, 2025)

**Table 1**

*Women's Entrepreneurship - Concept and Development*

Author and Year	Methods	Findings	Recommendations
Tanzanian Women Entrepreneurs, (2003)	Empirical study (case analysis)	Women start businesses for income but face finance, corruption, and legal barriers.	Offer training, reduce gender barriers, and support formalization.
McAdam (2011)	Multidisciplinary review	Research lacks unified definitions and legal focus.	Create a unified framework; encourage legal and interdisciplinary studies.
Noguera et al., (2013)	Systematic literature review	Women boost jobs and GDP but have lower participation, especially in developed nations.	Better policies, resources, and networks for women.
Cardella et al., (2020)	Systematic review	Growing research on motivations, barriers, and performance.	Expand studies on innovation-driven female entrepreneurship.
Krishnamoorthy & Balasubramani, (2021)	Empirical research	Key motivations: ambition, skills, family, and market opportunities.	Strengthening policies, family, and institutional support.

Contd.

Author and Year	Methods	Findings	Recommendations
Yousafzai et al., (2021)	Systematic review (content analysis):	Mostly qualitative studies in developing notions focus on challenges and motivations.	More quantitative research; address context-specific issues.
Khasma (2023)	Literature review	Women's entrepreneurship aids growth but faces social and economic hurdles.	More policies, mentorship, and societal change.

Studies mentioned in Table 1 identify their vital role in economic growth, the creation of employment, and gender empowerment in the developed and developing economies. Ambition, autonomy, and the need for earnings are the key stimuli for women entrepreneurs but are deterred by persistent barriers such as limited property rights, access to finance, and social biases (Christodoulou et.al., 2024). Most of the studies employ qualitative or systematic review methods, with missing mixed-method and legal research. Suggestions in all the studies emphasize improving institutional and regulatory support, providing target training, supportive policy, and interdisciplinary research for addressing the structural and contextual barriers of women entrepreneurs.

### Women Entrepreneurship Opportunities

The landscape of business opportunities for women entrepreneurs has expanded significantly over the past few years, driven by changes in global markets, technological development, and changing social attitudes regarding gender roles. These opportunities are potential channels for women to achieve economic self-reliance, career fulfillment, and social empowerment through business ventures (Ramya et al., 2024).

One significant opportunity is the growing services sector, where women entrepreneurs have been well-established for a long time (Kato, 2023). As economies worldwide transition away from manufacturing to services, women are well-placed to capitalize on their often-superior interpersonal skills and customer orientation (Tambunan, 2009). The service sector offers relatively fewer entry hurdles in the nature of capital intensity and technological knowledge, making it accessible to women with less in terms of assets or formal education.

Information technologies have created unparalleled opportunities for women entrepreneurs since they have rendered physical infrastructure less significant and have provided flexible working hours. Electronic payment systems, digital payment systems, and social media marketing allow women to establish and operate businesses from home and continue to be involved in meeting family responsibilities (Ahmetaj et al., 2023). Above all, flexibility is needed in settings where women have mobility limitations or primary caring responsibilities. The advent of social entrepreneurship presents an excellent opportunity for women entrepreneurs. We know that women have been found to care about social impact as much as economic returns, which ideally places them to succeed in the growing market of socially driven ventures (Cho et al., 2020). In Japan, for example, women social entrepreneurs are leveraging their authentic leadership styles and predisposition to transformative learning in coming up with creative solutions to social problems.

Green entrepreneurial opportunities and green entrepreneurship also bode well for women. Zhang et al. (2023) confirmed that green knowledge, green social behavior, and innovative competencies all exert positive influences on Chinese women's entrepreneurial success. As environmentally friendly products and services become more sought after by consumers, women entrepreneurs who have strong environmental commitment can carve out competitive niches in these growing markets.

Global value chains and global markets provide more possibilities for women entrepreneurs with adequate support. Studies in different contexts, including Jamaica (Saner & Yiu, 2019) and Asia (Cho et



al., 2020), highlight the higher engagement of women entrepreneurs in foreign partnerships and export ventures. Global linkages can open one to bigger markets, enhance knowledge transfer, and provide global networks that support business growth and sustainability. There are certain industries that have a huge potential for women entrepreneurs, according to present trends and gender-friendly advantages. These include health and wellness, education and childcare, food and hospitality and financial services. Women entrepreneurs are developing new financial services and financial instruments aimed at other women and thereby filling gaps left by mainstream financial institutions (Andriamahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022).

