Women Entrepreneurs - A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: In the wake of globalisation women entrepreneurship is gaining a lot of importance. The academicians have kept on par with researches on women entrepreneurship. However review of literature shows that qualitative studies on women entrepreneurs in Indian context is scanty. The aim of this study is to explore how role stress is experienced and portrayed by the women entrepreneurs and also to know their coping strategies. The study is qualitative in nature adopting phenomenology as the approach. Six women entrepreneurs participated in the study and the data was collected by semi structured interviews. The result is depicted as themes evolved by the analysis of the interview transcripts. Future studies can be done to find the ways the stress of the entrepreneurs impacts the colleagues and also background of the entrepreneur who might have some impact on the threshold of stress of women entrepreneurs.

Key words: entrepreneur, phenomenology, qualitative research

Introduction: The world has begun to accept the fact that women are an indispensable part of the global struggle for a stable economy. Same is the scenario in India wherein women have become the symbol of change. The reasons for such a change are: increase in women's education, changing socio-cultural values, increasing awareness and consciousness in women and the rise in economic independence. In such a changing scenario stress becomes inevitable. Role theory defines in terms of behavioural expectations in relation to others (Linton, 1936). Role has two subsystems: Role Space and Role Set(Pareek 1997) Stress occurs when perceived pressure exceeds your perceived ability to cope (Palmer, 2005). Role stress is the stress experienced by the person because of their role (job) in a social system. They assume a role based on the expectation of the self and others at work place. So the women are subject to a greater stress as the demands of home and entrepreneurial activity at times causes conflict. Considering all these factors this study was designed to study the factors that lead to stress and also the way the women entrepreneurs cope with them.

Review of literature:

Entrepreneurship and the research in the field of entrepreneurship has been has been growing at a very fast pace (Dean, Shook, & Payne, 2007; Short, Kitchen, Combs, & Ireland, 2010) but entrepreneurship articles have accounted for as little as 2% of the total articles published in leading management journals (Busenitz et. al., 2003). Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010), stated that the primary objective of a phenomenological study is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person or a group of people around a specific phenomenon. Due to the nature of the study it is found appropriate to use phenomenology. Entrepreneurial role stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the business or job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the entrepreneurs (Naik, 2011). While a lot of literature is available on stress management study on stress of women entrepreneurs in Indian context based on phenomenological study is hard and few and therefore this study is of value during the present times.
**Research Methodology:** As the aim of this study is to explore lived experiences of role stress by women entrepreneurs and to study their coping strategies, the researcher adopted qualitative study based on phenomenology. The study is part of the thesis of the first author. A sample of 6 women entrepreneurs were chosen for the study. The qualitative study also allows for a small sample size (Barker, Elliott & Pistrang, 2005). Snowball sampling was used for the study as it helped the researcher in getting the right sample. Principles of ethical research (McLeod, 2009) were used as the guidelines for the study. The various experiences with direct quotes can be captured (Van Manen, 1990); and process entails obtaining the perception of the participants (Patton, 1990).

Semi-structured interviews were used as the tool for data collection. All the interviews were in English. It lasted for about an hour. The areas that were concentrated included their experiences in starting the business, their coping strategies and the stress encountered experiences of success and failure. The interview was recorded and transcribed the same days. The notes taken during the interview were also transcribed the same day so that no information was lost. The researchers used inductive analysis to identify categories, themes, and patterns that emerge from the data (Janisick, 1994). The coding procedures of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were followed which resulted in identification of themes from the narratives that are presented in the section on findings.

**Results of the study:** The questions addressed in this study are what are the various factors that lead to stress among women entrepreneurs and what are the coping strategies adopted. While all entrepreneurs agreed that they find the process of running the business stressful the intensity of stress varied.

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**Stressors:** The various themes that evolved as to the factors the leads to stress in women entrepreneurs are expectations from self and family and transition from work to home and vice versa.

