

# Perceptions of Women Entrepreneurs and Their Performance: A Study in Sylhet City, Bangladesh

Md. Asraful Islam Chowdury<sup>1</sup> and Wahida Akther<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Leading University Sylhet, Bangladesh  
E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[ashraful.cumba@gmail.com](mailto:ashraful.cumba@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[wahidaala@gmail.com](mailto:wahidaala@gmail.com)

---

**Abstract**—Women entrepreneurs have rapidly growing contribution in economic development of Bangladesh. They should have positive perceptions on different aspects of society so that they can perform effectively in their societies of Bangladesh. This paper aims to investigate the perceptions of women entrepreneurs and the relation with their performance in Sylhet city. The study focuses on different aspects of perception which might have impact on women entrepreneurs such as perceptions on financial supports, family and friends, society, legal and political environment and women empowerment in society. This study involved field survey method by using structured interviews technique along with a structured questionnaire that was formed with thirty six statements in five-scale Likert. The field survey was conducted in Sylhet city by selecting fifty women entrepreneurs purposively from different sectors. So the study reveals that women entrepreneurs have highly positive perception on their family and friends as well as on their empowerment in family and society. On the other hand, they have very negative perception on political and legal environment and existing financial supports and moderate perception on society. The analysis also reveals that these perceptions haven't any significant influence on their performance such as business growth. It is yet necessary to change their perceptions through collective initiatives from government and private sectors for future growth of women entrepreneurs in Sylhet city.

**Keywords:** Women Entrepreneurs, Perceptions, Society, Performance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term entrepreneurship has acquired special significance in case of economic growth both in all developed and developing countries of the world. But women entrepreneurship development has been a challenging phenomenon particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh because here women are lagged behind economically and socially compared to men. So they might have negative perceptions about different aspects of society which hinder them to take risks to initiate a new business. It is important to make their perceptions positive about our society for the future development of women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. Over the past 20 years women entrepreneurship grew

dramatically in terms of revenues and employment throughout the world. [4] But women entrepreneurship development is still a challenging phenomenon in the social context of Bangladesh compared to other developed countries. [2] In Bangladesh, women face different constraints in business such as ability to access to financial services in formal lending institutions, entrepreneurship and market knowledge, lack of formal education, lack of managerial and technical skills, lack of time due to household responsibilities, socio-cultural constraints, legal and institutional constraints.[3] Although women consist half of the total population of Bangladesh, they constitute a very negligible portion of the total entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. The common causes behind this low participation are poor access to credit facilities, gender discrimination and perception of people about women in Bangladesh. Therefore the study will try to identify the real perception of women entrepreneurs on different aspects of society that may have influence on their business performance and their future growth in Sylhet region.

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceptions of women entrepreneurs and the relation with their performance in Sylhet city.

Based on this main research objective, the following supporting objectives were addressed:

- To understand the perceptions of women entrepreneurs on different aspects of society in Sylhet city.
- To identify the association between demographic characteristics and different perceptions of women entrepreneurs in Sylhet city.
- To identify the association between different perceptions of women entrepreneurs and their performance (Such as Business Growth) in Sylhet city.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women entrepreneurs may be defined as a woman or group of women who initiate, organize and run a business enterprise. In Bangladesh women entrepreneurs are growing day by day. It is commonly believed that society's attitudes to women entrepreneurs are gradually changing and the participation of women in different entrepreneurial activities is empowering them in social, economic and cultural fields. It is also increasing their power of and access to taking decisions within as well as outside the family in Bangladesh. Some key factors that are considered critical for women entrepreneur's success in Bangladesh such as access to technology, interpersonal skills, training and motivation, social security and freedom, assistance and easy regulation, family support and quality assurance.[5-6] The acknowledgment of the role played by women in the economy has led to the development of various programs and interventions intended to support women in enterprise development in form of financing, training and business counseling services. Considering the important role of Women Entrepreneurs in SME sector, Bangladesh Bank has also formulated a guideline named "Small and medium enterprise (SME) credit policies and programs". Besides it has taken some steps for the banks and financial institutions to ensure more institutional financial facilities for Women Entrepreneurs in SME sector. [7]

In addition to that social support is also important for a woman to lead her business successfully. Without proper support from family and society it may not be possible for women to be successful in her venture. The important support is from family and friends and close people as well wishers who play a very significant role in the success of their business. [1] Although women entrepreneurs constitute a very negligible portion of the total entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, It is mentionable that despite many complexities, the class of women entrepreneurs has increased in Bangladesh by taking the challenge to work in a male dominated, competitive business environment.[3] A number of studies have been conducted by various research scholars on a number of issues pertaining to women entrepreneurs such as contribution of women entrepreneurs, their problems and success factors as well as case studies of different successful women entrepreneurs and so on. However none of these studies have identified the real perceptions of women entrepreneurs on different dimensions of surrounding environment such as family, society, legal & political environments as well as financial supports and the relations with business performance.

