

Unveiling Gender Challenges: A Qualitative Exploration of Women Entrepreneurs' Experiences in Hunza, Pakistan

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Abstract: This study aimed to unveil the gender challenges faced by women entrepreneurs of the Hunza valley. Women entrepreneurs are a vital force in society, bringing about significant positive impacts. Their businesses generate employment, contributing to job creation and reduced unemployment rates. Keeping in view the significance of the topic under study, a survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire with objective and subjective questions for in-depth understanding. A total of 10 participants were interviewed, and questions were asked regarding their work experience, the type of industry they work in, the various types of gender challenges faced by them, and how much this impacts their business operations. After the data was collected, it was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 21. After analysis, it was found that most (60%) of the entrepreneur women were associated with tourism and hospitality, while 30% were working in food and beverage. A small portion (10%) belonged to services like a beautician. 50% of the participants had work experience of 1-3 years, and 30% had been in the business for 4-6 years. 10 % of the participants were either less than 1 year or more than 7+ years in the industry. 90% of participants said they have encountered some kind of gender related challenges during their work. Of which 40% claimed that due to their gender, they faced limited access to financial resources, and 40% said they had gone through gender biases and stereotypes. The participants reported that it had a significant negative impact on their business. Despite the struggles, it was found that 70% of participants were not provided with any kind of entrepreneurial support by local government or organisations. Only 30% received some training and skill development programs, mentorship, or networking opportunities.

Key words: Gender Equality, Gender Challenges, Entrepreneurship, Hunza.

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1. Introduction

Worldwide appreciation exists for women entrepreneurs' ability to drive economic growth alongside their efforts toward promoting gender equality and the creation of social development. Women entrepreneurs assume key positions within the business operations of Hunza, Pakistan. The numerous contributions of women entrepreneurs run into the obstacles that block their path while forging an entrepreneurial path. The goal of this research is to find out the specific gender challenges that women entrepreneurs face in Hunza and document how they deal with their difficulties. The research uses qualitative investigation methods to understand the particular barriers women entrepreneurs face and their business impacts and available support systems for overcoming these challenges. This research matters because it

reveals the life experiences of Hunza women entrepreneurs and details the obstacles they encounter because of their gender identity. The study intends to advance existing understanding of gender dynamics in entrepreneurship while offering decisive information to those involved in promoting women's entrepreneurship in the region. The identification and understanding of barriers and constraints operating on women entrepreneurs requires substantial intervention along with specific support networks that will enhance their business achievement and community development in Hunza. By using qualitative methodology with face-to-face interviews and thematic data analysis, this research project obtains a complex quantitative understanding of female business owners' situations. The participants for this study will include women entrepreneurs who operate in different industries across Hunza, thus enabling researchers to gather diverse observations. The study explores female entrepreneurs' life stories together with their business struggles and adjustment strategies to make their voices stronger and develop meaningful solutions for their business environment.

The research aims to expand current academic knowledge about gender challenges that female entrepreneurs experience in Hunza, Pakistan. This research discloses the obstacles women business owners encounter in influencing regulatory and operational measures while creating better, favorable conditions for female entrepreneurship to grow and make substantial social and economic contributions across the area.

The current study has importance for academia and policy-making. It reveals the problems that are faced by women entrepreneurs in the far-off areas of Hunza by highlighting their experiences. The study has significant implications for policymakers to urge enhanced participation of women by facilitating them and reducing impediments in the business.

1.1 Statement of Problem

The study measures the problems and gender-based challenges that women face when launching their businesses in Hunza. Women entrepreneurs in these far-off areas encounter various problems owing to their distance from the markets, lack of infrastructure, and funding issues.

1.2 Objectives

To seek out the challenges faced by women to continue their entrepreneurial business in the Hunza district.

1.3 Research Question

What are the challenges faced by women to run an entrepreneurial business in the Hunza district, Pakistan?