As Agarwal and Lenka (2018) note in their examination of Indian women entrepreneurs, opportunities for women have changed dramatically over time, from traditional home-based activities (the "3Ks: Kitchen, Kids, and Knitting") to small industry ("3Ps: Pickles, Powder, and Pappad") and now to knowledge-based fields ("3Es: Engineering, Electronics, and Energy"). This change is concurrent with the rising educational attainment, technical skill, and professional assertiveness among women.

While these opportunities are encouraging, scholarly studies show that women cannot achieve optimum benefits from these opportunities because of highly entrenched structural problems (Smith & Sinkford, 2022). The World Economic Forum gender gap report shows that countries like China (103rd), India (108th), Indonesia (85th), Japan (110th), South Korea (115th), Malaysia (101st), Thailand (73rd), and Vietnam (77th) still have wide gender gaps that discourage women's entrepreneurial aspirations (Cho et al., 2020). Capitalizing on these opportunities, therefore, demands concerted effort from various stakeholders such as governments, schools, banks, and civil society organizations.

**Table 2**

*Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs*

Author & Year	Methods	Key Findings	Recommendations
Shane (2000)	Case studies, interviews	Barriers: finance, social norms	Improve funding, gender-sensitive policies
Carter and Shaw (2006)	Longitudinal analysis.	Finance & social capital are critical.	Improve funding, boost social capital.
Aidis and Weeks (2016)	GEM data analysis.	Ecosystem (culture, policy) matters.	Supportive policies reduce barriers.
Kabeer (2016)	Ethnographic research.	Strong networks, weak institutions	Strengthening institutions, targeted support
Brush et al. (2018)	Survey	High social capital, low growth.	Strengthening networks, enhancing training.
Gozun and Koyuncu (2020)	Mixed methods.	Cultural norms constrain opportunities.	Awareness, inclusive ecosystems.

Table 2 reveals several significant remarks about women's entrepreneurship opportunities. Women entrepreneurs possess unique challenges but contribute significantly to economic development and social health. Their definition of success is guided by both personal factors (education, family size) and entrepreneurial factors (firm age, size). Entrepreneurial interest depends greatly on gender-role orientation, with androgynous and masculine women being more entrepreneurial. In terms of access to finances, women depend greatly on informal capital providers as formal banking is least available. Post-pandemic studies indicate greater interest in entrepreneurial happiness and well-being, with research that women entrepreneurs have higher levels of satisfaction compared to men, where they tend to measure

success differently through doing things rather than prestige. Support systems have to be framed for coping with these unique perceptions, acknowledging both financial and non-financial aspects of success as well as diversity among women entrepreneurs.

### **Policy, Support, Facilities, and Training for Women's Entrepreneurship**

The establishment of overall support mechanisms for women entrepreneurs has garnered increasing attention from policymakers, development agencies, and the private sector throughout the world. These mechanisms range from broad policies and legal measures to targeted interventions designed to advance areas of interest to women in entrepreneurship. The government policies also play a crucial role in establishing enabling frameworks that encourage women entrepreneurship.

Various countries have followed various paths in promoting gender equality in entrepreneurial activities and business administration. India, for example, introduced entrepreneurship training for women as part of its five-year plans starting with the fifth five-year plan (1974-78) (Agarwal & Lenka, 2018). Programs, over time, have changed from welfare-based to empowerment-based interventions aimed at placing women as independent agents whose actions will build the nation's economy. Financial support systems are the most important factors in the program design of developing women entrepreneurship. Literature generally identifies that access to finance is one of the major issues for women entrepreneurs (Panda, 2018). In the same way, governments and financial institutions have tried different interventions, including dedicated and credit lines and loan guarantee schemes, such as the Rastriya Mahila Kosh (Credit for Women) in India offers concessional loan facilities to women entrepreneurs alone (Agarwal & Lenka, 2018). Microfinance schemes offer tiny-sized financial facilities to women without access to traditional banking facilities, but some studies doubt the adequacy of such schemes for businesses with growth objectives (Aidis & Weeks, 2016). Some nations have set up specific investment funds for women-owned businesses, thus tackling the alleged gender discrimination in investment. Business development services for women entrepreneurs have also emerged as a successful intervention option. These services typically include business incubation and acceleration programs.

