

A Sociological Study of Factors Related to Social Entrepreneurship of Women Employed in the Handicrafts Sector in Tehran from the Perspective of Women Entrepreneurs

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Received 8 July 2025

Accepted 5 September 2025

Abstract: This research aims to analyze the sociological factors related to social entrepreneurship among women working in the handicraft industry in Tehran. The methodological approach of this research is qualitative and of the grounded theory type. The necessary data were collected using in-depth interviews with 7 female social entrepreneurs active in the handicraft sector of Tehran. Sampling was done purposefully and theoretically until theoretical saturation was reached. The research results indicate that the development of social entrepreneurship in the form of women's businesses in the field of handicrafts is a core category. Factors influencing it include cultural and indigenous roots, intrinsic motivation and entrepreneurial mindset, family and governmental support, market knowledge, identification and analysis of obstacles and problems, family and social pressures, and gender discrimination. These are accompanied by strategies such as creating, designing, and developing businesses, resilience in the face of perceived failure, and risk management, and efforts towards innovation and market development. The consequences include self-sufficiency and financial independence, attention to women entrepreneurs, cultural and social value creation, preservation of traditional and indigenous culture, risk, and the possibility of failure. This study shows that women's social entrepreneurship in handicrafts is a multi-layered and interdisciplinary phenomenon in which cultural capital, social capital, gender, and institutionalism are intertwined. From a theoretical perspective, the structure-agency framework is the most appropriate tool for analysis because structures simultaneously determine opportunities and limitations, and women entrepreneurs, by utilizing multiple capitals and internal and external resilience, reproduce or transform these structures.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Working Women, Handicrafts, Women Entrepreneurs.

Introduction

Women have a significant share in entrepreneurship and economic development through job creation and the increase of gross domestic product (Hechavarria et al., 2019). Due to characteristics such as compassion, empathy, and sensitivity, they may be more suited to implementing inclusive strategies and leading social enterprises. These types of female entrepreneurs contribute to socio-economic development and poverty alleviation (Rosca et al., 2020). The increase in women's participation in entrepreneurship is associated with improvements in women's social status, family welfare, and broader social outcomes. Moreover, women, as accelerators, play a vital role in enhancing social entrepreneurial intentions (Cardella et al., 2021). However, social and cultural norms can restrict their access to education and networking opportunities, thereby influencing their level of entrepreneurial activity (Haugh & Talwar, 2016). Social entrepreneurship is defined as the establishment of innovative organizations aimed at addressing social and environmental needs. Social entrepreneurs pursue a mission of creating and sustaining social value, seek opportunities, innovate, and engage in continuous learning. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, they are not primarily focused on direct financial profit (Terjesen, 2017; Bygrave & Minniti, 2000). Nevertheless, complete differentiation between economic and social benefits is complex, and social and commercial activities are often intertwined (Schram,

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2010). Broadly, entrepreneurship provides opportunities and sustainable cycles for social, economic, and institutional development (Gupta et al., 2020). Since women represent the fastest-growing segment in the entrepreneurial sector, exploring their role in social entrepreneurship can contribute to expanding the fields of entrepreneurship and gender studies. The integration of these topics collectively holds importance (Rosca et al., 2020). Women, as a crucial indicator of a country's level of development, play a pivotal role in social and economic progress. If regarded as an active workforce, they can increase the pace of development and improve human resource quality (Hesabi-Moghadam & Lisan, 2017). Despite women accounting for half of the population and two-thirds of the world's working hours, their share of income and wealth ownership remains small, indicating widespread inequality — a matter that has gradually attracted attention from international organizations and policymakers (Abdali & Hayati, 2017). Recent studies have examined women's position at regional and national levels, barriers to employment, and their role in development to inform public opinion and policymakers about the importance of increasing women's employment. Moreover, these studies emphasize the necessity of considering human resources and expertise in development analyses (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2014).

