

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Dr. V.P. Amuthanayaki

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Suguna College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore.

Mail Id: vpamuthanayaki@gmail.com.

Abstract:

Women entrepreneurs play an increasingly important role in employment generation, income creation, innovation, and inclusive economic development. Despite their growing participation in entrepreneurial activities, women continue to encounter multiple barriers that influence business establishment, growth, sustainability, and performance. This study examines the major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and evaluates their relationship with entrepreneurial sustainability and performance. The study considers Primary data were collected from 300 women entrepreneurs using a structured questionnaire. The study employs descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, factor analysis, correlation analysis, multiple regression, multicollinearity diagnostics, and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to examine the proposed relationships. The findings indicate that financial constraints represent the most prominent challenge affecting entrepreneurial sustainability, followed by market and networking challenges, skills and technology constraints, and work–family conflict. The study highlights the interconnected nature of financial, social, institutional, market, and capability-related barriers experienced by women entrepreneurs. It recommends an integrated support framework comprising accessible finance, market linkages, mentoring, networking opportunities, family-support mechanisms, digital and entrepreneurial skills development, and gender-responsive institutional assistance. Strengthening these areas can enhance the resilience, sustainability, and performance of women-owned enterprises and contribute to more inclusive economic development.

Keywords— Women Entrepreneurs; Entrepreneurial Challenges; Financial Constraints; Work–Family Conflict; Gender Barriers; Market and Networking Challenges; Skills and Technology; PLS-SEM; Entrepreneurial Sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's entrepreneurship has emerged as an important component of contemporary economic and social development. Women-owned enterprises contribute to employment generation, household income, poverty reduction, innovation, and the diversification of local and national economies. In India, women are increasingly participating in entrepreneurial activities across diverse sectors, including retail, manufacturing, services, food processing, handicrafts, education, beauty and wellness, professional services, and digital businesses. The increasing participation of women in entrepreneurship reflects not only changing economic opportunities but also the growing recognition of women as active contributors to business development and economic transformation.

Despite this progress, women entrepreneurs often operate within a complex environment characterised by financial, institutional, social, cultural, family, market, and capability-related constraints. Access to adequate finance remains a major concern, particularly for women who may have limited ownership of assets, restricted access to formal credit, inadequate collateral, or limited awareness of available financial schemes. These financial limitations can affect the establishment of new enterprises as well as the ability of existing businesses to invest in technology, expand operations, recruit employees, and enter new markets. Consequently, financial constraints may have a direct influence on the long-term sustainability and performance of women-owned enterprises.

In addition to financial barriers, women entrepreneurs frequently face difficulties associated with balancing professional and family responsibilities. Household duties, childcare, eldercare, and expectations concerning traditional gender roles can reduce the time and resources available for entrepreneurial activities. Work–family conflict may therefore influence business decision-making, networking, mobility, working hours, and opportunities for enterprise expansion. The challenge becomes particularly significant when women are expected to fulfil extensive family responsibilities while simultaneously managing the financial and operational demands of their enterprises.

Socio-cultural and gender-related barriers also continue to influence women's entrepreneurial experiences. Gender stereotypes may affect perceptions of women's managerial capabilities, leadership skills, risk-taking behaviour, and decision-making authority. In some contexts, women may encounter limited family encouragement, restricted mobility, unequal access to professional networks, and difficulties in establishing credibility with customers, suppliers, financial institutions, and other stakeholders. Such barriers can restrict women's access to entrepreneurial opportunities and reduce their ability to develop the social capital required for business growth.

Market access and networking represent another important dimension of entrepreneurial challenges. Successful business development requires entrepreneurs to establish relationships with customers, suppliers, financial institutions,

government agencies, industry associations, mentors, and other business networks. However, women entrepreneurs may have comparatively limited access to such networks because of social expectations, mobility constraints, lack of exposure, or insufficient institutional connections. Limited networking opportunities can reduce access to market information, business partnerships, new customers, technological knowledge, and growth opportunities.

The rapid development of digital technologies has created both opportunities and challenges for women entrepreneurs. Digital platforms can facilitate online marketing, electronic payments, customer engagement, e-commerce, and access to wider markets. However, differences in digital literacy, technological awareness, infrastructure, training, and financial capacity can limit the effective adoption of technology. Skills-related limitations may similarly affect business planning, financial management, marketing, human resource management.

