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Woman Entrepreneurship in the Al-Batinah Region of Oman: An identification of the Barriers

By Ruqaya Al-Sadi¹, Rakesh Belwal², Raya Al-Badi³

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has its origin from the French word *entreprendre* that means “to undertake” Burch (1986). The word reflects a willingness to do something, and usually the person who exhibits the willingness is known as an entrepreneur. There are many definitions for entrepreneurship but, simply, entrepreneurship is the process of identifying new opportunities and transferring them into marketable ideas, products and services. Lazear (2005: 649) defines entrepreneurship as "the process of assembling necessary factors of production consisting of human, physical, and information resources and doing so in an efficient manner" and entrepreneurs as those who "put people together in particular ways and combine them with physical capital and ideas to create a new product or to produce an existing." Entrepreneurship is considered as a factor of production, linked to innovation and risk taking, where entrepreneurial compensations are tied to uncertainty and profits (Montanye, 2006).

Several studies debate the definition of entrepreneurship (Howorth, Tempest, & Coupland, 2005), albeit entrepreneurship is all-pervasive as it occurs in every firm, enterprise, and sector (Collins, Smith & Hannon, 2005). Likewise, entrepreneurs are found in every country and in different enterprises therein. According to Montanye (2006), entrepreneurship enables talented individuals to realize rewards and enable them to live better than others. The drive to entrepreneurship is innate to human beings, as they compete in life for profit, similar to what they do in business (Montanye, 2006). At the micro level, while entrepreneurship benefits individuals or teams, at the macro level it creates and catalyzes employment and economic growth (World Bank, 2009). However, “To find a single appropriate and ubiquitous definition of entrepreneurship is a challenging problem for academic researchers and students of entrepreneurship” (Louw, van Eeden, Bosch, & Venter, 2003: 7).

In developing countries, small and medium enterprises are important for the economic growth and development. Entrepreneurship supports the process of economic development, fosters economic growth, job creation, and reduces rural unemployment and migration. Women, all over the world, have demonstrated success in handling small scale projects. In addition to meeting the needs of some large-scale industries and boosting innovation, the small-scale enterprises help the commercial and industrial community and also the development of women (OCCI, 2006).

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Recently, the Sultanate of Oman has devised certain strategies to diversify the economic activities to sectors other than oil, on which the economy was heavily dependent earlier. The government encourages the private sector and focuses on the human resources with a special drive towards ‘Omanisation’, inducing Omani nationals to support and create enterprises (McElwee and Al Riyami, 2003; Al-Mansory and Nagee, 2003).

To boost entrepreneurship and the Small and Medium Enterprises, the government of Oman has taken many initiatives such as the *Sanad* Program, Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KON), and projects under the Oman Development Bank and the Ministry of Social Development. The private sector has also created similar programs such as Youth Projects Development Scheme, *Intilaqa* Program and *Grofin Oman*, to boost entrepreneurship. Furthermore, private sector banks such as HSBC Bank, Middle East Limited, Bank Muscat, Sohar Bank, and National Bank of Oman also support the small and medium enterprises. Small and medium sectors such as sewing, cosmetics, design and other sectors that do not require large amounts of capital have attracted largely Omani women (Nadwa, 2009). However, there are certain barriers that challenge women entrepreneurs.

Many studies have been conducted on women entrepreneurs since the beginning of the 1980s, but more research is needed to understand various aspects of the women entrepreneurship. However, there is a dearth of research on women entrepreneurs in the Gulf, where the economy relies more on the oil sector and expatriates (Dechant & Al Lamky, 2005). Recognizing the presence of some self-motivated women entrepreneurs in Oman, this study identifies the barriers that they confront and highlights the challenges that are needed to boost entrepreneurship. This study aims to find the factors inhibiting women entrepreneurship in the Al-Batinah region of Oman, focusing on women entrepreneurs especially from the small and medium scale enterprises.

A Review of Women entrepreneurship

The rising number of female business owners is, currently, a global trend. In advanced market economies, women own more than 25% of all businesses (Woldie & Adersua, 2004). Walker et al. (2007) argue that historically women were “pushed” rather than “pulled” into business ownership, but more recent studies have indicated that overall many women now actively choose self-employment, specifically younger women. In a different study, Walker et al. (2008) observe that women’s preference to home-based business ownership is driven predominantly by the flexibility afforded to lifestyle and the ability to balance work and family.