2. Literature Review

Research and policy-making sectors now explore women entrepreneurs' gender-based challenges because they understand the fundamental role of gender equality in entrepreneurial activities. The understanding of special challenges that female business owners encounter in Hunza, Pakistan, remains essential for establishing an inclusive business environment. An examination of current research works investigates the gender obstacles that reveal information about the experiences of female business owners. The authors of Mawardi, [1] proposed a gender-handling framework that focuses on identifying and resolving gender-based obstacles that women entrepreneurs encounter. Through this grounded conceptual model, researchers gain vital knowledge about gender-oriented entrepreneurship phenomena while also obtaining recommendations for strategic intervention methods. Afshan, Shahid, & Tunio (2021) researched to analyze how gender impacts entrepreneurial motivation as well as strategic behaviors and business results of male and female entrepreneurs. The study identifies special obstacles that women entrepreneurs face, alongside their effect on business success rates. The study contributes essential knowledge about gender inequality in entrepreneurial activities across the business world. According to Islam [2], the assumption that women entrepreneurs perform worse than their male counterparts requires greater investigation. The authors recommend studying gender challenges with greater depth because effective policies and interventions need to support women entrepreneurs throughout their entrepreneurial journey. Shastri, Shastri, & Pareek [3] analyzed how women's occupational distribution affects their future entrepreneurship ambitions. Societal norms and gender expectations control the development of women's occupational choices and their availability for entrepreneurship. Knowledge about gender-related dynamics proves essential for resolving hurdles that stand between women entrepreneurs when they enter diverse business sectors.

The research by Alsos, Hytti, and Ljunggren [4] analyzes gender-based dynamics that affect entrepreneurial innovation together with creativity levels. The research demonstrates women entrepreneurs' challenges when it comes to innovation while emphasizing the need for environments that support female innovators. Gender and social capital, together with microfinance participation, are examined from Ainuddin and Routray [5] in their study of rural Pakistan. Their study demonstrates that both social network structures and financial resource availability determine female entrepreneurs' opportunities to start new businesses. The analysis demonstrates why rural women entrepreneurs need both financial support solutions and enhanced social networks to succeed in their businesses. Butt and Alvi [6]

conducted a study that explored the different obstacles that obstruct women business owners in Pakistan and Sweden. The researchers explore cultural, institutional, and societal barriers to women's entrepreneurial activities while studying the Pakistani women entrepreneur experience in particular. Knowledge of these barriers enables officials to create specialized solutions for women's entrepreneurial growth. Ismail and his team [7] deliver a wide-ranging review of gender-based entrepreneurship research within developing nation contexts. The authors demonstrate the different obstacles that women entrepreneurs face across contexts and advocate for thorough intervention methods to resolve these challenges successfully. Women entrepreneurs encounter special barriers to success based on gender prejudices, restricted resource availability, and occupational segregation, combined with insufficient support from their environment. Specific policies combined with targeted interventions can create an inclusive entrepreneurial environment that enables both gender equality and the complete empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Hunza.

3. Methodology

The research investigates gender challenges that women entrepreneurs face within the business context of Hunza, Pakistan. The research selected females who run businesses in Hunza to serve its research purposes. The sample size was targeted to be 10 participants. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring a diverse representation of industries and business sizes.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected participants. The interviews were designed to explore the participants' experiences and challenges related to gender in their entrepreneurial journeys. The interviews were conducted with participants' consent, and field notes were taken to fill in the questionnaires.

The questionnaire analysis process involved transferring data to SPSS statistical software and categorizing the data to uncover common experiences, challenges, and strategies related to gender. After analyzing the data, it was tabulated and presented in a graphical presentation.

3.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any stage.

4. Findings

This study presents the findings through rich narrative descriptions and quotations from the participants. These findings offer insights into the specific gender challenges faced by women

entrepreneurs in Hunza, along with their coping strategies and potential recommendations. These results can be used to inform policies and initiatives that support and empower women entrepreneurs in the region.

Table 1: The work experience of participants in years

		Frequency	Percentage
	less than 1 year	1	10.0
	1-3 years	5	50.0
	4-6 years	3	30.0
	7+ years	1	10.0
	Total	10	100.0

After descriptive analysis, it was found that 50% of participants were working in the business for the last 1-3 years (Table 1), while 30% for the last 4-6 years, and 10% from the last 7+ years or less than 1 year.

Table 2: Type of industry the participants work in

		Frequency	Percentages
	hospitality/tourism	6	60.0
	Food and beverage	3	30.0
	services (e.g, healthcare, beauty)	1	10.0
	Total	10	100.0

The majority of the participants were from hospitality/tourism (60%), while 30 % belonged to Food and beverage, and 10% worked as service providers.

