

**MICRO BUSINESS FAILURE AMONG WOMEN
ENTREPRENEURS IN GHANA: A STUDY OF SUNYANI
AND TECHIMAN MUNICIPALITIES OF
THE BRONG AHAFO REGION**

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Abstract

Despite the growth of women owned businesses, majority of them continue to face a lot of challenges leading to the demise of their business. The aim of this study is to identify the causes of business failure among women, so as to offer advice to assist policy makers and other stakeholders. Firstly, the authors reviewed the general literature on business failure, looking particularly at micro businesses which involve women. Secondly, in depth interview and structured 5 point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 133 women entrepreneurs from the Sunyani and Techiman central market in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. The study revealed that their businesses fail due to various factors such as taxation, load shedding, high rent charges, child care responsibilities and other family commitments as well as lack of information on business development. The findings of this study have important implications for those who formulate, deliver and evaluate micro businesses involving women entrepreneurs policy in Ghana. Based on the findings, policy makers may wish to review the current system and make changes to minimize micro business failure among women entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Micro business, entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs, business failures, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Women-owned businesses are on the rise all over the world and in the United States, women are majority owners for approximately 40 percent of all privately held firms (Centre for Women's Business Research, 2009). It has been noted that women's economic activities, particularly in self-employment, empower them economically and enable them overall to contribute more to the development of their country (Gupta, 2014; Handaragama, Rathnayake and Uluwaduge, 2013; Prasad and Sreedevi 2013; Rabbani and Chowdhury 2013; Sarri and Trihopoulou, 2004). Moreover, recent statistics have confirmed that women's economic activities play a crucial role in the growth of many of the world economies and recognising its importance, many governments in the world are paying at least some attention in order to create an environment conducive for the establishment of women-owned enterprises (Roomi, 2013; Minniti, Arenius and Longowitz, 2005).

Despite the growth of women-owned businesses, females still face challenges compared to men (Katz and Green, 2007; Kaushal, Negi and Singhal 2014; Singh and Raina 2013). Some researchers (Birley, 1989; Brindley, 2005; Eastwood, 2004; Rosa, Carter and Hamilton 1996) have discussed the issues and barriers faced by women-owned enterprises. Further studies by Bekele and Worku (2013) revealed that majority of businesses that fail in Ethiopia were operated by women and attributed them to difficulty to secure loans, poor managed skills and low level of education. Also, Khan (2014), indicated that female entrepreneurs in Pakistan motives for starting a business were to improve their quality of life to support their families.

However, previous studies have focused on the symptoms and have not adequately address the actual causes of failures among women entrepreneurs in micro business. Therefore, this study attempts to identify and evaluate, the major causes of failures among women entrepreneurs within the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of scholars (Hisrich and Brush, 1984; Chell and Baines, 1988; Birley, 1989; Sexton and Bowman-Upton, 1990; Rosa et al., 1996; Cliff, 1998; Boden and Nucci, 2000; Merrett and Gruidl, 2000; Watson, 2002; Westhead, 2003) have conducted research on the comparison of gender in terms of entrepreneurship. Rosa et al., (1996) conducted one of the few large-scale studies to measure the comparative performance of business by gender (Carter et al., 2001). They found women-owned businesses to have lower sales turnover, fewer employees, serving mostly local markets and women entrepreneurs being less ambitious to grow their businesses and less optimistic than men about the success of their businesses in the future.

In a developing country such as Ghana, the concern for increasing women's economic participation can be seen within the wider general concern to alleviate the socio-economic conditions of the poor households, especially those in the rural sector (Ijff, 1990). As a result of unrelenting poverty and deteriorating economic conditions, a lot of women have been forced to work outside the normal status and have therefore ventured into varied economic activities, while at the same time continuing to perform their traditional household duties (Ijff, 1990). This situation has social as well as economic implications.

Ijff (1990), in his research studies concluded that these women worked long hours daily, carrying out household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, bringing up children, as well as engaging in their income generating or income substituting activities (Ijff, 1990). According to Goscilo (1997), "society exhorts women to be both producers and reproducers. As a consequence, they bear the double load of full-time work and all domestic responsibilities". In many ways the "double burden" stems from patriarchal traditions that are still followed in the majority of the world's countries.

