

# Economic Empowerment of Malaysian Women through Entrepreneurship: Barriers and Enablers

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## Abstract

The main aim of this study is to identify the barriers and enablers to Malaysian women's entrepreneurship. A mixed method was used in this study. A qualitative approach using Delphi technique was used to obtain consensus on the barriers and enablers. This was incorporated into a questionnaire which was used in the survey of women entrepreneurs to obtain quantitative data on the barriers and enablers to women's entrepreneurship. The respondents were 130 participants of a seminar for women entrepreneurs conducted by the Women's Development Department of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community. The study found that the three top barriers were the lack of KSAOs followed by restrictive legalities, regulations and procedures and lack of business support and network. Personality and self-efficacy emerged as the most important enabler followed by support for businesses from government and women focused initiatives from government and NGOs.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship, women, barriers, enablers, economic empowerment

## 1. Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship is regarded as a woman or a group of women who are involved in entrepreneurial activities. Through entrepreneurship women are slowly brought into the mainstream of economic development of the country and have progressed into changing the face of the countries' economy (Olutunla, 2001). According to United Nations (Entrepreneurship and e-Business Development for Women) (2006), women's entrepreneurship has lower participation rates in formal larger enterprises however in small and medium enterprises, their participation rate is higher and makes substantial contribution to the economy of the country. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2012) reported that in 67 economies around the world, there were 126 million women who have engaged in entrepreneurial venture and employed at least one person in running the business. US Census Bureau (2014) found that from 1997 to 2014, the number of businesses owned by women have increased from 47 percent to 68 percent.

Gurjar and Wasnik (2015) state that women entrepreneurs can increase their economic empowerment by having power to decide (economic decision-making), ability to perform well in economic environment, sense of worth (economic efficacy and self-confident), own assets in terms of income, property, saving and capital (access to economic resources), having necessary knowledge and skills to grow business (capacity) and having legal and environment support (network). Women entrepreneurs, who view their business success more than just making money, empower and act as a role model, using their potential to create a better world and also scaling up the business and profit are success triggers to economic empowerment and their status in the society (Steege & Stamm, 2014). Hossain (2007) states that as women entrepreneurs are taking on challenge in running business in male-dominated environment, new women entrepreneurial class has arisen.

Research analysis from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2014) indicates work-life balance (ability in overcoming poverty), independency and ability to earn income, easy access to funding for business expansion (capital), increased literacy and education skills (networking), easy access to potential customers, suppliers and business partners and global presence (domestic and international recognition) to be major determinant of women entrepreneurs economic empowerment. The analysis further claims that women entrepreneurs gain recognition and new opportunities to improve and increase their business scale.

According to (BDHS) (2011), the ability of women to participate in decision-making elevates them in aspect of empowerment as well as contribution towards their overall welfare and the society. Xavier et al. (2013) further states that if the businesses of women entrepreneurs are successful, they automatically increase their status and they gain respect from others. Due to high level of necessity for entrepreneurship in emerging and developing economies, the rates of women's entrepreneurship are increasing (Brush et al., 2010).

Since the last decade, although the total number of women involving in business ventures have increased, the women's economic empowerment in Malaysia is relatively low despite the country's strong economy. Malaysia's gender gap index ranking has fallen lower at 107<sup>th</sup> spot in 2014 compared to 102<sup>th</sup> spot in 2013 (GEM, 2014). Malaysia is also one rank away from being among the 10 lowest nations in terms of political empowerment of women with a gender gap index of 0.6504. In addition, Malaysia rank at the 103<sup>rd</sup> in estimated income earned by gender with ratio 0.5:1 (female: male) respectively. In view of this, this study aims to identify the two factors that influence economic empowerment of Malaysian women through entrepreneurship: barriers and enablers. This study could be used to develop a model for women's entrepreneurship by developing strategies to overcome barriers and enhance enablers. This study could contribute to the existing literature on how to address the challenges individuals, community and the government face when taking initiatives to increase women's entrepreneurship and raise the socio economy status of women entrepreneurs in a developing economy like Malaysia.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Barriers

In less developed countries, women entrepreneurs' face peculiar barriers in the formal economic participation and the success of their business (Allen et al., 2008). When women entrepreneurs sacrifice their entrepreneurship career growth, it leads to smaller business, less profit and less income (Jennings & Mc Dougald, 2007). World Bank (2011) further added that with 22 percent of women's empowerment in the labour force, access to using property, credit building and employment regulation are the core barriers to women's entrepreneurship. World Economic Forum (2013) states that the gender gap on economic empowerment and opportunity still remain.

