

WHAT HINDERS THE FEMALES TO TAKE ENTREPRENEURIAL DECISIONS? A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON FEMALE BUSINESS STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Complex and multidimensional, entrepreneurship is driven by individuals and considered a key factor in economic value creation and development. There is an ample evidence to suggest that entrepreneurship assumes a critical part in propelling economic expansion through job creation, innovation, market competition, social change, and the distribution of wealth. Female entrepreneurs are making a significant contribution to economic development. This study is aimed at to identify the barriers that hinders the female university students (prospective entrepreneurs) to take entrepreneurial decisions in Pakistan. The semi-structured interviews are used in this research to in-depth conceptualization of the factors or barriers affecting the female entrepreneurial decisions. The business schools of the universities and under graduate colleges selected as target population for the collection of data. The female students of final year selected as respondents of the study. After the data collection, the data transcribed into initial codes and thematic analysis has been performed with the help of Nvivo software. With the help of thematic analysis, few new themes are explored i.e. joint family problems, technical illiteracy, communication short-comings and inflation-driven financial issues. These factors hinder females to take entrepreneurial decisions in Pakistan. This study provides a mode to the higher educational institutions in Pakistan that how to facilitate their students to become successful entrepreneurs by overcoming the barriers of factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions. As per my best knowledge, there are few studies available on female entrepreneurship especially the in-depth conceptualization of identifying the factors affecting their entrepreneurial decisions especially in the developing countries like Pakistan is missing the literature.

Key words: Female entrepreneurship, Thematic Analysis, Barriers of entrepreneurial decisions.

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Introduction

Every country sees entrepreneurship as a significant driver and economic engine, as new jobs are created and labor markets become more innovative and competitive through it (Barba-Sánchez et al. 2022). In recent years, a lot of research has been done on women's entrepreneurship, which is an emerging global concern (Henry, Foss, & Ahl, 2016). The status of women entrepreneurship in Pakistan deserves serious attention. In Pakistan, the female labor force participation rate is near to 23 %. Due to the gender discrimination (a social stigma) only 25 percent of the female university graduates join any job. Only 1 % of females are business entrepreneurs as compared to 21% male entrepreneurs. This shows that in Pakistan there is an inequality in taking business decisions by the university students, which is also highlighted in the Global Gender Gap Index (2022), where Pakistan falls at 145th out of 146 countries (Rifaqat, 2023). So, the research on women entrepreneurship in Pakistan is a big challenge.

Taking a new business decision isn't generally so easy as we consider rather it requires support and an adequate number of assets (e.g., intangible & tangible) (Huang, 2016). Even though the government and responsible authorities provide sufficient programs and support for inspiring new businesses, many people are unable to lead the way (Soetanto et al., 2018). Despite the fact that many stakeholders in society, particularly young people, believe that entrepreneurship offers numerous benefits, many obstacles are believed to be stifling its growth and development. The environment in which business activities are carried out may present unique challenges. For instance, social influences, social environments, regulatory complexities, access to assets, monetary conditions, and accessible frameworks may altogether support or beat the development of business projects among people, especially enterprising expectations down (Aim) and conduct (Kristiansen & Ryen, 2002; Gurbuz & Aykol, 2008).

Furthermore, it is important for graduates to ultimately change their attitude from looking for employment opportunities to the ultimate job providers as it is not possible for the government to adjust all the pass out students or create as much jobs against the passing out ratio of the students (Reuel Johnmark et al. 2016). Entrepreneurship is recognized as a basis of increasing entrepreneurial diversity in economic contexts (Verheul et al., 2006), additionally to its contribution to economies in terms of job creation and economic growth (Kelley et al., 2010). The entrepreneurial revolution should be the focus of university students (Nuan and Xin 2012; Jiang and Sun 2015). Women entrepreneurs can contribute to the development and advancement of the economy of a country (Bosma and Kelley, 2019; Hechevarria et al., 2019).

There are numerous factors that can influence female entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial decisions. Many researches has explained various factors like financial, support, technological, and a lot of studies has deliberated traditional factors such as support,

resources, financial capital, technology and novel ideas (Bruton et al., 2015; Marvel et al., 2016; Nambisan, 2017; Schmitz, et al., 2017), and emotional factors such as personal characteristics, behaviors and attitudes, self-efficacy etc. (Hamilton et al., 2019; Kirkley, 2017; Sultana et al., 2019) that can affect the entrepreneurial decisions; but the attitudes and beliefs of female entrepreneurs are not often described in the entrepreneurship literature, however, the factors/barriers that hinders the entrepreneurial decisions of female entrepreneurs in Pakistan require further systemization and conceptualization. Furthermore, most of the studies on women entrepreneurship explained the context of developed countries (Cardella et al., 2020) and it is much needed for the researchers to deeply explore the factors affecting the female entrepreneurship in developing countries like Pakistan etc.

Problem statement:

According to World Bank collection of development indicators, female participation in labor force is 23.18% in 2023 which is very less as compared to other developing countries (tradingeconomics.com). In Pakistan, only 25% of pass out female university students join a job or business. In context to the entrepreneurship, only 1 % females are entrepreneurs (start their own businesses) as compared to 21% males in Pakistan (Rifaqat, 2023). These figures highlight the unequal distribution in the society, that is also mentioned in the Global Gender Gap Report, 2022, in which Pakistan stands at 145th rank in 146 countries. Similarly, in educational institutions in Pakistan, the female business students after completing their degrees, are not in a position to give their innovative business ideas and inexact about their future endeavors. Females are aimed at best utilizing their business education qualification with their limited resources to start up their businesses in developing countries (Kanonchik and Mirza, 2023). Sometimes, they are interested and passionate about their startups but owing to some environmental, social, cultural, family dynamics and other factors, they didn't take the initiatives by themselves. They face different obstacles/barriers while taking the entrepreneurial decisions. The female entrepreneurship in developing countries is most neglected area of research. So, this research will identify the factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions of female students in Pakistan. These are the research questions of this research:

RQ1: How our culture affects the entrepreneurial decisions of female business students in Pakistan?

RQ2: What is the influence of family on the entrepreneurial decisions of female business students in Pakistan?

RQ3: How the lack of entrepreneurial education affects the entrepreneurial decisions of female business students in Pakistan?

