



From Employment To Entrepreneur: Uncovering The Motivations And Challenges Of Women In Transition

1. Laveena Pareek

(Research Scholar, Jayoti Vidyapeeth Women's University)

2. Dr. Mini Amit Arrawatia (Co- Author)

(Professor, Department of Management and Commerce, Jayoti Vidyapeeth Women's University),
India

Abstract: The transition from employment to entrepreneurship represents a significant shift for many women, driven by a desire for autonomy and fulfillment. Understanding the motivations behind this journey, as well as the challenges faced, is essential for fostering an environment that supports female entrepreneurs. This paper presents an exploratory research that investigates the motivations and challenges faced by women transitioning from employment to entrepreneurship. Key motivations include the desire for flexibility, pursuit of passion, control over career paths, financial independence, and recognition of skills. Conversely, women encounter several challenges such as cultural and social barriers, limited access to resources, confidence issues, work-life balance concerns, and the need to navigate new responsibilities. Understanding these dynamics through exploratory research is crucial for developing supportive policies and initiatives that empower women entrepreneurs. By addressing the unique obstacles they face, we can foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that enhances women's contributions to economic growth.

Index Terms - Women entrepreneurship, employment transition, motivations, challenges, work-life balance, cultural barriers, financial independence, empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The transition from corporate employment to entrepreneurship has emerged as a growing trend among women, motivated by the desire for autonomy, flexibility, and personal fulfillment. Globally, the number of female entrepreneurs has risen significantly, with women leaving corporate roles to pursue entrepreneurial ventures at unprecedented rates (Elam et al., 2019). Corporate environments often present structural limitations, such as the "glass ceiling" and lack of career progression, which drive many women to seek greater control over their professional lives (Still & Timms, 2000). Entrepreneurship offers women an opportunity to break free from rigid corporate hierarchies, pursue their passions, and achieve work-life balance (Kirkwood, 2009).

However, despite the increasing number of women entrepreneurs, they continue to face unique challenges during their transition from corporate employment. Studies highlight several barriers, including gender biases, societal expectations, and a lack of access to critical resources such as funding and mentorship (Brush et al., 2018). The transition can be especially difficult for women, who often feel isolated or unsupported in entrepreneurial ecosystems that remain male-dominated (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). Additionally, work-life balance concerns are more pronounced for women entrepreneurs, who frequently take on greater responsibilities in both their personal and professional lives (Eddleston & Powell, 2012).

This exploratory research seeks to understand the motivations and challenges faced by women transitioning from corporate roles to entrepreneurship. By analyzing these experiences, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on women's entrepreneurship and provide insights that can inform the development of policies and initiatives to support female entrepreneurs. Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that addresses the specific barriers women face (Manolova et al., 2012). Supporting women in their entrepreneurial pursuits not only empowers them individually but also contributes to broader economic growth, innovation, and diversity (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Objectives:

1. To explore the motivations driving women to transition from employment to entrepreneurship.
2. To identify the key challenges faced by women during the transition to entrepreneurship.
3. To assess the impact of societal and cultural factors on the entrepreneurial journeys of women.

Hypotheses:

1. H1: Women are primarily motivated to become entrepreneurs by the desire for flexibility and autonomy.
2. H2: Women face significant challenges in accessing resources and balancing work-life responsibilities during their transition to entrepreneurship.
3. H3: Cultural and societal expectations have a notable impact on women's ability to pursue and succeed in entrepreneurship.

Literature Review:

The transition of women from corporate employment to entrepreneurship has garnered considerable attention in academic research over the past two decades. Scholars have explored the motivations driving this transition, the challenges women face, and the unique experiences that shape their entrepreneurial journeys. This review synthesizes the existing literature on the motivations for women leaving corporate roles, the challenges encountered during their transition to entrepreneurship, and the role of support systems in overcoming these barriers.

Motivations for Women Transitioning to Entrepreneurship

The decision for women to leave corporate environments and pursue entrepreneurship is often driven by multiple factors. A prominent motivation is the desire for flexibility and work-life balance. Research indicates that many women in corporate roles experience difficulty managing the demands of their careers and personal lives, leading them to seek the autonomy offered by entrepreneurship (Duberley & Carrigan, 2013). According to Kirkwood (2009), entrepreneurship allows women to design their work around their family commitments, which is often unattainable in corporate settings.

Another key motivator is the pursuit of passion and the opportunity to engage in work that aligns with personal values and interests. In corporate environments, women may feel restricted by organizational goals and structures that limit their creative and innovative potential (Kirkwood, 2009). Jennings and Brush (2013) argue that entrepreneurship provides women with a platform to create businesses that reflect their personal aspirations and ideals, which is a significant driver for leaving the corporate world.