In the handicrafts industry, although some branches are traditionally associated with men due to physical labor requirements, women carry out a large part of production activities, especially in workshops and key tasks such as glazing and decorating, yet they often remain unacknowledged (Fallah & Pashaeinia, 2021). Overall, women appear in two categories: those working alongside men in workshops and remaining less recognized, and female entrepreneurs running independent businesses. Women account for up to 75% of handicraft producers, playing a crucial role in exports, safeguarding production, creating employment with minimal capital, promoting national identity, and protecting the environment (Shahsavand et al., 2022). Women play a prominent role in the registration of geographical indications of handicrafts. Statistical examples demonstrate that fields such as *Sirjan silk-wrapping* (over 90%), *Harsin kilim* (over 80%), *Varni weaving in Dasht-e Moghan* (over 85%), and *Gilan shawl weaving* (over 90%) as well as women's entry into crafts formerly dominated by men like *Sanandaj woodcrafts* and *Meybod zilou weaving* exemplify women's active presence in this domain (ISNA News Agency, 2021). Studies have investigated women's positions at regional and national levels, employment barriers, and their roles in development to better prepare policymakers for strategies that increase women's employment. Given the active participation of women in handicrafts, this research approaches social entrepreneurship from a sociological perspective (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2014). Social entrepreneurship — the combination of business and social purpose — defines success beyond profit, measuring it instead by improvements in the lives of target communities. This type of entrepreneurship may encompass environmentally friendly products or services to disadvantaged groups. Due to its mission and social impact, it is regarded as a sociological phenomenon (Huemke et al., 2022; Markus & Kitayama, 2010). Mikic's (2018) study showed that women demonstrate greater tendencies and capabilities to expand ideas locally, collaborate with civil organizations, support women and youth, and influence cultural attitudes and norms. Moreover, 76% of women entrepreneurs reported influencing social attitudes as the core of their strategic approach.

Research also indicates that socio-cultural, psychological, economic, environmental, technological, and legal-political factors affect the development of female social entrepreneurship, while behavioral, environmental, and organizational factors significantly influence social entrepreneurial activity among marginalized women (Shahsavand et al., 2022; Aramesh et al., 2021). Women, due to stereotypes and gender biases, are often vulnerable and socially excluded, which limits their social participation. Therefore, they require empowerment policies and cross-sectoral approaches (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Women's empowerment acts as an intermediary between family status, spousal behavior, and social participation, with social factors explaining around 20% of changes in empowerment levels. In Iran, alongside domestic responsibilities, women play direct and indirect roles in production activities such as agriculture, livestock farming, and handicrafts. However, due to the informal nature of their work and its integration with household tasks, they are rarely recognized as employed, and their economic and productive contributions are often underrepresented (Molla-Mohammadi et al., 2018). Social entrepreneurship, which aims to solve social problems and create social value beyond profit, can minimize negative externalities and amplify positive ones. Nonetheless, social entrepreneurs face a

paradox — they must align their organizational values with existing societal values to foster social transformation (Neubert & Hill, 2014; Chatterjee et al., 2021). Despite global efforts to reduce gender gaps, social inequality continues to increase. Women's entrepreneurial activities, especially in the informal economy, remain less visible even though their role in job creation and wealth generation is remarkable. This trend strengthens the process of gender socialization and women's empowerment.

Therefore, the present research aims to examine sociologically the factors related to women's social entrepreneurship in Tehran's handicrafts sector, adopting the inductive approach of grounded theory.

Literature Review

Women's economic participation rate is one of the key indicators of development, and their role in the economic structure and national modernization is highly significant (Aramesh et al., 2020; Rosca et al., 2020). In Iran, women's share of the labor force is far lower than men's, with the male-to-female participation ratio across various years being over 4 to 5 times higher. Moreover, the female participation rate (16.4%) remains lower than that of many neighboring countries (Global Education for All Report, 2014). The gender gap in economic participation remains substantial and is even wider in urban areas compared to rural ones (Hamidpour et al., 2022). Given that women constitute nearly half the population and thus possess capacity for greater involvement in social and technological transformations, studying factors affecting women's social entrepreneurship is essential to increase participation rates and accelerate social development. Since formal job opportunities for women are limited and mainly concentrated in the informal sector with low wages and benefits (Saraf-Razi, 2017), social entrepreneurship can serve as a response to government and market failures in empowering vulnerable groups such as women. However, sociological studies on factors related to women's social entrepreneurship remain scarce. The present study seeks to fill this research gap by developing a theoretical model that explores factors associated with women's social entrepreneurship in Tehran's handicraft industry, offering practical insights for the sector.

