

Women empowerment through entrepreneurship development: A study of Kolkata District

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Abstract

Purpose: The present study emphasized on two important aspects of empowerment i.e., perception and impact of entrepreneurship among women entrepreneurs. The study aims to analyses the perception of empowerment and impact of the entrepreneurship on empowerment among the women entrepreneurs in Kolkata districts.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research design is quantitative in nature. Primary data was collected from 200 women entrepreneurs of Kolkata district. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire of 5 points Likert scale by using purposive and snow ball sampling techniques.

Findings: The findings demonstrate that women entrepreneurship significantly enhanced economic independence, decision-making power, self-confidence, social status, entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. Hence, all of the predictors, Growth and independence, Status and recognition, Achievement and social change, and Entrepreneurial skills, are the crucial predictors in predicting the perception of empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the Kolkata district. The finding highlights the need for policies that focus on gender equality, more leadership opportunities, and better work-life balance, which support overall development for women entrepreneurs. The need for inclusive strategies targeting sustainable growth and societal transformation is also emphasised.

Originality/value: It provides new insights by highlighting the perception of empowerment of women entrepreneurs. The study also analysed the importance of financial independence, social status, achievement at a large scale in the socio-cultural context of Kolkata.

Keywords: Women empowerment, women entrepreneurship, gender equality, entrepreneurial skills

Introduction

From being dominated by men to walking shoulder to shoulder with them, women have come a long way in almost every field. This not only uplifted them individually but also brought about a much-needed shift in society's perspectives. This change is nothing but women's empowerment, i.e., giving more power to think and act freely, having a voice for themselves, putting an end to any kind of discrimination and injustice, representing themselves as equal members of society, availing their rights, having equal opportunities and support, etc. Women are performing equally well, and sometimes even better than men, in several fields, thereby making a significant contribution to the country's economic growth. Entrepreneurship Development is one of the areas where women's progress is evident over time. Women have broken all the stereotypes by stepping into business and leadership roles. Entrepreneurship development is widely recognised as means to achieve women empowerment, improve decision-making, foster financial independence, and enhanced social recognition and status across the various contexts (Andriamahery, A., & Qamruzzaman, M., 2022; Jain & Munuswamy, 2022^[1]; Rena *et al.*, 2025).

Entrepreneurship has empowered women by boosting self-confidence and creating special identities and financial independence (Andriamahery, A., & Qamruzzaman, M., 2022)^[1]. It provides great opportunities for the overall development of women by enhancing their leadership and skills, such as decision-making, problem-solving, risk management, communication and networking, time management, and innovation and creativity (Jain &

Munuswamy, 2022). Entrepreneurship not only helps them in getting financial independence but also generates employment for others (Chiplunkar & Goldberg, 2024)^[5]. Hence, their relationship is complimentary, with entrepreneurial activities results into personal as well as financial empowerment (Andriamahery, A., & Qamruzzaman, M., 2022^[1]; Trivedi, S.K., & Petkova, A.P., 2021)^[31]. The government has also played a vital role in shaping its entrepreneurial journey by launching various women-centric business schemes, providing access to funds, and offering training and programs. Women's innovative ideas and dedication are not only generating employment but also inspiring the future generation. All these become reality only due to the significant shift in the society's outlook i.e., considering women as an equal contributor of the growth and development of the nation. Women have shown their multitasking capabilities by achieving a good work-life balance (Tahir, 2025)^[30]. Thus, women are presenting entrepreneurship as a tool to transform their lives and the world around them.

In the context Kolkata district, which is a perfect blend of commerce and culture, understanding the empowerment's perception and entrepreneurial impact on the same by women is paramount.

