

Perception of Entrepreneurship as a Sustainable Career Option by Women in Rural Areas

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Abstract: The emancipation of women is an emerging area which is at the heart of many agendas of various nations worldwide. An entrepreneurship career can offer momentous opportunities to women in rural areas and enable them to realise financial independence as well as benefit the economy by contributing towards job creation. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how women in rural areas perceive entrepreneurship as a sustainable career option. The study was based on a quantitative research design. The survey method was used as a data collection method. Using this method, self-administered questionnaires were used as the primary data collection tool. These questionnaires were hand delivered to the participants by the researcher. The convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to obtain the participants. The population consisted of women in Ga-Sekopo rural area. 73 women participated in the survey. Data analysis included descriptive statistics and T tests. The Cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of reliability. The findings showed that women in rural areas have negative perceptions about the entrepreneurship career. This was based on the perception that the career is highly risk, with no clear benefits and that they have doubts in obtaining support from the government. Results from T tests showed that there is a significant difference on the perception of entrepreneurship by women in rural areas based on their level of education. The study concluded by proposing that the government should design a consortium of programmes aimed at raising entrepreneurship awareness among women in rural areas.

Keywords: Career, Entrepreneurship, Rural Area, South Africa, Women

1. Introduction

The emancipation of women is an emerging area which is at the heart of many agendas of various nations worldwide (United Nations, 2011). This study is driven by the desire to address the sustainable development goal number 5 which is to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. According to Cornwall (2016), in many countries, women empowerment has been making headlines recently but less action has been taken to actually empower this group. As such unemployment remains stubbornly high in countries like South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2016). The South African Board of People Practices (SABPP) Women's Report (2011) notes that women constitute a large percentage of the unemployed in South Africa, especially in the rural areas. As defined by the Rural Development Framework for South Africa (1997), *rural areas are sparsely populated areas in which people farm or depend on natural resources, including the villages and small towns that are dispersed through these areas. In addition, they include the large settlements in former homelands, created by the apartheid removals, which depend for their survival on migratory labour and remittances*". It is worth

noting that the plight of women is different. Women in rural areas are exposed to living harsh conditions compared to the ones in urban areas. The incidence of poverty, unemployment and inequality are more severe in rural areas than in urban areas (Armstrong, Lekezwa & Siebrits, 2007; de Witte Rothmann & Jackson, 2011). In South Africa, women especially in rural areas remain marginalised and economically excluded (Malinga, 2016). This emanates from the apartheid era where women were deemed solely responsible for child bearing and rearing while men work for the family. Consequently, this has resulted in an unbalanced society where especially black women languish in poverty and depend solely on social grants to make ends meet. The few who manage to progress with school are discriminated against in the workplace as priority is given to their male counterparts (Department of Women Affairs Report, 2015). The other significant number of women in the work place complains about bosses approaching them for sexual favours for a salary rise (Botha, 2016). A study conducted by Shontell (2010) showed that 15 percent of women have slept with their bosses and 37 percent of them got promoted for it. This sadly affects the integrity of women and the girl child.

The authors of this paper believe that an entrepreneurship career can be a sustainable career option for women especially in rural areas who by virtue of being less qualified cannot be absorbed into mainstream formal employment. On this account, an entrepreneurship career can restore and decorate women with the dignity they deserve through economic empowerment and social inclusion. According to the United Nations (2011), if given the same opportunities as many, women can greatly transform communities. Similarly, the National Development Plan (2030) asserts that the economic inclusion of women is a proxy towards attaining the projected 2030 targets. Hence, an entrepreneurship career can offer momentous opportunities to women in rural areas and enable them to realise financial independence as well as benefit the economy by contributing to job creation, innovation and economic growth.

Regardless of the benefits which can be derived from entrepreneurship, the number of women involved in entrepreneurship remains low and unsatisfactory in South Africa. Most people in South Africa prefer to work than starting their own businesses. A cross comparison between 1st and 3rd world countries conducted by Friedrich and Visser (2005) concerning the ratio between the number of people starting their own businesses and the ones who prefer working revealed a shocking ratio of 1:52 in South Africa compared 1:10 in 1st world countries. South Africa exhibit low levels of entrepreneurial intention (Luiz & Mariottiy, 2011). It is documented that a significant number of women still perceive running a business as risky and therefore meant for man. However, Brijlal (2011) believes that women have a great role to play in the entrepreneurial space. He further argues that it is important to study the entrepreneurship perceptions of females as a basis to improve the economic participation by this group. This paper intends to assess the entrepreneurial perceptions of women in rural areas and to investigate if the entrepreneurial perceptions of women in rural areas differ based on their level of education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Entrepreneurship as a Career Choice for Women in Rural Areas

