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The Role of Family Networks in Business Creation by Female Entrepreneurs in the Bejaïa Region

دور الشبكات العائلية في إنشاء الأعمال التجارية من قبل رائدات الأعمال في منطقة بجاية

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Abstract:

The economic reforms introduced in Algeria have marked the emergence of the private sector, whose objective is to absorb unemployment. SMEs and female entrepreneurship are at the centre of this development, upon which the hopes for job creation rest. Research in the sociological field reveals the strong presence of family networks amongst female entrepreneurs during the business creation process. The qualitative survey conducted through open-ended interviews with thirteen (13) female entrepreneurs operating in the Bejaïa region, within the framework of a pre-survey, allowed us to categorise types of links—strong ties and weak ties. The research revealed a typology of support received from these networks and characteristics that define the female entrepreneur profile.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurship, businesses, family networks, social capital.

المخلص:

أدت الإصلاحات الاقتصادية التي أدخلت في الجزائر إلى ظهور القطاع الخاص، الذي يهدف إلى استيعاب البطالة. وتقع الشركات الصغيرة والمتوسطة وريادة الأعمال النسائية في قلب هذا التطور، حيث تعلق عليها آمال خلق فرص عمل. تؤكد الأبحاث في مجال علم الاجتماع على وجود روابط عائلية قوية بين رائدات الأعمال خلال عملية إنشاء الشركات. سمحت لنا الدراسة النوعية التي أجريناها من خلال مقابلات مفتوحة مع ثلاث عشرة (13) رائدة أعمال تعمل في منطقة بجاية، في إطار دراسة استقصائية أولية، بتصنيف أنواع الروابط، القوية منها والضعيفة. وكذلك كشفت لنا عن أنواع المساعدة التي تتلقاها من هذه الروابط، والخصائص التي تميز رائدة الأعمال النشيطة. الكلمات المفتاحية: ريادة الأعمال، ريادة الأعمال النسائية، الشركات، الشبكات العائلية، رأس المال الاجتماعي.

1. INTRODUCTION

The interest in SMEs became clearly apparent through the implementation of liberal economic reforms. The orientation towards SMEs emerged in the context of the transition to a market economy as an alternative to revitalising investment and addressing the exhaustion of the basic industrialisation model in Algeria, attested to by the collapse of the public sector. In recent years, reforms and government support measures for SME development have been implemented, promoting business creation, which has encouraged women to enter the entrepreneurial sphere (Haderbache B., 2024).

Female entrepreneurship in Algeria is undergoing constant evolution, with female entrepreneurs representing a significant proportion of the female workforce, accounting for 18.8% according to the National Statistics Office (ONS) in 2019.

Studies of this phenomenon have sought to illustrate female entrepreneurship in certain dimensions such as: the profile of self-employed women, the profile of enterprises led by women and their sectors of activity. However, these new actors in the Algerian economy remain poorly understood in terms of the social networks that drive them to realise their future projects. For this reason, we conducted this research to better understand the nature of these social networks. Our primary research objectives were to answer the following questions: Who are these female entrepreneurs? In what manner do family networks contribute to the realisation of female entrepreneurs' projects? How do female entrepreneurs manage to establish themselves in the entrepreneurial field and succeed?

To address these questions, we formulated the following hypotheses: The presence of family ties (father, brother,

spouse, friends) intervenes in the business creation and management process of female entrepreneurs. Female entrepreneurs develop a set of characteristics enabling them to maintain their enterprises successfully. To achieve this, we adopted a qualitative approach and, using open-ended interview techniques, conducted thirteen interviews with female entrepreneurs who had created SMEs operating in the Bejaïa wilaya. The sample consisted of women operating in the artisanal and industrial sectors (hair salons, tailoring workshops, bakeries and pastry shops, pharmacies, medical laboratories).

1.1 Definition of the Female Entrepreneur:

The literature on female entrepreneurs is characterised by considerable definitional diversity, and scholars have not reached consensus on a common definition. The female entrepreneur is a modern construct situated within the problematic of development and women's access to the world of work, particularly their involvement in liberal economic activities in terms of female entrepreneurship. Lavoie conceptualises the female entrepreneur as a woman who, alone or with one or more partners, has founded, purchased, or inherited an enterprise, assumes its financial, administrative, and social responsibilities, and actively participates in its current management (Lavoie, 1988). Similarly, the Observatory of Female Entrepreneurship FUDICIAL defines her as "the person (the woman who owns and operates an enterprise) who can be designated as a female entrepreneur" (Christian Latouche, 2006). To understand the emergence of the profession of female entrepreneur, it must be situated within its original context. In other words, it is necessary to study the position of the female entrepreneur within the Algerian sociocultural context.