RQ4: What type of personality trait hinder females to take entrepreneurial decisions of female business students in Pakistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In developing countries females are not able to take entrepreneurial decisions by their own. There are seven categories of constraints that hinders women entrepreneurs to take entrepreneurial decisions by themselves like, work-family disputes, gender inequalities, insufficient finance, poor infrastructure, political and economic instability, lack of entrepreneurial education and personality differences (Panda, 2018). Gray et al. (2006) discussed the internal and external factors affecting the female entrepreneurial decisions like motivation and aspirations of the females towards entrepreneurship family background, culture, work experience and formal education (external factors) as the major barriers that influence the female entrepreneurial decisions to startup and develop a business. Colakoğlu and Gozulkara (2016) validated that when compared to students who did not have an entrepreneurial intention, those who did have a stronger intention are more innovative, have a greater locus of control, a higher need for achievement, and are more vigilant.

Moreover, the lack of training and entrepreneurial education also an obstacle in female entrepreneurship. It is crucial to foster entrepreneurship expertise through proper training that is used to the particular requirements of Moroccan business entrepreneurs (Asli and Nour, 2018). Naguib (2021) features the basic significance of confining entrepreneurship training and presenting ethical and gendered aspect inside an integrative system. The tendency of students to engage in future entrepreneurial intentions is significantly influenced by entrepreneurship training programs (Adekiya and Ibrahim, 2016; Zhao et al., 2005; Lee-Gosselin and Grise, 1990). On the other hand, there are also researches available that did not show strong influence of formal education and entrepreneurial decisions (Peterman and Kennedy, 2003). Likewise, Quagraine et al. (2023) also focuses on that the education especially the entrepreneurial education plays a positive and strong impact on entrepreneurial resourcefulness and ultimately the entrepreneurial decisions of females. So, courses and training programs for prospective female entrepreneurs also required to be adopted.

Additionally, family dynamics in Pakistan sometimes hinders females to take entrepreneurial decisions. It is a social norm in Pakistan that the decision making power belongs to the dominating person in the family and that is usually a man (Zaman et al., 2006) so, the females are not free to take their decisions personally to start a new business. The logic implies that the man in a family has the final decision-making authority (Kanonchuk and Mirza, 2023). Similarly, another study validated that the family dynamics like family back support, in-law's family pressure, communication gap and low convincing power affect the entrepreneurial decisions of females (Nawaz, 2018). Filimonau et al., 2024 revealed that the ultimate support by the spouses play a pivotal role in the entrepreneurial decisions. Sometimes, children give the female a supportive edge to females to do what they want to do. So, after reviewing the literature we can conclude that there are various factors that has to be conceptualized in more detail.

RESEARCH METHODS

Inductive reasoning followed in this research. It is a qualitative study based on in-depth conceptualization. New and unique themes generated from the interviews and this research is able to explore the new themes and factors affecting entrepreneurial decisions of female students in Pakistan. Data collected from females' students of final year project of entrepreneurship in public sector colleges and universities in the city of Lahore, Pakistan. Data was collected from the 15 female students working on the entrepreneurial project of final year. These students have to select a novel topic for new business startup, initial costing, operational, financial and marketing plan of their project. They have to invest in a small business but they usually face some problems while taking this entrepreneurial decision. Interviews and focus group discussion used as data collection method in this research. For this, semi-structured interviews taken from these students to identify the factors/barriers affecting their entrepreneurial decisions. The questions were open ended to identify their personal opinions and feelings. Further questions were designed at the spot while taking the interview. Interviews were recorded for transcription of data. After conducting interviews from 15 respondents, the repetition of arguments or viewpoints were observed i.e. data saturation point. So, the interviews were limited to 15 respondents to avoid repetition of arguments. Finally, a focus group discussion has been arranged to validate the data collected from the interviews. The interviews and focus group discussion were conducted in the native language of the respondents i.e. Urdu and the data was translated into English. For the translation of the interviews, listening, writing again listening and writing process followed personally to verify the translation process, so that the actual meanings or themes could be identified.

Data has been analyzed with the help of Nvivo software. The thematic analysis technique given by Braun and Clarke, 2006 used in this research. Thematic analysis is a technique or method used to identify the main themes and sub-themes from the data collected from the interviews and finally results are generated through findings of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

These six steps of thematic analysis have been incorporated in this study:

Step 1: Data transcription:

The qualitative data was in the form of videos, audios. Initially the videos and audios has been converted into readable text (transcription will be performed), after that we moved towards the initial codes.

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Step 2: Initial code’s creation:

In this steps, we read, re-read the transcribed data to identify some important points discussed in the interview or focus group discussion data and we assigned codes to these important points. Table 1 depicts the initial codes (sub-themes), main themes and frequency of codes.

The following table 1 briefly explains the demographic profile of the respondents. Out of 98 respondents, 55 (56.1%) respondents were male and 43 (43.9%) respondents were female. 49.0 % of 24-30 years entrepreneurs and only 4.1% of 45- above year’s entrepreneurs participated in the research. Participants were from different sectors, and a total of 14 industries were recorded among them: 15.3% of respondents were in the software company, 14.3% were in the manufacturing industry, and 8.2% were in a restaurant and retailing business.

Table 1: Main Themes, Sub-themes & Frequency of Coding

| Main Themes | Sub Themes | Frequency of Coding |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Personality Factors | Self-Confident take good decisions | 4 |
| | Timid vs Extrovert people | 17 |
| Family Factors | Collaborative Decisions | 22 |
| | Approval from Husband and In-laws | 2 |
| | Joint family problems | 3 |
| Financial or Economic Factors | Shared Contribution | 26 |
| | Inflation-driven Financial Issues | 8 |
| | Loan from financial Institutions | 9 |
| | Low Income Group | 15 |
| Cultural Factors | Family Leader's Decisions | 8 |
| | Relative's Objections | 13 |
| | Gender Bias | 23 |
| | In-Laws family Alienation | 12 |
| | Observe Parda | 3 |
| Educational Factors | Entrepreneurial Unawareness | 13 |
| | Inadequate Training | 9 |
| | Technical Illiteracy | 2 |
| | Communication Shortcomings | 3 |
| Other Factors | No need to be independent | 16 |
| | Online business only | 4 |
| | Study Purpose only | 1 |

Step 3: Themes allocation to initial codes:

After assigning initial codes, we identified the most closely related codes and categorized these common codes into a single theme. This phase is said to be the starting phase of the thematic analysis according to (Braun & Clarke 2006). Figure 1 undermines the main themes and sub-themes assigned to identify the factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions of females in Pakistan.