Another reason for the slow growth rate of women-owned businesses is that women consider growth as a risk which may be financial or social and may come from exogenous or endogenous sources, consequently they try to be more risk averse, more careful and conservative, purposely striving for a controlled and manageable rate of growth (Cliff, 1998). Women deliberately choose a slower pace and avoid expanding their businesses too quickly. Chung (1998) points out, however, that gender difference in attitudes to growth may have more to do with women not wishing to risk their home/work balance rather than an antagonism to growing the business. Buttner and Moore (1997) and Lerner et al. (1995) highlighted women's motivations to start their own businesses as the prime reason for women's low quantitative performance when compared to men.

On the other side, Carter and Allen (1997) found that access to financial resources and other financial aspects of business had stronger effects on business rather than choice or intention. Chell and Baines (1988), Boden and Nucci (2000) also argue that women's lack of human, social and financial capital affects their businesses more as compared to their intentions to start businesses. Selection of strategies that focused on market expansion and new technologies, as well as willingness to incur greater opportunity costs for the superior performance of their firms were the key factors for the high growth of women-owned business as compared to low or no growth firms (Gundry and Welsch, 2001). They also pointed out adequate capitalization, access to a wider range of financial resources, organised structure, quality control, and earlier planning as the differentiating factors for better performance and growth of the women-owned enterprises.

Brush et al (2004) also found that one of the most important reasons of slower growth of women-owned businesses was that women encounter social structures in work, family and social life that influence development of human and social capital, different from their male counterparts. This lack of appropriate social capital to make meaningful exchanges within business networks limits their opportunities to raise growth capital and other resources crucial for the development and growth of businesses (Brush et al., 2005).

Based on a research done on challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in sourcing micro finance in Ghana, the main challenges faced by them are high interest rates and non-financial support from financial institutions (Denanyoh et al., (2015). These show that women entrepreneurship is not encouraged in Ghanaian context.

METHODOLOGY

A major difficulty in studying micro and small businesses is the lack of a reliable data source. Once a micro and small business has ceased operating, information concerning the business becomes difficult to obtain. Typically most of the information resides with the owner as there is no systematic reporting of information on micro and small businesses in the same way as is provided for larger companies and particularly for listed companies (Bureau of Industry Economics 1995).

The research aimed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, with a variety of scaled and open-ended questions. The possible barriers and contributing factors to growth mentioned in the questionnaire were based on a number of studies (Buttner, 1993; Hitt et al., 2003; Bygrave and Zacharakis, 2004; Hisrich et al., 2005).

This is a survey study on a sample of women entrepreneurs in micro businesses within Sunyani and Techiman municipalities located in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. The municipality of Sunyani has a population of 123,224 people of which 61,610 are males and 61,614 are females. On the other hand, Techiman municipality has a population of 206,856 people, of which 100,498 are males and 106,358 females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The economic activities of both towns includes but is not limited to crop and animal farming and trade, trade in retail and wholesale, workshops of carpentry and metal fabrication, hotels and food kiosks, brick making, water vending, lodging, restaurants and bars. Sunyani and Techiman have both informal and formal business enterprises. Most of these businesses fall in the category of trading. These two particular towns were chosen for two reasons: 1) the observed increase of economic activity in terms of new buildings, schools, hotels, petroleum products gas stations; 2) viable small businesses have sprung up in the recent past in these towns but most of them have not survived for more than a year.

Primary data was obtained for the research by the use of questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires are good research methods as they yield information about the past and present and offer the best means of obtaining standardised stimuli (Tuckman, 1972). A semi-structured interview was also used so as to enable the interviewer follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings on some of the questions listed on the questionnaire (Bell, 1993). The semi structured interview is a good technique in relation to questions dealing with feelings and attitudes and any situation in which there is uncertainty about the range of possible answers obtained.

The population was heterogonous in terms of type of business, age, academic achievement, business experience and marital status. The sampling technique employed was the purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling technique. Business activities that were similar in nature were grouped together for sampling purposes. The sample size of the study was 140 businesses.

Data was collected from 133 business enterprises by interviewing the owners of these businesses, 113(85%) were from Techiman and the remaining 20(15%) from Sunyani. The number of businesses in Techiman compared to those in Sunyani is in a ratio of seven to one, and this dictated the numbers chosen from each town. The numbers were also determined based on the numerous socio-economic activities in Techiman compared to Sunyani Municipality as they yield information about the past and present and offer the best means of obtaining standardised stimuli (Tuckman, 1972).