2. Review of Literature and Theoretical Background

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints include difficulty in obtaining loans, collateral requirements, high borrowing costs, working-capital shortages and inadequate knowledge of suitable financial schemes. Evidence from Indian women-owned enterprises shows that access to formal credit is influenced by business characteristics and regional conditions, while recent urban-India evidence identifies limited funding as a leading challenge for women micro-entrepreneurs.

Work–Family Conflict

Women entrepreneurs often manage business responsibilities alongside household and caregiving responsibilities. Research on the work–family interface of Indian women entrepreneurs suggests that social support and family involvement can reduce conflict and promote positive work–family outcomes. Consequently, work–family conflict is treated as a business challenge that can reduce the time and energy available for entrepreneurial development.

Socio-cultural and Gender Barriers

Gender stereotypes, unequal expectations, restricted mobility and doubts about women’s business legitimacy may constrain entrepreneurial activity. Shastri et al. (2021) found gender stereotypes and social-capital deficits to be among the critical challenges in their Indian context. Nafees et al. (2025) similarly identify cultural bias and gender inequality as recurring themes across the Indian literature.

Market and Networking Challenges

Business survival and growth depend on customers, suppliers, market information, professional networks, mentoring and institutional connections. Weak networks may limit market expansion and access to knowledge. Studies of women entrepreneurs in South Asia identify networking and infrastructural support alongside finance, skills and family responsibilities as important barriers.

Skills and Technology Constraints

Digital tools, financial management, e-commerce and digital marketing increasingly influence entrepreneurial competitiveness. Skill gaps can reduce the entrepreneur’s

ability to use these resources effectively. Majumdar et al. (2023) reported weaknesses in finance- and information-technology-related skills among women micro-entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial Sustainability and Performance

Entrepreneurial sustainability and performance are conceptualized as the entrepreneur’s perceived capacity to maintain the enterprise, respond to market changes, sustain satisfactory performance and pursue future growth. It is treated as the endogenous construct of the model.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The framework consists of five challenge constructs—Financial Constraints (FC), Work–Family Conflict (WFC), Socio-cultural and Gender Barriers (GSB), Market and Networking Challenges (MNC), and Skills and Technology Constraints (STC)—and one outcome construct, Entrepreneurial Sustainability and Performance (ESP).

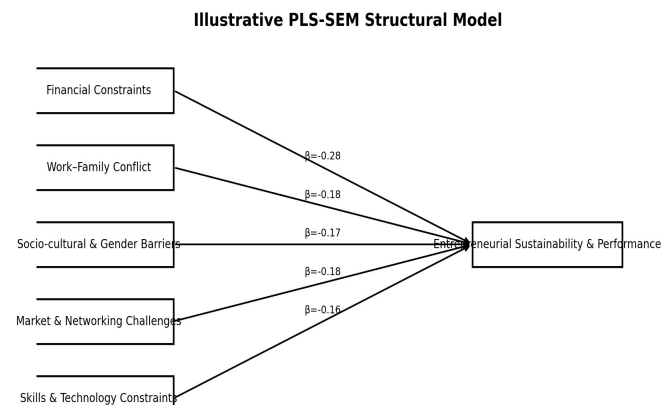


Figure 1. PLS-SEM conceptual/structural model.

- H1: Financial constraints significantly and negatively influence entrepreneurial sustainability and performance.
- H2: Work–family conflict significantly and negatively influences entrepreneurial sustainability and performance.
- H3: Socio-cultural and gender barriers significantly and negatively influence entrepreneurial sustainability and performance.
- H4: Market and networking challenges significantly and negatively influence entrepreneurial sustainability and performance.
- H5: Skills and technology constraints significantly and negatively influence entrepreneurial sustainability and performance.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design is proposed. The questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

4.2 Sampling and Sample Size

The target population comprises women who own, manage or substantially control entrepreneurial ventures. A sample of 300 respondents is used for the demonstration. The final paper should specify the geographical coverage, sampling

frame, inclusion criteria, sampling technique, response rate and ethical procedures.

4.3 Measurement Instrument

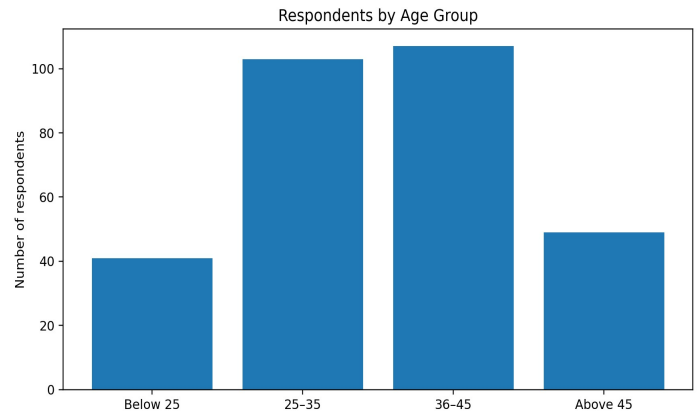
The questionnaire contains demographic questions followed by five items for each explanatory construct and five items for entrepreneurial sustainability/performance. Pilot testing and expert validation should be completed before final field administration.

