

Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs During the Early Stage of Startups:

Author Name:- **Ayushi Dev**
Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA)
Amity University Lucknow Campus
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

Women-owned enterprises are gradually emerging as a significant force in India's local economic landscape. Beyond income generation, they contribute to employment creation and community-level development. However, the transition from idea to operational startup is rarely smooth, particularly for women entrepreneurs operating in smaller urban centers.

This study investigates the practical challenges experienced by women entrepreneurs during the early stage of their ventures in Lucknow. The research follows a qualitative approach and is based on primary data collected through structured, face-to-face interactions with five women entrepreneurs representing different sectors.

The analysis reveals that restricted access to formal finance, pressure of dual responsibilities, inadequate market linkages, and persistent socio-cultural expectations collectively influence business sustainability. The study underscores the importance of accessible credit systems, structured mentoring, and localized entrepreneurial training to create a supportive environment for women-led enterprises. The findings offer grounded insights that may inform future policy and institutional interventions.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, Startup Challenges, Financial Inclusion, Work-Life Integration, Social Barriers, Lucknow

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is often viewed as an engine of economic dynamism, fostering innovation and employment opportunities. In India, the growing participation of women in business activities reflects gradual socio-economic transformation. Over the past decade, several public initiatives and institutional programs have attempted to encourage women to pursue entrepreneurial careers.

Despite this positive shift, the initial phase of establishing and stabilizing a venture remains particularly demanding. Early-stage startups typically operate under financial uncertainty, limited market recognition, and evolving operational systems. For women entrepreneurs, these business-related pressures are frequently intertwined with social expectations and domestic commitments.

Understanding such experiences within a specific local context is essential. Accordingly, this study explores the early-stage challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Lucknow, with the objective of identifying recurring patterns that shape their entrepreneurial journey.

2. Literature Review

Prior research consistently indicates that access to finance remains a structural barrier for many women entrepreneurs. Constraints such as absence of collateral, limited credit history, and procedural complexities often discourage them from approaching formal financial institutions.

Scholarly discussions also emphasize the influence of household responsibilities and entrenched social norms on women's ability to allocate time and resources toward enterprise development. Additionally, studies underline the importance of mentorship networks, exposure to markets, and business skill development in improving startup survival rates.

While national-level analyses provide broader perspectives, localized research in emerging urban centers remains comparatively limited. This study contributes to existing literature by focusing on early-stage entrepreneurial experiences within Lucknow.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative framework to capture experiential insights rather than numerical measurement.

Sample Size: Five women entrepreneurs

Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling

Data Collection Method: Structured in-person interviews

Area of Study: Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Interview responses were systematically reviewed and grouped into thematic categories. This thematic analysis enabled the identification of common constraints influencing early-stage business development.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

The respondents operate across varied sectors, including beauty services, food and beverage operations, cosmetic retail, mobile accessories trade, and small-scale refreshment services. Their ages range between 25 and 42 years. Most participants hold graduate-level qualifications.

Due to procedural and financial barriers, the majority initiated their businesses using personal savings or informal family support. Some respondents entered entrepreneurship after prior work exposure, whereas others transitioned directly from homemaking roles into independent business management. All participants were in the formative phase of their ventures at the time of the study.

4.2 Financial Constraints

Access to capital emerged as the most recurring concern. Participants reported hesitation in approaching banks due to extensive documentation requirements and collateral expectations. High borrowing costs further limited expansion possibilities. Consequently, reliance on personal funds or informal borrowing arrangements was common during the startup phase.

4.3 Managing Dual Responsibilities

Balancing entrepreneurial responsibilities with household obligations was frequently described as mentally and physically demanding. Several respondents expressed that time constraints affected strategic decision-making and business scaling efforts. The dual burden influenced productivity and long-term planning.

4.4 Market Exposure and Networking Gaps

Limited awareness of structured marketing practices restricted business visibility. Entrepreneurs highlighted challenges in digital promotion, customer engagement strategies, and professional networking. Insufficient exposure to broader markets reduced opportunities for growth and brand positioning.

4.5 Social and Cultural Influences

Although immediate family support was present in many cases, wider societal perceptions occasionally affected confidence levels. Traditional expectations regarding gender roles subtly shaped entrepreneurial experiences, particularly during the early stage when business stability was uncertain.

5. Major Findings

Financial accessibility remains the primary constraint during the startup phase.

Domestic and professional responsibilities intersect, influencing growth decisions.

Limited exposure to marketing tools and networks restricts expansion.

Social attitudes continue to influence entrepreneurial confidence.

Support from family members enhances resilience and sustainability.

6. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that early-stage women entrepreneurs in Lucknow encounter interconnected financial, operational, and socio-cultural challenges. While policy initiatives exist to promote inclusive entrepreneurship, practical accessibility gaps persist at the grassroots level.

Improving credit facilitation mechanisms, offering structured training programs, and strengthening mentorship networks could significantly enhance startup sustainability. Addressing these barriers through localized interventions may contribute to broader economic inclusion and long-term empowerment of women entrepreneurs.

8. References

Gupta, R., & Verma, S. (2019). Women entrepreneurship in India: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Business Studies*, 8(2), 45–52.

Sharma, P. (2020). Financial barriers in women-led startups. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship Research*, 5(1), 23–30.

Singh, A. (2021). Social challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. *Indian Journal of Management Research*, 12(3), 78–85.