

Comparative Study of Growth Aspiration among Married and Unmarried Female  
Entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to discuss the growth aspirations of the married and unmarried female entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The research is aimed at identifying if marital status would influence the business goals and aspirations of women entrepreneurs in terms of factors such as family support, societal expectations and access to resources. A total of 200 female entrepreneurs were involved in the study: 114 were married and 86 were unmarried women. Using quantitative approach, data were collected using a modified Career Aspiration Scale-Revised (CAS-R) and analyzed using independent sample t-test and correlation analysis. The results showed that there were no significant differences in the growth aspirations between married and unmarried women entrepreneurs. However, the family support was positively correlated with the growth aspiration of married women. The implications are that while marital status appears to have no significant influence on growth aspirations, other factors, such as access to support systems and mentorship, are found to have a more important role to play in the development of entrepreneurial goals. This Research adds to the insight into the nuanced elements involved in females in the business world in Pakistan and provides insights for policymakers and support programs designed to empower female entrepreneurs.*

**Keywords:** Growth Aspirations, Female Entrepreneurs, Marital Status, Family Support, Business Growth, Women Empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship, notably among women, is a crucial piece of the puzzle in terms of economic development and social change but it tends to encounter peculiar challenges and opportunities. Pakistani women entrepreneurs are faced with a complex range of societal expectations, cultural norms, and personal aspirations that affect their journey in entrepreneurship. These women also face more hurdles than their male counterparts, including lack of access to capital, societal biases, and family responsibilities (Khalid et

al., 2021). Despite these challenges, women in Pakistan are making important strides in the business world and making valuable contributions to innovation, job creation, and economic growth (Siddique et al., 2020).

One of the main aspects impactful on the success of female entrepreneurs is the growth aspirations. Growth aspirations is the desire and goals set by entrepreneur when growing their businesses to be successful and expanding the business (Caliendo et al., 2014). For women, it is possible to be influenced by a number of factors, among them is the marital status, socio-economic background, access to resources, societal expectations etc. While there have been many studies on the entrepreneurial ambitions of women, limited research has been conducted on the growth ambitions of married and unmarried female entrepreneurs (Falk et al., 2020).

In many cultures, such as Pakistan, marriage comes with other obligations that can affect a woman's ability to achieve her business goals. Married women entrepreneurs can be faced with the issue of balancing family with business growth, which can influence their growth aspirations (Falk et al., 2020). In the other hand, unmarried female entrepreneurs may have more freedom to give attention to business expansion without the additional pressures of family life. However, the societal expectations and cultural norms can still shape the entrepreneurial objectives of unmarried women, which can impact their business strategies and growth aspirations (Matthews & Williams, 2018).

This study aims to fill up the gap in the existing literature by comparing the growth aspirations of married and unmarried female entrepreneurs in Pakistan, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Region. The research seeks to examine to what extent marital status has a significant impact on the growth aspirations of women entrepreneurs, and how different factors, including family support, social networks and cultural norms, may influence the growth aspirations of women entrepreneurs. Understanding these dynamics is important in the development of special programs and policies aimed at helping female entrepreneurs to develop their growth potential regardless of their marital status (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

The research will offer insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by married and unmarried female entrepreneurs and will provide valuable information for policymakers, development agencies and organizations working to empower women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. By learning more about these differences, the research will help to develop a better understanding of how personal and societal factors affect the entrepreneurial aspirations of women, which in turn will help to develop more inclusive and effective strategies to help develop and grow female entrepreneurship in Pakistan (Saeed, 2015).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The role of women entrepreneurs in driving the development of the economy is gaining importance at a global level. In Pakistan, female entrepreneurs have a unique set of challenges influencing their growth aspirations. These hurdles are determined by a variety of policies such as being married, cultural expectations, resources accessible, and societal norms.

Growth aspirations related to entrepreneurship; the aspirations and goals set by entrepreneurs for their businesses, including expansion and financial success as well as long-term sustainability. According to Cassar (2007), growth aspirations are very important because they can be the driving force behind business decisions and entrepreneurial actions. These aspirations are an expression of the vision of the entrepreneurs for their businesses and are often predictors of the success of the business (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003). Several studies have indicated that personal features of the individual, the background of the individual, and external factors like support networks have an impact on their growth aspirations (Bhardwaj & Mittal, 2017). For women entrepreneurs, such aspirations are often influenced by the interlocking of personal, family and societal expectations (Hughes & Jennings, 2008).