According to Tubey (2013) majority of women entrepreneurs in Kenya have formal education (primary and secondary) and those with higher education have better sense of marketing and more focused on expanding the business (Balakumar & Devanesan, 2014). Past researchers suggest that lack of education act as a barrier for women entrepreneurship (Benard & Victor, 2013; Gayathridevi, 2014; Mwobobia, 2012; Palaniappan, Ramanigopal, & Mani, 2013). The responsibility of women in childcare and household tend to be the reason for women entrepreneurs' low rate in terms of skill and literacy programs training (Richard, 2013). Stress is one of the barriers for women's entrepreneurial efforts due to their spouses' expectations that they should be solely responsible for the housework and childcare after getting home from work (Ee, 2011).

In additions, lack of management and entrepreneurial skills (Benard & Victor, 2013; Commission, 2009; Qureshi et al., 2014), and lack of information and knowledge (Niazkar & Arab-Moghaddam, 2011) poses as barriers to women starting up a business. Studies by Benard and Victor (2013) and Benjamin (2012) found that during the initial stage of business, women faces barriers in terms of lack of confidence, fear of failure, spousal influence and role in the family lead to low profit or higher possibility of the business to cease.

Women entrepreneurs often blame the lack of demand of their products for the failure of their business but the real reason is that they do not take advantage of the increasing opportunities available for them in the marketplace (Nosa, 2013). The lack of assets, control over access to capital and gender discrimination impact negatively on women's economic empowerment (Benard & Victor, 2013; Gayathridevi, 2014; Leonard, 2013), together with policy constraints and government initiatives that focus more towards male entrepreneurs (Dauda, 2011; Robichaud et al., 2010; Poon et al., 2012). Formal network, networking and dealing with hostile business environment are further identified as business related barriers (Ademokun & Ajayi, 2012; Benard & Victor, 2013; Benjamin, 2012; Gayathridevi, 2014). Socio culturally induced constraint such as discrimination, stereotypes and isolation are further barriers to women's entrepreneurship (Benard & Victor, 2013; Benjamin, 2012; Gayathridevi, 2014; Mwobobia, 2012).

### 2.2 Enablers

The fact that women's income is lower than that of men serves as a driver for women to engage in entrepreneurship (Welsh et al., 2014). According to Steege and Stamm (2014), personal sense of urgency, customer care orientation, being goal focused and perseverance and tenacity are the key personal enablers to women's entrepreneurship. Latest research by EIGE (2015) reveal women tend to engage in entrepreneurship as

a way to be more independent and having a career that gives them a sense of purpose. Flexibility tends to be one of the influential factors due to dual work schedule of women entrepreneurs (Cabrera, 2007). Having characteristic such as self-confidence and being educated facilitates women's entrepreneurship initiatives (Allen, Elam, Langowitz, & Dean, 2008). Amutha (2011) found that when women choose entrepreneurial career it can enhance self-confidence as well as independent nature.

According to the PriceWaterHouse (2012) report, enablers for continued economic empowerment of women with children include the availability of flexible, reliable, and cost-effective child care. The support of family, spouse, relatives and friends are necessary for women doing business (Diaz, 2007). In addition, emotional support (Vadnjaj & Vadnjaj, 2007), male kinship (male relatives or brothers) assistance in business (Poon, Thai & Naybor, 2012) and access to network and resources (Ngo & Wahhaj, 2012) tend to be important enablers for women. In addition, self-help group (institution or agent) have been a major source of assistance towards women's entrepreneurship by providing and/or linking with credit, giving information on banks that provide business support and develop socio-economic status of women engaging in business (Devi, 2010). Successful women entrepreneurs mentor other women by inspiring, encouraging and guiding them on how to balance work and family (Women Entrepreneurs Network Association (WENA), 2014). Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (2013) found WEVS (Women's Entrepreneurial Venture Scope) influences women entrepreneurship by providing access to finance, educational advancement in terms of business skills training; and availability of child care program to support family (social services).