Schumpeter (1934) advocates the need for new venture creation through the genesis of

new entrepreneurially driven firms. According to Schumpeter (1934), the innovative ability of entrepreneurially driven firms creates a catalytic mechanism which breaks the equilibrium principle in the labour market hence creating more employment. Schumpeter (1934) believes that entrepreneurs are engines for innovation and drivers of economic growth and development. Rwigema and Venter (2004) define entrepreneurship as the process of conceptualising, organising, launching and through innovation, nurturing a business opportunity into a potentially high growth venture in a complex and unstable environment. The foundation of women entrepreneurship can be traced from the 1970s particularly with the work of Schwartz (1976). However, Yadav and Unni (2016) feel that the field is still not fully developed hence requiring more empirical studies. As Schreuder and Coetzee (2013:36) highlight, "entrepreneurial careers consist of those individuals who decide on self-employment as a means of sustenance and starting their own business ventures." According to Grigore and Toma (2014), entrepreneurship is gradually becoming one of the best career options worldwide. Tamvada (2010) reasons that self employment is more likely to eradicate poverty than salaried jobs. Entrepreneurship is commonly associated with job creation, entrepreneurial culture, business venture, innovation, new products and/or services, poverty reduction, well-being or economic development (Amoros *et al.*, 2013). Rural areas can be turned into economic development hubs if entrepreneurship is seriously fostered among women. In most rural areas there is vast underutilised land which women can utilise through different agricultural projects. Rural areas possess a lot of natural resources which just require a breed of new entrepreneurs to tap through and make economic gains for themselves and the rest of the communities. However, existing literature indicates that women in rural areas still hold negative perceptions about the entrepreneurship career.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Ibrahim *et al.* (2015) assert that like any other career options, the entrepreneurship career should be planned as well. The entrepreneurial process is entirely based on the cognitive process. Any action or decision to start something is influenced by perception. This explains why entrepreneurship depends largely with one's mindset. Perception shapes the different questions which arise from an

individual regarding the benefits, risks, and support one can get in pursuing such opportunity or decision. Figure 1 below shows the proposed perception framework on how people evaluate an opportunity and finally make a decision at the end.

2.3 Perceived Benefits

This explains both the financial and non-financial gains that one perceives to be associated with a particular decision or action. In the case of entrepreneurship, one evaluates whether it is viable for them to undertake such based on the monetary expectations. On the other hand, perceived benefits are associated with an evaluation of whether one will gain a certain status after taking an action to pursue the entrepreneurship career.

2.4 Perceived Risks

People have different risk appetite. For example, by nature men tend to be more risk takers than women. This emanates from the way people of different gender are raised and socialised. Men are socialised in a way that challenges them to be aggressive and to take risk while women are socialised to be conservative. Therefore, before taking a final decision to become an entrepreneur, people evaluate the decision based on the perceived risks associated with such an action. Risk varies from business failure, to personal failure. People are afraid to lose their startup capital in the case of business failure while on the other hand they fear to be social outcast after in the case that the society associate business failure with personal failure.

2.5 Perceived Support

Support comes in various forms. Before taking a particular decision, individuals evaluate whether they will have enough support in their endeavours. In the case of the decision for one to choose the

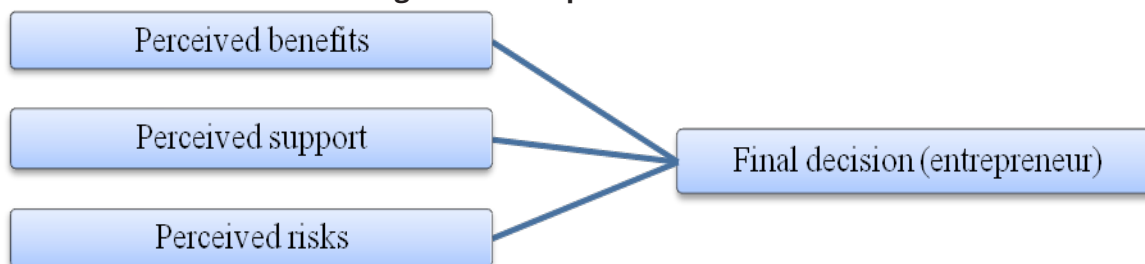
entrepreneurial career, they evaluate whether, their families, friends or the government will support them (Dzomonda, Fatoki & Oni, 2015). Most people usually end up dropping a certain decision because of the perception that they won't get enough support particularly from the government.