Data from Sunyani and Techiman were collected in three days with the aid of research assistants mainly using a field-tested questionnaire. The questions covered mainly the possible factors that cause micro and small businesses to fail. The scaled responses were generated from questionnaires that have been used for similar studies by Buttner, (1993), Hitt et al., (2003), Bygrave and Zacharakis (2004), and Hisrich et al., (2005).

Statistical analysis using SPSS was applied to analyse quantitative data gathered from the 133 responses, whereas, qualitative data collected were inductively analysed and interpreted in response to open-ended questions.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the key objectives of this study was to investigate the causes of failures among micro women entrepreneurs. The overall results were not much different from previous international research studies (Hisrich and Brush, 1984; Neider, 1987; Brush, 1992; Oeltjen, 1992; Buttner, 1993; Hitt et al., 2003; Brush et al., 2004; Bygrave and Zacharakis, 2004 Roomi et al., 2009).

The response rate for the survey was high. One hundred thirty three (133) representing 95% questionnaires were returned out of the 140 distributed, of which 52(39%) were from the respondents in Sunyani and the rest 81(61%) from Techiman. The high response rate was due to the fact that most of the questions were asked directly to the respondents.

Table 1. Factors faced by women entrepreneurs in micro and small businesses

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Difficult access to finance	3.7460	1.55510	133
Lack of information on business development	3.3492	1.43862	133
Shortage of skilled labour	3.6190	1.57017	133
Lack of networking abilities	3.3065	1.38598	133
Lack of business training opportunities	3.3710	1.57057	133
Lack of business support services	3.4194	1.58423	133
Location of business	3.5484	1.45622	133
Childcare responsibilities & family commitments	3.1290	1.52018	133

Using the five-point Likert scale rating, a criterion is deemed significant if it has a mean score of 3.5 or more. Where two or more criteria have the same mean score, the one with the lowest standard deviation is assigned the highest significance ranking. Standard deviation values of less than 1.0 indicate consistency in agreement among the respondents of the reported level of results. They were altogether used to assess the factors. The procedure, findings and relevant discussions are as follows.

Table 1 above, shows that the mean scores of all the 8 factors faced by women entrepreneurs in and small businesses evaluated are greater than the neutral value of 3 for all the respondents. The results in table1 reveals that 'Difficult access to finance', shortage of skilled labour' and 'location of business are major factors faced by women entrepreneurs in micro and small businesses.

The respondents identified 'access to finance/capital for expansion' to be one of the factors contributing to the failure of women-owned micro and small businesses in the study area with. Various research has provided evidence that women-owned micro businesses start with lower levels of overall capitalization (Carter and Rosa, 1998), Moreover, not all of them are lucky enough to have access to capital to grow their businesses when needed due to both internal and external conditionalities (Greene et al., 2003), including level of demand and the intensity of competition (McGee, 1992; McKay, 2001; McClelland et al., 2005).

Results of the study indicated a significant proportion of the respondents raised lack of capital as a major problem. This implies that the respondents start their businesses with limited capital and lack collaterals such as cars or land titles that can be deposited to get loans from the traditional commercial banks. On the other hand, the loans provided by microfinance institutions are small, with a short repayment period and high interest rates. This assertion confirms previous research (Denanyoh et al., 2013, Ridney& Swift 1990).

In addition, lack of information on business development was another factor that was identified by the respondents as contributing to failures of women-owned micro businesses. This implies that once women establish their businesses and start to grow, they are left on their own to compete fielding in an environment which is not quite even in view of their limitations of growth capital with disadvantages rooted in lack of experience and business training (Brush et al., 2004)

Another important cause of business failure by the respondents was their family responsibilities which include childcare and other care responsibilities such as maintaining the house by preparing meals for their husbands. During the early stages of some business start-ups, the women were unable to separate their business from family/domestic situations. Business funds were put to personal use and were used in settling domestic issues. This has a negative impact on profitability and sustainability of the business. Some owners employ family members and in some cases, these have turned out to be undisciplined and ineffective, a factor that has led to eventual failure of businesses.