Step 4: Revising the themes:

We read and re-read again the initial codes and revise the themes assigned to codes to ensure that themes didn't overlap. We merged the sub-themes and main theme who was similar in term of meaning or belong to same category.

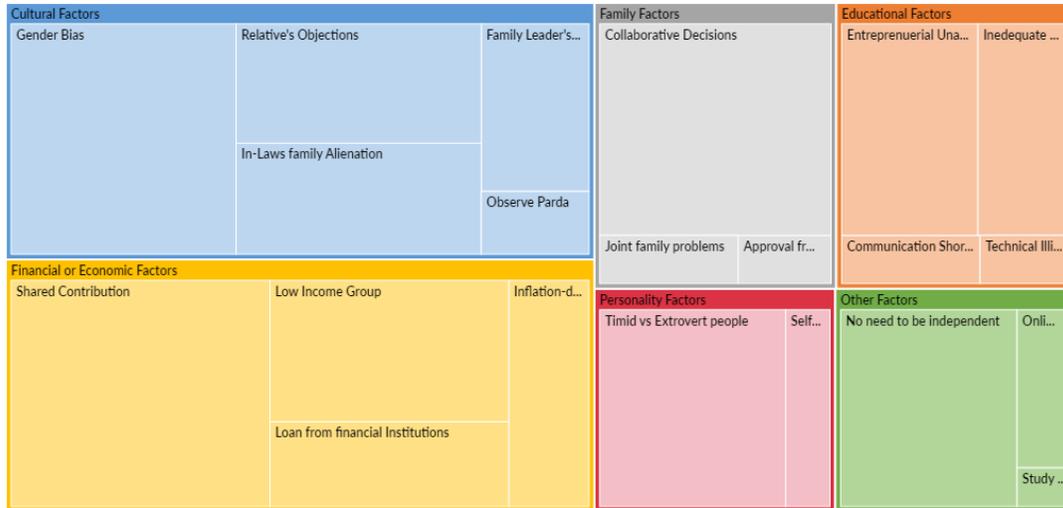


Figure 1

Hierarchy Chart of Factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions of females in Pakistan

Source: Author's self-creation with NVivo

Step 5: Themes conceptualization and title allocation:

In this step, we defined the themes and more elaborative and comprehensive title or name assigned to the themes. According to the responses or views given by the respondents the themes have been conceptualized.

Step 6: Generating the report:

Finally, the results of thematic analysis reported in this step by following the procedure of argument building with literature support (previous evidence) and empirical support (results of the current study).

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Table 2: Definitions of Themes

| Rank | Themes | Definition of Themes |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Personality Factors</i> | | |
| 1 | Self-Confident take good decisions | Persons with healthy self-esteem or self-confidence do not let their feelings stop them doing new things or taking on difficulties and ultimately they can take excellent decision-making. |
| 2 | Timid vs Extrovert people | Timid or shy persons feel hesitate to take prompt decisions whereas extrovert people are more confident about their decisions. |
| <i>Family Factors</i> | | |
| 3 | Collaborative Decisions | Collaborative Decisions means taking input from every member of a group, combine these inputs and take best decision for a group. |
| 4 | Approval from Husband and In-laws | Approval from Husband and In-laws is a condition imposed on the married women to take permission from her husband and in-laws while taking any decision. |
| 5 | Joint family problems | Joint family problems mean problems arrived from the joint living culture of the society. In Joint family systems, the people other than parents of an individual influence the decision making process. |
| <i>Financial or Economic Factors</i> | | |
| 6 | Shared Contribution | Shared contribution means funds contributed by the members of the business mutually and all members are responsible to contribute in the capital of the organization mutually. |
| 7 | Inflation-driven Financial Issues | Inflation-driven financial issues depicts the situation in which due to increase in prices people have less money to spent on their household expenditures and their purchasing power may decline. |
| 8 | Loan from financial Institutions | Loan from financial institution is the money that people borrow from bank or financial institutions to meet their business expenditures or to invest in a business venture. |
| 9 | Low Income Group | Low Income group refers to a group of people who has less income to meet their household expenditures and low level of savings to invest in any business or entrepreneurial project. |
| <i>Cultural Factors</i> | | |
| 10 | Family Leader's Decisions | Family leader's decisions means the decisions taken by the head of the family or some person who have major contributions in the family budget. |
| 11 | Relative's Objections | Relatives' objections refers to all the allegations by the relatives or some other person outside the family on any act or decision by an individual in the family. |
| 12 | Gender Bias | Gender bias is a behavior prevailing in the society or culture to give preference to any particular gender. Sometimes this preferential behavior is found towards males and sometimes towards females. |
| 13 | In-Laws family Alienation | In-laws family alienation refers to the discouraging behavior with the daughter in laws from their in-laws family while taking any self-decision. |
| 14 | Observe Purdah | Observance of Parda means a female covered with some purdah or veil while interacting in the public place or interacting with unknown people especially in males interaction. |
| <i>Educational Factors</i> | | |

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 15 | Entrepreneurial Unawareness | Entrepreneurial unawareness depicts the individual's unawareness about the start-up of new venture and the complete execution process of entrepreneurial projects. |
| 16 | Inadequate Training | Inadequate Training shows the knowledge giving process to the individual about the entrepreneurial project start-up, implementation and all the skills required to execute the entrepreneurial project. |
| 17 | Technical Illiteracy | Technical illiteracy describes the individual's ability to acquire, retain and deliver the information in a technological manner. |
| 18 | Communication Shortcomings | Communication shortcomings are the problems prevailing in the individuals due to lack of disseminating information that leads to miscommunication or misunderstanding. |
| <i>Other Factors</i> | | |
| 19 | No need to be independent | No need to be independent refers to a state in which an individual is dependent financially on someone in the family and he or she is dependent on any member of the family while taking any decision. |
| 20 | Online business only | Online business only refers to a situation in which females are supported only in case of business by using technology i.e. online buying and selling. |
| 21 | Study Purpose only | Study purpose only means an individual is only permitted to take entrepreneurial decision only for study purpose not as future career. |

ANALYSIS

Cultural Factors

Family Leader's Decisions

In Pakistani culture, it is obvious for children to get permission from the head of the family and normally it is father who has the prime authority to take any decisions for their children and family. Owing to cultural and religious restrictions in Islamic nations, women typically need permission from their father, brother, or husband before beginning a new business. (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2010). This is also observed from the interviews and focus group discussion.