Women entrepreneurs can significantly contribute in poverty reduction, mobilization of entrepreneurial initiatives, autonomy, and in accelerating the achievement of wider socio-economic objectives (Belwal & Singh, 2008). However, the contribution of women entrepreneurs depends on their performance, which in turn is affected by the underlying facilitators and barriers, understanding of which is a key to nurturing a balance economy and the growth in a long run.

In his search for factors that influence the survival of women owned small business startups in Ghana, Chea (2004) observed innovation, flexible business planning, strong family support systems, strategic social networks, professional development, and

economic policies as prime facilitators. Similar studies on women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia and Nigeria found 'support from family, society, and government', 'presence of an environment of work culture, awareness, and trust', education, and training as facilitators; the main inhibitors to success were lack of competence and exposure, problems in finding the markets, limited opportunities of promotion and participation, limited amount of government and institutional support, and absence of technological knowhow (Belwal and Singh, 2006; Woldie and Adersua, 2004). Approaching from a social capital theoretical framework, Brunetto et al. (2007) find that trust affects the networking behaviour of women entrepreneurs where government involvement may affect the relational dynamics. Rather than pinpointing specific facilitators or inhibitors, Dhaliwal (2000), however, contemplated that there are distinctive issues faced by South Asian women, and that each case is unique and must be weighed on its own merits.

However, women entrepreneurs in developed countries such as the US are much more ambitious in constructing a professional identity. James et al. (2006) revealed that they actively draw on role models from different domains and prefer to learn from external role models. Petridou et al. (2008) appraise rural women entrepreneurs running co-operatives in Greece to examine the effects of training support on their entrepreneurial skills and attitudes, co-operatives' viability and growth prospects, and work-family balance. Their study illustrates that participants perceived training positively in terms of skill improvements, identification and capturing of business opportunities, effective co-operation and flexibility in decision making, more positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship, development and growth prospects for the cooperative and better work-family balance.

Women entrepreneurship in the Arab world has certain peculiarities and demands specific attention. The Arab world faces a different politico-economic setup, culture, and family structure, where people are highly conscious of each other, and of family memberships, identities, and status. McElwee & Al Riyami (2003) argue that gender differences are enshrined in the Islamic holy book and Shari'a law, limiting woman's role in the family to either that of a wife or a mother. Employers give priority to males, in employment and promotion, even if women command higher merits. Women, despite their interest, lack work opportunities and represent only 9.7% of the labor force (Al Mandhry, 2000: 20; McElwee & Al Riyami, 2003). Jamali (2009) observes that such differences even in Lebanon - a relatively liberal country, and conclude that gender differences in identification of opportunities are, however, linked to differences in human capital that includes education and work experience as important variables.

The Arab world has its own outlook on women's involvement in business activities. Sidani (2005) presents varying discourses between Muslim scholars and active feminists pertaining to women's work and how it is impacted by interpretations of Islam, and argues that developing the status of women in Arab societies needs a major reassessment of Muslim history and tradition. Amid all the setbacks, women in the Arab world look further to establish their careers and identities. Some Arab women managers have succeeded in creating their social identities even with their traditional clothing attire, in pursuit of managerial careers (Omair, 2009).

Although various sectors of the economy are open to Omani women for work, their participation is limited and does not exceed 12% of the total effective institutions (Omani Women Workshop, 2009). Collectively, in Arab states, 28% of the women

participate in the work force (Nayeem, 2010). Although women have benefitted from the recent initiatives, they still represent a very small percentage of business owners in the Sultanate (Omani Women Workshop, 2009).

However, Oman marks a significant departure from its traditional and exclusive male dominated decision-making situation. The era of exclusive patriarchal dominance in leadership positions is changing to an evolving phase of women's empowerment (Al-Lamky, 2007). Omani Women Workshop (2009) observes that legal, educational, training, and financial support have offered some opportunities to Omani Women in the field of entrepreneurship. McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) find that factors such as family support and encouragement have positively influenced women in emerging as entrepreneurs in Oman. They note also that increased educational opportunities for women and the level of education have led to increased productivity.

Although the experience of women's entry in the field of entrepreneurship is a relatively new experience in Oman, it has not been free from challenges and difficulties. Task-related issues such as funding difficulties, access to business information and technology, and personal issues such as self-reliance and the need for change and continuous innovation to ensure the ability of competitiveness impose major challenges, especially in the light of rapid advances in various sectors at the local and the global levels (Omani Women Workshop, 2009).

Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

Naqshbandi (2004) in his article on women entrepreneurship (in Arabic) affirms that the entry of women in the field of entrepreneurship in Asia and Africa is constrained by a large number of barriers and challenges. Contextualizing the basic framework of El Namaki & Gerritson (Birley, 1988), he identifies these challenges under seven categories:

- 1- *Barriers of infrastructure* such as access to credit, access to technology, support and guidance, information on opportunities, government support, industrial support and financial support (for raising capital);
- 2- *Professional barriers* such as traditional occupational restrictions, lack of professional education, generating skill, and knowledge of industrial collaboration;
- 3- *Educational and training barriers* such as vocational training opportunities, lack of information/ advice on how to start an enterprise, basic educations, and no time for training/ upgrading skills;
- 4- *Social and cultural barriers* such as values and family structure, combining family and work life, and gender bias;
- 5- *Legal barriers* such as discrimination in acting independently and assuming responsibility;
- 6- *Behavioral constraints* such as self-confidence, finding the right contacts for your business ventures, gaining of acceptance/ respect of people, and the negative image of self; and
- 7- *Barriers of role*: leadership requirements, compatibility with tasks, and the pressures to achieve.

Adopting the above framework, this study conducts a detailed survey on women entrepreneurs in the Al Batinah region of Oman and assesses the major obstacles that they face while running their business ventures. The main purpose of this research is to reveal to what extent these factors and components affect women entrepreneurs in Oman and to give a descriptive account of associated problems. The paper addresses the following research questions in its coverage:

1. What are the challenges faced by Woman Entrepreneurs in Al Batinah Region of Oman?
2. What factors inhibit the women from starting their entrepreneurial ventures?
3. How could improve the participation of women in the entrepreneurial ventures?

Methodology

The survey targeted Women Entrepreneurs from the Al-Batinah region of Oman, who are registered with the Oman Chamber of Commerce (OCC). Our initial contact with the OCC office at Sohar - the headquarters of the Al-Batinah region, led to a list of 165 individuals. To capture the responses of these individuals on the barriers to entrepreneurship, a structured questionnaire was prepared, which was aimed to be administered to this entire population.

The questionnaire was initially prepared in English and had both open-ended as well as close-ended questions. For easy administration and securing clear responses, the questionnaire in English was converted into Arabic. Face validity of the questionnaire was performed to ensure the relevance of content and interpretation by discussing with experienced faculty members of Sohar University. The exercise produced a response of 101 completed questionnaires and 22 interviews. Soon after the administration of questionnaires, interviews were conducted with those who confirmed their availability and interest to cooperate further.

Although we tried to contact each of the 165 women on the list, we could contact only 101. Out of these 101 women, 27 women were contacted by phone, 33 were visited in their business ventures, and 41 were contacted through the OCC. Out of the remaining 64, seven women refused to meet with the team, some of them took the questionnaires but did not reply. Fifty-seven women entrepreneurs were found no more in business.

A descriptive analysis was made, comprising the generation of frequency tables and bar diagrams. The percentage/number of cases was computed for each variable of interest for reporting and comparing quantitative data (number of cases represents percentage too, since the total number of cases was 101). SPSS software was used to generate the frequency tables and to perform the reliability analysis. MS Excel was used to create bar diagrams. For comparing the variables, a weighted score was calculated for each sub-component of the main barriers.

Analysis and findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The profile of sample respondents indicates that 53% of the entrepreneurs were married and 69 % of them resided in the city. A majority had secondary or higher

education, and were less than 30 years of age. Sixty percent had monthly income more than 200 Omani Rials (1 Omani Rial = 2.67 USD). Almost 45% had driving license and drove cars for their personal mobility.

Table 1
Profile of Respondents

Particulars	Number	Percent	Particulars	Number	Percent
Marital Status			Residing in		
Unmarried	47	46.5	City	69	68.3
Married	53	52.5	Village	32	31.7
Divorced/ Widowed	1	1.0	Driver's License		
Education Level			Yes	46	45.5
Primary	7	6.9	No	55	54.5
Secondary and more	94	93.1	Age		
Monthly Income			Less than 30 years	66	65.3
Less than 200 RO	41	40.6	30-50	35	34.7
200-500 RO	43	42.6	Nationality		
More than 500 RO	17	16.8	Omani	101	100

Further to what is covered in the sample profile, 42 % have children. A sizeable majority (80%) have less than two children. Eighty-eight percent have domestic help in their homes and almost half of them work alone, while a quarter depend on family for work related assistance. Almost 95% of the women participate in their domestic decisions and 61% participate in decision-making bodies of other organizations or entities. While 28% of the entrepreneurs work 8 hours a day, 14% work for 6 hours and another 14% for 12 hours. Almost 36% work 6 days a week, 28% work 5 days a week, and other 23% work 7 days a week. Only 14% work less than 4 days a week.