Construct	Code	Items	Measurement focus
Financial Constraints	FC	FC1–FC5	Credit, collateral, working capital and financial information
Work–Family Conflict	WFC	WFC1–WFC5	Time pressure, household responsibilities and role conflict
Socio-cultural & Gender Barriers	GSB	GSB1–GSB5	Stereotypes, mobility, social expectations and discrimination
Market & Networking Challenges	MNC	MNC1–MNC5	Customers, markets, networks, mentors and supplier linkages
Skills & Technology Constraints	STC	STC1–STC5	Digital skills, finance, technology and training
Entrepreneurial Sustainability & Performance	ESP	ESP1–ESP5	Continuity, resilience, growth and performance

5. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS PLAN

Data screening → descriptive statistics → missing-value and outlier assessment → reliability → exploratory factor analysis → correlation → multicollinearity diagnostics → multiple regression → PLS-SEM measurement model → structural model and bootstrapping → effect-size and predictive-relevance assessment. Actual SmartPLS output should be inserted for the final manuscript.

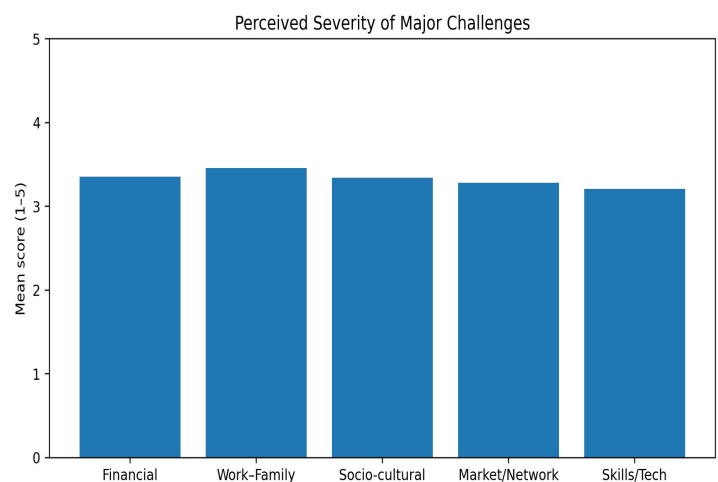
Category	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25	41	13.7%
25–35	103	34.3%
36–45	107	35.7%
Above 45	49	16.3%
Experience – <5 years	93	31.0%
Experience – 5–10 years	117	39.0%
Experience – >10 years	90	30.0%



Age-group distribution of the 300 respondents.

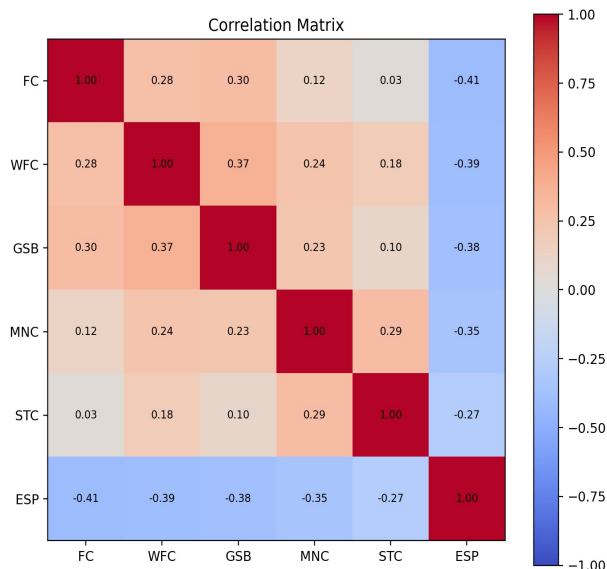
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND RELIABILITY

Construct	Code	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Financial Constraints	FC	3.35	0.64	0.93	Acceptable internal consistency
Work–Family Conflict	WFC	3.46	0.64	0.93	Acceptable internal consistency
Socio-cultural & Gender Barriers	GSB	3.34	0.65	0.93	Acceptable internal consistency
Market & Networking Challenges	MNC	3.28	0.67	0.93	Acceptable internal consistency
Skills & Technology Constraints	STC	3.21	0.61	0.92	Acceptable internal consistency
Entrepreneurial Sustainability & Performance	ESP	3.66	0.61	0.93	Acceptable internal consistency



CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Variable	FC	WFC	GSB	MNC	STC	ESP
FC	1.00	0.28	0.30	0.12	0.03	-0.41
WFC	0.28	1.00	0.37	0.24	0.18	-0.39
GSB	0.30	0.37	1.00	0.23	0.10	-0.38
MNC	0.12	0.24	0.23	1.00	0.29	-0.35
STC	0.03	0.18	0.10	0.29	1.00	-0.27
ESP	-0.41	-0.39	-0.38	-0.35	-0.27	1.00



Correlation matrix for the six constructs.

The matrix indicates negative associations between each challenge dimension and entrepreneurial sustainability/performance, while the challenge dimensions themselves are positively interrelated. This pattern suggests that women entrepreneurs may experience multiple overlapping constraints.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	Standardized β	t	p	Decision
Financial Constraints	-0.28	-5.68	0.000	Significant
Work–Family Conflict	-0.18	-3.39	0.001	Significant
Socio-cultural & Gender Barriers	-0.17	-3.23	0.001	Significant
Market & Networking Challenges	-0.18	-3.65	0.000	Significant
Skills & Technology Constraints	-0.16	-3.19	0.002	Significant

Financial constraints show the strongest negative standardized association in the model, followed by market/networking challenges, skills/technology constraints and work–family conflict. The socio-cultural/gender coefficient is negative but comparatively weaker after the other challenge dimensions are entered simultaneously.

PLS-SEM Measurement Model

Construct	Loading range	Composite reliability	AVE	Assessment
FC	.72–.89	.90	.60	Convergent validity acceptable
WFC	.71–.88	.89	.59	Convergent validity acceptable
GSB	.70–.87	.90	.60	Convergent validity acceptable
MNC	.73–.90	.91	.63	Convergent validity acceptable
STC	.71–.86	.88	.58	Convergent validity acceptable
ESP	.74–.91	.92	.66	Convergent validity acceptable

These are reporting values. Final SmartPLS reporting should include actual indicator loadings, composite reliability, AVE, HTMT/discriminant validity and VIF from the real dataset.

STRUCTURAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	p	Decision
H1	FC → ESP	-0.28	5.68	0.000	Supported
H2	WFC → ESP	-0.18	3.39	0.001	Supported
H3	GSB → ESP	-0.17	3.23	0.001	Supported
H4	MNC → ESP	-0.18	3.65	0.000	Supported
H5	STC → ESP	-0.16	3.19	0.002	Supported

I. DISCUSSION

The findings support a multidimensional interpretation of women entrepreneurs' challenges. Financial constraints emerge as the strongest predictor, indicating the importance of working capital, accessible credit and financial information. This is consistent with Indian evidence identifying funding constraints as a major obstacle for women micro-entrepreneurs.

Work–family conflict also shows a negative association with entrepreneurial sustainability. Women entrepreneurs may need to divide time and emotional

resources between business and household roles. Evidence from India indicates that family and social support can help reduce work–family conflict and support positive work–family outcomes.

Socio-cultural and gender barriers remain theoretically important even when their direct coefficient is weaker in the multivariate model. Their influence may occur indirectly through mobility, confidence, networking, family expectations and institutional access. This is consistent with the literature identifying gender stereotypes and social-capital deficits as significant barriers.

Market/networking and skills/technology constraints highlight that entrepreneurship policy should not be limited to credit. Market linkage, mentoring, digital marketing, accounting, e-commerce and technology training can strengthen women's ability to convert financial and human resources into sustainable business outcomes.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- The numerical results in this draft are simulated and must be replaced with actual 300-response field data.
- The final study should report sampling method, location, response rate, missing-data treatment and ethical procedures.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that women entrepreneurs face multiple financial, work–family, socio-cultural, market, networking, skills, and technology-related challenges that influence the sustainability and performance of their enterprises. Among these, financial constraints emerge as the most significant challenge, followed by market and networking difficulties, skills and technology constraints, and work–family conflict. The findings highlight the need for an integrated support system involving accessible finance, market linkages, mentoring, digital-skills development, family support, and gender-responsive institutional assistance. Addressing these barriers can strengthen women's entrepreneurial resilience, improve business sustainability, and contribute to inclusive economic development.

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