***The Impact of Marital Status on Entrepreneurial Growth Aspirations***

The influence of marital status on growth aspirations of women entrepreneurs is one of the issues that has attracted considerable interest. Studies have shown the critical role that marital status plays in the development of business objectives by women. Married women entrepreneurs are often burdened with running a family and a business. This can also be a limiting factor for their growth ambitions, as they might not focus on business growth but instead on family obligations. A study by Yadav and Kamboj (2017) found that married women tend to use more conservative approaches to growth, mainly because of their family commitments and the need to balance their work-life responsibilities. Similarly, Smith et al. (2018) observed that married women entrepreneurs tend to have more modest goals for their businesses such as sustainability and stability instead of aggressive growth.

The reverse would be true for unmarried women entrepreneurs who may have different growth aspirations. Without the same family responsibilities, unmarried women may have more freedom to pursue more ambitious business goals and business expansion strategies. Studies have found that single female business owners tend to take risks and invest more in an opportunity for growth. According to Matthews and Williams (2018), unmarried women are more likely to value their businesses and they are often more receptive to innovation and aggressive growth strategies.

***Socio-cultural Norms and Family Support***

In Pakistan cultural norms and family expectations play a major role in the entrepreneurial aspirations of women. Traditional gender roles generally restrict women in domestic spheres whereby they are restricted from pursuing professional goals especially in entrepreneurship (Siddique et al., 2020). These gendered expectations can raise barriers to entrepreneurship for women, as they are expected to put their energies into their family's needs rather than in entrepreneurship. However, married women entrepreneurs may be able to get support from their spouses, which can help overcome some of the challenges of balancing family and business responsibilities. As mentioned by Gusheh and Sultana (2019), spousal support can positively affect the growth aspirations of married women entrepreneurs, giving them the resources, financial stability, and encouragement to pursue business expansion.

On the other hand, unmarried women entrepreneurs might have a different set of challenges. While they may not have familial obligations, societal norms and cultural expectations about women in business continue to play a large role in the development of their entrepreneurial aspirations. Unmarried women entrepreneurs can face judgment from society and pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, which can impede the successful implementation of aggressive growth strategies. A study by Garcia and Rodrigue (2019) found that for the female entrepreneurs who are not married, there is a societal pressure that needs to balance their aspiration of economic achievement with the social expectations of being a family wife, which may restrict their aspirations of business growth.

***Access to Resources and Networks***

Access to resources, such as financial capital and mentorship, are also important factors that affect the aspirations for growth of women entrepreneurs. Women, particularly in developing countries such as Pakistan, often have a difficult time obtaining financial resources (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Lack of access to loans, venture capital and financial networks can limit the access of women entrepreneurs to invest in business expansion. Married women may be further restrained in this regard as they might have other issues with securing loans because of joint finances or spousal financial histories (Gupta and Sharma, 2016). In contrast, unmarried women entrepreneurs might be better in control of their financial decisions, which could increase their capacity to finance business growth (Kim et al., 2020).

Furthermore, social network and mentorship play an important role in the growth aspirations of women entrepreneurs. Research by Patel (2020) emphasises on the importance of networking in promoting the growth of business, particularly for women entrepreneurs. Strong networks not only give access to valuable resources, mentorship and business opportunities, but essentially lead to higher growth aspirations. However, accessing these networks, which are usually dominated by men, is often a challenge for women entrepreneurs. As noted by Patel and Lee (2021), women entrepreneurs require access to various and encouraging networks that can open doors to business expansion and offer guidance.

### ***Impact of Education and Experience on Growth Aspirations***

Education and previous entrepreneurial experience are also important determinants of growth aspirations of female entrepreneurs. Studies have shown that women with higher levels of education tend to have higher entrepreneurial ambitions and have a higher probability of aggressive growth strategy (Bhardwaj & Mittal, 2017). Education gives them the skills, knowledge and confidence to tackle the business world and calculated risks. Similarly, women who have previous entrepreneurial experience are more likely to have higher growth aspirations as they are better equipped to deal with the challenges of expanding a business (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003).