Lack of sales has been a predicament during the inception of such businesses. This is because most of these businesses lack the competence of challenging market leaders. They usually lack a public image and yet publicity is one of the major mechanisms for business triumph. The study also revealed that the women start businesses without careful regard to the location of the business; thus less sales and less profits and this delays growth.

In the qualitative data, a maximum number of respondents described the following as the key causes of their micro businesses failure; taxation, load shedding, competition, high rent charges, lack of business skills, transportation costs, and politics.

Many women entrepreneurs reported that taxation is contributing to failure of their businesses. The study revealed that the local authorities impose other forms of taxation like ground rates, property rates, security fees, and trading licenses. Ground rate is a tax imposed on businesses according to the location and type of business facilities. These have a greater impact on the operations of businesses. Another aspect of high taxation is a corresponding increase in illicit or illegal trade. Smuggled products have found their way into the markets places and these goods

are attracting customers as they are sold at lower prices. This therefore mitigates chances for the success of genuine business people.

The study revealed that another factor that causes businesses to fail was power shortages which lead to load shedding and higher electricity bills. The findings of the study revealed that on average, respondents in hotels, cold stores, mineral water production, drinking bars and restaurants each uses approximately 658 units of electricity on a monthly basis which costs US\$210.56 (32cents/kw) To make the situation worse, it was found out that on average, electricity goes off more than 2 times a week for a period of 12 hours or 24 hours. Generators were found to be a major alternative source of power. Therefore, businesses that do not have generators come to a standstill during such times and those that use generators find it much more expensive because of the high costs of fuel (1-liter petrol costs USD 1.01). Thus, on average USD 216 is spent monthly on fuel for generators. A total expenditure of USD 284 on only electricity and fuel for generator is a substantial operational expense. Due to the expensive nature of generators, most businesses do not even have an alternative source of power hence the business fails.

Once businesses are established by the women, they confront competition from other businesses in either similar or related businesses and as towns expand, the number of entrepreneurs also increases. Therefore, the success of one business often comes at the expense of another. This necessitates price reductions so as to attract more customers, which in turn lead to a potential reduction of profits.

High rental charges have impeded the success of many businesses as some charges are pegged to the United States dollar, which in most cases appreciates against the Ghana cedi. Expansion of towns has led to increased demand for business premises, which means that some small businesses have been pushed away from the busy areas of the town to the periphery. This has increased costs and resulted in poor sales and negative cash flow, thus minimizing the chances for most businesses to succeed.

Communication networks have also been poor, leading to high operation costs. Lack of information on existing goods and poor access roads in rural areas have constrained businesspersons to buy products that are in easy-to-reach areas where competition is relatively high.

Politics can also pose a threat to business success. Women in building and construction businesses complain that tenders are awarded to political favorites who then do not deliver to the required standards. Some businesses operate without paying taxes or are under-assessed, gives them an advantage over their competitors. Politics influences customers who choose to

deal with specific people because they were in the same camp during presidential or parliamentary elections, irrespective of the quality of the services provided.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The study tried to show business failure factors among women owned micro businesses. It emerged that micro businesses owned by women in the Sunyani and Techiman municipalities of Brong Ahafo region in Ghana face a lot of problems such as high taxes, load shedding, lack of capital, poor market, and high rent charges. Statistically, the differences in means suggest that women rank access to capital for expansion as the most important constraining factor to the failure of their businesses, confirming the findings of many previous studies (Brush and Hisrich, 1999; Greene et al., 2003; Brush et al., 2004; Kovalainen and Arenius, 2006).

In addition, factors such lack of information on business development, shortage of skilled labour, lack of effective networking abilities, lack of business training opportunities, child care responsibilities, and their family commitments were also indicated as statistical significant hurdles in the development of their businesses.

Therefore, policy makers can use the results of this study to decrease the micro business failure among women entrepreneurs. The non-existence of load shedding will help women entrepreneurs to operate their business activities without any interruption and increase their motivation to stay in business. The survey also shows majority of the women entrepreneurs experienced failure as a result of taxation, high rent charges and lack of capital, so policy makers can make the business environment more favourable and consider incentives to motivate entrepreneurs to remain in their business.

It is suggested that future studies examine business failure factors among women owned micro businesses in other sectors or geographical regions. These studies could be done in order to find solutions to reduce business failures among women owned micro businesses.

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