"In Focus group discussion, Mehak said that in our family my father is very strict and we have to get permission from him while taking any decision. It is not easy for us to take entrepreneurial decision independently. Some of the respondents said that we have to take permission from father as head of the family. Our father is the supreme power to take all decisions relating to family and our future. It is the culture of our family."

"In my family, all the decisions are made with the consultation with my parents and ultimate decision is taken by my father as the leader of the family. We can't take any decision personally whether it is the decision of starting a new business or for any other matter. We have to take permission from our father (R11)".

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“We can’t take individual decision in our family. We have to get permission from father. While taking this decision, he permitted me for only study purpose not for the future endeavor. He said that due to fluctuation in prices in the country it is not profitable to produce goods myself. And he also said that it is very difficult for female to run business independently (R9)”.

Relative’s Objections

In Pakistan, there are two family systems one is the separate family system (in which father and mother living with their children) and the other one is joint family system (parents living with their children and grandparents, uncles etc.). In joint family systems, females face discouragement from grandparents and uncles to take any entrepreneurial decisions. This point is highlighted by (Nawaz A. , 2018) and validated by the respondents in this study also:

“In Focus group discussion some respondents pointed out that Somehow my uncles discouraged me that how I purchase raw material from market and sell the product in the market as I am a female and it is very difficult me to deal with different type of people in the market. So, they were not interested to start any kind of business. They said that it is better to start a job rather to start a business.”

“Mostly, in Pakistan, people want females to be a dependent person rather to become an independent financially. Our society think that there is no need to give such freedom to females as they become independent. So they didn’t support females to start their own business. My mother and father supports me to continue business. But when my relatives discourage me to be an entrepreneur (R11)”

Gender Bias

Females are discouraged in Pakistani society as compared to males to be an entrepreneur. People normally didn’t accept females as business women. So, it is very difficult for females to convince families by the females to start a business venture owing to gender biasness in our society. In Pakistan, women had to persuade their families for them to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Drawing from our research, we contend that Pakistani society norms have a notable impact on individuals of all genders who wish to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors, however it is more challenging for women (Nawaz A. , 2018). In context to the entrepreneurship, only 1 % females are entrepreneurs (start their own businesses) as compared to 21% males in Pakistan (Rifaqat, 2023). This argument is also validated by the responses given by the respondents while conducting their interviews as under:

In focus group discussion, one of the respondent highlight that “Family will not support like my uncles that there is no need to start a business. It is better to start a job. In our family most of the females are job oriented so my uncles will say that I should also do a job rather to start a business. But I think this attitude will not be for my brother if he wants to start a business because he is a male and my uncles will discourage me because I am female. They support males because in our family most of the males are businessmen.”

“Women were not encouraged to become entrepreneurs in our culture. Typically, women are discouraged from becoming entrepreneurs by our culture. When a woman opens a store in a mall and begins physically selling goods, it will be quite challenging for her to interact with a variety of people. While some individuals support them, in our society the majority of people remark on them, boo them, and ask why these girls are engaging in this kind of behavior (R10)”.

“Yes, this attitude and belief exist in our society. Some People think that business activity belongs to males and females can’t handle the businesses properly (R3)”.

In-Laws family Alienation

Married females are dependent on their In-laws family to take any entrepreneurial decisions in Pakistan. Alina & Zahra (2023) explained this statement in past research that satisfying the mindset of the spouse and in-laws is closely related to how Pakistani women make business decisions and proceed with their ventures. This claim also validated by the interviews given by the respondents of this study as follows:

In focus group discussion, one of the respondent Maryam says that “the majority of the in-law family didn’t support their daughter in law to start her own business. They said that there is no need to earn money. She should give her time to her family. They feel that it is the primary responsibility of the females to look after her house rather to be a business woman.”

“In my relatives, females are not much educated. They even don’t allow to do job to unmarried females. So, it is impossible in our family for a married woman to do a business. Majority of the in-law family didn’t support their daughter in law to start her own business. They said that there is no need to earn money. She should give her time to her family. They feel that it is the primary responsibility of the females to look after her house rather to be a business woman (R10)”.

“It is not feasible to cover all household expenses during this financial crisis with just the husband's pay. Thus, some married women feel compelled to launch a business in order to contribute to the family's finances. But regrettably, their in-laws' family presents them with

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a lot of obstacles. Laws state that taking care of one's family and home comes first for women, and that there is no need for them to work for a living. They believe she is unable to balance her work and home life at the same time (R12)''.

Observe Purdah

In Pakistan, the females belonging to religious families have to cover them while interacting in public. Devi & Kaur (2019) highlighted this point that Pakistani culture expects women to cover themselves when they leave the house and to continue being devout and obedient to their family. This cultural constraint is also validated by the respondents of this study:

''We belong to Islamic culture, so females need to observe ''purdah''. This cultural factor normally create hurdle for females to take entrepreneurial decisions. Some people think that females can do everything with observing ''purdah'' or hijab but some people think that they should stay at home and females have no permission from families to work in male interaction due to their culture (R1).''

''R9 highlighted that our families normally said that they should stay at home or do a job in some indoor office. They don't need to sell products in public places. They should obey the 'purdah' culture of Islam but if they have to earn money then a respectable job should be their priority rather to be an entrepreneur. In Pakistan, females have not given their all rights in the culture.'''

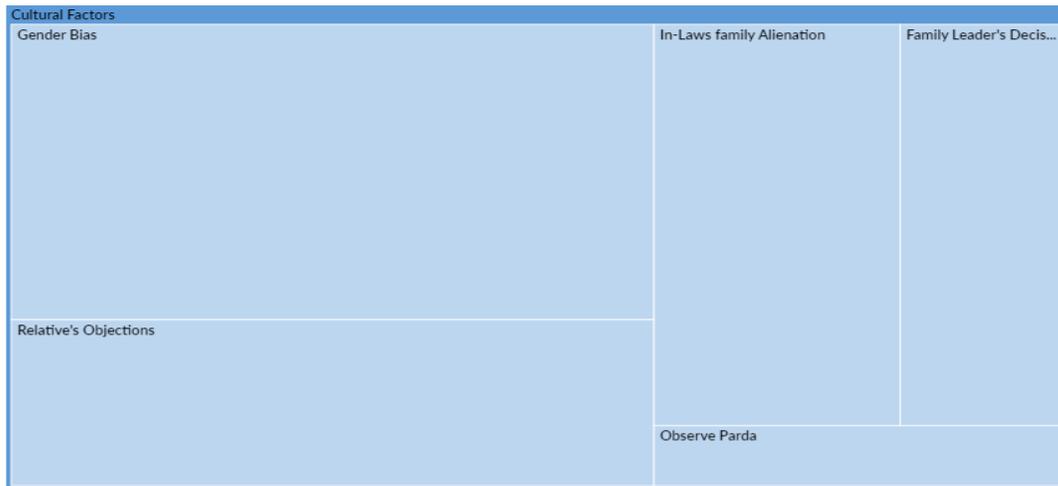


Figure 2: Hierarchy Chart of Cultural Factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions of females in Pakistan