Recent study in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2014) reveal that in Korea, the authorities have simplified contract procedures when establishing contract with women entrepreneurs and it is mandatory for public institutions to purchase five percent of products and services from women entrepreneurs. These initiatives were done to provide opportunities as well as expand the market share of women owned businesses. Hallward-Driemeier and Hasan (2013) states that women entrepreneurship is inhibited in many country as the law explicitly differentiates between both sexes in terms of property rights and legal capacity. In addition, government should initiate measures to change societal norms about the perception on women's entrepreneurship (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Li, 2014).

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework

The literature review has identified several factors that can influence women's entrepreneurship which fall into two main categories: barriers and enablers. The focus of this paper is to study the barriers and enablers that impact on Malaysian women's entrepreneurship and as a consequence their economic empowerment. The theoretical model for this study is presented in Figure 1.

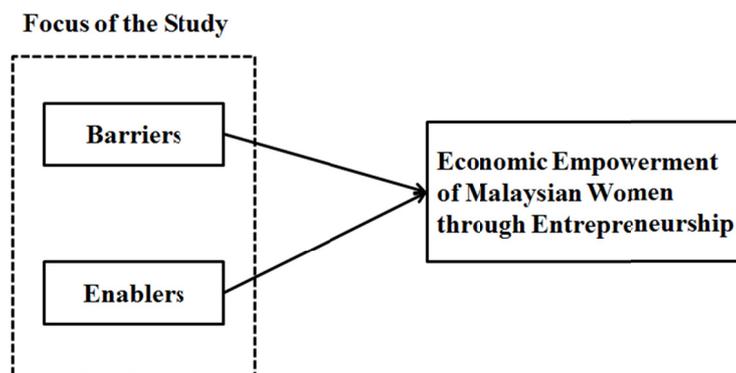


Figure 1. Theoretical model of economic empowerment of Malaysian women through entrepreneurship

## 3. Materials and Method

### 3.1 Research Design and Measurement of the Variables

This study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Delphi technique is used for qualitative approach and survey method using a structured questionnaire is used for quantitative approach. Delphi technique is a group process used to obtain consensus and involves a series of questionnaires which build on the previous one (Somerville, 2007). For the Delphi technique, barriers and enablers obtained from literature review were used to develop a questionnaire. This was sent to 30 women SME entrepreneurs obtained from the latest

database of women entrepreneurs from Ministry of Women, Family and Community (KPWKM). The unit of analysis is individual women entrepreneurs. The respondents were asked to select those barriers and enablers that applied to them. They were also asked to include others that were not in the list. Based on this response a second questionnaire was prepared and sent to them. They were again asked to report those that applied them and include those that were not in the list. This was repeated until a consensus was reached. This happened in the fourth round.

For quantitative method, a structured questionnaire was developed based on the barriers and enablers identified in the Delphi Technique. A four –point Likert like scale ranging from 4 = very important; 3 = Important; 2 = Not important; 1 = Not important at all, was used to solicit responses from the respondents. The questionnaire was translated to Bahasa Malaysia as most of the respondents had O level education or less and were not proficient in the English Language. The respondents were 130 participants of a seminar organised by the Women’s Development Department in the Ministry of Women, Family and Community. The criterion applied in selecting the respondents was based on definition of woman entrepreneurs by Ahmad et al. (2011), women who have initiated a business, are actively involved in managing it, and own at least 50% of the firm. Since only entrepreneurs who had been conducting business for at least one year were the focus of the research, those who did not meet this criterion were not included in the study. Therefore the sampling technique is both convenience and judgment. The questionnaires were personally administered and collected by the researcher.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis and Orthogonal Varimax rotation was used to extract the factors related to the barriers and enablers. Prior to the extraction of the factors, several tests were used to assess the suitability of the respondent data for factor analysis. These tests include Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy / Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity are very important measures to conclude the worthiness of factor analysis. KMO takes values between 0 and 1. A value of 0 indicates that the sum of partial correlations is large relative to the sum of correlations, indicating diffusion in the pattern of correlations and the factor analysis is not appropriate to be conducted. A value close to 1 indicates that patterns of correlations are relatively compact and so factor analysis should yield distinct and reliable factors.