1.2 Profile of the Female Entrepreneur in the Algerian Context :

Early sociological studies on the profile of female entrepreneurs date back some time. Eleanor Schwartz was the first to address the profile of female business leaders

in her studies. Her initial empirical study aimed to understand who female entrepreneurs are by analysing their sociodemographic profile (age, education level, and experience) (Schwartz, 1976). Anne Gillet likewise proposes a classification of the socioprofessional profile of the Algerian female entrepreneur, specifically: Woman from a family-constructed background: These are women with a relatively low level of education who began work at an early age and created their enterprises whilst young, yet possessed significant family support and substantial initial capital. Woman as inheritance inheritor: These are women of a certain age who inherit their husband's enterprise and resume its management with success and competence. They typically have not pursued formal education. Young woman entrepreneur supported by a family network – "family tradition": This type of young woman ventures into business creation with educational attainment at the secondary school level. They receive support from their father and/or husband (who already own enterprises). These young women establish their enterprises using family financial resources (through social networks). Woman from the university environment: Certain liberal professions are a logical outcome of university education. They entail the creation of enterprises with some employees (legal or consulting firms). Young women creating these activities draw on personal savings or family assistance (Gillet, A., 2003).

1.3 Characteristics of the Female Entrepreneur :

Researchers who have examined the emergence of female entrepreneurs have attributed socioprofessional characteristics that distinguish them from the opposite sex. Among these characteristics are: Female entrepreneurs tend to be younger than their male counterparts. They enter the entrepreneurial domain after experiencing unemployment (explained by family circumstances, concerns regarding children, etc.) or encountering difficulties in salaried

employment. They have fewer financial resources available to them (Sellami, 2007). They are less numerous than male business owners in the industrial sector, to minimise financial burdens as much as possible. Their initial training and experience are important for enterprise qualification and sustainability; they also demonstrate cautious behaviour. Women frequently resort to personal financing or loans from their family environment—father, mother, husband, brother, and sister—and when family members are unable to meet their needs, they turn to government welfare schemes established by the State (ANSEJ, BANQUE, ANGEM).

2. Social Capital Theory:

2.1 Its Emergence:

Bourdieu's work in 1980 emphasises that economic capital alone is insufficient to generate wealth and to be involved in project realisation; it must be articulated with other types of resources—"extra-economic capital"—perceived as a set of resources linked to the possession of a network of relations. This capital enables access to opportunities and, most importantly, facilitates the circulation of information about the project and relates to the realisation of economic capital. Sandefur and Lauman (1998) define social capital through the advantages it provides, identifying three principal dimensions: influence and control, information possession, and bonds of solidarity. Lin (2001), conversely, proposes a more relational and expanded conception of social capital, explaining it as an investment by entrepreneurs in personal networks and access to resources embedded within them.

2.2 Family Networks:

Certain sociologists consider the family to be a principal agent of modernisation, as Talcott Parsons (1955) explains in his work "Family, Socialisation and Interaction Process". Bourdieu's concept of social capital (1980) allows us to regard the family as a strategic source of material, symbolic, or psychological support. In Algeria, horizontal family ties (siblings,

cousins, etc.) dominate; these networks constitute an essential lever for the development of female enterprises. Family networks play a primary role that manifests in three principal ways:

- Psychological role: The family, founded upon bonds of solidarity, provides women with affective, social, economic, and identity support. Kinship constitutes an aspect of women's social identity

- Economic role: Algerian culture strongly emphasises family solidarity, prompting female entrepreneurs to mobilise their relatives to establish their enterprises.

- Social role: The family transmits the norms and values necessary to prepare children for their social environment, with fraternity occupying a central place. As Waddah and Charara noted, when a daughter works, she becomes financial support, which tends to reduce differences between masculine and feminine roles.

3. Methodology :

3.1 The Method Employed

It is evident that the choice of method is directly linked to the nature of the research topic, and to understand this nature, we selected the qualitative method. The aim is to describe the work of the female entrepreneur and her profile. The qualitative method also enables us to understand and become acquainted with the individuals who constitute the female entrepreneur's social network and their impact on the business creation process.

3.2 The Technique Employed:

We opted for open-ended (free) interviews as the data collection technique for our pre-survey. To this end, we formulated five questions that corresponded to our research objectives. This allowed us to gather very interesting information on the themes discussed with our respondents.