Table 3: Participants' encounters with gender related challenges during their business ventures

		Frequency	Percent
	Yes	9	90.0
	No	1	10.0
	Total	10	100.0

A majority (90%) of participants reported having encountered gender related challenges during their business ventures. While 10% of participants said they haven't encountered gender related challenges (Table 3).

Table 4: Type of gender related issues faced by participants.

		Frequency	Percentages
	NA	1	10.0
	limited access to financial resources	4	40.0
	Gender biases and stereotypes	4	40.0
	limited access to information and training opportunities	1	10.0
	Total	10	100.0

40 % of participants claimed that they faced limited access to financial resources, while the other 40 % of participants claimed that they faced Gender biases and stereotypes due to their gender (Table 4). 10% reported having limited access to information and training opportunities due to their gender.

Table 5: Participants' perspective of the impact of gender challenges on their businesses

		Frequency	Percentages
	Significant negative impact	4	40.0
	Some negative impact	5	50.0
	Neutral/No impact	1	10.0
	Total	10	100.0

50% participants claimed to have some negative impact on their business due to gender related challenges, while 40% reported a Significant negative impact on their business, 10% didn't see any impact (Table 5).

Table 6: Entrepreneurial supports to women by local government or organizations

		Frequency	Percentages
	Yes	3	30.0
	No	7	70.0
	Total	10	100.0

70% of participants claimed to get no entrepreneurial support for women from local government or organizations, while 30% said they did receive some kind of support.

Table 7: Type of entrepreneurial support to women by local government or organizations

		Frequency	Percentages
	No support	6	60.0
	Training and skill development programs	2	20.0
	Mentorship or networking opportunities	2	20.0
	Total	10	100.0

60% participants reported they haven't received any kind of entrepreneurial support for women by local government or organizations, while 20% claimed to have received Training and skill development programs, and 20% mentorship or networking opportunities (Table 7).

Table 8: Participants' Perception on the Importance of Local Government Support

		Frequency	Percentages
	Very important	8	80.0
	Somewhat important	2	20.0
	Total	10	100.0

80% participants perceived that it's very important for their business to receive local governmental support. 20% said it's somewhat important for their business.

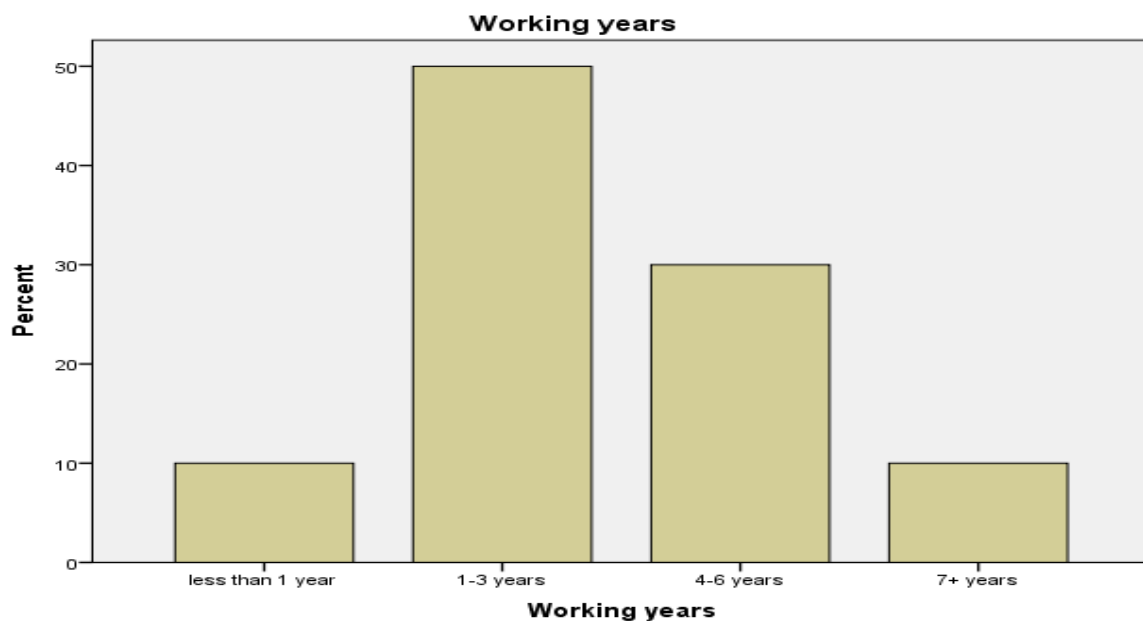


Figure 1: Working experience of participants.