Financial independence is also frequently cited as a motivation. Women who experience career stagnation or limited opportunities for advancement in corporate settings may turn to entrepreneurship as a means of breaking through the "glass ceiling" (Elam et al., 2019). By starting their own businesses, women can take control of their financial futures and expand their earning potential, which is often constrained by salary caps in corporate roles (Carter et al., 2003).

Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

Despite the increasing number of women transitioning to entrepreneurship, research consistently shows that they encounter unique challenges that can hinder their success. Access to resources, particularly financial capital, is a significant barrier. Studies reveal that women often face more difficulties than men in securing funding, whether through traditional loans, venture capital, or angel investors (Marlow & Patton, 2005). This challenge is exacerbated by gender biases that can undermine women's credibility in the eyes of investors and financial institutions (Brush et al., 2018).

Cultural and societal expectations also pose significant challenges. In many cases, women entrepreneurs are expected to adhere to traditional gender roles, which can limit their ability to fully engage in entrepreneurial activities. Women are often perceived as primary caregivers, and this societal expectation places additional burdens on them to balance entrepreneurship with household responsibilities (Manolova et al., 2012). This has a direct impact on their ability to dedicate time and resources to their businesses, as noted by Eddleston and Powell (2012), who found that women entrepreneurs often face greater work-life balance struggles compared to their male counterparts.

Another challenge is confidence and self-efficacy. Research by Gupta et al. (2009) highlights the role of self-perception in entrepreneurial success, noting that women are more likely to doubt their capabilities when compared to men, even when they possess equal levels of experience and education. This can prevent women from pursuing high-growth ventures or taking necessary risks to scale their businesses. The corporate environment, where women may have been subject to gendered biases and limited leadership opportunities, can leave them feeling less prepared for the entrepreneurial journey (Still & Timms, 2000).

Support Systems for Female Entrepreneurs

The importance of support systems in helping women overcome the challenges of entrepreneurship is widely recognized in the literature. Mentorship plays a crucial role, particularly for women who are transitioning from corporate roles, where they may have lacked strong female role models or mentors (Brush et al., 2006). Research suggests that access to experienced mentors—especially female mentors—can significantly enhance women's confidence and provide them with the knowledge and networks needed to succeed (DeMartino & Barbato, 2003).

Networks also serve as an essential resource. Female entrepreneurs benefit from participating in women-centered networks, which provide opportunities to share experiences, access resources, and build relationships with investors and fellow entrepreneurs (Manolova et al., 2007). However, studies have shown that women often struggle to gain entry into traditionally male-dominated business networks, which can limit their opportunities for collaboration and growth (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). Therefore, the development of women-focused entrepreneurial networks has been identified as a crucial strategy for supporting female entrepreneurs (Robb & Coleman, 2010).

Additionally, government and institutional support has been highlighted as a key factor in reducing gender-based barriers. Initiatives such as grants, training programs, and financial incentives tailored to women entrepreneurs can help level the playing field and provide them with the resources they need to start and grow their businesses (Verheul et al., 2021). However, research indicates that many women are unaware of these programs or face difficulties accessing them due to bureaucratic challenges (Kelley et al., 2020).

Research Methodology:

1. Research Design:

This study will employ exploratory research to gain an in-depth understanding of the motivations and challenges faced by women transitioning from employment to entrepreneurship. Given the qualitative nature of exploratory research, the focus will be on gathering insights rather than definitive statistical data.

2. Data Collection Methods:

- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with women entrepreneurs who have transitioned from employment. The interview guide will cover topics such as motivations, challenges, and experiences during their transition.
- Focus Groups: Group discussions will be organized to explore shared experiences among female entrepreneurs and the role of cultural, social, and familial factors.
- Secondary Data: Review of existing literature, reports, and case studies on female entrepreneurship, focusing on gender-specific challenges and motivations.

3. Sample:

The study will target a purposive sample of women entrepreneurs from diverse industries and backgrounds who have transitioned from employment to entrepreneurship. The sample will include a range of ages, career stages, and geographic locations to capture a broad perspective on the issue.

4. Data Analysis:

The data from interviews and focus groups will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. This will help in understanding the core motivations and challenges experienced by women. Findings will be coded and categorized into key themes such as motivations, barriers, support systems, and recommendations.

5. Ethical Considerations:

Participants will be informed about the study's purpose, and their consent will be obtained prior to conducting interviews and focus groups. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the research process.

6. Limitations:

As this is an exploratory study, the findings may not be generalizable to all female entrepreneurs. The focus on qualitative methods means that the study will prioritize depth of understanding over breadth, and further quantitative research may be needed to validate the findings.