In contrast, women who have lower levels of education or experience may have lower growth aspirations, as they may have lower confidence in their ability to scale their businesses. The inability to access education and training programs for women in developing countries such as Pakistan only serves to further compound this problem (Hussain & Rehman, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

This study adopts a quantitative research design to analyze the differences in growth aspirations between married and unmarried female entrepreneurs.

### ***Hypotheses***

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

1. **H1:** Married women entrepreneurs will have lower growth aspirations than unmarried women entrepreneurs.
2. **H2:** Unmarried women entrepreneurs will have higher growth aspirations due to fewer familial responsibilities compared to married women entrepreneurs.
3. **H3:** The availability of family support will positively correlate with the growth aspirations of married women entrepreneurs.

### ***Sample***

The study sample will consist of 200 female entrepreneurs from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, selected through purposive sampling. The sample will be divided into two groups:

- **Married Women Entrepreneurs:** 114 participants

- **Unmarried Women Entrepreneurs:** 86 participants

The participants will be selected from various business sectors, with some operating home-based businesses and others engaged in online entrepreneurship. This sampling approach ensures that the research captures a diverse range of female entrepreneurs from different business types and experience levels.

### *Operational Definitions*

1. **Growth Aspiration:** Growth aspiration is defined as the career-related desires and ambitions that provide the impulse for career-related behaviors leading to career success (Rojewski, 2005). It reflects the entrepreneurial goals of expansion, innovation, and business scaling.
2. **Married Women Entrepreneurs:** Female entrepreneurs who are legally married and engage in business activities alongside their family responsibilities.
3. **Unmarried Women Entrepreneurs:** Female entrepreneurs who are not married and may face fewer family-related obligations compared to married women.

### *Data Collection Instrument*

To measure the growth aspirations of female entrepreneurs, the **Career Aspiration Scale-Revised (CAS-R)** developed by Gregor and O'Brien (2016) will be used. The scale consists of 24 items categorized into three parts: achievement aspiration, educational aspiration, and leadership aspiration. It uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5).

The reliability of the instrument will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The instrument has been previously validated and has demonstrated high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ). Permission for using the scale has been obtained from the authors.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

The data will be collected in two phases:

1. **Phase I - Pilot Study:** A pilot study will be conducted with 56 female entrepreneurs to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. This phase will help refine the questionnaire and ensure that the data collection process is effective.
2. **Phase II - Main Study:** After refining the instrument based on the pilot study findings, the main data collection will take place. The 200 female entrepreneurs will be approached using purposive sampling, and data will be collected through a combination of:
  - **Online Surveys:** Distributed via platforms like Google Forms, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook to ensure a broad reach.
  - **Printed Surveys:** For those who prefer a more traditional method.

Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring confidentiality and ethical standards are maintained. Participants will be briefed about the study's objectives and assured that their responses will be used solely for research purposes.

*Data Analysis*

Data collected from the surveys will be analyzed using **SPSS** (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The following statistical techniques were employed:

Descriptive Statistics, Independent Sample T-Test, Correlation Analysis and Reliability Analysis

**RESULTS**

*Descriptive Statistics*

**Table 1:**

**Sample Characteristics (N=200)**

<b>Sample Characteristics</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	114 (57%)
	Unmarried	86 (43%)
<b>Type of Business</b>	Online Business	139 (69%)
	Home Business	61 (31%)
<b>Experience</b>	More than 3 years	46 (22%)
	Less than 3 years	154 (78%)

The sample was 200 female entrepreneurs and 114 of them were married (57%) and 86 were not married (43%). The majority of the participants (69%) were in online businesses and 31% were in home-based businesses. In addition, most of the entrepreneurs (78%) possessed less than three years of business experience; only 22% had more than three years of experience.

*Reliability Analysis*

**Table 2:**

*Cronbach's Alpha for the Career Aspiration Scale (N=200)*

<b>Scale</b>	<b>No. of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
CAS-R	24	0.827

The reliability of the Career Aspiration Scale-Revised (CAS-R) was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was found to be 0.827, which indicates good internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

*Descriptive Statistics of Growth Aspirations*

**Table 3:**

*Descriptive Statistics for Growth Aspirations (N=200)*

Variable	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Growth Aspiration (GA)	200	68.1	14.1	-1.05	2.43

The mean and standard deviation for growth aspirations (GA) among the participants were calculated. The overall mean growth aspiration score for the entire sample was 68.1, with a standard deviation of 14.1. The data showed a negatively skewed distribution (skewness = -1.05), suggesting that most participants reported relatively high growth aspirations, with a few reporting lower aspirations.

