

*Women's entrepreneurial networks in Algeria: Reality
and perspectives*

**الشبكات المقاولاتية النسوية في الجزائر:
الواقع والآفاق**

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Received: 01/11/2024 Accepted :16/12/2024 Published : 20/12/2024

Abstract:

This paper examines the reality of female entrepreneurial networks in Algeria as one of the key drivers of women's entrepreneurship. Business networks are considered as a way of empowering women through connections and collaborations, and as a door for new opportunities for growth in a male-dominated field. A descriptive-analytical approach was used to encompass the evolution of the concept of entrepreneurial networks, and to explore the state of female entrepreneurship practices in Algeria.

An overall view on some notorious female business networks active in Algeria, confirmed the awareness about the resources and advantages derived from female professional interactions. However, these networks are limited in number and mostly located in major cities, what makes them exclusive.

Key words: Entrepreneurial Networks, Female Entrepreneurship, Resources, Connections, Algeria

المخلص:

يبحث هذا العمل في واقع الشبكات المقاولاتية النسوية في الجزائر باعتبارها أحد أهم العوامل المحفزة للنشاط المقاولاتي النسوي. تعتبر شبكات الأعمال أداة لتمكين النساء المقاولات عبر الترابط، الشراكة وفتح الآفاق نحو فرص النمو الجديدة في ميدان يتميز بالسيطرة الذكورية. تمت الاستعانة بالمنهج الوصفي

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التحليلي قصد تعميق المعارف حول مفهوم الشبكات المقاولاتية، و كذا التعرف على ظروف المقاولاتية النسوية كممارسة في الجزائر. عبر إلقاء نظرة على أهم شبكات الأعمال النسوية الناشطة في الجزائر، توضح وجود وعي بالامتيازات و الموارد التي تنتج عن التفاعلات المهنية النسوية. غير أن محدودية عددها و تمركزها في الولايات الكبرى، جعل من هذه الشبكات حصرية و غير متاحة للجميع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشبكات المقاولاتية، المقاولاتية النسوية، الموارد، العلاقات، الجزائر.

Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship is growing significantly worldwide and has garnered significant academic and field attention in recent years. The development of women's entrepreneurship reflects a new perception of women's economic contribution in terms of job creation, increasing GDP, and diminishing poverty rates. Women are being recognized for their ability to stand against restrictive bias about women's roles in specific fields, and challenge cultural barriers and stereotypes. Entrepreneurship appears to be a suitable career option for women, offering them financial independence while keeping a balance between professional ambitions and self-fulfillment as mothers and caregivers. The attractiveness of independent work has encouraged a significant number of women from various generations and backgrounds to establish their own businesses. In the United States, 4 out of 10 new businesses are led by women, with 39.9% of all businesses founded in 2021 being started and managed by women. However, these figures remain far from those achieved by men (Kauffman-Foundation, 2022).

Entrepreneurship is a path full of challenges for both genders, but these challenges are more severe for women. Male dominance in certain sectors, high entry barriers, women's isolation from resources and opportunities, gender inequality, along with family responsibilities, have all limited women's entrepreneurial potential. As a result, women often have to rely on their personal and professional networks or borrow connections from male family members to procure the support they lack. This reality accentuates the need to underline the role of female entrepreneurial networks, as they are a key success factor in women's businesses.

In order to foster entrepreneurship and innovation, Algeria is making considerable efforts to build a stable and attractive business ecosystem, targeting women as key actors. For Algerian women entrepreneurs, networks have become an essential tools for business

growth and stability in a competitive business environment, often hindered by restrictive cultural norms. Women's business networks provide a reliable support system for female entrepreneurs to connect, share resources, and grow collectively. In Algeria, these networks are represented by associations, organizations, and incubators aimed at empowering women, providing support, building relationships, and offering the necessary training for developing innovative women-led projects. This paper seeks to discuss the following problematic:

What is the reality of women's entrepreneurial networks in Algeria?