Personal mobility affects women entrepreneurs. Those not having driving licenses, have to depend on others. Some women travel by using rented transportation, which becomes costly. Others depend on family, friends, or relatives. Also, some women use private lady drivers, while entrepreneurs with large enterprise also use company drivers. Balancing home and work is a big challenge. Most of these women work from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm and complete routine or any specific business related work usually within these time limits. The women need to travel to attend conferences organized by OCC, and prepare reports. "Raising a typical Arab family consisting on an average 10 children is not possible for us", this is what was stated by one such entrepreneur.

A majority of respondents work alone. They are involved in activities such as the making of Omani caps for males (known as Kemma), running traditional retail outlets, manufacturing handicrafts, working as ladies tailors, and running beauty parlors. A quarter of women depend on their family for the feasibility study of the project, the initial planning, and financial support at the beginning. Their participate in domestic decisions are generally related to family budget, children's education, other family related issues, and future planning such as construction and design of the houses. Friday is the Islamic holy day, so most of them do not work on this day. On this day, gathering with the

family, entertaining children, and taking a break from the routine of work are prime on their agendas.

Table 2 indicates that most of the women entrepreneurs (80%) work in micro and small scale enterprises. However, a few run large enterprises having more than 250 employees. Respondents were found running big businesses such as laundry services of high quality, construction companies, housekeeping and cleaning services, and food suppliers.

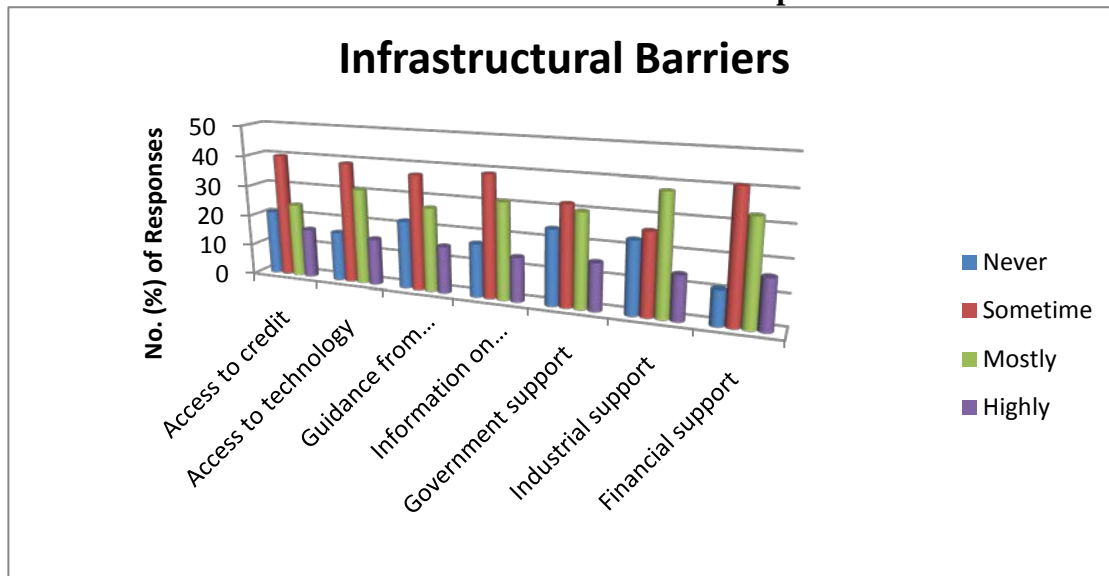
Table 2
Women entrepreneurs and Enterprises

	Number	Percent
Micro (1- 9 employees)	60	59.4
Small (10 - 49 employees)	21	20.8
Medium (50-249 employees)	15	14.9
Large (250+ employees)	5	5.0

Barriers affecting women entrepreneurs

This subsection covers the seven barriers and the intensity with which they affect women entrepreneurs in the North Al-Batinah region of Oman. Table 3 in combination with Figure 1 indicates that all seven barriers affect the women entrepreneurs. In approximately 20 cases only, these barriers have no effect, but in the remaining cases they affect sometimes or mostly. *Financial support, access to technology, industrial support, and information on opportunities* affect with higher intensities (in reducing order) among others.