In other words, KMO indicates the amount of variance shared among the items designed to measure a latent variable when compared to that shared with the error. Kaiser (1974) recommends accepting values greater than 0.5 as acceptable. More specifically, values between 0.5 and 0.7 are considered mediocre, values between 0.7 and 0.8 are considered good, values between 0.8 and 0.9 are deemed great and values above 0.9 are superb (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999). A value with more than 0.7 is the common threshold for confirmatory analysis (Hair et al., 2010). The Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity should be significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) for factor analysis to be suitable.

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## 4. Results

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percent
Industry	Service industry	90	69.2
	Others	40	30.8
Age	20-29 years	13	10.0
	30-39 years	32	24.6
	40-49 years	48	36.9
	50+ years	37	28.5
Marital Status	Single	19	14.6
	Married	78	60.0

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percent
No. of Children	Divorced	13	10.0
	Widow	20	15.4
	None	27	20.8
	1-3	55	42.3
	4-6	44	33.8
Highest Education Qualifications	More than 6	4	3.1
	Primary Education	89	68.5
	SPM	14	10.8
	Certificate	22	16.9
	Diploma	4	3.1
Years involved in business	Bachelor's Degree	1	0.8
	1-5 years	82	63.1
	More than 5 years	48	36.9

Table 1 describes demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study. The majority of respondents are in the service industry with a percentage of 69.2%. The distributions of the respondents according to their age group are 20-29 years (10%), 30-39 years (24.6%), 40-49 years (36.9%) and above 50 years (28.5%). For marital status, most of the respondents (60%) are married, 15.4% are widows while 14.6% and 10% are still single and divorced respectively. About 42.3% of the respondents have 1-3 children; 33.8% have 4-6 children; 20.8% have no children; and only 3.1% has more than 6 children. Majority of the respondents (68.5%) have only primary education, 10.8% have finished high school (SPM) and only a small number, about 4% have college education (diploma and bachelor's degree). In terms of the number of years they have been involved in business, 63.1% of the respondents have 1-5 years of experience while the remaining 36.9% have more than 5 years of experience in business.

#### 4.1 Factor Extraction

The aim of factor analysis is to simplify the factor structure of a group of items or in other words, high item loading on one factor and smaller item loadings on the remaining factor solution.

##### 4.1.1 Data Screening

Table 2. Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy / Bartlett's of Sphericity for barriers

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.873
	Approx. Chi-Square	6549.289
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	2080
	Sig.	.000

Table 3. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy / Bartlett's of Sphericity for enablers

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.888
	Approx. Chi-Square	8520.857
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	2016
	Sig.	.000

According to Hair et al. (2010), the value with more than 0.8 is a common threshold for confirmatory analysis. In the case for the data for barriers (KMO = 0.8730; the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 2) and for enablers (KMO = 0.8730; the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 3). Therefore the data is suitable for factor analysis.

In this study the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) is used. PCA is recommended when no a prior theory or model exists. Pett et al. (2003) suggested using PCA in establishing preliminary solutions in EFA. A cumulative

percentage of variance (criterion) is another measurement that is used in factor extraction. According to Hair et al. (2011), in the humanities, the explained variance is commonly as low as 50-60%. In this study the cumulative percentage of variance of 71.337% and a total of 13 components (factors) having an eigenvalue > 1 were obtained for barriers.

#### 4.1.2 Factor Extraction (Barriers)

In this study the cumulative percentage of variance of 71.337% and a total of 13 components (factors) having an eigenvalue > 1 were obtained for barriers.