3.3 Thematic Content Analysis of Interviews:

After conducting the interviews, we carefully rewrote the interview content with fidelity, without omission or neglect of information related to the research topic. Subsequently, vertical analysis was performed to identify themes in each

interview and especially new themes raised by respondents. Horizontal analysis was then conducted to identify themes and sub-themes (relevant and less relevant themes) through frequency calculation. This allowed us to gather very interesting information on the themes discussed with our respondents.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Results :

4.1 The Socio-professional Situation of Interviewed Women in the Bejaïa Region

Table 1: Marital status of interviewed women

Marital status	W	%
Married	10	71,42
Single	3	21,42
Divorced	1	7,14
Total	14	100 %

We observe that the most prevalent marital status among our respondents is that of married women, with a frequency of (10). These women report that it was through their husbands that they were able to realise their future projects. Their husbands provided moral, psychological, and most importantly, financial support to initiate the creation of their enterprises. These women assert that they lacked the necessary financial capital to obtain premises and equipment. In this situation, the husband forms the foundation for business creation, representing an advantage for them. One respondent disclosed: "As a married woman, my husband and I represent one" (Head of an educational institution, aged 50). Two of the interviewed women moreover emphasised that the husband plays a fundamental role throughout the entire business creation process.

Regarding the second category—single women—with a frequency of (3), the role of parents assumes particular importance in establishing the enterprise, particularly the father. In situations where it falls to him to undertake everything: financing, the support he provides to his daughter, legal procedures, and ultimately

the realisation of the project.

Only one interviewed woman was divorced. She received help from no one; unlike the cases of married and single women, she provided support to her family once she had succeeded with her project. From this, we conclude that marital status significantly encourages women to demonstrate their entrepreneurial capabilities.

Table 2: Educational level of female entrepreneurs:

Educational level	W	%
University	10	71,42
Secondary	2	14,28
Intermediate	1	7,14
Primary	1	7,14
Total	14	100%

The results of this table demonstrate that the majority of our respondents possess university-level education, with a frequency of (10). This leads us to conclude that their educational level represents an element triggering the entrepreneurial venture, particularly given the information obtained during their university education.

In the second category, two respondents possessed secondary education; however, this did not prevent them from realising their objective of creating their enterprises.

From these results, we can conclude that a higher level of education influences women to establish their enterprises, pursuing elds congruent with their studies. However, this does not necessarily mean that women with lower educational attainment will not succeed, as with willpower and courage all is possible, and outcomes also depend on the activity undertaken.

4.2 The Contribution of Social Networks (Strong Ties) of Interviewed Female Entrepreneurs in the Bejaïa Region and the Nature of Their Support :

Table 3: Contribution of networks

during business creation and management

Contribution of networks	F	%
Family member	11	61
Friends	4	22
None	3	17
Total	18	100%

The frequencies shown in this table demonstrate that the family plays an essential role for these women, with a frequency of (11). As we have demonstrated in our theoretical framework, family networks contribute in various ways, specifically: - Moral support: This type of support is considered an essential element when launching and throughout the business creation process of the interviewed women. Such support is provided through advice or initiation into activities, as well as encouragement, which develops within the nuclear family. For single women, this comes through their parents or siblings. As one respondent confirmed: "My father told me that to succeed, one must be thorough in one's work" (Owner of a psychological practice, aged 32). As another confirmed: "My brothers are pharmacists; they initiated me towards opening a pharmacy by providing me with advice" (Creator of a pharmacy, aged 44). Regarding married women, they received moral support from members of their nuclear families and also from their husbands, as one confirms: "My husband truly encouraged me, and he continues to encourage me, as he is an educated person, so I believe that is the reason for his encouragement" (Owner of an educational institution, aged 50). - Financial support: Accordingly, Pierre Bourdieu would emphasise the volume of social capital as a major element providing access to other forms of capital, including economic capital (Bourdieu, 1998). This type concerns economic potential, namely the sums of money that the interviewed women received from their strong ties. As one respondent confirms: "My husband was obliged to sell an apartment to finance my

project" (Owner of a beauty centre, aged 52).

- Relational contribution: This type of contribution involves the participation of family members; they themselves participate either with their physical labour, such as installing materials during project implementation, as one confirmed: "Before the opening, it was my brothers who came to arrange the shelves where I had to place the medical products" (Creator of a pharmacy, aged 44). Or by accompanying women during their travels to other wilayas, for example to purchase raw materials, as one respondent confirmed: "During my trips outside the wilaya to purchase fabrics, my brother accompanies me" (Creator of a tailoring workshop, aged 33).