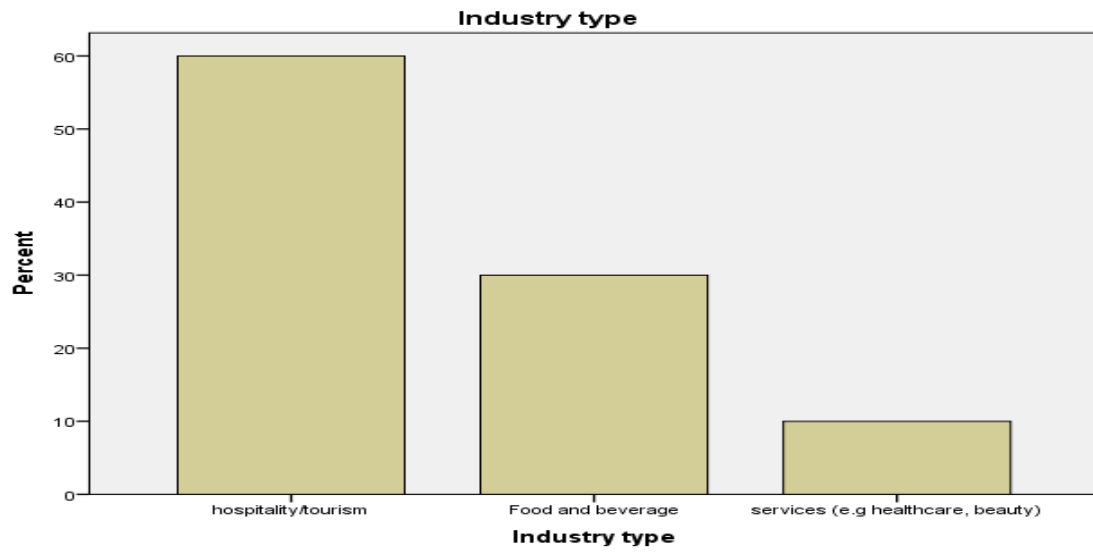


Figure 2: Type of industry the participants work in.