Review of Literature

Perceived empowerment refers to the self-assessment by women entrepreneurs of different dimensions of empowerment, i.e., independence, autonomy, mobility, confidence, and self-esteem within their entrepreneurial

activities. Building on this understanding, Khan (2015) ^[17] highlights issues of gender equity by focusing on women's empowerment through entrepreneurship and incorporating a feminist perspective on discrimination and entrepreneurial subordination. The study concludes that women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, and capacity and skill development are crucial for the societal welfare. Extending this perspective, Hossain *et al.* (2018) ^[13] identifies economic status, self-worth, self-confidence, control over their own life-related problems, control over resources, and social recognition as key variables that define the level of empowerment among women entrepreneurs. This perception is significant, as it not only shapes their social status and recognition but also influence their persistence in business and their attainment of gender equality.

Recognising the multi-dimensional nature of empowerment, Hoque *et al.* (2020) ^[18] examined the factors responsible for women's empowerment through entrepreneurship. Their findings reveal that the regulatory framework, entrepreneurship education and training, the role of business associations and the engagement of husbands in women's businesses are the significant enabling factors, whereas access to finance and market facilities were found to be insignificant. It further emphasises that economic independence, social upliftment, and enhanced entrepreneurial skills are crucial outcomes of women's entrepreneurial endeavours. In a similar vein, Pal and Mishra (2021) ^[23], focusing on women entrepreneurs in Kolkata, explored the hurdles, motivational factors (push and pull), and perceptions of success. They identified financial independence, social recognition, and self-fulfilment as key motivators, while limited access to financial independence and the burden of family responsibilities as main challenges. Complementing these findings, Andriamahery and Qamruzzaman (2022) ^[1] highlighted the importance of availability of finance, technical know-how, financial literacy, while identifying work-life balance, family responsibilities, and societal pressure as critical challenges that continue to women's entrepreneurial journeys.

While the above studies focus on women who have already engaged in entrepreneurship, several researchers have examined the role of entrepreneurial attitudes and perceptions formed even before their entrance. Jaleel *et al.*, (2017) ^[15], in their study of universities commerce students, found that the universities and college's atmosphere significantly influenced student's entrepreneurial perception, whereas, economic assistance, socio-cultural norms, and statutes had little effect. Interestingly, students expressed a willingness to pursue entrepreneurship even without adequate economic support and despite the fear of failure. Building on this finding Rajini (2016) ^[2] observed that commerce students exhibit higher entrepreneurial perception compared to arts and science students, underscoring the significance of entrepreneurial education in generating awareness about the entrepreneurial opportunities.

The role of the attitude is further highlighted in the domain entrepreneurial intentions. Anggadwita and Dhewanto., (2016) ^[2] examining the Indonesian of Micro and Small Entrepreneurs revealed that entrepreneurial attitude acts as a mediator between psychological features, personal capabilities and entrepreneurial intentions. While

entrepreneurial attitude effect personal capabilities, perception does not affect intention. Supporting this, Dinc and Budic (2016) ^[7] established the relation of entrepreneurial intention with the attitude, social norms, perceived behavioural control and demographic factors. It was revealed that attitude and perceived behavioural control have positive impact on entrepreneurial intention. Further, education and family or societal support boost women's self-confidence and that a positive perception of entrepreneurship is closely associated with women's entrepreneurial intention.

Risk-perception is one of the vital factors influencing the startup ideas. Cecilia *et al.*, (2015) ^[4] assessed the risk-perception, and start-up decision by mediating the effect of passion and self-efficacy among nascent women and men entrepreneurs. The study highlights that nascent women entrepreneurs perceived more risk than the male entrepreneurs. However, the risk-perception significantly impact both male and women entrepreneurs while commencing their entrepreneurial journey. Shifting the focus to post entry experiences, Parmar (2016) ^[7] investigates the women entrepreneurial perception as well as the familial and societal attitude towards female entrepreneurship. The family support particularly the spousal support and society's attitude are found to be responsible for economic and social upliftment. Moreover, the dimensions like autonomy, self-confidence, decision-making and risk-bearing capabilities, health and hygiene have also improved after becoming an entrepreneur. Significant difference has been evident in holistic empowerment of women entrepreneurs both in personal and economic level after commencing their entrepreneurial journey.