- Shahsavand et al. (2022), in an analytical–descriptive study, examined women's employment in Iran. This research, through redefining employment and reviewing its background, explored the cultural, social, political, and economic causes and factors influencing women's employment as well as its individual and psychological effects. Furthermore, the study assessed both positive and negative impacts of women's employment on family relationships and proposed strategies to mitigate adverse consequences. Among these recommendations are adopting flexible working hours, effective time management, establishing remote work regulations and reduced working schedules, providing counseling services, educating family members to encourage greater participation, and employing women in gender-appropriate positions—all of which enhance the quality of women's professional presence and their ability to fulfill spousal and maternal roles more effectively.
- Aramesh et al. (2021), by reviewing scholarly sources and surveying a sample of 380 marginalized women in Zahedan, identified three dimensions and 46 components influencing women's social entrepreneurship within behavioral, environmental, and organizational factors. The study demonstrated that these dimensions significantly affect the development of social entrepreneurial opportunities.
- Ali-Nejad and Mousavi (2021) conducted a qualitative study on 13 female entrepreneurs in Yazd and proposed the central concept of “*constructive engagement with limitations*.” They recognized imposed structures, mental barriers, and supportive capitals as contextual factors and identified strategies such as alignment with society, self-improvement, feminine understanding of entrepreneurship, and role harmony as enablers of empowerment.
- Fallah and Pashaeinia (2020), through thematic analysis and interviews with 14 experts, emphasized in their theoretical model that successful entry of women into social entrepreneurship requires “*multi-dimensional empowerment*” (stimulators and facilitators) and “*dynamic capacity building*” (stabilizers and enablers). These processes, supported by social norms and synergy mechanisms, lead to the creation of social value through empowerment and social cohesion.

- Yeung and Yu (2022), in their systematic review of 1,142 studies on social entrepreneurship and 59 studies related to women, highlighted the need to revisit theoretical concepts, strengthen social integration, overcome gender discrimination, expand contexts and regions of study, and investigate operational strategies and performance factors to advance future research.
- Tankard and Paluck (2016), through narrative analysis of 35 women with disabilities in Burkina Faso, found that the combination of stereotypes and gender prejudice makes disabled women increasingly vulnerable and excluded from social participation. They stressed the necessity of empowerment policies and intersectional approaches.
- Yadav et al. (2023), using focus groups and interviews with Andalusian baby-boomer women, revealed that elderly women shape spaces of social participation based on spatial desirability, alignment with preferences, facilitators, barriers, and the importance of agency. They emphasized improving spaces that foster self-management and autonomy.
- Fernandez and Lopez (2023), in their case study during the COVID-19 pandemic, identified survival-related characteristics—leadership, multidimensional prudence, altruism, innovation, norm-breaking, and labeling—as reinforcing factors of resilience among social entrepreneurs working toward women’s empowerment.
- Khair (2021) demonstrated that *design*, as a tool for storytelling and meaning-making, can assist cultural entrepreneurs—particularly in handicraft retail—in creating social and economic value for lesser-known cultural artifacts, thereby generating new markets.

Research Method

The present research was conducted using a qualitative method, following a developmental, deductive–inductive approach, and employing a survey strategy. The qualitative component utilizes the *Grounded Theory* methodology in its systematic form—a flexible, dialectical process. Data sources include library studies and interviews, leading to the development of a conceptual model. *Grounded Theory* is an inductive, fully qualitative, and exploratory approach that systematically constructs theory based on real-world data.

In the qualitative phase, the statistical population consisted of female entrepreneurs in the handicraft sector who were interviewed to identify indicators. Sampling in this phase was conducted using the *theoretical sampling* method, which begins by interviewing individuals active in the handicraft field who meet specific criteria. Sampling continues until *theoretical saturation*—the point at which no new concepts emerge and the model structure is complete.