Data Analysis (Thematic Analysis):

In this exploratory research, the thematic analysis of data collected through interviews and focus groups reveals several key themes related to the motivations and challenges faced by women transitioning from corporate employment to entrepreneurship. The analysis focuses on three major themes: motivations, challenges, and support systems.

Theme	Motivations	Challenges	Support System
Flexibility	Desire for better work-life balance.	Difficulty balancing entrepreneurial duties with personal life.	Importance of flexible work arrangements in support programs.
Passion	Pursuit of personal passions and interests.	Need to build new networks and find mentors.	Role of mentorship in helping women navigate entrepreneurship.
Financial Independence	Breaking through salary caps and achieving financial autonomy.	Limited access to capital and funding.	Government and institutional support programs.

1. Motivations:

a. Desire for Flexibility and Work-Life Balance:

- A recurring theme in the interviews is the desire for a more flexible work schedule, particularly in managing both personal and professional responsibilities. Women in corporate environments often cited the rigidity of corporate jobs as a major reason for transitioning into entrepreneurship, where they felt they could better manage their work-life balance.

- Example Quote: "I wanted to be able to spend more time with my family without sacrificing my career, and entrepreneurship gave me that freedom."

b. Pursuit of Passion and Autonomy:

- Many respondents expressed a strong desire to pursue a career aligned with their personal passions and values. In corporate roles, they often felt restricted or unfulfilled, unable to channel their creativity or make meaningful decisions. Entrepreneurship was seen as a path to regain control over their career trajectories.

- Example Quote: "In the corporate world, I was doing work that didn't excite me. Starting my own business allowed me to pursue something I'm truly passionate about."

c. Financial Independence and Growth Opportunities:

- Another key motivator was the desire for financial independence and the opportunity to grow their income beyond the salary constraints in corporate roles. Some women saw entrepreneurship as a way to break through glass ceilings that limited their career progression in corporate environments.

- Example Quote: "I felt that no matter how hard I worked, I was hitting a ceiling. Entrepreneurship gave me the opportunity to build my own success."

2. Challenges:

a. Cultural and Societal Expectations:

- Many women highlighted the challenge of overcoming societal expectations around gender roles, especially in male-dominated corporate industries. These expectations often carried over into entrepreneurship, where women had to work harder to be taken seriously.

- Example Quote: "In corporate settings, I constantly had to prove myself. I thought things would change in entrepreneurship, but the bias still exists."

b. Limited Access to Resources and Networks:

- A common challenge mentioned was the difficulty in accessing financial resources, including loans and investments, which were often harder for women to secure compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, corporate women found that their networks were not always useful in entrepreneurial contexts, forcing them to build new relationships from scratch.

- Example Quote: "Finding investors was a challenge because most networks were male-dominated, and I felt overlooked."

c. Confidence and Risk Aversion:

- Women transitioning from corporate roles often struggled with self-confidence in navigating the uncertainties of entrepreneurship. In corporate environments, they had more structured roles and risk management, but entrepreneurship required them to take on new, unfamiliar responsibilities, leading to self-doubt.

- Example Quote: "In my corporate job, I knew my role, but as an entrepreneur, I had to be everything — from a strategist to an accountant. It was overwhelming."

3. Support Systems:

a. Importance of Mentorship and Peer Networks:

- Many respondents emphasized the role of mentorship and support from peers as critical in their entrepreneurial journey. Women who had access to female mentors or networks felt more supported and confident in overcoming the challenges of entrepreneurship.

- Example Quote: "Having a mentor who had already been through the process helped me navigate the unknowns of starting my business."

b. Need for Government and Institutional Support:

- Women in corporate environments transitioning to entrepreneurship also noted the importance of government programs and institutional support, such as grants or initiatives aimed at supporting women-owned businesses. However, access to these resources was often limited or difficult to navigate.

- Example Quote: "There are programs for women entrepreneurs, but getting the right information and access was a hurdle."

Conclusion:

This exploratory research highlights the significant motivations and challenges women face as they transition from corporate employment to entrepreneurship. The desire for flexibility, pursuit of passion, and financial independence emerged as the strongest drivers for this shift. However, these women encounter substantial challenges, including cultural and societal barriers, limited access to resources, and confidence issues in handling new responsibilities.

In corporate environments, women often experience barriers such as limited career progression and rigid structures that make it difficult to balance professional and personal life. These barriers push many to seek entrepreneurship as a path to autonomy. However, the transition is not without challenges. They continue to face gender biases, lack of access to capital, and the need to build new networks outside of their corporate experiences.

To foster a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem, there is a need for targeted interventions, such as mentorship programs, greater access to funding for women, and policy changes that specifically address the unique challenges faced by female entrepreneurs. These efforts will be crucial in empowering more women to successfully make the transition from corporate roles to entrepreneurship, ultimately contributing to greater gender diversity in the business world.