Complementing these findings, Mathew (2015) ^[21] examined the entrepreneurial attitude among male and female youth. The study emphasized that women have strong positive entrepreneurial attitude in comparison to men. Further, business family background builds high entrepreneurial attitude among the women. However, Belwal *et al.*, (2015) ^[3] examined the entrepreneurial perception through the lenses of entrepreneurial education. The study reveals that women with positive entrepreneurial intentions, self-confidence, operational network lacks in entrepreneurial education, and risk-taking capabilities.

Research Gap

Apart from the growing recognition of women's entrepreneurship as an important tool for economic and social empowerment, most studies consider only gender, ignoring other dimensions, such as the perception of women's empowerment through entrepreneurship in Kolkata. There are many studies on women entrepreneurs across various aspects in different megacities, especially the state capitals in India. There has been less research on the megacity of Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal. The research addresses the lack of prior studies examining the significance of the statistical relationship between entrepreneurship and women's empowerment in this specific context, thereby distinguishing it from other studies.

Research Objectives

1. To study the socio-economic profile of the women entrepreneurs in Kolkata.
2. To assess the perception of empowerment among women entrepreneurs in Kolkata.

Table 1: Themes and variables of the study

Sl. No.	Areas of interview	Variables
1	Demographic profile	Age, marital status, education, annual income, and years of business
2	Perception of Empowerment	Perception towards the factors leading to empowerment (Financial, personal, social and familial)

Research Methodology

1. **Research Design:** The study included both descriptive and analytical research designs. Primary data is collected through a structured questionnaire targeting the women entrepreneurs.
2. **Study Site:** The study was carried out in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, for the time period of August 2024 to December 2024.
3. **Population and sampling**
 - a. **Sampling Method:** Purposive and snowball sampling techniques have been used to collect data from the women, mainly running businesses in the main city, Kolkata. Data were collected from the respondents fulfilling the following criteria
 1. Businesses were run by women only.
 2. Women, specifically the owners, were targeted.

- b. **Sample Size:** Here, responses were collected from 200 women engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Kolkata.

4. **Data collection:** A structured questionnaire using the 5-point Likert scale was used for data collection here.

Data Analysis: Results and Findings

This study investigates the perception of empowerment of women entrepreneurs running their businesses in the Kolkata district. The results of the various statistical analyses are presented below.

Reliability Statistics

Before proceeding to further analysis, the reliability of the data was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal consistency. Table 2 shows the values assigned to the perception of empowerment and the impact of entrepreneurship on women's empowerment.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items
Perception of empowerment	0.903	0.092

The scale consisted of 16 items designed to measure women entrepreneurs' perceptions of empowerment. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.903, indicating excellent internal consistency among the items.

Demographic profile

Of the total, 52% of respondents are 25-35 years, followed by 36-45 years (29%), 46-59 years (18%), and below 25 years (1%). The majority, i.e., 166 out of 200 respondents, are married (83%). Most of the women entrepreneurs have completed their graduation (38%), followed by postgraduate and above (25%), higher secondary (18%), secondary (9%), Primary education (8%), and professional qualification (2%). Out of 200, 80 respondents (40%) have an annual income below ₹200000, 27% earn between ₹200001 and ₹500000, 27% earn between ₹500001 and ₹1000000, and only 6% earn above ₹1000000.

Business profiles

The majority, i.e., 26% of the respondents, are engaged in the food business, followed by baking 17%, boutiques (12%), coaching centres (8%), interior designing (7%), handicrafts (6%), education and training (4%), and consulting services (3%), respectively. Out of 200, 94 respondents are doing business for more than 10 years,

followed by 62 respondents (31%) of 6-10 years, 41 respondents (20.5%), and only 3 respondents (1.5%) having less than 2 years of business experience respectively.

1. In this study Factor Analysis has been used to determine the underlying dimensions of 16 items of perception of empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Kolkata. The suitability of the data for Factor Analysis was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test		.863
Bartlett's Test	Approx. Chi-Square	900.544
	Df	120
	Sig.	.000

Total variance explained 67.204%

The KMO value was 0.863, indicating meritorious sampling adequacy for the analysis. Bartlett's test (chi-square = 900.544, df=120, p<0.001) confirmed that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and hence appropriate for factor analysis. The analysis was executed by selecting the eigenvalues greater than one. Table 3 presents the rotated component matrix relating to this factor analysis.