The most common model applied in grounded theory, and used in this research, is that of *Strauss and Corbin*, a systematic method comprising three main stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

- Step 1 – Open Coding: The researcher analyzes and codes data, discovers categories, describes them based on their properties, and organizes an open coding matrix.
- Step 2 – Axial Coding: Various elements are examined, including *causal conditions* (sets of categories and attributes affecting the central phenomenon), *strategies* (goal-directed behaviors shaped under the influence of intervening and contextual conditions), *context* (specific conditions shaping strategies), *intervening conditions* (mediating variables influencing strategies), and *outcomes* (results from adopting those strategies).
- Step 3 – Selective Coding: This involves the systematic selection of the core category, linking it to other categories, validating these relationships, and filling theoretical gaps through refinement or expansion. The process has multiple phases:
 1. Describing the central storyline or theoretical core.
 2. Connecting supplementary categories around the main phenomenon using an analytic paradigm.
 3. Integrating categories at a higher level of abstraction.
 4. Validating the established relationships against the data.
 5. Completing and refining categories requiring further development.

The interview data were documented in three stages: recording and note-taking, transcription, and manual data analysis. Subsequently, interviews were imported into qualitative software, where the three coding stages were implemented. In total, 615 open codes, 31 axial codes, and 6 selective codes were extracted.

To ensure validity, findings were reviewed and refined by expert scholars, who provided recommendations for theoretical adjustments. One method for demonstrating reliability was an audit of the research process: reliability is confirmed when another researcher can reconstruct the decision-making path taken during interviews. Thus, the researcher achieved reliability by presenting detailed decision trails and providing all raw data, analyzed data, codes, categories, research processes, initial objectives, and interview questions to supervisors and consultants. Through their meticulous auditing, the accuracy of all steps was verified.

Additionally, the intra-subject agreement method was used to calculate the reliability of interviews: a subset of interviews was re-coded by another researcher, and the resulting agreement percentage exceeded 70%, confirming the consistency and reliability of the qualitative findings.

Findings

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the women entrepreneurs who participated in this study. These participants were between 32 and 43 years old, most of them married, and all either employed or simultaneously working and managing household responsibilities. Their educational levels ranged from high school diploma to master's degree.

Following the three phases of coding—open, axial, and selective—the core and most abstract category identified was “Development of Social Entrepreneurship within Female Businesses in the Handicrafts Sector.” This concept was formulated and presented in a paradigmatic model. After implementing and analyzing the interviews, the key themes raised by participants were categorized into six main (selective) categories.

Table (1): Background Characteristics of Participating Female Entrepreneurs

No.	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Employment Status	Work Experience (Years)
1	37	Single	Bachelor's degree	Active employed woman	15
2	43	Single	Bachelor's degree	Active employed woman	18
3	36	Married	High school diploma	Employed and homemaker	12
4	38	Married	Master's degree	Employed and homemaker	20
5	32	Married	High school diploma	Employed and homemaker	4
6	33	Married	Master's degree	Employed and homemaker	7
7	36	Single	Master's degree	Employed	9

Main Categories of the Research

Women's social entrepreneurship among employed women in Tehran's handicrafts sector is deeply intertwined with cultural and social contexts and values. These factors not only act as fundamental roots for the creation and development of this type of entrepreneurship but also actively participate in “Cultural and Social Value Creation.” In other words, the entrepreneurial activities of these women are not purely economic; rather, by preserving traditional and indigenous culture, and promoting cultural and social value creation, they contribute significantly to the sustainability and richness of society's cultural and social fabric. This finding indicates that understanding and supporting these cultural roots is vital for the sustainable development of female social entrepreneurship in this field. Individual empowerment plays a pivotal role in their social entrepreneurship. This empowerment is reinforced through internal motivation and an entrepreneurial mindset that drives women toward accepting challenges. Furthermore, “Resilience against the interpretation of failure and ability to manage risk” is among the key factors that help women entrepreneurs remain sustainable in the business environment. “Strengthening resilience skills in business” not only allows them to overcome obstacles but also leads

to their “Self-sufficiency and material independence,” which ultimately aids the development of social entrepreneurship for employed women in Tehran’s handicrafts sector. Multifaceted supports, including family, occupational, and governmental support, play a significant role in the development of social entrepreneurship among employed women in the handicrafts sector in Tehran. “Family support” acts as an emotional and practical backup, and “Governmental structural support” through policies and facilities provides a suitable platform for these women’s activities. Furthermore, special attention to female entrepreneurs and the “Development of participatory programs and networking with customers and stakeholders” not only contributes to “Economic growth and job creation” but also leads to the strengthening of the social and economic position of women in this field. Collectively, these supports contribute significantly to the sustainability and expansion of women’s social entrepreneurial activities in handicrafts.