Table 4. Total variance explained (barriers)

Component (Factor)	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	23.754	36.544	36.544	23.754	36.544	36.544	9.540	14.677	14.677
2	4.546	6.993	43.538	4.546	6.993	43.538	6.453	9.927	24.605
3	2.785	4.285	47.823	2.785	4.285	47.823	5.201	8.002	32.607
4	2.248	3.458	51.282	2.248	3.458	51.282	5.043	7.759	40.366
5	2.200	3.385	54.666	2.200	3.385	54.666	3.403	5.235	45.601
6	1.701	2.617	57.283	1.701	2.617	57.283	2.904	4.468	50.069
7	1.627	2.503	59.786	1.627	2.503	59.786	2.576	3.963	54.031
8	1.438	2.212	61.998	1.438	2.212	61.998	2.229	3.429	57.460
9	1.394	2.145	64.144	1.394	2.145	64.144	2.140	3.293	60.753
10	1.255	1.930	66.074	1.255	1.930	66.074	1.919	2.953	63.706
11	1.232	1.895	67.969	1.232	1.895	67.969	1.879	2.891	66.597
12	1.128	1.735	69.703	1.128	1.735	69.703	1.757	2.703	69.300
13	1.062	1.634	71.337	1.062	1.634	71.337	1.324	2.037	71.337

Table 5 to Table 13 present the factor loading for the top 9 factors that pose as barriers to women's entrepreneurship. Knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAOs) tops the list with 23.754. It is followed by legalities, regulations and procedures (4.546), lack of business support and network (2.248), business constraints (2.220), powerlessness (1.701), discrimination (1.627), security (1.438), gender stereotype (1.438) and stress (1.294).

Table 5. Factor 1- knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAOS)

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
1	KSAOs	Lack management skills Lack entrepreneurial skills Lack of intercultural and work skills Fear of failure Loss of security Fear of debt Lack of assertiveness Lack negotiation skills Lack of knowledge Low bargaining skills Low level of education Low risk bearing capacity Insufficient family income Lack of proper training on management and production skills upgrading Lack of business Ideas	23.754

Table 6. Factor 2- legalities, regulations and procedures

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
2	Legalities, Regulations And Procedures	Lack of access to credit, training, networks and information Legal and policy constraints Unrealistic and unreasonable securities to get a loan Loan rates are higher for women compared to men Discriminatory attitude of banks and informal lending Too many legal formalities Procedural delays for various licenses, electricity, water and shed allocations Currency fluctuations	4.546

Table 7. Factor 3- lack of business support and network

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
3	Support and Network	Lack of access to external funds due to inability to provide tangible security Finding the right contacts Availability of financial resources Lack of information/ advice on how to start a business Finding the right contacts for your business venture Access to business support Accessing the right social networks	2.248

Table 8. Factor 4- business constraints

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
4	Business Constraints	Finance institutions are skeptical towards women-owned business Mistakes in business Tough competition High production costs Existence of glass ceiling Absence of marketing facilities for women Absence of proper sales centre or showroom facility Non-availability of skilled labour Not having the opportunity to freely choose your business location Hostile business environment Finance institutions are skeptical towards women-owned business	2.220

Table 9. Factor 5- Powerlessness

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
5	Powerlessness	Not having the opportunity to freely choose your business location Reputation Hostile business environment	1.701

Table 10. Factor 6-Discrimination

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
6	Discrimination	Lack of healthy workplace environment Discrimination	1.627

Table 11. Factor 7- Security

Factor	Variable	Loading
7	Job Security Satisfaction with salaried job Having a job	1.438

Table 12. Factor 8 –Gender Stereotype

Factor	Variable	Loading
8	Gender Stereotype Acquiring approval of family members Business culture / tradition Acquiring Credibility and Trust of Others A question of Self Confidence No family support	1.438

Table 13. Factor 9-Stress

Factor	Variable	Loading
9	Stress Stress due to competition and business routine Stress due Financial problems	1.294

#### 4.1.3 Factor Extraction (Enablers)

A cumulative percentage of variance of 77.587% and a total of 12 components (factors) having an eigenvalue > 1 were obtained for enablers (Table 14).