These networks provide not just instrumental guidance but also affective support and role modeling that enable women to remain on track despite challenges. Technology-facilitated platforms have surfaced as novel methods of assisting women entrepreneurs. For instance, in 2016, the Indian government introduced 'Mahila E-Haat,' an online platform under which women entrepreneurs can directly sell their products to customers without the intervention of middlemen (Agarwal & Lenka, 2018). Such online markets and information sites are being established in several countries with a view to facilitating women's access to markets, resources, and networks. Training and educational institutions are increasingly recognizing their role in the development of female entrepreneurship. Universities, along with vocational colleges, are incorporating entrepreneur education into their curriculum while designing specific programs for women students. For Indonesia, for instance, a study conducted by Anggadwita et al. (2017) demonstrates that institutions of higher education have managed to change the mindset of society towards women's involvement in the economy and equip them with necessary skills and knowledge. International institutions and organizations have placed much emphasis on women entrepreneurship in their interventions. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), provide an overarching framework for activities for promoting the economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurship (Saner & Yiu, 2019). The World Bank, International Labour Organization, and UN Women operate several programs with the aim to empower women entrepreneurs in developing countries.

Despite several programs existing for support, research has found that many programs tend to be susceptible to fragmentation as well as insufficient coordination. Jamaica's situation is illustrative of this. Saner and Yiu (2019), for example, find that "financing for women entrepreneurs is on the rise in developing countries" (p. 302), yet whether financial investments are targeted and effective remains a doubt.

Likewise, questions have been raised about the extent to which entrepreneurship support programs tackle structural and cultural constraints that discourage women's business activities. Current studies stress the necessity of more focused and context-specific mechanisms to support women entrepreneurs. Rather than generic programs, effective interventions will need to be tailored to the needs, drivers, and issues of women operating in particular contexts. As the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)

Jamaica survey has suggested (Saner & Yiu, 2019), this may include facilitating women's cultural clubs, creating care cooperatives, developing digital literacy, and accessing to appropriately structured financial flows.

**Table 3**

*Policies, Support Systems, Resources, and Training Schemes Facilitating Women's Entrepreneurship*

Author & Year	Methods	Key Findings	Recommendations
Bekh (2014)	Lit. review, policy analysis.	Targeted policies help but face obstacles.	Human capital, gender mainstreaming, policy evaluation.
OECD (2018)	Policy brief: case studies.	Systemic barriers (finance, skills) exist.	Gender-sensitive policies, training, and access to networks.
Bullough et al. (2019)	Global qualitative/quantitative	High-growth ventures need networks & policies.	Expand networks, incubators, and inclusive regulations.
EU Parliament (2021)	Lit. review, surveys, Delphi panel	Gendered barriers; need for mentoring & networks	Gender-aware policies, role models, and funding access
Ghimire (2023)	Survey (Nepal), SEM	Policy support boosts self-efficacy & sustainability.	Strengthening policies, training, and mentorship.

Table 3 shows how women's entrepreneurship is constrained by structural barriers such as the absence of finance, networks, and tailored training. Policy interventions—when they are evidence-based and gender-sensitive—can significantly improve women's entrepreneurial performance by averting these barriers. Successful intervention involves mentoring, networking, and role models, in addition to targeted training and exposure to financial instruments. Research emphasizes the establishment of self-efficacy among women entrepreneurs and implies that support systems go beyond male-centric models to adopting proactive, inclusive, and persistent approaches. Recommendations always demand the creation of facilitative policies, investment in human capital, and establishment of supportive ecosystems through incubators, accelerators, and redesigning regulations.

### Challenges to Women Entrepreneurship

Even though there has been advancement in discovering and promoting women entrepreneurs, there are still considerable obstacles to their overall involvement and prosperity in entrepreneurial endeavors (Zhang et al., 2023). These obstacles are multifaceted, comprising personal, social, economic, and institutional elements that function in complicated manners in various settings.

Gender discrimination is a fundamental barrier to women's entrepreneurship globally.