Female social entrepreneurs in Tehran’s handicrafts sector face numerous challenges across familial, occupational, and governmental dimensions that can be a hindrance to their entrepreneurial activities. “Familial and social pressures,” especially the conflict and role strain between family responsibilities and work duties, is one of the main obstacles. Additionally, “Structural and educational barriers,” such as lack of access to specialized training and financial resources, along with “Physical and environmental barriers,” add to the complexity of the situation. “Gender discrimination” also acts as a latent challenge, which can make the path of advancement for these women more difficult. Finally, the “Risk and probability of failure” in any entrepreneurial activity, in conjunction with these challenges, highlights the need for more comprehensive and targeted support so that women can operate in this arena with greater confidence. This section of the research emphasizes the critical importance of training and business consultation for social women entrepreneurs in Tehran’s handicrafts. “Access to necessary training and support” paves the way for the “Development of practical and educational skills” for these women. Furthermore, it was found that there is a “pressing need for specialized consultation and targeted investment in the handicrafts sector” so that they can sustainably develop their businesses. These factors not only help improve the quality level of their products and services but also increase their managerial and marketing capabilities, ultimately leading to the strengthening of social entrepreneurship and economic independence for women in this sector. In this part of the research findings, the emphasis on the importance of principled business management in the social entrepreneurship of employed women in Tehran’s handicrafts sector is evident. “Market knowledge” and focusing on effective “marketing” are among the vital strategies for the success of these businesses. Despite efforts toward innovation and market development, as well as “product quality improvement,” “weakness in marketing and networking” has been identified as a key challenge. “Business creation and development” requires “accurate knowledge and analysis of existing obstacles and problems,” and the “design of business plans and attraction of financial support” so that women entrepreneurs can overcome these challenges and achieve sustainability and economic growth. These findings demonstrate that improving managerial skills and access to support resources play an essential role in strengthening social entrepreneurship in this field.

Core Category of the Research

The core category in this research is the development of social entrepreneurship in the form of women’s businesses in the handicraft sector.

Factors Affecting the Social Entrepreneurship of Female Entrepreneurs

This section seeks to examine the factors influencing the social entrepreneurship of employed women in the handicraft sector in Tehran; because each of these factors is closely interconnected with the others and plays a significant role in the occurrence of this phenomenon. The paradigmatic model of the interviews with female entrepreneurs is depicted in Figure 1.

Causal Factors

Several causal factors play a role in the formation and development of social entrepreneurship for employed women in Tehran’s handicraft sector. Cultural and indigenous roots, along with cultural and social roots, provide a rich environment for fostering entrepreneurial ideas. Inner motivation and an

entrepreneurial mindset in women are the main driving forces for entering and continuing activities in this field. Furthermore, family support, as an emotional and practical backing, and governmental structural support through policies and facilities, play a decisive role in reducing obstacles and facilitating the path of women's social entrepreneurship. Collectively, these causal factors, in a combined manner, help strengthen and sustain social entrepreneurial activities among Tehran's handicraft women.

Contextual Factors

Female social entrepreneurs in Tehran's handicraft sector operate within a specific context of contextual factors that can affect their success. Family and social pressures, including traditional expectations, sometimes act as a barrier to their entrepreneurial activities. Insufficient market awareness and business know-how, as well as weakness in marketing and networking, are among the significant challenges these women face. Gender discrimination can also limit their access to resources and opportunities. Moreover, structural and educational barriers, such as a lack of specialized training and facilities, and physical and environmental barriers, such as lack of access to a suitable workspace or transportation facilities, add to the complexity of the situation. Collectively, these contextual factors shape the entrepreneurial environment for handicraft women and indicate the need for targeted support to overcome these challenges.