This research is based on the general hypothesis that the position of women within the Algerian social structure, negatively affects their success in pursuing independent careers, which reinforces their need to be imbedded in some supportive personal and professional networks to overcome resource and field experience shortages. To answer the problematic of this study, a descriptive-analytical approach was used to explore the role of relational networks in women's entrepreneurship, and to examine the current state of women's business networks and the benefits they provide to Algerian female entrepreneurs.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section presents various academic perspectives on the concept of entrepreneurial networks, as well as their role in facilitating business creation. The second section focuses on the unique characteristics of women's entrepreneurship as a field practice. The third section examines the current state of women's entrepreneurship in Algeria, the challenges faced by Algerian businesswomen, and a review of active women's associations and incubators in the country.

1. Entrepreneurial networks

1.1. Entrepreneurial networks: Evolution of the concept

In the early 1980s, entrepreneurship researches took a new direction with the emergence of the "social embeddedness of entrepreneurial behavior" theory. Previous theoretical models explaining entrepreneurship were limited; some viewed entrepreneurship as the product of a specific social and economic context, while others considered the process of firm creation as a solo success of an exceptional entrepreneur (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986, pp. 7-8). The theory of social embeddedness highlights the relational nature of the firm creation process. Indeed, entrepreneurs operate within an environment

that provides opportunities and imposes obstacles, and they are involved, either incidentally or intentionally, in networks of personal relationships that can influence their activity positively or negatively. As Granovetter (1985) asserts: *"economic activity is embedded in networks of existing personal relationships managed by individuals"* (Granovetter, 1985, p. 485). This approach brought to light the concept of "social networks" reflecting *"a system of specific relationships among a defined group of individuals"* (Lazega, 1998, p. 8). By applying this concept to the entrepreneurial process, the notion of "personal entrepreneurial networks" appeared, which Sailleilles (2007) explains as *"all individuals or organizations that played a positive or negative role during the creation and launch of the firm, either at the explicit request of the entrepreneur or otherwise"* (Sailleilles, 2007, p. 34).

Entrepreneurial networks are formed when an individual uses his personal connections, to obtain the resources required to establish, manage, and develop his own business, resources that he would be unable to secure in isolation from these networks. In this way, the process of creating a new business can be described as a *"relational activity"* (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991, p. 306). The entrepreneurial networks approach places the entrepreneur at the heart of the business creation process, making them the only responsible for building, managing, and maintaining his entrepreneurial network. The entrepreneur is seen here as a rational actor who chooses his social interactions in a manner that best serves his project. From this perspective, social networks emerge as a tool that helps the entrepreneur on his path, and the act of networking is described as a *"goal-oriented activity"* (Galkina, 2013, p. 25). The process of building entrepreneurial networks is dynamic, This is affirmed by Bourdieu (1980), who pointed out that a network of relationships *"is the result of a deliberate investment strategy through which the entrepreneur creates and maintains relationships that are beneficial"* (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 2). The quality and effectiveness of entrepreneurial networks relies on the following factors:

a. Nature of ties:

Granovetter (1973, 1985) distinguishes between strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties are characterized by trust, emotional involvement, and frequent exchanges, typically referring to family relationships, friendships, and close circles. While weak ties include casual and occasional connections, they operate as bridges to new relational

spheres and new opportunities. Networks dominated by strong ties are dense, and contrary to the belief that they are more effective for entrepreneurs because they facilitate the exchange of resources, ideas, and information, Granovetter argues the opposite. He believes that an abundance of strong ties may limit the entrepreneur's access to resources outside his direct circle, emphasizing the importance of weak ties as they offer greater opportunities for growth in diverse circles (Granovetter, 2000, p. 62).

b. Structural holes

The concept of structural holes reflects the overall architecture of a network and represents the absence of connections or familiarity between individuals within the personal network of the entrepreneur, meaning there is no redundancy in ties. Burt (1995) argues that dense networks with fewer structural holes, where everyone is interconnected, often transmit redundant information, hindering the entrepreneur's growth (Burt, 1995, p. 226).

c. Social positions of network members

This dimension refers to the advantages of having ties with people who occupy superior positions within the social structure. The more heterogeneous the entrepreneur's personal network is, in terms of the social positions and characteristics of its members, the more strategic the resources he's likely to obtain (Lin, 1995, p. 690).