Figure 1
Infrastructural barriers and their effect on women entrepreneurs



Women complained about the unavailability of capital for their projects and the limitation of financial support from institutions. “We need an increase in the amount of loans which are offered to the women and a greater support from financing bodies”, expressed one entrepreneur. Some reported technology and related materials as expensive and also highlighted a shortage of trained people. They further reported a lack of industrial support, as not enough information flows from industrial companies, and difficulties in establishing communication with such companies. They cited the unavailability of centralized modes of information and complained that most opportunities are given to the already well-established companies.

Table 3
Infrastructural Barriers

	Access to credit	Access to technology	Guidance from institutions	Information on opportunities	Government support	Industrial support	Financial support
Never	21	16	22	17	24	23	11
Sometimes	40	39	37	39	32	26	41
Mostly	24	31	27	31	30	38	33
Highly	16	15	15	14	15	14	16
Weighted score	136	146	136	143	137	144	155

Table 4 in combination with Figure 2 indicates that while all four components affect women entrepreneurs professionally, *generation of skills* and *knowledge to collaborate* affect more intensity than the other two, *traditional restrictions* and *lack of professional education*.

Table 4
Professional Barriers

	Traditional restrictions	Lack of professional education	Generation of skills	Knowledge to collaborate
Never	32	38	20	16
Sometimes	43	29	40	33
Mostly	20	27	27	34
Highly	6	7	14	18
Weighted score	101	104	136	155

In the area of educational and training barrier, Table 5 and Figure 3 collectively indicate that *training opportunities* have the largest effect, followed by *timings for*

training. Basic education as well as information on education also affect but with lower intensities.

Among traditional restrictions are difficulties in travelling alone, working after hours, and difficulties in attending places such as hotels. “We are bound by social customs and values, which do not allow us to be present in such places”, claimed one entrepreneur. They felt constrained with lower business-related skills such as newer ways of doing business. Collaborations are affected due to weak networking or relationship between the parties and lack of good communication. “We don’t have a common platform where we can share the experiences and discuss our issues with each other or with the concerned authorities”, replied another entrepreneur. Training opportunities are not freely available, as there are shortages of professional institutions, high costs of education, and transportation problems to attend institutions. Further, timings for such training impose difficulties as hours are not suitable, because of family obligations, and work fatigue.

Figure 2
Professional barriers and their effect on women entrepreneurs

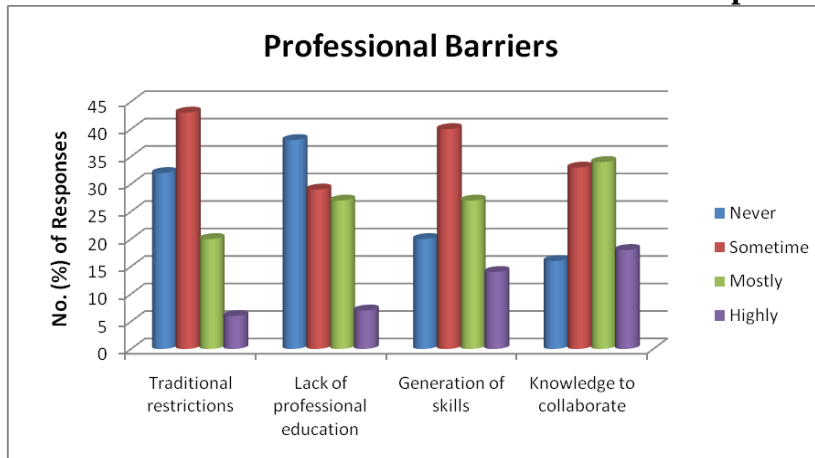


Table 5
Education & Training Barriers

	Training opportunities	Information on education	Time for training	Basic education
Never	19	27	21	30
Sometimes	39	47	35	43
Mostly	28	21	37	18
Highly	15	6	8	10
Weighted score	140	107	133	109