Intervening Factors

Intervening factors play a key role in the process of social entrepreneurship for employed women in Tehran's handicraft sector. Market knowledge, as an intervening factor, helps women align their products with customer needs and discover new opportunities for their business. Furthermore, recognizing and analyzing the existing obstacles and problems in the entrepreneurial path enables them to adopt appropriate solutions to overcome these challenges. The development of practical and educational skills, as well as access to training and the need for business consultation, are among the vital factors that lead to the enhancement of female entrepreneurs' capabilities and improved performance. Collectively, these intervening factors significantly contribute to the sustainability and growth of women's social entrepreneurship in handicrafts by creating a suitable environment and access to training and support.

Strategies

The key strategies employed by social women entrepreneurs in Tehran's handicraft sector for success have been analyzed. Business creation and development, along with designing a business plan and attracting financial support, are among the essential actions for the sustainability of their activities. Resilience against the interpretation of failure and risk management indicate the importance of sustainability and flexibility in facing challenges. Furthermore, effective marketing, efforts towards innovation and market development, and the development of participatory programs and networking with customers and stakeholders have been identified as pivotal strategies for increasing sales and expanding the scope of activities. Finally, strengthening resilience skills in business helps these women to continue their activities even in uncertain economic conditions. Collectively, these strategies help increase the efficiency and sustainability of women's social entrepreneurship in this field.

Consequences

The social entrepreneurship of employed women in Tehran's handicraft sector has multifaceted consequences at the individual, cultural, social, and economic levels. At the individual level, self-sufficiency and material independence are among the most prominent results of these activities, leading to women's empowerment. At the cultural and social level, this entrepreneurship contributes to greater attention to women entrepreneurs, cultural and social value creation, and the preservation of traditional and indigenous culture. Additionally, improving product quality and contributing to economic growth and job creation are considered positive economic consequences of these activities. However, familial and work role conflict and pressure, as well as risk and the probability of failure, indicate challenges that always exist alongside these positive outcomes. Collectively, these provide a comprehensive picture of the various dimensions of women's social entrepreneurship in Tehran's handicrafts.