1.2. The importance of entrepreneurial networks in business creation:

The importance of entrepreneurial networks arises from the challenges faced by entrepreneurs during the process of business creation, and they intensify according to entrepreneur's gender and activity newness. To establish a business, an entrepreneur needs three types of resources: financial capital, qualified human capital tailored to the project's requirements, and social or relational capital. It is challenging for a nascent entrepreneur to possess all these resources at the right time, which compels him to interact directly with the owners of these resources in his business environment or with those who can serve as a bridge to them (Djiko, 2018, p. 82). The main reason for the difficulty in meeting these strategic resources resides in the entrepreneur's newness in the sector or the novelty of the project. In this

case, stakeholders often tend to be skeptical about the entrepreneur as he lacks of legitimacy and credibility (Bayoudh, BenHassine, & Gherib, p. 14).

From this perspective, entrepreneurial networks are viewed as facilitators in the business creation process, helping to overcome resource limitations, the obstacle of newness, and cultural barriers related to gender and minority status. This point has been explored by a stream of literature across various disciplines (Johannisson, 1990; Butler & Hansen, 1991; Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Aldrich, Rosen, & Woodward, 1987; Fayolle, 1996; Saillelles, 2007; Dubini & Aldrich, 1991). The support provided by personal networks to the entrepreneur, reflects why some entrepreneurs successfully establish their businesses while others struggle, a point that Aldrich & al(1987) made clear: *"The family provides financial support, the spouse gives consent to use family resources, and friends and colleagues may become partners or clients, or even offer their opinions and judgments on the entrepreneur's project"* (Aldrich, Rosen, & Woodward, 1987, p. 155). Similarly, Fayolle (1996) highlights the role that family and professional relationships play in helping the entrepreneur navigate the multiplicity of procedures involved in the entrepreneurial process (Fayolle, 1996, p. 110). Lin (2001) outlines four primary effects of the entrepreneur's personal network: information, influence, social loan (where network members act as a guarantee or collateral for the entrepreneur with stakeholders), and social support (Lin, 2001, p. 20). Likewise, Drakopoulou-Dodd & al. (2006) add that *"besides innovation and collective learning, regional networks provide a range of resources, such as market access, connections with suppliers, and the sharing of new technologies and infrastructures"* (Drakopoulou-Dodd, Jack, & Anderson, 2006, p. 5).

Saillelles (2007) identifies three categories of resources that an entrepreneur may potentially mobilize through his membership in a personal network (Saleilles, 2007, pp. 45-46):

a. Material resources

This group of resources includes: financing, access to bank loans, equipments, distribution channels, clientele, assistance in exploiting opportunities, service exchanges, price advantages, technical skills, avoidance of direct competition, etc.

b. Non-material resources

It includes: Informations about markets, consumers needs and desires, competitors, benchmarking practices, innovations, etc. This category also covers early access to resources, advice on dealing with challenges (such as finding new customers, identifying suppliers, hiring employees, seeking financing, business growth, export opportunities, accounting and financial management, taxes, advertising and communication, legal issues, employee management, etc.), ideas (related to services and products, marketing, innovation, etc.), business motivation, assistance in identifying opportunities, mentoring/guidance, emotional support, etc.

c. Relational resources

It refers to reputation, legitimacy, recommendations and endorsements, image and branding, meeting new people, joining new social circles, and endorsing individuals.

2. Women's entrepreneurship and business networks

2.1. Women's entrepreneurship : Between reality and ambitions

As a research field, women's entrepreneurship only emerged in the late 1970s. It focuses on the phenomenon of women initiating and managing businesses on their own, while considering the specific circumstances surrounding each case and the differences compared to men. In other words, studies of women's entrepreneurship are based on gender differences, reflecting the reality of gender inequality in both social and economic spheres. This indicates that the study of entrepreneurship was initially built on male-centric standards (Paquin, 2021, p. 35). On the other hand, the theoretical framework for studying women's entrepreneurship is subject to the differences among female entrepreneurs in terms of education, experience, situation, age, and cultural backgrounds, what makes them a non-homogeneous community. Thus, the issue is not only about the impact of the entrepreneur's gender on business creation, but also about understanding how and from what perspective this influence occurs (d'Andria & Gabarret, 2016, p. 88). In general, Moore and Buttner (1997) define a female entrepreneur as "*a woman who has established a business, is committed to managing it, owns at least half of it, and has been active in it for no less than one year*" (Moore & Buttner, 1997, p. 13).