Figure 3
Education and Training Barriers and their effect on women entrepreneurs

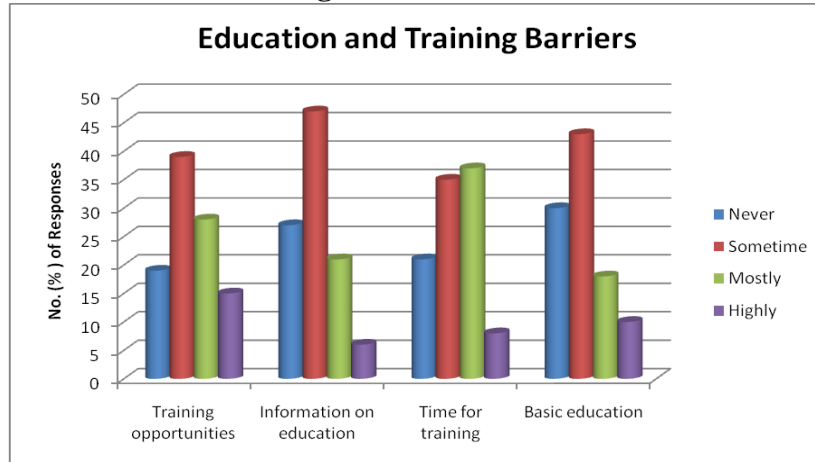


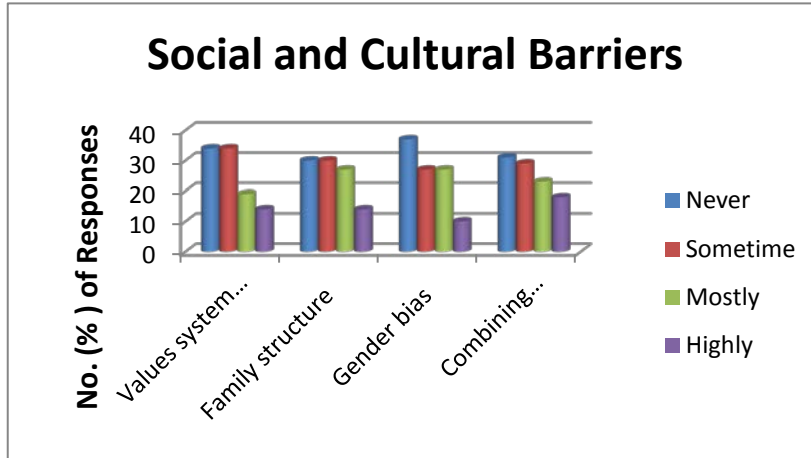
Table 6 and Figure 4 collectively indicate that *combining family and work life* along with *family structure* affect more in terms of intensity. The factors *value system of the society* as well as *gender-bias* also affect, but with lower intensities.

The values system of society exerts constraints as some sections of society expect women to practice a full veil on their face, restricts genders to mix at work, and puts restrictions in traveling alone, etc. “Our customs and traditions discourage women in seeking or offering employment. We find it difficult to review such proposals independently, to travel and recruit people, and interact with other institutions.”, asserted an entrepreneur who wished to recruit people for her business venture. Family structure is patriarchic, women are supposed to do only the minor works, and are restricted from making decisions and sharing responsibilities, outside their homes. Combining family and work life is difficult because amidst other constraints, the women find difficult to rationalize their time between their work and the family.

Table 6
Social and Cultural Barriers

	Values system of society	Family structure	Gender bias	Combining family and work life
Never	34	30	37	31
Sometimes	34	30	27	29
Mostly	19	27	27	23
Highly	14	14	10	18
Weighted score	114	126	111	129

Figure 4
Social and Cultural Barriers and their effect on women entrepreneurs



Regarding the discrimination of the legal system on women acting independently and assuming responsibilities, the respondents lacked specific knowledge. While 42% said that laws do not discriminate in their assuming responsibilities, a considerably lower proportion (30%) admitted that laws do not discriminate in their acting independently (See Table 7).

Table 7
Legal Barriers

	Act independently	Responsibility center
Never	30	42
Sometimes	32	28
Mostly	18	20
Highly	21	11

Table 8 and Figure 5 collectively indicate that interacting with males along with finding the right contacts affect with higher intensity. Almost half of the respondents feel that self confidence and negative image of the self have never been barriers for them, while the other half of the respondents consider gaining respect from others as a barrier.