Source: Author's self-creation with NVivo

Family Factors

Collaborative Decisions

In Pakistan, it is generally observed that most of the decisions are made with the consultation with the family. Most of the people have a problem in taking decisions with their own and it is family bindings due to which people are bound to consult with their family. Studies indicate that women's decision-making capacity is restricted by societal norms, culture, and gender inequalities, impeding them as entrepreneurs (Bastian & Zali, 2016). In the literature, it is explained that norms, culture and gender inequality affects the female entrepreneurial decisions but up to my knowledge it is missing in the past literature that females have to take suggestions or consultations from all family members and should take collaborative decisions. So, this is a new theme as explained by one of the respondent in interview in this manner:

“It is obvious that we do it only after consultation among ourselves and then we take even a single decision, but before this business, I definitely asked father and mother (R2).”

It is Pakistani culture that while starting any activity people get consulted with parents and then take any decision. It is a type of respect that the people in Pakistan give to their parents. One of the respondent said that they consult with their parents while taking any decision due to their respect and honor.

“I am not free to take any financial decision by myself. I will take permission and make discussion with my parents then I will finalize any decision. I need to take permission or consultation with my parents before investing money in any business venture. We give respect for our parents and they have more life experience as compared to us. So, it is better to consult with parents before taking any financial decision (R6).”

R5 said that “I didn’t take my financial decisions by myself. In my family, all the decisions are taken by discussing the pros and cons of any matter and decisions are taken mutually. It is the respect that we give to our parents that all the decisions are taken with the consent of my parents because they have more life experience as compared to us.”

Approval from Husband & In-laws:

Some norms are prevailing in our culture that while taking any decision married females have to get permission and approval from their husbands and in-laws. Without informing or getting permission from husband and in-laws females are not free to take their decisions independently. So, it is very difficult to start a business venture or entrepreneurial project without the approval form husband & in-laws. However, women in Pakistan must obtain permission before engaging in any entrepreneurial activity. In contrast, women in other

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nations, such the USA, Australia, etc., are not need to obtain permission of any type in order to undertake an entrepreneurial activity. (Nawaz A. , 2018)

Same thoughts were shared by most of the respondents as Respondent Sofia highlighted this factor in focus group discussion: in the following manner:

“Sofia said that in some families there is no culture that their daughter in law is doing any kind of job or business. If she wants to start a business they didn't support her and discourage that there is no need to be independent and no need to earn money”.

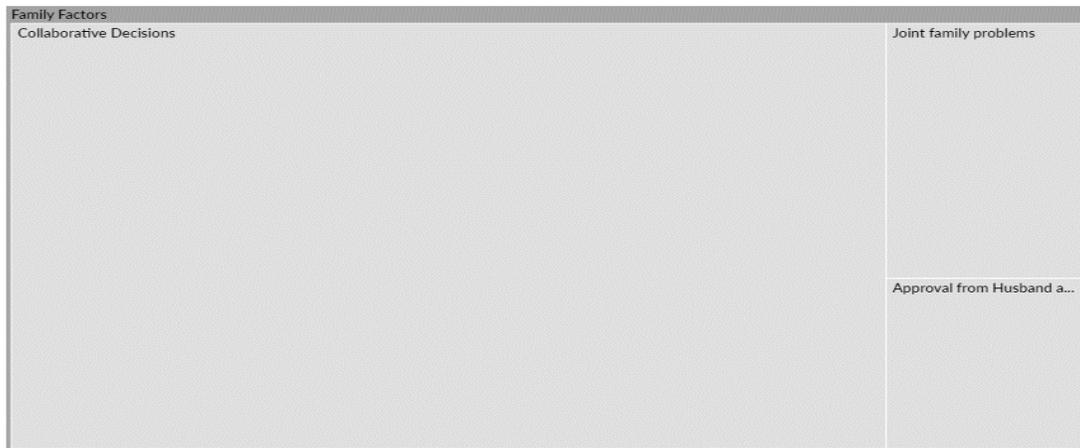
Joint Family Problems

Joint family system is a family system in which consists of multiple generations like grandparents, parents and their children live under single roof. Whereas nuclear or separate family system consists of only parents and their children live under single roof. There are various problems arise due to the interference on joint family members in the decisions of every family member of the family. These problems may affect the entrepreneurial decisions of females in Pakistan.

“We live in a joint family system. My father and mother supported me to take entrepreneurial decisions. But somehow my uncles discouraged me that how I purchase raw material from market and sell the product in the market as I am a female and it is very difficult me to deal with different type of people in the market. So, they were not interested to start any kind of business. They said that it is better to start a job rather to start a business (R6).”

R11 stated the following point in the interview that “My parents mother and father supported me to take entrepreneurial decision on the grounds that I have to utilize my education in a better way, but other relatives discourage that females have no need to earn money and they have to stay at home.”

Similarly, the respondents R3, R10, R4 etc. validated this argument that they face discouragement from relatives to be an entrepreneur. This is also a new theme and empirical evidence for this is missing in the past literature.



*Figure 3
Hierarchy Chart of Family Factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions of females in
Pakistan*

Source: Author's self-creation with NVivo

Educational Factors

Entrepreneurial Unawareness

Entrepreneurial awareness or knowledge plays an important role in the entrepreneurial decisions of females. It is generally experienced that when the students who completed their degree try to search a job from themselves and ultimately there is no job market to accommodate all the graduates and they feel that they have no enough entrepreneurial knowledge to start their own business to earn money to meet their family expenditures. By encouraging students to engage in entrepreneurial activities, entrepreneurial education in higher education contributes significantly to the development of fundamental entrepreneurial knowledge as well as a variety of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities (Walter & Block 2016; Brüne & Lutz 2020). So, the entrepreneurial unawareness is a crucial factor that affect the entrepreneurial decisions of individuals as said by one of the respondent in the focus group discussion.

“Rabia said when we started our project we have no enough knowledge that how we start and execute an entrepreneurial project. So, I think there should be some more courses to be taught to enhance the knowledge of the students so that they can become the successful business women and play a vital role in the economic development of the country”.