As, in the opinion of Panda (2018), "Entrepreneurship is generally perceived as a man's domain" (p. 3), women are subjected to overt and covert discrimination in their endeavor to enter this field. This is faced by them through various channels, including differences in compensations, loss of reputation, and resistance from family members and working associates. In certain instances, patriarchal religious and social roles place further restrictions on women's mobility, decision-making freedom, and ability to meet with male business counterparts. Work-family conflict is also one of the significant challenges for women entrepreneurs globally (Saner & Yiu, 2019). Empirical evidence consistently shows that women perform the heavy-duty domestic work and care to a great extent, leading to what has been called a "double burden" or "second shift" (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015).



This conflict is particularly acute in societies with salient gender role expectations, as described by Jennings and Brush (2013): "Women are pushed to play their 'womanly' role as primary caregivers to their children and simultaneously comply with the patriarchal ideals of what a 'good wife' and homemaker would be" (p. 7). These pressures may push women to relinquish their entrepreneurial development aspirations or entrepreneurship altogether. Financial constraints are often the primary obstacle for female entrepreneurs. Women candidates will be expected to encounter high collateral demands, increased interest rates, and general suspicion on the part of lending agencies (Panda, 2018). Poor employment records and low wages restrict women from building credit histories required for finance (Andersson et al., 2007). Venture capital and private equity are still out of reach for women entrepreneurs, especially in developing economies. According to some research, women entrepreneurs have a greater level of risk aversion regarding external financing, thus hampering their growth opportunities (Maden, 2015). Infrastructural deficiencies negatively affect women entrepreneurs, who generally have lower mobility and working hours compared to male entrepreneurs. These infrastructural deficiencies include a shortage of childcare facilities, poor transport facilities, unsystematic power supply, and poor business support services.

In emerging economies, such infrastructural deficits severely constrain women from building and growing successful businesses (Panda, 2018). Negative business, economic, and political conditions pose difficulties that face all entrepreneurs but have gender-differentiated implications. Excessive taxation, complex regulations, bureaucracy, corruption, and political instability pose particularly difficult conditions for women entrepreneurs who may lack enough resources and networks to mitigate these difficulties (Panda, 2018). In some environments, gender-discriminatory regulations and property rights also constrain women's economic activities.

Insufficient entrepreneurship education and training is another important obstacle. Most women lack exposure to formal business training, mentoring, and experience that can prepare them for entrepreneurial success (Cho et al., 2020). Even women who are tertiary educated might not be able to transfer their knowledge to business in the absence of entrepreneurship training. The gap is particularly wide in developing countries where general access to education for women is low. Psychological and personal limitations significantly affect women's entrepreneurial activity. These limitations are low self-efficacy, fear of failure, low perception of opportunity, and absence of entrepreneurial female role models (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007). As suggested by Panda (2018), "Even after succeeding, women entrepreneurs downplay their achievements to avoid antagonizing their male family members and business counterparts" (p. 7). These ingrained problems might deter the entrepreneurial intentions as well as persistence of women.

The intersection of these issues offers particularly relevant obstacles in some contexts. For example, in traditional Islamic societies, women entrepreneurs are limited in mobility and contact with men, which takes away from their ability to conduct business activities (Yousuf Danish & Lawton Smith, 2012). In another example, in rural areas of developing countries, inadequate infrastructure, highly ingrained gender roles, and limited access to education offer some of the same obstacles to women's entrepreneurship. Regional variations in these concerns are typical. In East Asia, for instance, women entrepreneurs are likely to experience challenges in balancing family expectations and business demands, while in South Asia, mobility restrictions and weak property rights present additional challenges (Tambunan, 2009). Despite regional variations, the literature recognizes some comparable patterns in emerging and developing economies, with financial constraints, work-family conflict, and gender discrimination constituting almost universal concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic has also generated unprecedented challenges for women entrepreneurs globally. The evidence indicates that women-owned businesses have been disproportionately affected by pandemic disruptions, largely because of their overrepresentation in vulnerable sectors (e.g., hospitality, retail, and personal services), their smaller average size, and the greater caregiving responsibilities women bore with school and child care closures (Ayatakshi-Endow & Steele, 2021).

Understanding these multi-faceted challenges is key to developing useful strategies for assisting women entrepreneurs. Rather than attempting to address every barrier in isolation, there needs to be complementary strategies that recognize the interconnected dynamics of the problems facing women and that address both structural and attitudinal barriers simultaneously.