Giagtzi (2013) argues that perception greatly affects one's final decision to become an entrepreneur. Shapero and Sokol (1982) assert that perception is a proxy to one's intention to become an entrepreneur. He however, argues that these perceptions can change based on situations. Similarly, Ajzen (1991) theory of planned behaviour emphasises the importance of perception in shaping an individual's final decision to become an entrepreneur. Therefore, factors which affect the perception of women about entrepreneurship need to be identified and improved. Existing literature indicates that factors such as family factors, cultural factors, lack of previous experience and entrepreneurial skills, lack of information and lack of entrepreneurial support structures in communities hinder women from venturing into entrepreneurship (Lekhanya, 2016).

2.6 Level of Education and Entrepreneurial Perceptions

Existing literature indicate that perception about entrepreneurship is shaped by a number of factors. According to Brijlal (2011), attaining tertiary level equips one to become a serial entrepreneur who understands the risk associated with new venture creation. As such, it implies that people with tertiary qualifications are likely to pursue an entrepreneurship career compared to their counterparts with Matric and below (SBP, 2013). However, Ibrahim *et al.* (2015) note that many schools are producing more of job seekers than job creators. This calls for a change in the curriculum from primary stages. Education improves one's entrepreneurial alertness. Grigore and Toma (2014), assert that

Figure 1: Perception Framework



Source: The author, 2017

entrepreneurship education creates a culture that is responsive and supportive towards entrepreneurship initiatives. According to the World Economic Forum (2009), education shapes entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviour as well as instilling an entrepreneurial mindset in a person. Furthermore, the report asserts that entrepreneurship education boosts self-confidence in people and hence gives them the zeal to start something of their own. Seet and Seet (2006) found out that entrepreneurship education, where students are exposed to experiential learning and simulation, greatly imparts a positive perception in students on entrepreneurship. Raichaudhuri (2005) found that students who enrolled for entrepreneurship studies have a high probability of starting their own businesses. Based on the findings of Seet and Seet (2006), the authors believe that the negative perceptions held by women in rural entrepreneurship can be changed through entrepreneurship education. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that there is a significant relationship between the level of education and perceptions formed about the entrepreneurship career by women in rural areas.

3. Methodology

This study is quantitative in nature. A quantitative research uses statistical data and methods to arrive at conclusions about a phenomenon (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). The quantitative research design was used because it makes it easier for the researcher to generalise findings given that the data is quantifiable and statistical in nature. The survey method was used to obtain the respondents. Using the survey, self-administered questionnaires were hand-delivered to the respondents by the researcher. The authors of this study reason that perception about entrepreneurship is in sync with entrepreneurship intention. Hence, questions related to perception were merged with the entrepreneurial intention to gauge responses from the participants. The questionnaire was constructed after critically consulting similar studies such as Shapero and Sokol (1982), Ajzen (1991) and Krueger and Brazea (1994). In these studies, the data collection yielded high levels of reliability and validity. The question was divided into section A consisting of biographical questions and section B consisting of questions related to perception and the entrepreneurial intention of women in rural areas. Due to the inability to obtain the sampling frame in the study area, convenience and snowball

sampling techniques were used to collect data from the respondents. The respondents were surveyed based on their availability and existing respondents referred the researcher to the next participant. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and T tests. The Cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of reliability.

4. Results and Discussion

As part of data collection, one hundred and fifty-six questionnaires were sent out. Seventy-three questionnaires were returned and filled properly. The response rate was 47 percent.

4.1 Entrepreneurial Perception and Intention

As indicated by Table 1 on the following page, women in rural areas have negative perceptions about the entrepreneurship career. In addition, the results indicate that women in rural areas perceive the entrepreneurship career as highly risk. It was also discovered that a significant number of women in rural areas still perceive entrepreneurship as something mainly for men. Hence, they do not have any plans to venture into entrepreneurship in the near future as indicated by low averages on the entrepreneurial intention. Rodrik (200) argues that South Africans lack the entrepreneurial spirit. Similarly, Brijal (2011) reports that a significant number of South Africans have negative perceptions about the entrepreneurship career. This is creating people who are dependent on the government to create jobs hence resulting in astronomical levels of unemployment because the government cannot keep pace with the increasing population (Luiz & Mariotti, 2011).

4.2 Inferential Statistics

The second objective was; to investigate if the entrepreneurial perceptions of women in rural areas differ based on their level of education. This objective was included on the basis that education shapes one's perception about a particular decision. T tests were used to test this assumption.