With the significant changes in the roles of women in modern societies, women's entrepreneurship has asserted itself as a social and economic phenomenon whose impact cannot be ignored. It has become a driver of economic and social development, prompting governments worldwide to develop strategies to foster women's entrepreneurship. However, the rates of female entrepreneurial activity remain low compared to those of men (Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019, p. 1667). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor on Women's Entrepreneurship (GEM) indicates that 11% of global entrepreneurial activity is represented and led by women, which is nearly half of the global rate for 2020. This numbers remain significant despite the repercussions of the global COVID-19 crisis (Elam & al., 2021, p. 14).

In 2023, global indicators of women's entrepreneurship continued to improve, with one in six women expressing an intention to start an independent business, compared to one in five for men. The same source found that the entrepreneurial intention rate among women was higher, at 28.2%, in low-income countries and lower, at 11%, in high-income countries. This difference is due to varying reasons. In developing countries, women often see entrepreneurship as a necessary path due to the scarcity of jobs, while in high-income countries; women view it as a means of professional scalability (Lbiati, 2022). According to GEM (2023), actual female entrepreneurial activity rates in high-income countries are close to those of men. For instance, in Qatar, 11% of men are entrepreneurs compared to 10.5% of women; in the US, 20% of men are entrepreneurs compared to 18% of women, and in Spain, the rate is equal at 7%. However, the gender gap in entrepreneurial activity rates is noticeable in North African and Middle Eastern countries, such as Tunisia, where 19% of men are entrepreneurs compared to 14% of women, and Egypt, where 9% of men are entrepreneurs compared to 4% of women (Elam, Hughes, & M, 2023, p. 25). This gender gap is also evident in various aspects of the entrepreneurial process, such as the presence of networks with other entrepreneurs, the size of investment in the project, and the use of digital media.

2.2. Characteristics of women's entrepreneurship as a practice

The specificity of women's entrepreneurship explained by Brush & al (2009) is not limited to the difficulty in gathering strategic resources, but extends to other dimensions stemming from the social embeddedness of the entrepreneurial activity, such as the influence of

family and culture (Brush, De Bruin, & Welter, 2009, pp. 9-12). The literature review on this subject reveals key findings regarding the challenges faced by women in their entrepreneurial journey, that also reflect the characteristics of business creation process led by women:

a. Motivations and Drivers

Entrepreneurship and self-employment are perceived by many women as a way to achieve financial freedom while maintaining a professional-private life balance. Furthermore, entrepreneurship is seen as a career option for highly educated women who view paid employment as an obstacle to achieve their professional ambitions and reaching senior management positions (Halabisky, 2018, p. 3). In general, Fielden and Davidson (2005) distinguish between "pull factors" such as the desire for financial independence, flexible work schedule, self-fulfillment, gaining recognition, and "push factors" that may be incarnated in difficult economic conditions, glass ceiling barrier, restrictive work schedule, and wage inequality compared to men (Touissate & Azdimoussa, 2021, p. 266).

b. Performance

While most studies confirm that there is no connection between performance indicators and entrepreneur's gender, some researchers suggest that businesses launched and managed by women perform less well than those managed by men. Carrier et al. (2006) attribute these incorrect conclusions to researchers "*failure to differentiate between business failure and business discontinuation*", especially in sectors with high business cessation rates for both genders (Carrier, Julien, & Menvielle, 2006, p. 39).

c. Management Style

Many researchers concluded that women prefer a participatory management style with a present-oriented approach (Hirrich & Brush, 1984; Mione, 2002; Bird & Brush, 2002). Women tend to be more personal and interactive with employees in order to motivate them and strengthen their sense of belonging. In contrast, men tend to prefer a hierarchical, bureaucratic management style with a future-oriented approach, imposing their decisions on others (Paquin, 2021, p. 40). Similarly, Buttner (2001) clarified that women's management approaches are based on their values and beliefs about effective ways to

communicate with stakeholders, distinct from the male-dominated organizational culture (Buttner, 2001, p. 262).