**Table 4**

*Challenges to Women Entrepreneurs*

Author & Year	Methods	Key Findings	Recommendations
Kruja and Berisha (2021)	Case study	Funding gaps, patriarchy, and bureaucracy hinder women.	Targeted funding, reduced bureaucracy, gender-sensitive programs
GEM (2019)	GEM survey	Lack of government support limits growth.	More women-focused training and mentorship
Hysa (2011a, 2011b)	Policy analysis	Weak institutions, corruption block access.	Strengthening institutions, fight corruption.
Aidis and Weeks (2016)	Comparative analysis	Supportive policies boost success.	Comprehensive finance/training policies
Godany and Mura (2021)	Qualitative research	Training empowers women.	Tailored training programs
Xheneti and Smallbone (2008)	Policy review	Poor infrastructure limits growth.	Invest in women's business infrastructure.
Farzana (2018)	Survey analysis	Necessity-driven, needs support	Expand training, improve financing.

Table 4 identifies that women entrepreneurship is strongly hampered by weak policy support, low access to facilities, and poor training programs. Kruja & Berisha (2021) demand policies aimed at specifically enhancing the finance and overcoming the bureaucratic red tape, whereas GEM (2019) demands increased government expenditure on women-focused training, mentorship, and support infrastructure. Hysa (2011a, 2011b) focuses on the necessity to develop robust institutional frameworks and combat corruption in a bid to guarantee access to resources. Aidis & Weeks (2016) demonstrate that comprehensive policies like financial support and networking sites are vital for success. Similarly, Godany & Mura (2021) advocate individualized training in entrepreneurship and social support groups for empowering women. Xheneti & Smallbone (2008) highlight investments in infrastructure, particularly in buildings that can accommodate women entrepreneurs. Farzana (2018) finds that need-based motivation can be translated into success through good policy intervention. Overall, literature converges on the need for holistic policy frameworks that enhance support structures, expand access to facilities, and provide specialized training to catalyze women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment.

## Discussion

Women's entrepreneurship research has also developed from early work, which to a large degree, was interested in female and male entrepreneur contrasts, to more complex frameworks examining the multidimensional interaction of individual, organizational, and environmental factors affecting women's entrepreneurial behavior (Zhang et al., 2023). In the eyes of studies, it moved from merely reporting gender differences to the investigation of the processes explaining the emergence and reproduction of gender differences (Jennings and Brush, 2013). Despite these developments, theoretical discussions specifically targeting the understanding of women's entrepreneurship remain underdeveloped (Anderson & Ojediran, 2022). Many studies continue to apply theory models based on male entrepreneurs' experiences, which can inadvertently overlook the unique aspects in women's entrepreneurial experiences (Steenblock & Sundermeier, 2025). Theoretical explanations that are more gender-sensitive could be evolved in future studies to capture the complex nature of women's entrepreneurship (Vuciterna et al., 2024).

Literature highlights an extensive variety of differences in women's entrepreneurial activity and interest by region and nation (Deng et al., 2021). Though both gender discrimination and work-family

conflict issues seem almost universal, their precise nature is extremely context-specific (Brieger et al., 2024). Women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia, for instance, have to contend with mobility constraints and mixing of genders that entrepreneurs in Jamaica or India do not (Alreshoodi et al., 2022). This heterogeneity of places demands context-sensitive research and intervention. One-size-fits-all policies and programs purporting to promote women's entrepreneurship are not going to work amidst such contextual diversity (Andersson et al., 2022). Policies and programs, on the other hand, must be context-sensitive in order to deal with the unique challenges and opportunities of each environment while drawing on universally relevant principles and best practices (Andersson et al., 2021).

**Necessity vs. Opportunity: Entrepreneurship** One important difference in opportunity-driven vs. necessity-driven entrepreneurship literature among women is that women in most developing economies engage in entrepreneurship out of necessity and not for seeking found market opportunities (Minniti & Naudé, 2010). The high rate of necessity-driven entrepreneurship among women indicates more deeply rooted gender disparities in labor markets and the general lack of access to alternative employment. This distinction has significant policy implications for support policies and programs aimed at providing assistance. Support policies and programs tailored to opportunity-driven and growth-oriented entrepreneurs are likely to be unsuitable for necessity entrepreneurs, who run smaller, less formal businesses with little scope for expansion. Further research is needed on how best to assist necessity entrepreneurs while providing them with avenues to opportunity-driven enterprises where feasible.