Table 8
Behavioral Barriers

	Self confidence	Negative image of self	Interacting with males	Finding the right contacts	Gaining respect from others
Never	51	45	17	42	31
Sometimes	22	27	42	24	48
Mostly	10	21	30	13	19
Highly	18	8	12	22	3
Weighted score	96	93	138	116	95

Figure 5
Behavioral Barriers and their effect on women entrepreneurs

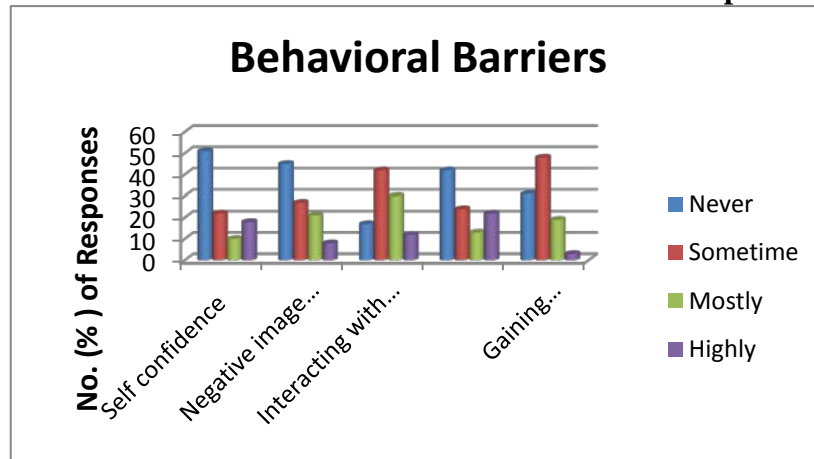
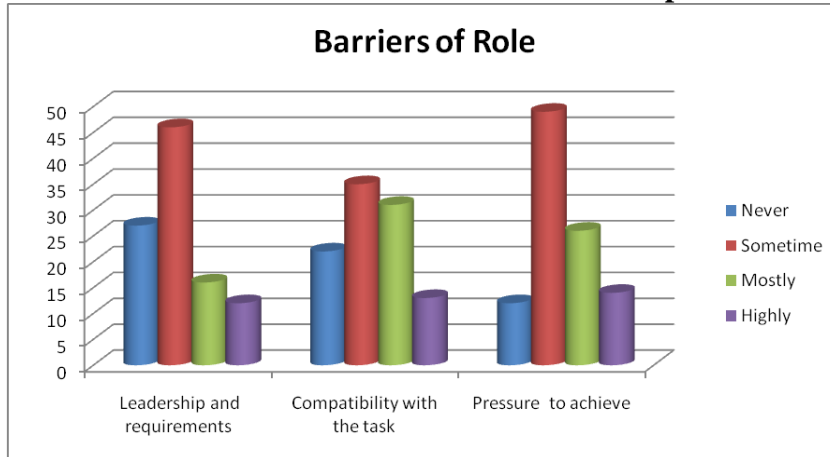


Table 9 and Figure 6 collectively indicate that *pressure to achieve* along with *compatibility with the task* affect with higher intensity. Almost 72% respondents consider *leadership and requirements* as a barrier.

Table 9
Barriers of Role

	Leadership and requirements	Compatibility with the task	Pressure to achieve
Never	27	22	12
Sometimes	46	35	49
Mostly	16	31	26
Highly	12	13	14
Weighted score	114	136	143

Figure 6
Barriers of Role and their effect on women entrepreneurs



Further to what is presented above, Table 10 presents the most important benefits which women perceive in entrepreneurship. Similarly, Table 11 presents the most formidable challenges which women perceive in their ventures.

Table 10
Major benefits that women perceive being an entrepreneur

No.	Reasons	Number
1	Freedom to take decision/ decision making	31
2	Freedom to choose any type of work and to work any time	22
3	To earn more profit as an individual	18
4	Self-dependence	10
5	Increase in skills and experience	9
6	Apply creation and innovation at work	8
7	Opportunity to deal with others and getting respect	7
8	Participation in the social services	6

Table 11
Major challenges that women face being an entrepreneur

No.	Reasons	Number
1	How to get the capital/ sources of capital	34
2	How to choose the location	19
3	Society's outlook at the women entrepreneurs	15
4	Supplier search and interactions	13
5	Management of time (balancing work and home)	10
6	Dealing with the males	8
7	Problems with the customers	6
8	How to market their products	5
9	Personal mobility (Transportation)	4