Table 14. Total variance explained (enablers)

Component	Total Variance Explained					
	Initial Eigenvalues <sup>a</sup>			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	15.058	43.589	43.589	15.058	43.589	43.589
2	2.971	8.600	52.189	2.971	8.600	52.189
3	1.616	4.677	56.866	1.616	4.677	56.866
4	1.295	3.748	60.614	1.295	3.748	60.614
5	.970	2.809	63.423	.970	2.809	63.423
6	.881	2.551	65.974	.881	2.551	65.974
7	.824	2.384	68.358	.824	2.384	68.358
8	.757	2.190	70.548	.757	2.190	70.548
9	.672	1.945	72.492	.672	1.945	72.492
10	.614	1.777	74.270	.614	1.777	74.270
11	.585	1.692	75.962	.585	1.692	75.962
12	.561	1.625	77.587	.561	1.625	77.587

Table 15 to Table 22 presents the factor loading for the top 8 factors that serve as enablers to women. Personality and self-efficacy tops the list with 15.058. It is followed by support for businesses from government (2.971), women focused initiatives from government and NGOs (1.616), mentoring (1.295); role models (0.970), long-term orientation (0.881), high need for achievement (0.824) and help at home (0.824).

Table 15. Factor 1- personality and self-efficacy

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
1	Personality and Self Efficacy	Self confidence Self-awareness Hard work Quick action Possessing perceived necessary skills and knowledge Own income Commitment towards business Self-reliance Courage Risk tolerance ability Interest Desire for responsibility Innovation capability See the opportunity/potential for business	15.058

Table 16. Factor 2- support for businesses from government

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
2	Support for businesses from Government	Continuous monitoring of women's development progress Making provisions and marketing assistance from government Soft loan financial assistance Matching grant financial assistance Training, seminar and workshops Marketing and promotion by government Government websites and TV program assistance Tax benefits and tax exemptions Government publications, pamphlets, brochures etc. pioneer status and investment tax allowance Physical infrastructure and business premises from government	2.971

Table 17. Factor 3- women focused initiatives from government and NGOs

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
3	Women focused initiatives	Women as specific target group for developmental programs Better facilities for women Vocational training to understand production process and management Training and counseling on large scale of existing women entrepreneurs Aid from committed NGOs	1.616

Table 18. Factor 4- mentoring

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
4	Mentoring	Receive advice and support from a mentor Receive support from women's association in Malaysia External advisors /consultants' support	1.295

Table 19. Factor 5- role models

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
5	Role Models	Entrepreneurial parents Role Models and mentors Inspired by friends' and other peoples' success Encouraged by a friend	0.970

Table 20. Factor 6- long-term orientation

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
6	Long-term Orientation	High level of energy Future orientation	0.881

Table 21. Factor 7- high need for achievement

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
7	High Need for Achievement	Personal achievement, to be reckoned in the community Pursue intrinsic goals Life impulse	0.824

Table 22. Factor 8- help at home

Factor	Variable	Items	Loading
8	Help at home	Child care support Division of work and care responsibilities	0.824

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this research was to identify the barriers and enablers for women's entrepreneurship in SME in Malaysia. For barriers, the results show that the factors that posed as barriers to women are lack of knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAOs) to start and do business, too many legalities, regulations and procedures and formalities in accessing loans, licenses etc., lack of business support and network, business constraints e.g. costs and competition, sense of powerlessness, discrimination, job security, gender role stereotype and stress.

For knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAOs), the findings are consistent with research findings of Benard and Victor (2013); Commission (2009); Qureshi et al. (2014); Gayathridevi (2014); Mwobobia (2012); Palaniappan, Ramanigopal and Mani (2013); and Niazkar and Arab-Moghaddam (2011). These researchers found that lack of management skills, fear of failure, low level of education, lack of information and knowledge and lack training are barriers to women starting up a business. For legalities, regulations and procedure, the findings are consistent with research findings of Benard and Victor (2013); Gayathridevi (2014); Leonard (2013); Dauda (2011); Robichaud et al. (2010); and Poon et al. (2012). The lack of assets, control over access to capital together with policy constraints and government initiatives that focuses more towards male entrepreneurs and gender discrimination impact negatively on women's economic empowerment.