*Independent Sample t-Test*

**Table 4:**

*Independent Sample t-Test Showing Differences in Growth Aspirations Based on Marital Status (N=200)*

Group	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval (CI)
Married (n=114)	68.2	11.9	0.22	0.82	-3.5 to 4.4
Unmarried (n=86)	67.8	16.5			

An independent sample t-test was performed to compare married and unmarried married women entrepreneurs in growth aspiration. The results showed that there was no significant difference in growth aspirations in the two groups. The average value of growth aspiration of married women entrepreneurs was 68.2 with SD = 11.9 while for unmarried women entrepreneurs it was 67.8 with SD = 16.5. The t-value obtained was 0.22 and p-value obtained is 0.82 which is greater than the significance level of 0.05, and hence marital status did not have significant effect on growth aspirations.

*Correlation Analysis for Family Support*

**Table 5:**

*Correlation Between Family Support and Growth Aspirations for Married Women Entrepreneurs (N=114)*

Variable	Family Support	Growth Aspiration (GA)
Family Support	1.00	0.45**
Growth Aspiration (GA)	0.45**	1.00

*Note: p < 0.01*

A correlation analysis was performed to check the relationship between family support and growth aspirations towards the married women entrepreneurs. The results showed a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), which indicated that the higher the level of family support, the higher the growth aspirations of the married women entrepreneurs.

## **DISCUSSION**

The main purpose of this study was to compare the growth aspirations of the married and the unmarried female entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. The research was conducted in view of exploring the impact of marital status on business goals and marriage ambitions of women entrepreneurs, especially on business growth aspirations. The results that are reached under the Results section give great insights to this area. However, it is crucial to consider this results against the light of available research and give possible explanations for the results.

The results of the study showed that there was no statistically significant difference in growth aspiration between married and unmarried female entrepreneurs. The mean growth aspirations of the married women entrepreneurs ( $M = 68.2$ ) were very similar (with a mean of 67.8) to the mean growth aspirations of the unmarried women entrepreneurs. This finding contradicts the popular view that married women entrepreneurs are less ambitious in stages of growth because of their family duties. Previous research has claimed that married women must often juggle business expansion and family duties, which may prevent them from pursuing aggressive business strategies (Yadav & Kamboj, 2017). However, the result of this study showed that marital status may not be a critical factor in the determination of the growth aspirations of female entrepreneurs in the sample.

One possible reason for these findings is that a large proportion of married women entrepreneurs in Pakistan may have evolved coping mechanisms to balance family and business responsibilities. As pointed out by Gusheh and Sultana (2019), spousal support can be a significant factor in supporting the growth of business for married women. In this study, it is possible that married women entrepreneurs with good support systems by their spouses and families are able to pursue their entrepreneurial goals without compromising much on their family responsibilities. Moreover, as society's expectations of gender roles change, women are now increasingly being sought as business leaders, regardless of their marital status (Saeed, 2015). Therefore, both married and unmarried women entrepreneurs may have similar aspirations for growth as they try to build successful businesses.

Although the marital status of female entrepreneurs did not have a significant impact on the growth aspirations of the female entrepreneurs in this study, the family support was found to have a positive correlation with the growth aspirations of married women entrepreneurs. The correlation analysis showed that the level of family support was positive in growing aspirations for married women. This finding is consistent with earlier research that indicates that family support, particularly from spouses, can have a positive impact on the business aspirations of married women entrepreneurs (Gusheh & Sultana, 2019). Family support can help married women in providing emotional stability, financial security and practical support, which in turn allows them to concentrate on business growth.

However, it is important to note that the availability of family support may vary depending on the individual circumstances, such as the level of cooperation from spouses or other family members. In some cases, family support may not necessarily result in higher growth aspirations, especially if there are competing demands between family responsibilities and business goals (Falk et al, 2020). In the present study, the positive correlation between family support and growth aspirations suggests that family support is critically important in increasing the business ambitions of married women entrepreneurs, but this association may not hold in all the cases.