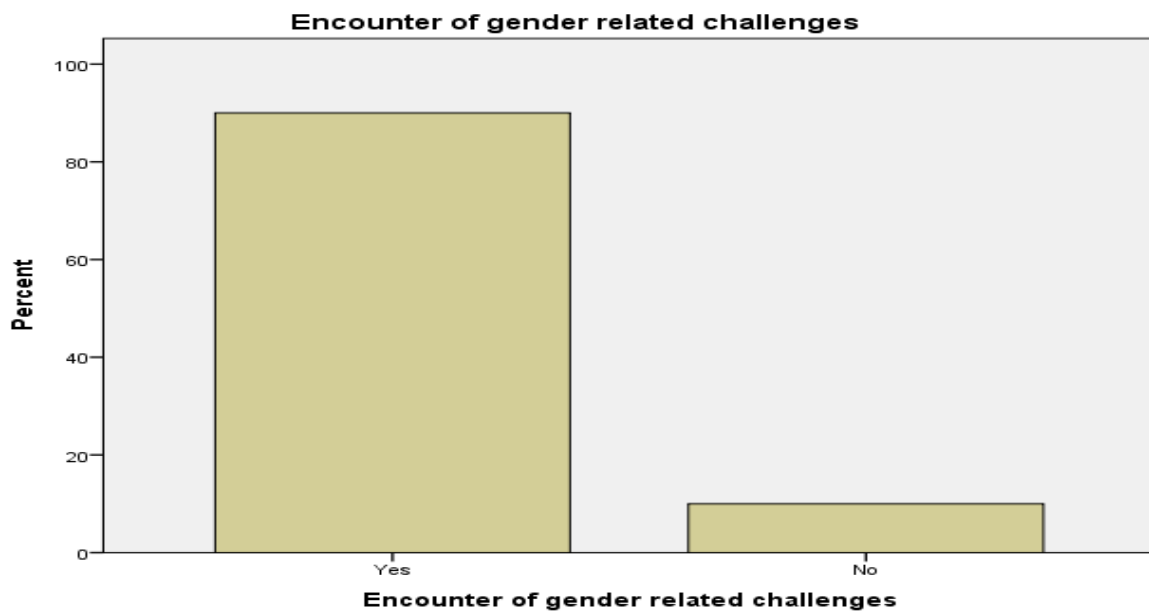


Figure 3: Encounter of women entrepreneurs with gender related challenges

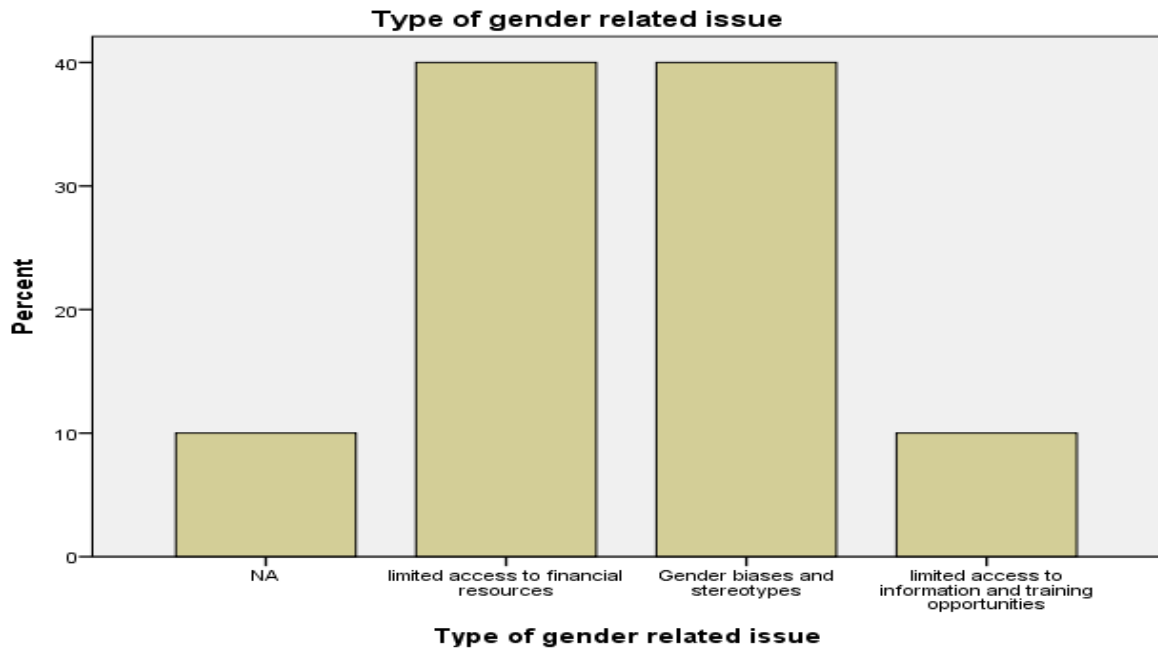


Figure 4: The type of gender related issues women entrepreneurs face

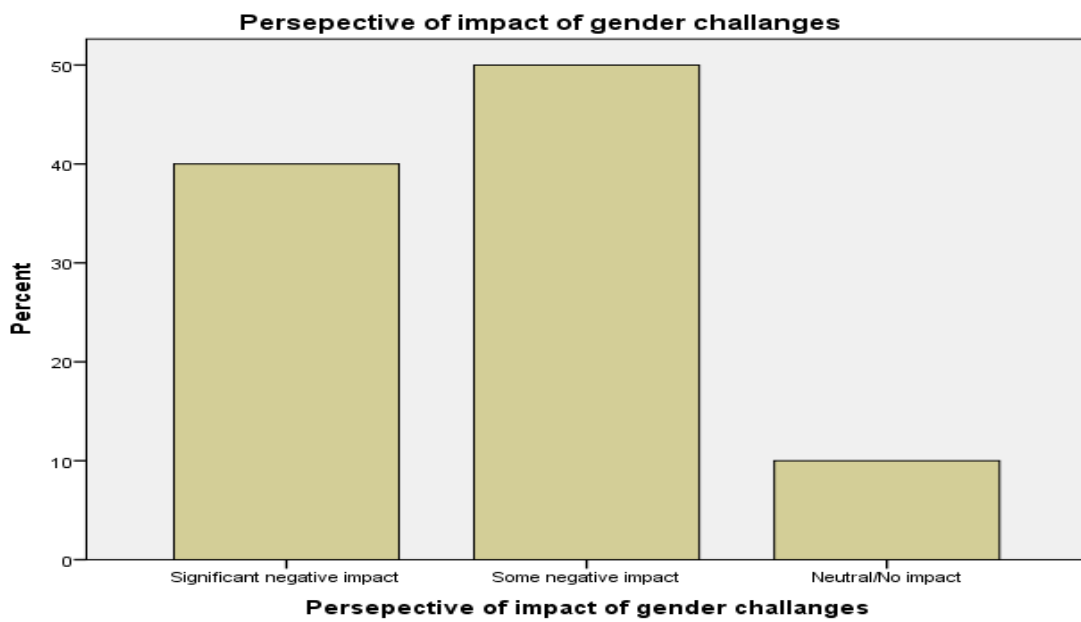


Figure 5: Participants' perspective of the impact of gender related challenges on their businesses

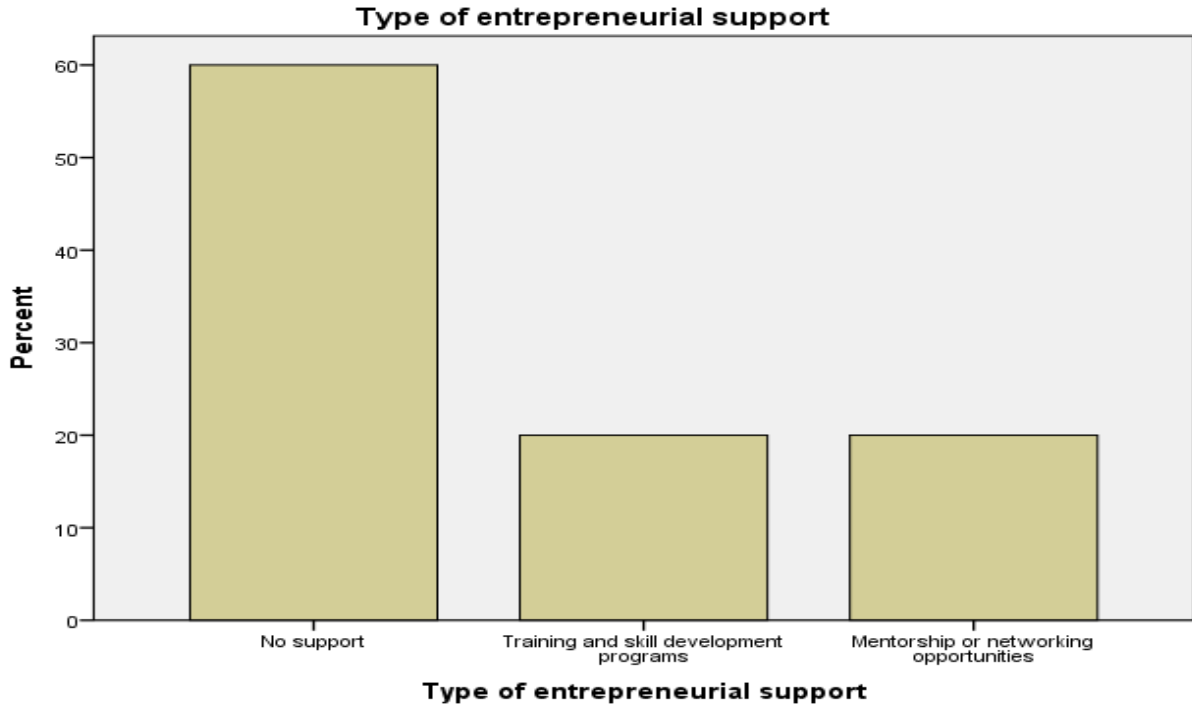


Figure 6: Type of entrepreneurial support given to women entrepreneurs

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to unveil the gender challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Hunza, Pakistan, and explore their experiences in navigating these obstacles. Women entrepreneurs bring innovation, diversity, and fresh perspectives to the business landscape, fostering economic growth and development.

These trailblazers function as leadership examples while providing motivational inspiration, which pushes different women to start their business ventures and fight social stereotypes.