4.2.1 Level of Education Difference on the Entrepreneurial Perceptions by Women in Rural Areas

To test the education differences, the level of education was categorised into; Matric and below and tertiary. The results indicate that there is a significant

difference on the perceptions held by women in rural areas towards the entrepreneurship career based on their level of education. It can be deduced that those with tertiary qualifications have positive perceptions about the entrepreneurship career that those with Matric and below. The findings are consistent with the findings of SBP (2013) that tertiary education improves one's entrepreneurial

alertness and hence the intention to start a business. Similarly, Brijal (2011) argues that education stand as an effective tool to change the negative perceptions women in rural areas hold about the entrepreneurship career. The World Economic Forum (2009) remark that entrepreneurship education can be used a societal agent of change, this implies that everyone is empowered.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Entrepreneurial Perception and Intention

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
1. I perceive entrepreneurship as my possible career choice.	1.71	1.21
2. I perceive entrepreneurship as a profitable career path.	1.33	0.66
3. I perceive entrepreneurship as beneficial to me.	1.66	0.73
4. In my community entrepreneurship is associated with success.	1.37	1.31
5. I perceive entrepreneurship as risky career option.	4.03	0.67
6. I perceive to get favourable support from my family and the government.	2.21	1.44
7. I plan to have my own business in the coming 3 years.	1.24	1.11
8. It is has been my intention to start my own business.	1.03	1.32
9. Starting my own business is an attractive idea to me.	1.30	0.77
10. I am enthusiastic about starting my own business.	1.55	1.23
11. I spent a lot of time thinking about owning my own business.	1.82	1.12
12. Owning my own business is the best alternative for me.	1.33	0.81
Cronbach's alpha	0.80	

Source: Authors

Table 2: T-test Results for Level of Education Difference

Factor	Matric and below Mean	Tertiary Mean	t-statistic	Sig level
1. I perceive entrepreneurship as my possible career choice.	1.33	1.71	1.66	0.01
2. I perceive entrepreneurship as a profitable career path.	1.44	1.82	1.53	0.00
3. I perceive entrepreneurship as beneficial to me.				
4. In my community entrepreneurship is associated with success.	1.01	1.22	1.71	0.03
5. I perceive entrepreneurship as risky career option.	3.44	3.43	1.61	0.00
6. I perceive to get favourable support from my family and the government.	1.11	1.63	1.33	0.02
Sig>0.05				

Source: Authors

5. Conclusion

Women remain marginalised and economically excluded in South Africa. It was noted that this is worse in rural areas, where women solely depend on social grants for a living. The authors of this study were of the view that entrepreneurship can improve the economic exclusion of women and give them financial independence. However, it was discovered that women in rural areas have negative perceptions and attitude towards the entrepreneurship career. This negative perception and attitude automatically lowers the intention to start their own businesses. The framework proposed for this study highlighted that these perceptions are formed based on the perceived benefits one is likely to derive from the entrepreneurship career, perceived risks associated with pursuing the entrepreneurship career and more importantly perceived support from different stakeholders such as the government, family and financial institutions. Therefore, it was important to identify and improve the factors which affect the perception of women in rural areas. Education was identified as an important factor which positively shapes the perception and attitudes of women in rural areas about the entrepreneurship career. Comparisons were made between those with Matric and below and their counterparts with tertiary qualifications. The T tests results indicated that there is a significant difference between participants with Matric and below and those with tertiary qualifications. The results were in favour for those with tertiary qualifications who might have been exposed to business courses.

6. Recommendations

It was discovered that education can change the negative perceptions held by women in rural areas about the entrepreneurship career. Hence, the government should adopt a stance to include entrepreneurship education from the primary level. Furthermore, universities are encouraged to introduce the practical element of entrepreneurship where students are tasked to start and run businesses as part of their studies so that they can learn and familiarise themselves with the dynamics of entrepreneurship.

There is need for coordination by different stakeholders to join hands in building an entrepreneurial ecosystem. It was discovered that perceived support

is one of the important factors shaping perceptions one hold about being an entrepreneur. Hence, stakeholders such as capital and financial structures, educational institutions and policy makers need to come on board and make the entrepreneurial ecosystem work. It can be deduced that negative perceptions about the entrepreneurship career held by women in rural areas can be due to lack of awareness about the career and its benefits. Therefore, it is recommended that the media such as radios, newspapers and radios should come on board and raise awareness about this career. In addition, community leaders like councillors and the municipalities should invite role models to come and motivate women in rural areas about the benefits of pursuing the entrepreneurship career.

More importantly women in rural areas should endeavour to equip them with entrepreneurial knowledge by enrolling for entrepreneurship short courses as well as following programs that teach entrepreneurship on televisions and radios.

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