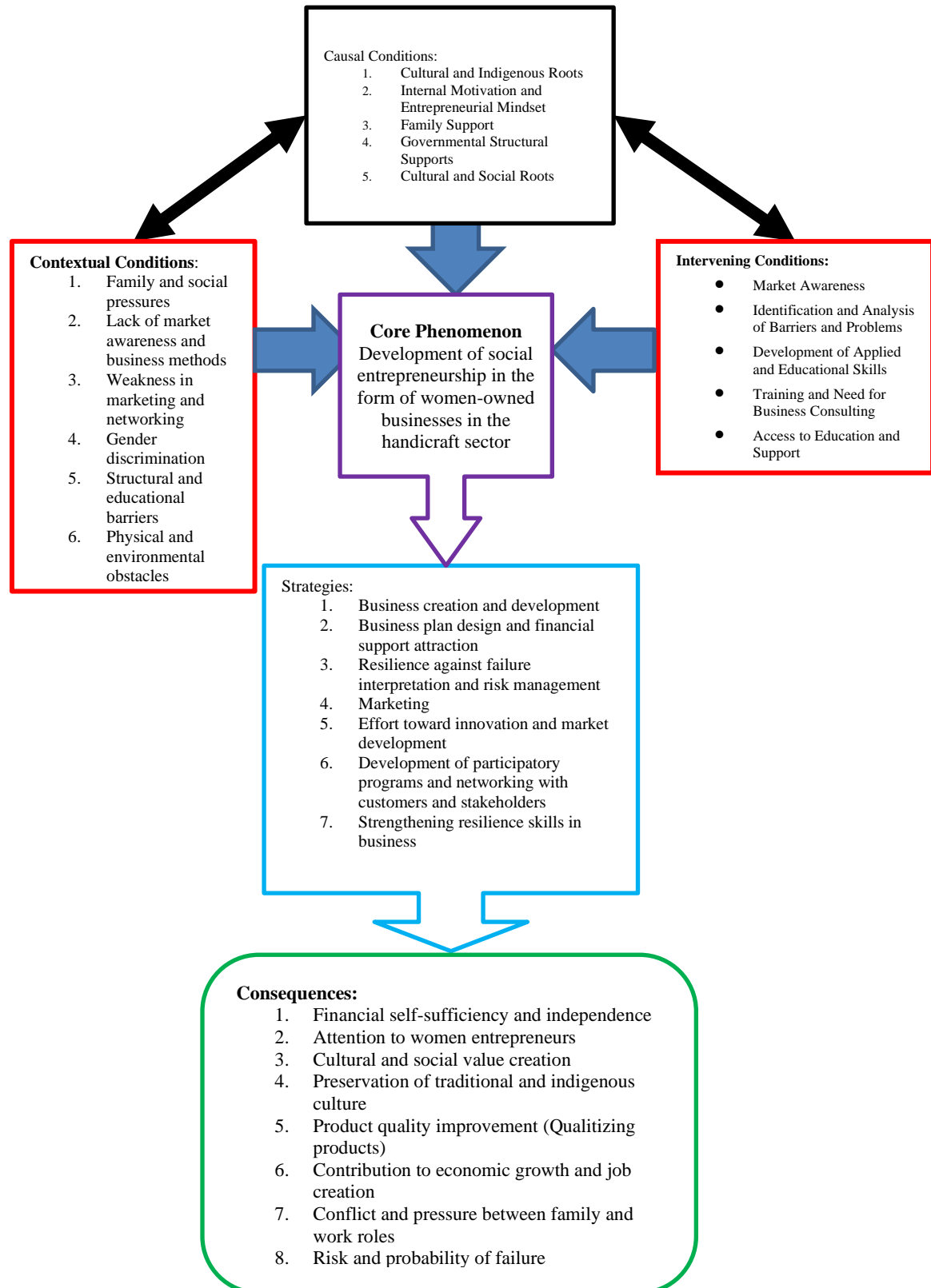


Figure (1): Paradigm Model from Interviews with Women Entrepreneurs

Conclusion

The sociological examination of factors related to the social entrepreneurship of employed women in the handicraft sector in Tehran reveals a process that is simultaneously composed of cultural-symbolic,

structural-institutional, and individual-psychological layers. From a sociological perspective, the social entrepreneurship of these women cannot be considered merely as an economic activity or substitute employment; rather, this phenomenon is a symbol of the effort to redefine gender roles, revive indigenous cultural capital, and produce new social meanings in the urban space. A layer-by-layer analysis is presented below. Handicraft women are carriers and reproducers of local narratives and indigenous knowledge; social entrepreneurship in this field is equated with the process of transforming cultural capital (skills, symbols, local narratives) into economic and symbolic capital. This transformation not only generates income but also strengthens the woman's social position within local networks. This cultural capital is an enabling factor that leads to the production of collective identity; meaning that individual successes in handicraft businesses can become the basis for social recognition and the elevation of group status; however, this process necessitates the existence of display arenas (markets, exhibitions, digital platforms, urban spaces) that enable the embodiment and reproduction of symbolic value.

Structures based on gender inequality, the uneven distribution of resources and access networks, and the shortage of targeted policymaking are among the structural factors that not only limit motivations but also narrow the practical pathways for transforming an idea into a business. These structures systematically reduce access to financial capital, workspaces, and markets. In the institutional sphere, the lack of alignment between supporting institutions (local government, development agencies, non-governmental organizations) and the actual needs of handicraft women prevents policies from being effective. Fragmented or short-term policies based on generalized gender assumptions are incapable of responding to the complex problems of women entrepreneurs.