d. Need for Training and Support

According to Loscocco & Robinson (1991), the weaknesses of entrepreneurs of both genders are almost identical, they generally report a need for training in areas such as accounting and financial skills (Loscocco & Robinson, 1991, p. 522). In this matter, Halabisky (2018) found that the gender gap lies in women's lack of field experience and leadership skills, as well as them being skeptical about their own entrepreneurial capabilities which hinders them from seizing entrepreneurial opportunities (Halabisky, 2018, p. 11).

e. Gender Stereotypes in Entrepreneurial Culture

Gender stereotypes consist of a set of general judgments and perceptions that shape the culture of entrepreneurship, promoting the belief that men are inherently better suited for business than women. According to these societal beliefs, men are thought to possess physical and intellectual qualities that facilitate their entry and dominance in the business world. In this regard, Hamilton (2013) emphasizes the negative influence that mass media has had in reinforcing these stereotypes by focusing on the careers of male entrepreneurs and under-representing female role models, often associating them with traditionally feminine fields (Cukier & Chavoushi, 2019). As a result, these stereotypes become a barrier for women, depriving them of the trust and resources of stakeholders who doubt their success. This increases the need for women to build strong personal networks (Carranza, 2018, p. 38).

f. Self-Efficacy

Under the influence of negative societal judgments towards female entrepreneurship, women often feel restricted to start and manage their businesses. This reality undermines female entrepreneurs' self-confidence, often leading them to delay their entrepreneurial decisions or even abandoning the idea altogether (Ibanescu & Marchand, 2017, p. 62).

g. Access to Financing

A review of research on this topic (Orser et al., 2006; Brush et al., 2002; OECD, 2017; Thurik, 2001) reveals a consensus among researchers regarding the difference in the financial opportunities

available to male entrepreneurs compared to the limited opportunities for women. As explained by Malmstrom et al. (2017), investors, whether individuals or institutions, often hold a negative perception of women's abilities to prove themselves in the business world (Fackelmann & al., 2020, p. 38). Consequently, investors question the credibility, expertise, and knowledge of female entrepreneurs. Ibanescu and Marchand (2017) add that the difficulty in obtaining bank loans explains why more women are relying on their personal savings or family loans to fund their activities (Ibanescu & Marchand, 2017, p. 61).

h. Networks

One of the most prominent challenges for female entrepreneurs, often hindering their success and development, relates to the nature of the personal networks they build and manage. These networks differ in characteristics and usage from those available to men, a point that will be elaborated on in the next section of this paper.

i. Balancing Family and Work Life

Although one of the motivating factors for women entering the business world is the desire to escape the time and space constraints of paid employment, balancing work and life remains one of the key challenges female entrepreneurs face. This is particularly true in light of the assumption that childcare is the ultimate wife task, while earning income is the man's role. From this perspective, academic opinions differ. Some argue that family responsibilities are a significant barrier to women's entrepreneurial journeys (Ahl, 2006; Stoner, 1990), while others (Greenhouse & Powell, 2006; Marks, 1977; Carlson et al., 2011) focus on the positive interactions between professional and family life, suggesting that the skills and resources women gain from their work may upgrade their family lives and help them address challenges in innovative ways (Iplik & Ulbegi, 2021, p. 5169).

2.3. The importance and nature of women's entrepreneurial networks:

The study presented by Aldrich(1989) on the differences between business networks owned by women and those owned and managed by men, served as the starting point for a series of studies that sought to further explore this aspect. These studies examined how these networks are built, structured, and managed (Katz & Williams, 1997; Bird, 1989;