- Material contribution: This element refers to assistance in the form of materials received from close relations, which female entrepreneurs need to implement their projects and cannot do without. Thereby, the interviewed women bear fewer financial burdens. One respondent stated: "My brother helped me with the finishing of a few rooms, such as flooring and painting, and purchasing some materials for my project" (Owner of a body care institute, aged 52).

The second category concerns the contribution of friends, with a frequency of (4). They contributed during management in the following manner:

- Moral contribution: As one respondent, who resorted to her former director to obtain his opinion on the idea she wished to realise, confirms. She states that he provided her with advice to enable her to succeed and strongly encouraged her to open her own psychological practice. She continued to consult him during the management of her enterprise as he provided her with directives to follow relating to the profession and enterprise activities. She states: "It is to my former director that I sought advice before creating, and much more after opening my practice; he frequently told me what I should do and how to succeed in developing the enterprise; he

was the first friend to help me" (Owner of a psychology clinic, aged 33).

- Financial contribution: The friends of certain interviewed women played a primordial role in managing their enterprises, as one confirms: "After opening my workshop, it was my friend who came to work with me; she assured me regarding the salary and that I would pay her when I could, and if I could not, there was no need" (Owner of a tailoring workshop, aged 33). Another confirms that the success of her enterprise was due to a friend who was there to provide her with financial assistance for enterprise development (purchase of necessary materials for activity emergence).

Three entrepreneurial women respondents reported having received help from no one, stating that they overcame all difficulties alone, and that the family was particularly a factor of demotivation for their work. One respondent declares: "I nearly divorced my husband because he was against the idea of my working" (Owner of a pastry business, aged 42).

We observe that the family, particularly the nuclear family (father, husband, mother), occupies an important place, especially during the business creation process of the interviewed women, and the category of friends, whose role is demonstrated during the development of SME activities. The contributions of strong ties consist of moral, financial, personal, and material support. Indeed, environment and education play a significant role in business creation. The female entrepreneur's circle of support differs from one environment to another, as does family culture, which varies from culture to culture. In certain instances, family culture does not permit women to work, prompting some women not to resort to their social networks (family).

4.3 The Ensemble of Characteristics and Values a Female Entrepreneur Must Possess to Succeed:

The interviewed women mentioned several characteristics specific to women who develop an intention to open their own enterprise during the interviews. These

characteristics include:

Courage, vigour, and self-confidence are criteria that must be ingrained in women to enable them to confront gender-based discrimination. This is confirmed by one of our respondents: "When I terminated my partnership with my associate because he did not comply with the conditions I imposed, he came to my workshop and provoked my employees; he verbally harassed me, and of course, he did not accept the termination because it was I who did all the work; even the materials were mine; his success depended upon me. He did not leave me alone; I constantly received his calls, and when I answered, he would not stop threatening me. Due to fear, I remained at home for 3 months without going to work. It was with courage that I resumed my work" (Creator of a tailoring workshop, aged 45). Willpower and objective-setting are two crucial elements for engaging in entrepreneurship. They consider these to be a vision of success—the willingness to work, to sacrifice to achieve the goals set, as one respondent expressed: "One must have willpower and objectives, and when one wants, one can succeed" (Creator of a laboratory reagent manufacturing enterprise, aged 33). Authority and love of one's profession create a good relationship between the entrepreneur and her work, and mastering one's profession generates customer satisfaction and thus assures professional success, as one respondent expressed: "One must work with love because when one loves something, one does everything to make it perfect" (Creator of an educational institution, aged 50). Regarding authority, it entails punctuality, eliminating subjectivity in work, and being a woman of one's word with clients, as one respondent briefly stated: "It suffices to be authoritative and everything will be resolved" (Owner of a pharmacy, aged 44).

Female entrepreneurs furthermore emphasise expertise as an obligation for women to obtain the power to better control and manage work.

3. CONCLUSION

The pre-survey we conducted amongst female entrepreneurs in the Bejaïa region has enabled us to highlight the principal characteristics specific to female entrepreneurs in the region and has underscored the importance of the intervention of social networks during the business creation process, namely family networks consisting of father, husband, brother, and friends. These networks demonstrate their influence in an apparent manner, and we observe that they constitute strong ties rather than weak ties. Furthermore, these female entrepreneurs receive financial support from family members, and these members also present themselves in a moral and psychological capacity. Our research has furthermore identified new characteristics describing women who succeed in their projects, regardless of the field in which they are engaged. Our investigation into female entrepreneurship has not concluded here, as the respondents revealed and highlighted several other elements we were unable to address, such as the trajectory of their entrepreneurial identity formation whilst reconciling private and professional life.

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