“R15 highlighted that at the start we had not enough entrepreneurial knowledge at the time of startup decision. I think when students completed their study, they should be given entrepreneurial training so that they can start their own business rather to search jobs.”

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Inadequate Training

In our educational institutes, there is no culture to train the students for the future needs of the economy and there are less trainings are offered to the passing out students so that they become a productive citizen for the country. When the students passed out their degrees they are found searching jobs and most of them unable to find their suitable jobs. Moreover, there are no proper trainings available from which they can take guidance and motivation to start their own business ventures. The empirical evidence on this thought is the study by Al-Qadasi et al., (2023) that programs for entrepreneurial education and training can improve Entrepreneurial decisions by influencing students' entrepreneurship and motivating them to start their own businesses but it is a generic perspective. So, in this research we validated the female perspective about the training for the successful entrepreneurial business. Some of the thoughts given by respondents are as follows:

“I think when students completed their study, they should be given entrepreneurial training so that they can start their own business rather to search jobs. Proper knowledge or training should be provided to each passing out student so that if they didn't get proper job then they will be able to start their own business and become job provider rather to be a job seeker (R10).”

“We feel that if we have given proper training relating to entrepreneurship then we might be able to enhance our product features and marketability” (R3).

Technical Illiteracy

Technological illiteracy means the inability to use, understand, manage or acquire the suitable technology to the business. It is feel that in our education system there is lack of subjects introduced to give technical literacy to the students specifically of final year. This factor is missing in the literature, so, this is a new theme of this study. This issue is highlighted by many of the respondents in the interviews:

“I think we have no technical education relating to the manufacturing of our product. We even didn't know about the technicalities associated with the handling of our product. So, it was very difficult to convey our specifications to the ultimate supplier of material and other accessories (R13).”

“Our product needed some kits that required proper technical knowledge. We all girls were commerce background and we feel that we have no enough technical knowledge required for the manufacturing of our product and we were dependent on some experts to get technical support relating to our product (R14).”

Communication Shortcomings

In our business environment, especially in the local markets from where students have to purchase material and other items for the manufacturing of their product, the language is usually less understandable. They usually communicate in a local native language like Punjabi, Pushto etc. which is not understandable by the female students. This issue is also missing in the empirical studies, so, this is a new theme. There are communication shortcomings felt by the female prospective entrepreneurs while taking entrepreneurial decisions as mentioned by respondents:

“When we were communicating with different type of people in the market we feel that we have lack of communication skills to deal with the people in the market especially males who normally talk in local language and most of us feel difficulty to talk in the local language like Punjabi etc. (R13)”.

“Some girls were not expressive and they even don’t able to communicate properly to other people so it was very difficult for us to convey our opinion or suggestions” (R14).

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to estimate the direct and indirect effects by using the AMOS. SEM allows researchers to consider multiple dependent variables in a single model. The maximum likelihood process was run to analyze and calculate estimates. The SEM analysis was used to display direct and indirect paths among considered constructs. The bootstrap (500) test was used to examine mediation effects. The mediation effects of both network capability and entrepreneurial orientation were tested at different levels through the indirect effect of transformational and transactional leadership on firm financial and employee growth. The following Figure 1 explains the variance and structural coefficients among constructs.

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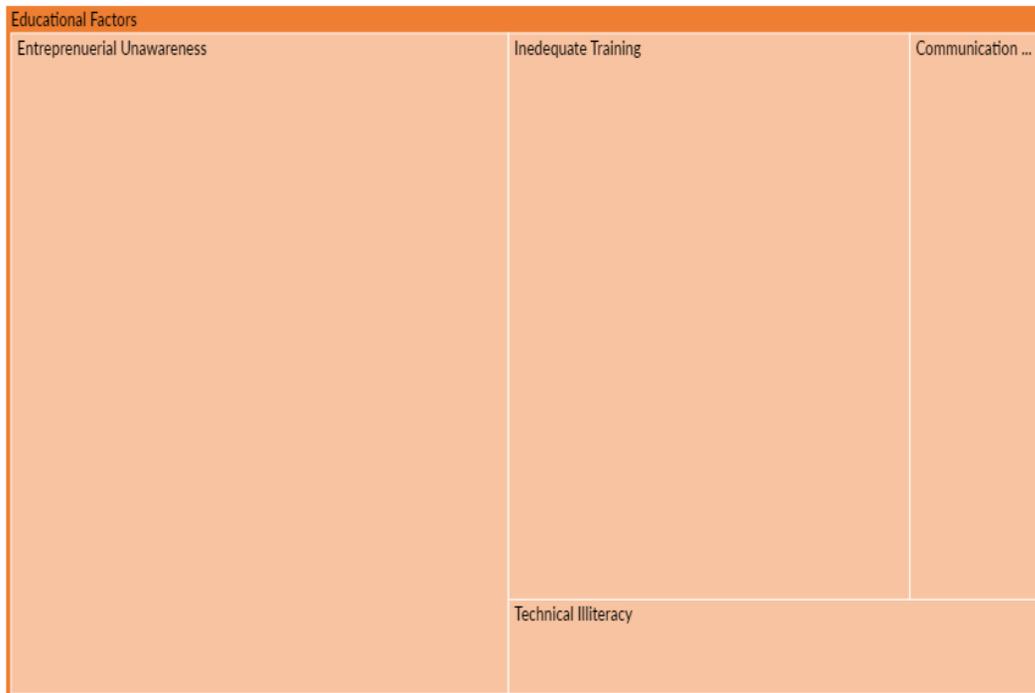


Figure 4
Hierarchy Chart of Educational Factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions
Source: Author's self-creation with NVivo

Financial or Economic Factors

Shared Contribution

Most of the females in public sector educational institutions belong to middle class families, so they have to do the entrepreneurial projects on partnership basis due to low finance. Within the context of the study, the entrepreneurship ecosystem research shows that the entrepreneurs initially relied on their savings for venture capital, then they contact with friends and family to invest in the entrepreneurial project (Alshebami and Alzain, 2022). Most of the respondents pointed out that they faced problems while arranging the finances and most of the time they shared equally and sometime by some of the group members for the entrepreneurial project.

“In focus group discussion, majority of the participants said that When we have taken entrepreneurial decision, we all used our personal savings. Some group members contributed from their pocket money and some group members received contribution from family.”