The literature is increasingly acknowledging that women entrepreneurs are not monolithic and that their experiences are influenced by a set of intersecting variables such as race, ethnicity, class, age, education, and geographic location. In the Jamaican context, Hossein (2013) has already pointed out that class and race backgrounds may be even more daunting barriers than gender for certain women entrepreneurs. Intersectionality awareness challenges simplistic women's entrepreneurship theory-building assumptions of monolithic barriers facing all women. Future research needs to investigate more specifically how various dimensions of identity are combined to present unique challenges and opportunities for specific groups of women entrepreneurs and strive to develop more targeted and effective interventions. **Measurement and Impact Assessment** Among the dominant motifs in the research literature concerns the challenges of quantifying women's entrepreneurship and assessing the impacts of interventions intended to support it. There are substantial data gaps, with few countries possessing gender-disaggregated data on business ownership, performance, and growth (Cho et al., 2020). This deficit constrains both research and policymaking in this area. Similarly, women's entrepreneurship programs tend to be measured in terms of near-term outputs (e.g., number of participants or businesses launched) and not later-term outputs or impacts. More robust impact analysis techniques need to be used to determine the most impactful interventions for women entrepreneurs in different contexts.

Literature emphasizes the pivotal position of family and social context in guiding women's entrepreneurial behavior. Just as Zhang et al. (2023) discovered when they investigated green women entrepreneurs in China, the role played by family support in moderating entrepreneurial success and green knowledge is staggering. Likewise, research from Indian, Indonesian, and other contexts reveals the ways that family relationships either facilitate or hinder women's entrepreneurship (Dewitt et al., 2023). This result implies that interventions focusing on individual women entrepreneurs alone, without intervening in their social and family environments, might be less effective. Interventions involving family members and communities in promoting women's entrepreneurship might be more effective by targeting underlying reasons for gender barriers instead of their symptoms (Emon et al., 2024).

Technological advancement, particularly electronic technology, is creating new opportunities for women entrepreneurs while reducing some conventional barriers (Molina-López et al., 2021). Internet-based e-commerce, mobile phones, and internet social marketing enable women to work from home, access broader markets, and establish networks without unnecessary travel or face-to-face contacts that could be culturally restricted (Wan et al., 2024). Further research is needed into how digital opportunities can be more inclusive for groups of women entrepreneurs if we are to witness technological change that reduces rather than exacerbating existing inequalities.

The review concludes that while many countries have policies and programs targeting women entrepreneurs, these themselves too often are fragmented, uncoordinated, and short-lived. Short-term and project-based programs often fail to address structural barriers or build long-term institutional change that would provide women entrepreneurs with ongoing support. More effective approaches include

placing women's entrepreneurship within overall economic, social, and gender equality policy and in coordination across different government departments, private sector organizations, and civil society institutions (Lwamba et al., 2022). Long-term commitment and continuity of implementation are necessary to realize true change in this regard.

## Conclusion

This research examines women's entrepreneurship worldwide from four overarching perspectives: its formation, rising potential, institutional support, and enduring problems. Despite the recognition of women entrepreneurs' economic contributions, there remain inconsistencies in their distinct gender-specific social and culturally imprinted motivations and methodologies. Emerging opportunities exist, particularly in the services, technology, and green sectors; yet, unequal access disproportionately benefits educated, urban, and affluent women. Support systems are proliferating yet frequently fail to tackle the intricate financial, social, and psychological obstacles encountered by women, hence requiring comprehensive, tailored programs. Persistent issues such as gender discrimination, work-family conflict, and restricted access to financing continue to impede progress and necessitate coordinated responses. The findings underscore the necessity for gender-neutral policy, customized support, and concentrated research on long-term effects and technological advancements. Ultimately, women's entrepreneurship is crucial for economic advancement and social empowerment, necessitating coordinated efforts to surmount challenges and establish supportive settings for women entrepreneurs globally.

In summary, women's entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth, social transformation, and gender empowerment worldwide. To realize this potential, it takes joint effort to understand and act on the multifaceted drivers and obstacles that facilitate as well as limit women's entrepreneurial ventures in diverse settings. By leveraging the increasing literature in this area and taking evidence-based action, stakeholders can forge more favorable conditions for women entrepreneurs to succeed and actualize their contributions towards their economies and societies.

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