Women entrepreneurs are playing an important role in community development as they employ their business investment and provide funding to different programs, while they contribute to social change. Women entrepreneurs link genders to progress while building female empowerment programs that develop successive generations. Women business owners focus on social responsibility and environmental responsibility, so they implement sustainability methods and organize philanthropic initiatives. Women are striving to strengthen economic growth to set forth an equitable society that entails different people. The research identifies specific obstacles that affect women entrepreneurs in this area, which demonstrates the necessity for specialized programs that will aid them to overcome barriers and establish gender equality in business ownership. The research discovered that Women entrepreneurs in Hunza frequently experience gender-biased and stereotypical treatment.

Women entrepreneurs in Hunza encountered multiple types of discrimination because they received less access to funds, alongside discriminatory conduct throughout business interactions. Previous worldwide research on women entrepreneurs, Brush [8], DeTienne [9], documented comparable results to those obtained in this study. Through both confidence repression and resource denial, gender specifics and stereotypes reduce the market potential of female business owners, thereby blocking business growth while restricting network communities and resource acquisition possibilities. The research results demonstrated insufficient program support networks aimed at encouraging women entrepreneurs in Hunza. Most respondents indicated they received no backing from government entities or organizations since training programs, together with mentoring and networking services, remained unavailable to them. The research outcome shows consistency with past studies demonstrating that women entrepreneurs need supportive networks with resources to succeed, Brush [8], DeTienne [9]. The research demonstrates an immediate requirement for stakeholders to establish programs with targeted government and NGO involvement, together with industry associations that will create complete support networks for women entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the study highlighted the dominance of women entrepreneurs in certain industries, particularly tourism and hospitality. This concentration may be influenced by cultural and societal norms, as well as economic opportunities prevalent in the region. The findings correspond with previous research that noted the influence of gendered occupational segregation on women's entrepreneurship, Marlow [10], Pylak [11]. Promoting diversification in industry sectors and breaking traditional gender roles can foster a more inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The research contributes to the growing body of literature on gender challenges in entrepreneurship and highlights the specific experiences of women entrepreneurs in Hunza, Pakistan. The findings underscore the need for multi-dimensional interventions to address the identified challenges. These interventions may include implementing policies to combat gender biases, providing targeted financial support and access to resources, offering training programs tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs, and establishing networking platforms and mentorship programs. Such interventions should be designed in collaboration with local stakeholders and informed by the voices and experiences of women entrepreneurs themselves.

While this study provides valuable insights into the gender challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Hunza, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The qualitative nature

of the research limits the generalizability of the findings to a larger population. Future research could employ a mixed-methods approach or quantitative surveys to validate and expand upon the findings of this study.

To summarize, the qualitative exploration of women entrepreneurs' experiences in Hunza, Pakistan, revealed significant gender challenges and barriers that hinder their entrepreneurial journey. By unveiling these challenges, this study contributes to the understanding of gender dynamics in entrepreneurship and highlights the need for targeted support mechanisms. It is imperative for policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders to work together to create an enabling environment that promotes gender equality, empowers women entrepreneurs, and unlocks their full potential as catalysts for economic and social development in Hunza.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, women entrepreneurs are a vital force in society, bringing about significant positive impacts by empowering women through economic opportunities and financial independence. Their businesses contribute to job creation, reducing unemployment rates, and fostering economic growth and development with innovation and fresh perspectives. Serving as role models and sources of inspiration, they encourage other women to challenge gender norms and pursue entrepreneurship. Through their businesses, women entrepreneurs contribute to community development, reinvesting profits, supporting local initiatives, and driving social impact. They bridge gender gaps, empower future generations, and prioritize social and environmental causes through sustainability practices and philanthropy. To delve into this topic, a survey was conducted with 10 participants, utilizing a semi-structured questionnaire that included objective and subjective questions for a comprehensive understanding. The collected data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 21. The findings revealed that the majority of participants were associated with tourism and hospitality (60%), followed by the food and beverage industry (30%) and services like beauty (10%). Participants had varying levels of work experience, with 50% having 1-3 years and 30% having 4-6 years. It was concerning to discover that 90% of participants had encountered gender-related challenges, including limited access to financial resources and biases/stereotypes, negatively impacting their businesses. Disappointingly, 70% of participants did not receive any entrepreneurial support from the local government or organizations, while only 30% had access to training, skill development programs, or mentorship/networking opportunities. These results emphasize the urgent need for local governing bodies to step up and provide essential support to women entrepreneurs in the Hunza region.

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