Klyver & Grant, 2010; Scott, 2001). To analyze the source of these differences, Cromie and Birley (1992) explain that business networks are shaped by personal motivations and experiences. Due to the social construction of women's roles and household responsibilities, as well as their entry into the business world without prior professional or managerial backgrounds, women generally lack the chance to create influential connections or seize business opportunities. As a result, they tend to have smaller, more limited networks (Watson, 2011, pp. 537-538). Similarly, researchers such as Munch et al. (1997), Moore (1990), and Watson (2011) have observed that women tend to have small and informal networks that is composed mainly of strong ties, family and friends, who often lack the skills and experience needed for entrepreneurial activities. Women entrepreneurs invest less time, effort, and interaction into developing and diversifying these networks, largely due to their family obligations. Male entrepreneurs, on the other hand, tend to build formal, professional networks with a variety of connections. When they start a business, men usually consult financial and accounting experts and learn from experienced practitioners in their field before seeking family support, while women often turn first to their close circles for approval and support (Malende & Vaisanen, 2017, p. 16).

Halabisky (2018) adds that one of the factors women consider when forming professional relationships is safety and comfort. This explains why women entrepreneurs often build networks that consist mainly or exclusively of women, which may negatively impact their ability to develop strong business connections. While male entrepreneurs may exhibit similar tendencies, this characteristic is more restrictive for women because most strategic resources are owned by men. By excluding men from their networks, women may limit the potential of their business growth. Halabisky also notes that sometimes men do not accept women as active participants in their networks, even when women want to diversify their entrepreneurial relationships (Halabisky, 2018, p. 15). Although diverse studies have focused on the reasons for women's isolation in business and their limited access to resources compared to men, many have emphasized the benefits that women derive from having an entrepreneurial network. These benefits include easier access to financial resources, information on business opportunities, technical advice, as well as psychological support. However, most of this research has been conducted in developed countries, where women entrepreneurs

are often members in professional networks and business organizations that provide training programs in management, strategic planning, and specialized advice, as well as financial assistance and support in dealing with customers and suppliers. These conclusions may not be as valid in developing economies, where civil society organizations, especially women-oriented ones, are weaker or absent (Ogundana et al., 2023, p. 10).

3. Motivations and barriers to the development of women's entrepreneurial networks in Algeria: Elements of analysis

3.1. An overview on female entrepreneurship in Algeria :

Algeria's women empowerment project began in the 1980s, starting with reducing female illiteracy and improving education levels. Indeed, the female literacy rate in Algeria increased from 62.2% in 1987 to 97.3% in 2018 (Ghanem, 2022). In secondary education, female representation has reached 66.4% of total enrollments in 2020. At the university level, female enrollment in various higher education institutions reached 60% in 2022, compared to 40% for men (MESRS, 2023). This progress opened up new doors for women in the Algerian labor market. In fact, women represent 20% of the total Algerian workforce in 2019, against 8.1% in 1987. Despite these advances, women's participation in the labor market remains modest, with a female employment rate of only 13.8% in 2019 compared to 60.7% for men.

Similarly, female portrayal in the business sector is still limited, despite notable progress in recent years. According to the 2019 "Mastercard Female Entrepreneurship" report, women's representation in entrepreneurship in Algeria is 7.3%, one of the lowest rates in Africa and the world (MasterCard, 2019). Official data from the National Center for the Commercial Register (CNRC) shows that in 2021, women made up 8% of the total registered traders, with 192,568 women holding a commercial registration at the beginning of 2024, compared to 159,807 in 2019, marking a 20.5% increase. Most of these women are active in the services sector, wholesale and retail distribution, artisanal production, and import/export sector (www.algerie-eco.com, 2024). Naima Benouaret, head of the Association SEVE, points out that these figures are inflated. She explains that many men register businesses in their wives or mothers names to evade taxes or bypass Algerian laws that prohibit holding multiple jobs. Additionally, the 8% rate is far from the

target number of 40%, considering that Algerian entrepreneurship laws and regulation supports gender equality.