For unmarried women entrepreneurs, on growth aspirations, the study did not find any significant difference from their married counterparts. This finding is somewhat unexpected, as prior research has hinted that there might be more flexibility for unmarried women entrepreneurs to pursue more ambitious growth strategies without having to worry about their family responsibilities (Matthews & Williams, 2018). Unmarried women can have fewer personal commitments and thus be able to focus more on the growth of their businesses, taking risks, and pursuing opportunities for innovative growth.

However, the negligible differences in growth aspirations between the unmarried and married women is the outcome in this study, suggesting that other factors, such as access to financial resources, educational background, and social networks, are perhaps more important in shaping the growth aspirations of unmarried women entrepreneurs. Studies have revealed that single women entrepreneurs are subjected to pressures and cultural expectations from society that can restrict them from pursuing entrepreneurship (Kim et al., 2020). Despite less familial responsibility, there are still potential challenges for unmarried women that may be associated with social stigma or a lack of supportive networks which could affect their business objectives.

The findings of this study have important implications for policy makers, support organizations and business development agencies. First, the results do not show that marital status alone is a good indicator of growth aspirations among women entrepreneurs. Therefore, attempts to be used to support female entrepreneurs should not be based solely on their marital status. Instead, policies and programs should be focused on addressing other factors that affect growth aspirations, such as access to finance, mentorship, networking opportunities and educational resources.

Furthermore, the positive relationship between family support and growth aspirations for married women indicates the importance of spousal involvement in business ventures. Policies that encourage family-oriented support systems, such as spousal training programs or financial support for married entrepreneurs, may be helpful in getting married women to grow their businesses.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of having more inclusive and diverse support networks for unmarried women entrepreneurs. These women may encounter some unique challenges to dealing with the entrepreneurial landscape, including lack of access to networks and mentorship opportunities (Patel, 2020). Support programs that offer resources to unmarried women to help them build networks and access mentorship could help them to improve their growth aspirations and improve their success rates.

#### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

This study has a number of limitations that should be considered for future research. First, the sample was restricted to female entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, which might not be representative of women entrepreneurs in other regions or countries. Future studies may include a more diverse sample of different geographical locations to improve the generalisability of the results.

Second, this study was carried out using cross-sectional design, which reduces the robustness to draw any causality between marital status and growth aspirations. Longitudinal studies that show how women entrepreneurs grow their aspirations over time would have stronger implications for understanding how their aspirations to grow their businesses are affected by their marital status or other factors.

Finally, future research should delve deeper into other variables, such as the educational background, industry experiences and access to capital which may have a significant impact on the growth aspirations of female entrepreneurs. A better understanding of these factors could assist in the more targeted design of

support programs and policies to better address the needs of women entrepreneurs in different demographic groups.

## CONCLUSION

This study focused on women entrepreneurs (both married and unmarried female entrepreneurs) aspirations of growth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan and how their marital status affects their business goals and aspirations. The results showed that marital status does not have a significant effect on growth aspirations of female entrepreneurs. Both married and unmarried women entrepreneurs had similar aspirations for growth, indicating that characteristics of entrepreneurship beyond marital status, such as access to resources, networks, and mentorship, are more important in determining entrepreneurial aspirations.

However, the result of the study discovered that family support was positively correlated with the growth aspirations of married women entrepreneurs. This represents the importance of having a good support system in helping married women deal with the challenges of balancing family responsibilities and business growth. In contrast, unmarried women, although having fewer obligations to their families, experiences pressures from society that may constrain their entrepreneurial ambitions which indicates that cultural expectations and lack of support networks may affect their business growth.

The results of the study indicate that policies and support programs for female entrepreneurs need to target improving access to financial resources, networks and mentorship, and not just consider marital status. Encouraging family-oriented support systems and developing inclusive networks for unmarried women entrepreneurs could play an important role in supporting their growth aspirations and entrepreneurial success. Furthermore there may be a need to conduct more research into the role of educational background, industry experience and access to capital on growth aspirations of female entrepreneurs in order to design more effective policies and support structures.

Overall, this research provides useful information on the entrepreneurial environment for women in Pakistan, especially for those interested in promoting gender equality and creating gender-targeted interventions to support the growth and sustainability of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan.

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