This research underscores the importance of building inclusive support systems and creating an entrepreneurial environment that recognizes and addresses the unique obstacles faced by women. By doing so, we can better harness the potential of female entrepreneurs, leading to more innovative, diverse, and thriving business communities.

REFERENCES

- Brush, C. G., Edelman, L. F., Manolova, T. S., & Welter, F. (2018). A gendered look at entrepreneurship ecosystems. *Small Business Economics*, 53(2), 393–408.
- Eddleston, K. A., & Powell, G. N. (2012). Nurturing entrepreneurs' work–family balance: A gendered perspective. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36(3), 513–541.
- Elam, A. B., Brush, C. G., Greene, P. G., Baumer, B., Dean, M., & Heavlow, R. (2019). Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2018/2019 Women's Entrepreneurship Report. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.
- Jennings, J. E., & Brush, C. G. (2013). Research on women entrepreneurs: Challenges to (and from) the broader entrepreneurship literature? *The Academy of Management Annals*, 7(1), 663–715.
- Kirkwood, J. (2009). Motivational factors in a push-pull theory of entrepreneurship. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 24(5), 346–364.

- Manolova, T. S., Brush, C. G., Edelman, L. F., & Shaver, K. G. (2012). One size does not fit all: Entrepreneurial expectancies and growth intentions of US women and men nascent entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 24(1-2), 7–27.
- Marlow, S., & McAdam, M. (2013). Gender and entrepreneurship: Advancing debate and challenging myths; Exploring the mystery of the under-performing female entrepreneur. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 19(1), 114–124.
- Still, L. V., & Timms, W. (2000). Women's business: The flexible alternative workstyle for women. *Women in Management Review*, 15(5/6), 272–283.
- Brush, C. G., Carter, N. M., Gatewood, E. J., Greene, P. G., & Hart, M. M. (2006). *Women and entrepreneurship: Contemporary classics*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Brush, C. G., Edelman, L. F., Manolova, T. S., & Welter, F. (2018). A gendered look at entrepreneurship ecosystems. *Small Business Economics*, 53(2), 393–408.
- Carter, S., Anderson, S., & Shaw, E. (2003). Women's business ownership: A review of the academic, popular and internet literature. *Small Business Service*.
- DeMartino, R., & Barbato, R. (2003). Differences between women and men MBA entrepreneurs: Exploring family flexibility and wealth creation as career motivators. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 18(6), 815–832.
- Duberley, J., & Carrigan, M. (2013). The career identities of 'mumpreneurs': Women's experiences of combining enterprise and motherhood. *International Small Business Journal*, 31(6), 629–651.
- Eddleston, K. A., & Powell, G. N. (2012). Nurturing entrepreneurs' work–family balance: A gendered perspective. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36(3), 513–541.
- Elam, A. B., Brush, C. G., Greene, P. G., Baumer, B., Dean, M., & Heavlow, R. (2019). *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2018/2019 Women's Entrepreneurship Report*. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.
- Gupta, V. K., Turban, D. B., & Bhawe, N. M. (2009). The effect of gender stereotype activation on entrepreneurial intentions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(5), 1053–1061.
- Jennings, J. E., & Brush, C. G. (2013). Research on women entrepreneurs: Challenges to (and from) the broader entrepreneurship literature? *The Academy of Management Annals*, 7(1), 663–715.
- Kirkwood, J. (2009). Motivational factors in a push-pull theory of entrepreneurship. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 24(5), 346–364.
- Manolova, T. S., Brush, C. G., Edelman, L. F., & Shaver, K. G. (2007). One size does not fit all: Entrepreneurial expectancies and growth intentions of US women and men nascent entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 19(1), 41–65.
- Manolova, T. S., Brush, C. G., Edelman, L. F., & Shaver, K. G. (2012). One size does not fit all: Entrepreneurial expectancies and growth intentions of US women and men nascent entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 24(1-2), 7–27.
- Marlow, S., & McAdam, M. (2013). Gender and entrepreneurship: Advancing debate and challenging myths; Exploring the mystery of the under-performing female entrepreneur. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 19(1), 114–124.
- Marlow, S., & Patton, D. (2005). All credit to men? Entrepreneurship, finance, and gender. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 29(6), 717–735.
- Robb, A. M., & Coleman, S. (2010). Financing strategies of new technology-based firms: A comparison of women-and men-owned firms. *Journal of Technology Management & Innovation*, 5(1), 30–50.
- Still, L. V., & Timms, W. (2000). Women's business: The flexible alternative workstyle for women. *Women in Management Review*, 15(5/6), 272–283