Algerian government is making efforts to promote female entrepreneurship by setting up several public mechanisms and programs that offer training, funding, and assistance, such as ANADE, CNAC, and ANGEM. Despite these pull factors, along with the growing societal acceptance of female self-employment, the high educational levels of Algerian women, the accessibility to training programs, etc., the causes behind the low rates of women's entrepreneurial activity in Algeria remain mystifying. In this regard, studies identified the main constraints that are preventing the bloom of female businesses in Algeria:

a. Cultural and Social Barriers

Ghanem (2022) stressed the schedule and connections restrictions Algerian women are dealing with. Even when a woman owns a business, she can only work during the day and she faces societal disapproval when interacting professionally with men. Moreover, societal bias favors men, giving them a perceived advantage in the business world. Many Algerian women entrepreneurs report that they witnessed an underestimation and a lack of serious consideration when they expressed the will to start a business. These reactions initiated a sort of frustration and stressed the need to rely on a male figure, such as a husband or father. In some cases, family opposition to women being entrepreneurs stems from the fear of women financial independence or doubts about their ability to succeed in a male-dominated field (Ghanem, 2022).

b. Difficulty in Obtaining Financing

Algerian women often face delays and obstacles in obtaining approval from banks and public institutions due to gender bias. As a result, they often rely on personal savings or family loans to sponsor their businesses. This challenge is exacerbated by women's family commitments and responsibilities, the thing that makes it difficult for them to handle the bureaucratic procedures of Algerian administration as they require patience, physical attendance and direct connections.

c. Lack of Specialized Guidance and Difficulty Accessing Information

Many women entrepreneurs in Algeria complain about the difficulty of obtaining technical advice in aspects such as marketing,

laws and regulations, accounting, and taxation, as well as the lack of adequate training and family support in some cases (Messikh, 2021, p. 138). This issue is compounded by women's limited professional experience and networks, preventing them from accessing to strategic business information (Metaiche, 2013, p. 18).

d. Difficulty Building or Joining Business Networks

Several studies have highlighted the challenges faced by Algerian women entrepreneurs in joining professional groups and establishing connections with key stakeholders in their sectors. According to Metaiche (2013), Algerian women entrepreneurs are aware of the importance of relational capital in driving entrepreneurial learning and gaining the necessary field knowledge. However, cultural constraints and family responsibilities prevent them from fully utilizing these connections, leading them to use alternative communication methods like phone calls or emails, or rely on male family members to interact on their behalf (Metaiche, 2013, p. 20). Bekaddour and Lacri (2021) observe that business networks of Algerian women are small and dense as they rely heavily on family ties. They use these connections to access both intangible resources (information and advice) and tangible resources (financing and equipment). The authors add that women entrepreneurs in Algeria are isolated from the business sphere, a situation that is particularly caused by the lack of women's business associations in Algeria (Bekaddour & Lacri, 2021, pp. 713, 718).

3.2. Reality of female's entrepreneurial networks in Algeria:

Solidarity among women entrepreneurs is a viable way to overcome female entrepreneurship obstacles, enabling women to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions without colliding with societal values or compromising family obligations. The awareness about the role of women's business networks is constantly growing. Hence, Algerian female entrepreneurial ecosystem is reinforced by a number of business networks aimed at encouraging women emancipation by helping them to benefit from the support of their female peers. Some of the most notable women's business associations in Algeria include:

a. Algerian Women Entrepreneurs Organization (SEVE)

Founded in 1993 by two Algerian businesswomen, SEVE is the first Algerian association dedicated to integrating women into the

business ecosystem, aiming to make women influential actors in the economic sphere. SEVE seeks to improve the social conditions of Algerian women by providing training, information, and support throughout the process of initiating a business. It also helps women expand their horizons by the mean of national and international conferences and seminars featuring local and foreign experts. SEVE offers membership opportunities to any woman with a business idea, providing access to a valuable professional network and support from the ideation stage to the final implementation (SEVE.DZ).

b. *Elle-Moukawila Network*

This network was launched as part of a strategy developed by the Ministry of Micro-Enterprises to promote women's entrepreneurship. Funded by ANADE(Ex ANSEJ), it operates in 11 Algerian wilayas. The goal is to ensure equal opportunities between men and women by providing holistic training programs, targeting women, particularly those in rural areas, and empowering them to use technology and digital platforms to launch and manage their projects independently (APS, 2022).