### 4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

#### 4.1 Population & Sampling

The population of the study are the women entrepreneurs doing business in Sylhet city. The study has used purposive sampling method under non- probability sampling technique.

The reason behind using this sampling technique is that there was unavailability of list of women entrepreneurs from where sample can be drawn based on a probability technique. The sample size is fifty women entrepreneurs selected purposively for this analysis.

#### 4.2 Instrument

A structured questionnaire has been developed based on the previous literature to collect information. The questionnaire consists of 36 items which have been identified from literature review on different dimensions such as financial supports, family, friends and relatives, society, women empowerment in society, legal and political environment. The reliability of the items for each dimension was confirmed by Cronbech's alpha. Minimum Cronbech's alpha (0.58) was found for the dimension of perception on political environment shown in **Table 01**. Each question was set on five point likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree.

Dimensions	Items/ Variables	Cronbach 's Alpha
Perception on financial supports	6	0.61
Perception on family, friends and relatives	7	0.66
Perception on society	5	0.65
Perception on legal environment	7	0.83
Perception on political environment	5	0.58
Perception on women empowerment	6	0.78

#### 4.3 Data Collection

Data has been collected by face to face interview with the women entrepreneurs of Sylhet city between the months of October, 2015 and February, 2016. Some secondary sources of data have also been used.

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

Data has been analyzed by SPSS 20. Statistical tools like chi-square and correlation analyses have been used to interpret data.

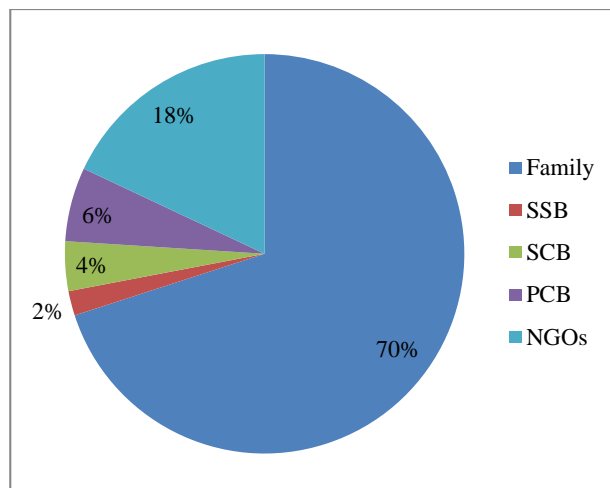
### 5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The analyses use descriptive statistical methods, chi-square test and correlation. Here **Table 2** and **Table 3** show the demographic and other information of respondents found in this study where as **Table 4** shows the levels of their perceptions on different dimensions such as financial supports, family, friends and relatives, society, women empowerment in society, legal and political environment. From this sample study, it was found that most of the women entrepreneurs have very poor perception on financial supports of their society, legal and political environment and overall society of Sylhet city. On the other hand they do believe positively that their family and friends are more supportive and they are getting empowered gradually in their families and society. Here **Fig. 01** shows that most of the women entrepreneurs in Sylhet city perceive that state owned banks are most complex source of

finance than others such as private banks and NGOs for their business.

On the other hand the study found that most of the women entrepreneurs in Sylhet city still perceive family source as the easiest source of finance for their business which is shown by Fig. 02.

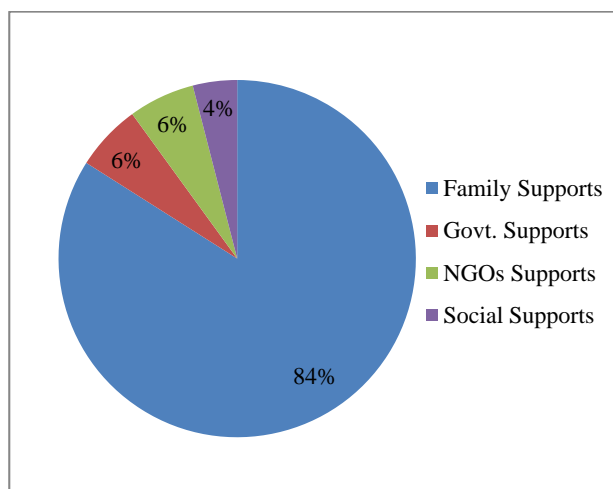
Details		No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 30	20	40%
	Above 30 & Below 40	19	38%
	Above 40	11	22%
Educational Qualification	SSC & below	14	28%
	HSC	24	48%
	Graduate & above	12	24%
Business Tenure	>= 3 years	22	44%
	<3 & >=5 years	12	24%
	<5years	16	32%



**Fig. 02: Easy sources of finance for women entrepreneurs**

Besides the study also shows that majority of women entrepreneurs of this sample survey perceive their family supports as the most important support for their entrepreneurial development that is shown by Fig. 03.

