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Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in establishing new enterprises in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

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Abstract

Women entrepreneurs play a vital role in shaping local economies, fostering innovation, and promoting inclusive development. This study investigates the socio-economic background, knowledge levels, perceptions, and challenges experienced by women entrepreneurs in Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala. Employing a descriptive research design and multi-stage sampling, data were collected from women entrepreneurs engaged in diverse sectors, primarily those integrating agriculture with small businesses.

Findings reveal that most women entrepreneurs have intermediate to higher education, live in nuclear families, and earn moderate annual incomes. While mass media exposure, extension contact, and social participation are generally moderate, they display strong economic motivation and a progressive mindset. However, their perception of entrepreneurship remains low due to gender-based discrimination, market barriers, societal expectations, and work-life imbalances.

Key constraints include limited financial access, lack of collateral, market isolation, safety concerns, and restricted institutional support. Despite these hurdles, women entrepreneurs demonstrate resilience and offer practical solutions such as enhanced training, infrastructure development, financial assistance, and market adaptation. The study emphasizes the need for policy measures tailored to the unique requirements of women entrepreneurs in Kerala to unlock their full potential.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship, Thiruvananthapuram, knowledge, perception, gender barriers, enterprise development

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a transformative process that involves identifying opportunities, mobilizing resources, and managing ventures to achieve economic and social goals (Desa, 2012) ^[4]. Entrepreneurs are recognized for their innovation, risk-taking abilities, and contribution to regional development (Sampene *et al.*, 2021) ^[12]. In recent years, women's participation in entrepreneurship has gained attention as a catalyst for inclusive growth and gender equality (Emon & Nipa, 2024) ^[5].

Despite their contributions, women in India continue to face systemic challenges such as limited access to finance, inadequate training, mobility restrictions, and entrenched societal norms (Sikka & Bhayana, 2024) ^[13]. In Kerala, although women's literacy and social indicators are high, their entrepreneurial participation, particularly in formal sectors, remains limited (Sajjan & Sumathy, 2025) ^[11].

Thiruvananthapuram, the state capital, presents a unique paradox. While it hosts a highly literate female population and active self-help groups, barriers like inadequate access to capital, limited market exposure, and domestic responsibilities impede enterprise development (Fletschner, 2009) ^[7].

This study investigates the socio-economic background, knowledge levels, perceptions, and constraints faced by

women entrepreneurs in Thiruvananthapuram. It aims to understand the structural and social barriers limiting their entrepreneurial success and suggest measures to enhance their participation in regional development.

2. Materials and Methods

1. Research Design

A descriptive research design was adopted to explore the characteristics, perceptions, and challenges of women entrepreneurs, facilitating unbiased observation and interpretation (Singh, 1986).

2. Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Vellanad block of Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala, due to its high concentration of women-owned enterprises.

3. Sampling Procedure

A multi-stage sampling technique was used. Thiruvananthapuram district was purposively selected, followed by Vellanad block. Five villages—Perumkulam, Veeranakavu, Aryanad, Tholicode, and Vellanad—were selected based on the density of women entrepreneurs. A total of 140 respondents (28 from each village) were randomly selected.

4. Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected using structured interview schedules aligned with research objectives. Personal interviews ensured authenticity and accuracy.

5. Variables and Measurement

Independent variables included age, education, caste, landholding, and occupation. Dependent variables were knowledge and perception regarding enterprise establishment. Responses were categorized into low, medium, and high using cumulative frequency and statistical scoring.

6. Statistical Tools

Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS v16. Tools included percentages, mean and standard deviation for classification, correlation analysis for relationships, and multiple regression to understand the influence of independent variables.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Socio-Economic Profile

- 46.43% of respondents were aged 46-55 years.
- 32.14% had completed intermediate education; 22.86% were graduates.
- 63.57% were involved in both agriculture and business.
- 40.71% had landholdings below 1 hectare.
- 70% lived in cemented houses; 63.57% were married and lived in nuclear families.
- 39.29% had an annual income between ₹60,000-₹90,000.

Moderate levels of media exposure (67.14%), extension contact (71.43%), and social participation (45.71%) were observed.

4.2 Knowledge Level

48.57% had medium knowledge, and 31.43% had high knowledge. Gaps were observed in legal aspects, digital marketing, and contract management.

4.3 Perception

55.71% of respondents had a low overall perception level. While many acknowledged gender-based challenges and societal constraints, fewer recognized the value of peer collaboration or media influence.

4.4 Constraints

Key constraints included:

- Gender bias and discrimination (84.29%)
- Work-life imbalance (80.00%)
- Funding challenges due to gender (73.57%)
- Societal norms and safety concerns (over 70%)

4.5 Suggestions

Women entrepreneurs recommended:

- Adapting to changing market scenarios (82.14%)
- Conducting training and awareness programs (69.29%)
- Improving infrastructure (57.86%)
- Facilitating access to loans and finance (41.43%)

5. Summary

The findings align with global literature highlighting the systemic barriers women face in entrepreneurship (Bui *et al.*, 2018; Abbas & Smith, 2023) ^[2, 1]. Despite moderate education and support structures, women in Thiruvananthapuram experience knowledge gaps and social constraints limiting enterprise success.

Gender bias, financial inaccessibility, societal expectations, and safety concerns persist as major deterrents (Rehman & Roomi, 2012; Ergun *et al.*, 2025) ^[10, 6]. Even with strong economic motivation, there exists a disconnect between aspiration and capability due to limited training and exposure.

To bridge this gap, comprehensive interventions including legal literacy, gender-sensitive policy frameworks, and infrastructure support are critical (Khan, 2015; Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013) ^[8, 9]. Addressing perceptual limitations is equally important, requiring cultural transformation and active inclusion of women in decision-making ecosystems.

6. Conclusion

Women entrepreneurs in Thiruvananthapuram face substantial challenges despite strong motivation and community presence. Their potential remains underutilized due to structural and socio-cultural barriers.

Efforts to empower women must go beyond financial aid to include tailored capacity-building, infrastructural support, institutional backing, and cultural transformation. By fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, Kerala can unlock the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs, thereby driving sustainable and equitable development.

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