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix

Perception of empowerment by women entrepreneurs	Components			
	1	2	3	4
I feel improvement in confidence and self esteem	.806			
I feel more self-reliant now	.749			
I feel more financially independent	.719			
I feel confident in managing my business activity effectively	.719			
I feel empowered as a result of business activities	.679			
I believe that my overall personal growth has improved	.641			

I feel respected more within my family after becoming an entrepreneur	.561			
I feel socially more respected after setting up a business		.903		
I feel my opinions are valued more in my family		.898		
I feel more socially recognised after setting up a business		.694		
I feel a sense of family recognition after setting up the business		.584		
I feel empowered to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes through entrepreneurial pursuit.			.807	
I believe that my control over the lives and decisions has significantly improved			.734	
I feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in being an entrepreneur			.647	
I feel capable of handling challenges and risks in business.				.807
I feel more confident while making decisions independently in both personal and professional spheres				.734

Here, factor 1 has been determined as Growth and Independence. Factor 2 has been labelled Status and Recognition. As the items in factor 3 are mostly related to independence, societal impact, and self-fulfilment, it has been named

Achievement and social change. Finally, the factor 4 has a high load for components of enhanced self-confidence and problem-solving abilities, so it is named Entrepreneurial skills. All these four factors altogether explain 67.204% of the variance.

Table 5: Results of Multiple Regressions

Model Summary							
Explained Variable: Perception of Empowerment of women entrepreneurs							
No. of observations: 200							
F- value	Significance		R square	Adjusted R square	Root MSE		
128.528	.000		.725	.719	0.409		
Coefficients							
Explanatory variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	4.370	.029		151.103	.000		
Growth and Independence	.526	.029	.679	18.086	.000	1.000	1.000
Status and Recognition	.061	.029	.079	2.097	.037	1.000	1.000
Achievement, and social change	.312	.029	.404	10.768	.000	1.000	1.000
Entrepreneurial skills	.237	.029	.307	8.163	.000	1.000	1.000

A multiple regression model is developed to test the relationship between independent variables (predictors), i.e. growth and Independence, Status and Recognition, Achievement, and social change and Entrepreneurial skills and the dependent variable (outcome), i.e., perception of empowerment. Analysis of Variance for testing the regression model has been conducted, and it produces the f-statistic 128.528 and the p-value is 0.000 (less than 0.05), indicating that the regression model is statistically significant in examining the perception of empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Kolkata.

Further, it can be inferred that there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables, as the tolerance values are 1 and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are all lower than 10. It was also inferred that the p-values of the predictors are below 0.05, the factors are the major contributors in predicting the model, and from t-values, it can be seen that all of the predictors, Growth and independence, Status and recognition, Achievement and social change, and Entrepreneurial skills, are the crucial predictors in predicting the perception of empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the Kolkata district.

Conclusions

The study highlights the factors of perceived empowerment as a result of women's entrepreneurship in the Kolkata district. Factors such as growth and independence, status and recognition, achievement and social change, and entrepreneurial skills are the most significant determinants of perceived empowerment. It reveals that women entrepreneurs feel empowered when they attain financial independence, experience personal growth, and can bring about social change.

The finding highlights the need for policies that focus on gender equality, more leadership opportunities, and better work-life balance, which support overall development for women entrepreneurs. The need for inclusive strategies targeting sustainable growth and societal transformation is also emphasised. Since this research scope is limited to the Kolkata district in West Bengal, India, only, there is plenty of opportunity to expand the geographical areas, determining whether its results differ in different parts of India.

Future efforts should focus on addressing these gaps, especially by improving entrepreneurial performance and reducing gender inequality, and by facilitating arrangements for entrepreneurship and social engagement. Future studies can examine these factors and dimensions across different socio-cultural and geographical contexts to capture indirect effects. The findings of the paper are setting the base for further research and discussion.

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