That lack of business support and network can act as barriers to women entrepreneurship is consistent with studies by Ademokun and Ajayi (2012); Benard and Victor (2013); Benjamin (2012); and Gayathridevi (2014). They found that lack of formal network, networking and dealing with hostile environment can negatively impact women entrepreneurship and act as important barriers. Socio culturally induced constraint to entrepreneurship initiatives by women such as discrimination; negative stereotypes and isolation are consistent with findings by past researchers like Benard and Victor (2013), Benjamin (2012), Gayathridevi (2014) and Mwobobia (2012). Stress is also featured as a significant barrier for women entrepreneurship. Ee (2011) found that the stress was

caused by the spouses of women entrepreneurs who expected their wives to be responsible for the housework and childcare while offering little or no help.

The top cited enablers relate to personality and self-efficacy. This result is consistent with research findings of Allen, Elam, Langowitz, and Dean (2008); Cabrera (2007); Steege and Stamm (2014); and EIGE (2015). According to them, the drive for women to engage in business and having characteristic such as self-confidence, courage and being more independent are the key enablers to women entrepreneurship. The finding that support for businesses from government, women focused initiatives from government and NGOs, mentoring and role models, are consistent with past researches by Bruton, Ahlstrom and Han-Lin Li (2014); Devi (2010); EIU (2013); Hallward-Driemeier and Hasan (2013); Ngo and Wahhaj (2012); OEDC (2014); and WENA (2014). According to these researchers, business and government bodies provide access to finance; education advancement in terms of business skills training; and availability of child care program to support family (social services) to women entrepreneurs. In addition, successful women entrepreneurs' mentors other women by inspiring, encouraging and guide how to balance work and family. In addition, government should initiate changes in the societal norms pertaining to the perception of individuals, community and organisations /institutions at large (e.g. banks, licensing bodies) towards women entrepreneurs. Self-help group (institution or agent) have been a major source of assistance to women entrepreneurs by providing and/or linking them with credit agencies, giving information on bank that provides business support and raising the socio-economic status of women engaging in business.

The research findings by Poon, Thai and Naybor (2012) and Vadjal and Vadjal (2007) confirm that help at home can serve as an enabler for women entrepreneurship which was one outcome of this research. The emotional support and family, spouse, relatives and friends supports are necessary for women doing business especially at the beginning of their business.

## **6. Implications and Recommendation**

The research findings have implication for continued education and development of Malaysian women engaging in entrepreneurship. The recommendations are grouped under two categories: (1) Overcoming Barriers and (2) Enhancing Enablers to economic empowerment of Malaysian women through entrepreneurship.

### *6.1 Overcoming Barriers*

Lack of KSAOs will be overcome by providing education, training and development on entrepreneurship. The government and non-government agencies could play a major role in providing this.

Too many legalities, regulations and procedures and formalities will be overcome by government in easing the regulations and providing one-stop centers for start-up women entrepreneurs and also help in accessing loans, licenses and etc.

Lack of business support and network will be overcome by initiatives undertaken by the Government, women's organisations and NGOs. They could set up networks specifically for women entrepreneurs especially for those in the SME sector where they can turn for advice and support.

Powerlessness, discrimination and gender role stereotype will be overcome by having legislations that treat both genders fairly while eliminating laws that discriminate against women.

### *6.2 Enhancing Enablers*

Personality and self-efficacy will be enhanced by motivating women to be economically self-sufficient.

Support for businesses from Government will be enhanced by increasing and improving ways of helping businesses in the SME sector.

Women focused initiatives from Government and NGOs will be enhanced by providing more initiatives to help women entrepreneurs.

Mentoring and role models will be enhanced by successful men and women entrepreneurs offering to mentor and guide women who want to start a business are at the early stages of their businesses and act as their role models.

Help at home will be enhanced by family members whether husbands or extended family members offering to share more household responsibilities so that women can start and run their own businesses.

## **7. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research**

This study is essentially exploratory in nature and was intended to give an opportunity to women entrepreneurs to list down the barriers faced by them and what enables them to engage in entrepreneurship. By virtue of the research methodology used in this study there are limitations to the generalizability of the results of this research.

The study could be extended to men and comparisons made on their opinions to see whether they significantly differed from women. Further research using a larger sample should be carried out to increase the external validity of the findings.

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