“We face some financial issue like each member didn’t equally contribute in the budget of the entrepreneurial project. Every girl was not financially stable so it was very difficult for them to contribute for the execution of the project” (R10).

Inflation-driven Financial Issues

Financial conditions of the people living in Pakistan are not good due to high inflation in the country now a day. While taking interviews from the females they pointed out that due to inflation and decreased value of money, their father or family are not in a position to meet their family expenditures so it is impossible for them to arrange finance for their entrepreneurial project. The views of some of the respondents are stated below:

“Aneesa in focus group discussion said that We face some financial problems while managing household activities. My family is financially stable but somehow due to inflation we have less finance as to meet our expenditures. Sometimes my father contributes more in family budget and sometimes less. So, there are financial ups and down occurring in our family. When I have taken this decision, I have to take finance from my family and I have used my savings also.”

“In current inflation, sometimes financial conditions found better and sometimes my family faces some problems to meet household expenditures. When I have started this project, I have taken some money from my parents and also utilized my pocket money to invest in this entrepreneurial project (R11)”.

We searched the literature in this regard but unable to find the inflation related financial issues in the past literature up to our best knowledge. So, inflation driven financial issues is a new theme.

Loan from Financial Institutions

In past literature, the studies are available that enlightens that there are less opportunities for females as compared to males (Asli & Nour, 2018, Naguib, 2021), but this context is missing that females will prefer to take loan from banks or financial institutions in case of lack of resources from family and friends. This new theme is explained by respondents in this study:

“Maria in focus group discussion said that if I will continue this business on large scale and as an independent business then automatically finance issue arise. Then I will take loan from a financial institute.”

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“We started this business with our personal savings and contribution from family. But in future if we want to expand this business or shift this into physical business then we will definitely get loan from bank or other financial institutions. (R3)”

Low Income Group

Females students in the public sector institutions mostly belong to low income group families and they have not enough funds to finance the entrepreneurial projects. In the past literature it is highlighted that low income groups need money to increase their abilities to be a successful business entrepreneur. Edmiston, K., (2008) emphasized that It seems that the primary problem is that many people with low and moderate incomes just lack the skills needed to run successful businesses. However, the financial insufficiency of low income group is ignored in the past literature but it is highlighted by the respondents of this study, that is a new theme given by this study.

“In my household, my father is the only source of money. He works for Pakistan Railways. My mother oversees all of our family's expenses, and he makes financial contributions to the family budget. (R 12)”

In focus group discussion, most of the respondents pointed out that when we started this business my father was the only source of income of the family and we belong to low income group so it was very difficult for us to manage the finance then we manage the finance mutually. Sometimes my father has no money to meet my project expenditures then we contributed the money and sometimes I get loan from my friend.



Figure 5

Hierarchy Chart of Financial or Economic Factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions

Source: Author's self-creation with NVivo.

Personality Factors

Self-confident take good decisions

The people who have confidence on them can take better entrepreneurial decisions. higher the confidence level, the higher is the intention toward the investment. Riidhi et al., (2023) emphasis that the people with high level of confidence have highly motivated to take entrepreneurial or investment decisions. This argument if also validated by respondents in this study:

“Self-confident people have confidence on themselves and take better decisions. They can start and execute an entrepreneurial project in a better way (Focus group discussion).”

“I think more confident female can take quick and sound decisions (R2)”.

Timid vs Extrovert people

Timid or shay people feel reluctant to take quick entrepreneurial decisions as compared to confident or extrovert people. Gullone and Moore, (2000) highlighted that the extraverted

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individuals are higher risk-takers than those with lower extraversion scores this viewpoint is also validated by the respondents R1, R6, R4, R9 etc. Some of the views are given below:

“Sometimes we take decisions in hurry without taking into consideration their future execution. So personality traits impact entrepreneurial decisions (Focus group discussion).”

“There are different types of personalities. Some people think’ about any business but focus only on idea and didn’t feel confident to execute the business. The people with shy personality feel reluctant to take entrepreneurial decisions and extrovert people are more enthusiastic to take entrepreneurial decisions (R10)”.

“Shy students can’t take decisions independently and overconfident students take decisions in hurry (R1).”



Figure 6

Hierarchy Chart of Personality Factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions

Source: Author’s self-creation with NVivo

Other Factors:

No need to be independent

In our society it is general belief that female should not be independent and the earning hand. This point is highlighted by many of the respondents in interviews and focus group discussion.

“If I want to continue my business physically, then my family will not allow me to work outside. In my family, my family members didn’t feel good to allow females to do job or any other business activity. They think that it is not the responsibility of females to earn money and contribute in the finance of the family. (R10)”

“Mostly, in Pakistan, people want females to be a dependent person rather to become an independent financially. Our society think that there is no need to give such freedom to females as they become independent. (R12)”

Online business only

Some respondent emphasis that they permitted by the parents for online business only not for the physical business.

“Family support only for online business not for the physical business because they feel that it is not easy for females to run a business independently.” (R1)

“We get motivation from this attitude that it is common in our society that people didn’t support females to go outside and earn money, so we started this business online. (R4)”

Study Purpose only

Some respondents emphasized that this project was only for study purpose but if they wanted to continue in future their parents will not support them.

“Family has supported me about my entrepreneurial project relating to medi kit key chain but only for the study purpose not for the career. They said that you can work as an entrepreneur for study purpose not for the future career. (R1)”

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Figure 7
Hierarchy Chart of Other Factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions of females in Pakistan

Source: Author's self-creation with NVivo

DISCUSSION

In this qualitative study, we applied the thematic analysis to identify the in-depth concepts of females relating to the factors or barriers affecting the entrepreneurial decisions of females in Pakistan. With the help of this research, we are able to identify the cultural factors, financial or economic factors, family factors, personality factors, educational factors etc. The findings depict that the females in Pakistan are highly dependent on their husbands, fathers and in-laws' family members while taking entrepreneurial decisions ((Bastian & Zali, 2016; Nawaz A. , 2018). Furthermore, in this study, we have identified the financial factors that depicts that females belonging to low income group have less capacity to invest in any entrepreneurial project. The inflation in the country creates financial issues for the people in the country and then they have less money to invest in any entrepreneurial project. It is observed from the responses of the respondents in this study that the people with shy personality feel reluctant to take good entrepreneurial decisions and self confident people can take sound entrepreneurial decisions This is also tested empirically in the past literature (Riidhi et al., 2023; Gullone and Moore, 2000). The findings of this research demonstrated that the entrepreneurial unawareness, inadequate trainings and communication shortcomings