Internal motivations and the entrepreneurial mindset of women (including creativity, the pursuit of independence, and the will to reproduce and transfer knowledge) play a key role in initiating and continuing activities. These motivations, combined with individual resilience, the ability to manage failure, adapt to risk, and continue activities in the face of family and social pressures, shape the sustainability of the businesses. Human capital (technical skills, marketing knowledge, ability to use information technology) is a vital variable that can act as an intersection point between the individual and structural layers; when human capital improves, women can better exploit market opportunities and form more effective support networks. Local and supra-local networks play a complementary role in business development; local networks provide emotional and practical support, while supra-local networks help expand the market and increase income. To bridge the gap between these two and scale up activities, professional associations and cooperatives play a key role by pooling resources and facilitating access to larger markets, provided there is transparent management, mutual trust, and member empowerment. Entering large urban markets, tourism, and online platforms increases sales and branding opportunities but requires digital skills and the ability to manage orders. Trust-based social capital enables long-term cooperation, and intermediaries can also help link these networks, provided their benefits are transparent and aligned with empowerment. Finally, despite challenges arising from gender norms within networks, women's networks can provide a safe space for knowledge and skill exchange.

The transformation of cultural capital into economic and social capital is a complex and feedback-driven process. Indigenous skills turn into income when the market, networks, and institutions provide opportunities for display and sale. Conversely, successful monetization can lead to an increase in symbolic and social capital, expanding the scope of activities. This feedback loop shows that isolated interventions (e.g., only providing loans) are effective only when combined with skill enhancement and networking. Paths to success and failure change over time; failure experiences can turn into learning and cognitive investments, paving the way for innovation. Therefore, the research perspective must go beyond a single time slice and consider longitudinal processes and the study of path evolution. There is a fundamental contradiction between cultural revival and market-driven premiumization. As handicrafts enter broader markets, the pressure for product adaptability may lead to a transformation in cultural authenticity and production forms; thus, social entrepreneurship in this field requires managing the conflict between preserving cultural authenticity and responding to economic demand. The

contradiction between women's economic independence and the division of household labor is also apparent: increased individual income does not necessarily lead to a reduction in asymmetrical pressures in the domestic division of labor and may even reproduce or intensify traditional roles, unless accompanied by programs for changing attitudes and family support.

Social entrepreneurship in handicrafts acts as a field of action for reshaping gender norms: women's active presence in the spheres of production and the market can re-represent and redefine gender role boundaries. This redefinition occurs at various levels, from changes in family attitudes towards the economic role of women to changes in the public image of women entrepreneurs in the media and policymaking. However, this redefinition is not a linear process and faces social, cultural, and institutional resistance; the capacity of women to translate these movements into sustainable changes depends on the extent of support from networks, institutions, and policies.

This research indicates that "women's social entrepreneurship in handicrafts" must be analyzed as a multi-level and interdisciplinary phenomenon that intertwines concepts such as cultural capital, social capital, gender, and institutionalism. From a theoretical perspective, a combined structure-agency analysis is the most appropriate framework for understanding this phenomenon: structures (institutions, norms, markets) simultaneously determine constraints and opportunities, and agents (women entrepreneurs), with their multiple capitals and internal and external resilience, engage in the reproduction or transformation of those structures. At the policy and practical level, it can be added that successful interventions require a systemic view, simultaneously addressing the symbolic (awareness-raising, attitude change), institutional (financial facilities, workspaces, support policies), and individual (training, consulting, and networking) levels. Interventions that are purely economic or technical, without addressing the cultural and social layers, cannot lead to sustainability.

Limitations

This research, by focusing on employed women in Tehran's handicraft sector, has limitations regarding generalizability to other regions and cultural contexts. Methodological constraints, including purposive qualitative sampling or issues with quantitative instrument validation, can affect the validity and generalizability of the results. Furthermore, reporting biases stemming from social norms may influence the accuracy of data, particularly concerning income or discrimination. Market dynamics and limited access to official information are other challenges that complicate a comprehensive analysis of the handicraft situation and women's employment in this field.

Suggestions

To strengthen and sustain women's social entrepreneurship in Tehran's handicraft sector, it is recommended that policymakers and non-governmental organizations focus on developing multifaceted support packages that include (a) practical training programs and business consulting to upgrade skills and market knowledge, (b) the creation of marketing networks and digital and physical platforms for access to broader markets, and © facilitative financial and legal policies (conditional microloans, location facilities, and assistance in smoothing legal barriers). These actions, coupled with awareness campaigns to reduce gender discrimination and gain family support, can mitigate contextual barriers and significantly increase the economic and social sustainability capacity of these women.

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