Discussion and policy implications

Taking note of the above findings, this section discusses the barriers affecting women entrepreneurs in Oman, particularly the Al-Batinah Region. The profile indicates that most of the entrepreneurs are less than 30 years old and almost half are unmarried. Interview discussions indicate that after marriage women have to follow the expectations of their husbands and in-laws, who might not be supportive. This finding coincides with the quote of an Abu Dhabi based resident - "Irrespective of socio-economic independence, there are certain expectations from women that haven't changed with time. The pressure to get married, have children, and nurture a domestic life continues to exist" (Nayeem, 2010). The study found that almost all the potential barriers identified affect the women entrepreneurs, though with different intensities. Most prominent among these are *financial support, knowledge to collaborate, access to technology, industrial support, pressure to achieve, interacting with males, training opportunities, information on opportunities, and the time for training*. This indicates that women need support in raising finance, in opening up in their interactions with males, and in securing training opportunities. Khan (2010: 4) reports that "Networking in the workplace is very important and this can be difficult for some women who may not be able to interact freely with men." *Traditional restrictions, value system of society, gender bias, lack of professional education, finding the right contacts, negative image of self, and self confidence* are the barriers that affect with lower intensities. This along with the findings on Table 11 indicates that the women, despite affected by these barriers, have learnt to live with some of these. Khan (2010: 4) reports that "Arabs see the need to adapt to the modern world to survive economically and politically, but they also do not want to lose traditional values". The last two components, namely *negative image of self* and *self confidence* occupying the lowest position indicate that the sample respondents have generated some self confidence and positive outlook for their work and do not find these two as major barriers in their growth. The benefits cited by the women in Table 10 support this argument.

In view of the findings and the discussion, to ensure the success of women in their ventures the following policy implications are suggested:

1. Women need to be trained for better time management to create a balance between work and home.
2. Women need better understanding from the community, and their support.
3. There is a need for support from the government in diverse areas related to supportive policies, legal protection, financial support, professional education, and training.
4. Local chambers of commerce or other professional bodies need to assist women in finding raw materials, suppliers, and markets for finished products.
5. There is a need to develop a communication system to facilitate better information flow among stakeholders.
6. Women need to be given updates through the organization of workshops and conferences in related business sectors for better developmental plans, implementation, and control of their ventures.

Conclusions

Entrepreneurship is a desirable trait for catalyzing the economic growth and development in developing countries. The participation of women as entrepreneurs is low all over the world. Research on women entrepreneurs is scant, particularly in the context of the Arab world. Women entrepreneurship in the Arab world has certain peculiarities in itself and demands specific attention. The Arab world has its own outlook on women's involvement in business activities. Although the experience of women's entry in the field of entrepreneurship is a relatively new phenomenon in Oman, it has not been free from challenges and difficulties. This study focused on the factors inhibiting women entrepreneurship in the Al-Batinah region of Oman, and observed that barriers related to infrastructure, profession, education and training, society and culture, legal system, behavior, and role, all affect women entrepreneurs. Women are involved in activities such as the making of Omani caps for males, running traditional retail outlets, manufacturing handicrafts, tailoring, and operating beauty parlors. Although a quarter of women depend on their family for the initial planning and financial support, almost 95% of such women participate in their domestic decision making. The most prominent barriers that affect women entrepreneurship are financial support, knowledge to collaborate, access to technology, industrial support, pressure to achieve, interacting with males, training opportunities, information on opportunities, and the time for training. Personal mobility affects those who do not have a driving licence. This affects more those women who work alone in their ventures. Women entrepreneurship is constrained after their marriage and a drop-out tends to take place when the families which they join after marriage are non supportive. Despite these constraints, women in Oman are emerging as entrepreneurs, since they have revealed some self-confidence and positive outlook for their work. They have learnt to face some of the barriers and to compromise with others, especially those which are connected to the value system, tradition, and family structure.

The role of women entrepreneurs has been growing and progressing throughout the world. Creating a balance between work and home is not easy, especially in the Arab world, and particularly Oman where the socio-cultural expectations are highly challenging. For women, raising a family in itself is not an easy task and beyond it successfully running a business adds additional responsibility. Women demand social,

institutional and family support to succeed in their efforts. To ensure the success of women in their ventures, there is a clear need for supportive policies, education and training opportunities, understanding from the community, establishment of a communication system, and work-related assistance.

Significance and limitations

This study illustrates and focuses on women entrepreneurship in Oman how it is developing; it observes and reports the hindrances; and it suggests some measures for improvement in the role of women entrepreneurs. Overall, it adds to the literature on entrepreneurship, especially in the context of socio-cultural aspects and the Islamic Arab world, where the literature is still scant. The study is limited to a particular region of Oman and covers only those women who are registered with OCC. Hence any generalization of our findings has to be tempered by these limitations. Although the survey was personally administered by the researchers, the biases on the part of respondents could also impose some limitation and impact the outcomes of the study. Furthermore, responses from the women who quitted from their business could not be secured. Although the team met three of such women personally, they avoided discussing on the topic, and briefly responded that they faced some problems - one of them attributed it as a failure in partnership.

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