c. *WomWork Incubator*

Established in 2020 by The Annex DZ, WomWork is the first 100% women-oriented incubator in Algeria and Africa. Its mission is to encourage, motivate, and support businesses and startups founded by women, encouraging their independence and helping them succeed in the marketplace by leveraging the benefits of digitization and technology. WomWork offers a co-working space with flexible hours, providing female entrepreneurs and freelancers with comfortable, well-equipped offices and opportunities for professional exchanges. Additionally, the incubator assists entrepreneurs with administrative tasks, such as obtaining a commercial registration and tax identification number and setting up a bank account. WomWork also provides customized coaching programs based on the specific needs of each entrepreneur, as well as group training led by industry experts, with topics including finance, IT, and market analysis (<https://theannexdz.net/>).

d. *Women in Business of Algeria (WIBA)*

Created in 2016 under the slogan "We can do it, nothing is impossible", WIBA includes businesswomen, project managers,

researchers, artisans, and potential entrepreneurs. WIBA operates in 22 wilayas and offers a variety of programs aimed at fostering women's entrepreneurship, including efforts to break women's isolation, expand the association's scope nationally, encourage women-led businesses, and support new women-owned ventures by organizing professional networks that facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise between established and new entrepreneurs across Algeria. WIBA also promotes innovation in startups through scientific research cells managed by its academic members. This association is committed as well to providing training and guidance, and supporting craftswomen's entry into the tourism sector, particularly in rural areas (IEMed, 2018).

e. Algerian Association of Women Managers and Entrepreneurs (AME)

Founded in 2005, AME provides a platform where businesswomen and artisans from across Algeria can find opportunities for growth, answers to their questions, and strategies to modernize women's entrepreneurship to align with global standards. AME launched the "Haoua Networking" project to address the isolation of Algerian women entrepreneurs. This initiative seeks to connect women entrepreneurs locally, establish female partnerships across sectors, foster entrepreneurial spirit among women, support women in the post-creation phases, provide training for new entrepreneurs, and develop partnerships between Algerian women entrepreneurs (<http://www.ame-dz.com/Default.aspx>).

4. Results and conclusion

The concept of Entrepreneurial networks introduces a new perspective for analyzing the phenomenon of female entrepreneurship, as it highlights the particularities and challenges women are facing during the business creation and management process. Algeria's business ecosystem is opening the doors for women to grow in the business sector. But these efforts often collide with strong cultural stereotypes and societal constraints that directly hinder women, limiting their ability to capitalize on their full potential.

This paper focused on the reality of female business networks in Algeria. The study reveals that personal and professional networks are indeed an effective way for women entrepreneur to limit the impact of society's restrictions, which confirms the general hypothesis. Indeed,

Algerian women are dealing with gender inequality as a significant barrier in their independent work journey. Thereby, they use family and friend connections to gain access to resources and opportunities available in their communities. However, major opportunities for growth reside within professional connections (weak ties). Entrepreneurial networks address this issue by providing a formal platform to connect business women with their peers, in order to share informations, exchange resources, learn from each other's experiences, benefit from professional guidance, start partnerships and foster innovation.

To sum up, the study concluded the following points:

- Cultural bias and gender favoritism forms the main obstacles for Algerian women entrepreneurs,
- Algerian women entrepreneurs relies mostly or entirely on strong ties,
- The awareness of the importance of women's entrepreneurial networks is increasing, but the number of these networks is insufficient compared to the growing number of female entrepreneurs in Algeria,
- Female business associations and networks in Algeria are mostly located in the big Algerian cities, thus they are not covering the entire national territory,
- There is a lack of data about women's entrepreneurial networks in terms of outcomes and performance, which is not giving a clear image about their contribution,
- There is a noticeable lack of promotion of Algerian female business networks making them out of sight.

5. *Suggestions :*

Business networks are a catalyst of female entrepreneurial activity in Algeria. Hence, a number of operational recommendations may contribute to their development and effectiveness:

- Business networks should be regional/local and more decentralized in order to meet the specificities of women in each area of Algeria,
- Capitalizing on the rise of social networks and digital platforms, by promoting female digital networking,
- Establish Partnerships with other female business organizations or professional associations,
- Organize regional or national events in order to promote the network programs and gain notoriety, in addition to attract capital investors,

- Highlighting member's achievement and success stories through social media and award programs.

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