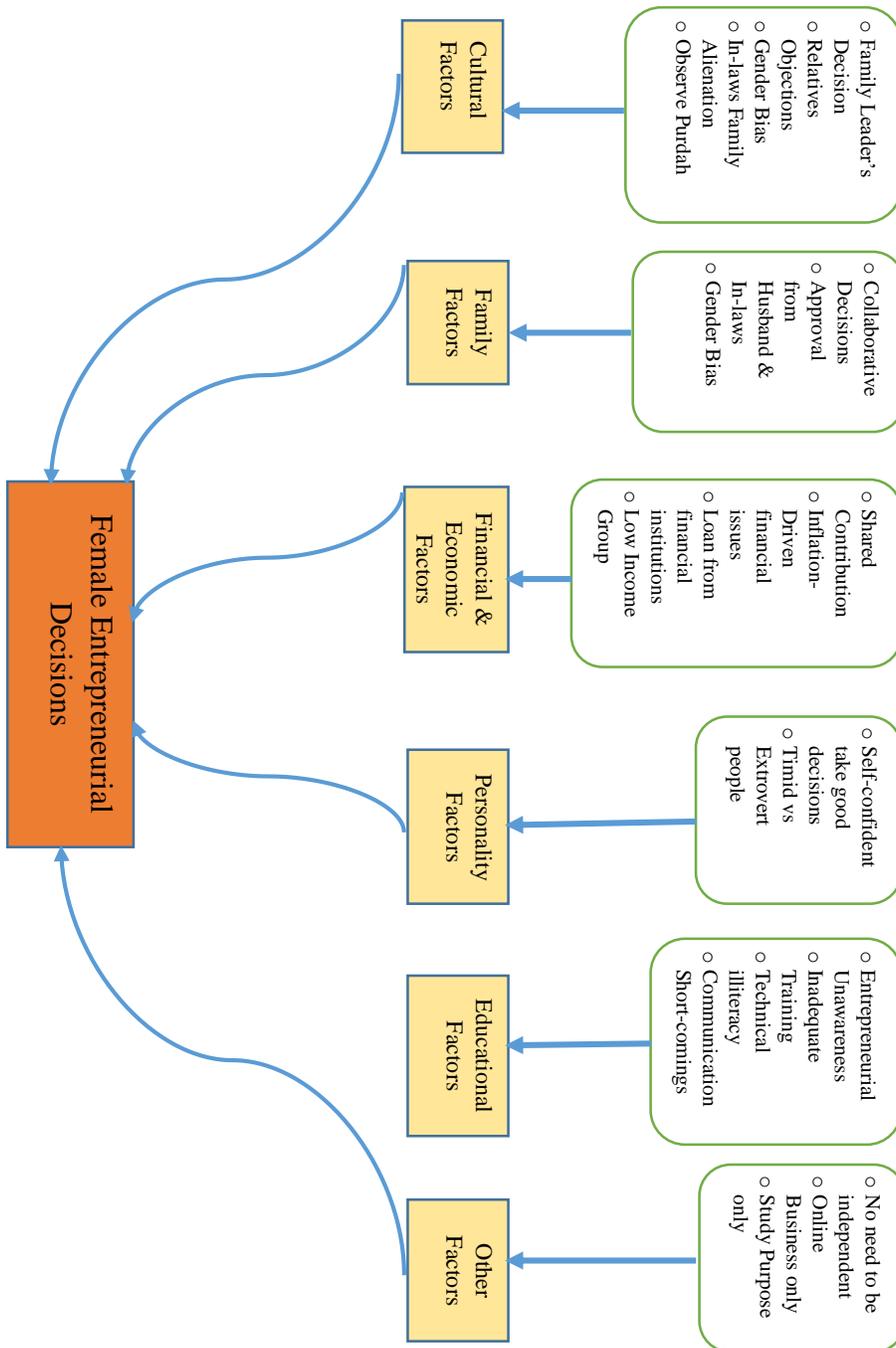


Figure 7

Final Model of the Factors affecting the entrepreneurial decisions of females in Pakistan
 Note: The rectangles highlighted the main themes & round shaped rectangles displays sub-themes

Source: Author's self-creation

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also hinder females to take good entrepreneurial decisions (Walter & Block 2016; Brüne & Lutz 2020). Moreover, if we want to see more females as entrepreneur then proper entrepreneurial knowledge and training should be given to the females especially the passing out females in the higher educational institutions, so that they can become job providers rather to become job seekers after completing their degrees.

This study further explored that married females in Pakistan find alienation from their in-laws' family member. The in-laws' family emphasized the females to spend more time on household activities rather to spend their times in outdoor activities (Alina & Zahra, 2023). The families with religious background focused on the point that females should observe "purdah" and stay at home rather to be an entrepreneur. This is a major hurdle in the entrepreneurial decisions in Pakistan as mentioned by many of the respondents in this study and also explained in the past literature (Devi & Kaur, 2019). Moreover, females have to get permission from leader of the family, husband and in-laws while investing money in any entrepreneurial project (Bastian & Zali, 2016) as validated by the respondents of this study. Gender biasness also hinders females to be an entrepreneur. It is said that business activities belong to males only (Rifaqat, 2023). This point is also highlighted by the respondents of this study.

Finally, with the help of thematic analysis, few new themes are explored i.e. joint family problems, technical illiteracy, communication short-comings and inflation-driven financial issues. These factors hinder females to take entrepreneurial decisions in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

This study will extend the literature on women entrepreneurship. It will be beneficial for those female business students who are going to complete their degrees and willing to join or search any job. It will create a sense in the female students that they can prefer to start a new business rather to search a job. They will feel that they should be a job provider rather to be a job seeker. With the help of thematic analysis applied in this study, few new themes are explored i.e. joint family problems, technical illiteracy, communication short-comings and inflation-driven financial issues. These factors hinder females to take entrepreneurial decisions in Pakistan and these themes will be the theoretical contribution of this study. With the help of this research, female entrepreneurs will be able to plan the way how they can overcome these barriers or obstacles. This study will guide the educational institutes to train their students to be a productive citizen and play an important role in the economic development of the country. The entrepreneurial training will encourage female students to critical and problem-solving skills and they can be better able to identify entrepreneurial opportunities and think outside the box. This research is limited only to the perspective of

female students passing out their degrees and are taking entrepreneurial decision but more researches can be done on the women working in different sector who are willing to start their own business and find some obstacles and hurdles while taking entrepreneurial decision.

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