**Expectations:** From the interview the researcher learned that one of the major stressors were the conflict in fulfilling multiple roles both as an entrepreneur and as a family pillar. There were two aspects to the role conflict: the traditional element of time balanced equal time devoted to work and family (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002), and the role of dependent care which is specific to the Indian context. All the participants in my study had extended family to take care of.
“My in-laws never wanted me to set up a business as it was too risky an affair. So I was always in an anxiety if I would be successful in my business because if I do not succeed I would be failing in their eyes. Failure or even a set back in business would not be appreciated by the family. In our culture anything a woman does in a family is to be considered as only of secondary importance”

“I have borrowed money to set up my business so I have expectations of my own. I would like to finish my debts at the earliest. I feel am self critical. I keep evaluating myself in terms of my goals. That keeps me going but I think it adds up to my stress too.

Most of the entrepreneurs had role models and they served as constant motivations for them to strive through difficult times.

“I feel it is a question of our mind our decisions. If we are passionate about doing something we will be extremely patient and work towards it. Nothing can deter us.

Though most agreed that the stress is a part of their entrepreneurial life one entrepreneur who has been in business said different.

“The system is in place there’s nothing for me to worry. Things will be taken care of. I have seen it all”

Transition from work to home and vice versa: Role stress is said to be the maximum in the entrepreneurs when they have to play multiple role of wife, daughter, daughter in law, mother and entrepreneur.

“The daily transition from work life to home life can sometimes feel just as daunting as returning to Earth from space. Even though home is much more important, the shift into role of a parent and spouse is not easy after a rough day at the office. I used to feel guilty in the beginning but now I have overcome that but still that leads to stress in me”

Coping with stress:The lived experiences as to how women entrepreneurs cope with stress are mentioned below as breaks, supporting people and maintaining positive image.

Breaks: The entrepreneurs quoted in several forms that they all have some way of ensuring that they keep their calm.

“I am a very religious person so it makes it easy for me to relax. It calms me down. I start my day with prayers and I pray for all my employees too. As entrepreneurs we must learn to make ourselves strong and faith gives us that strength.”

“At work I encourage my team members to share personal stories as it builds bonding between them. We are a team which has been together for long time many since the time of inception. You can hear a lot of laughter during break times. We have an informal environment which kind of helps especially in stressful situations.”

Family: In all the interviews family was mentioned as an indivisible factor in the lives of the women entrepreneurs.

“I make sure I spend time with my family as it helps me relieve me of my tensions. I discuss everything with my family. Ours is a close knit family.”
“In the Indians culture we are blessed with close relationships. Also the maids are of great help without whom it would be impossible to manage work and home”

Though many a themes are in line with the previous literature a contribution to the literature which evolved from this study is the “dressing to feel good”

**Self image:** Higher self-confidence enhances the individual’s motivation level and gives them with a vested significance in his performance an encouragement to build up and maintain his self-esteem (Bénabou&Tirole, 2002). High self-esteem has been reported to be one of the strongest predictors of psychological wellbeing (Diener, 1984). This study however has analysed that women feel stress relieved when they spend time on themselves and perceive to be appearing good.

“Wearing something new helps me de-stress. Also pampering myself. I feel wearing something nice makes me feel good about our self and that makes us start the day in a totally new perspective. Also appearance matters in business.”

**Conclusion:** The study was done to know the lived experiences of stress and ways of coping and it was achieved by interpretative phenemenological analysis of the data collected from the women entrepreneurs. In conclusion the six participants of the study provided in-depth, intuitive and compelling data that led to several findings, some supporting existing literature Strazdins& Broom, (2003) and others contributing to it. However it was found that the findings were different from the finding that women simply diverts thinking Syed Zamberi, (2010)Managing and maintaining a positive self-image is found to be an important finding of this study as a stress coping strategy adopted by women entrepreneurs.

Like any other study this study is also not free from limitations. As the study was based on in-depth semi structured interviews much importance has not been given to the background of the entrepreneur which might have some impact on the threshold of stress of each participant. Future studies can focus on a 360 degree analysis using all stakeholders of the business.

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