Details		No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Business Type	Tailoring	18	36%
	Parlor	17	34%
	Clothing	10	20%
	Others	5	10%
No. of Employees	>= 5	28	56%
	5< & >10	12	24%
	< 10	10	20%



**Fig. 03: Most important supports needed for women entrepreneurs**

Details		Levels of Perception	
		Poor	Positive
Financial Supports	f	38	12
	%	76%	24%
Family, Friend & Relatives	f	11	39
	%	22%	78%
Society	f	33	17
	%	66%	34%
Legal Environment	f	37	13
	%	74%	26%
Political Environment	f	42	8
	%	84%	16%
Women Empowerment	f	9	41
	%	18%	82%

The following tables (5-7) show the relation of age, education and business tenure of respondents with different perceptions of women entrepreneurs by cross tabulation. It was obvious from these tables that the relations of age, education and business tenure of respondents with perception of women entrepreneurs are not significant at 5% level with calculated values of chi-square 0.292, 0.009 and 0.990 for financial support dimension respectively which doesn't exceed the critical chi-square value ( $\chi^2 = 3.84$ ) for 1 degree of freedom at 5% level of significance. The results are not significant for other dimensions as well shown in following tables (5-7). So it could be concluded that the women entrepreneurs with higher age, educational qualification and higher business tenure don't have positive perceptions significantly more than the entrepreneurs with lower age, lower educational qualification and lower business tenure in Sylhet city.

**Table 05: Cross tabulation for two levels AGE by different dimensions of perception for Women Entrepreneurs**

Dimensions	Chi-Square Test Statistics	Degree of freedom (d.f)	p-Value
Financial Supports	$\chi^2=0.292$	1	.589
Family, Friend & Relatives	$\chi^2=0.228$	1	.633
Society	$\chi^2= 0.535$	1	.465
Legal Environment	$\chi^2=0.624$	1	.430
Political Environment	$\chi^2=0.025$	1	.875
Women Empowerment	$\chi^2= 1.107$	1	.293

Legal Environment	$\chi^2=2.229$	1	0.135
Political Environment	$\chi^2=0.132$	1	0.716
Women Empowerment	$\chi^2= 0.482$	1	0.487

Finally the analysis illustrates through following tables (8-9) the relation of business performance (measured by business growth rate for two years and five years) of respondents with different perceptions of women entrepreneurs by cross tabulations. It was also apparent from these tables that the relation of their business performance with their perception is not significant at 5% level with calculated values of chi-square 0.008 and 0.000 for financial supports dimension respectively which doesn't exceed the critical chi-square value ( $\chi^2 =3.84$ ) for 1 degree of freedom at 5% level of significance. The results are not significant for other dimensions as well shown in following tables (8-9).

**Table 08: Cross tabulation for two levels BUSINESS GROWTH in TWO years by two levels perception of Women Entrepreneurs on different dimensions**

Dimensions	Chi-Square Test Statistics	Degree of freedom (d.f)	p-Value
Financial Supports	$\chi^2=.008$	1	0.928
Family, Friend & Relatives	$\chi^2= .787$	1	.375
Society	$\chi^2= .082$	1	.775
Legal Environment	$\chi^2=.208$	1	.649
Political Environment	$\chi^2=.902$	1	.342
Women Empowerment	$\chi^2= .081$	1	.775

**Table 06: Cross tabulation for two levels EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION by different dimensions of perception of Women Entrepreneurs**

Dimensions	Chi-Square Test Statistics	Degree of freedom (d.f)	p-Value
Financial Supports	$\chi^2= 0.009$	1	.926
Family, Friend & Relatives	$\chi^2= 3.559$	1	.059
Society	$\chi^2= 4.641$	1	.310
Legal Environment	$\chi^2=1.387$	1	.239
Political Environment	$\chi^2=0.426$	1	.514
Women Empowerment	$\chi^2= 0.182$	1	.670

**Table 09: Cross tabulation for two levels BUSINESS GROWTH in FIVE years by two levels perception of Women Entrepreneurs on different dimensions**

Dimensions	Chi-Square Test Statistics	Degree of freedom (d.f)	p-Value
Financial Supports	$\chi^2=.000$	1	1.0
Family, Friend & Relatives	$\chi^2= .117$	1	.733
Society	$\chi^2=.802$	1	.370
Legal Environment	$\chi^2=.104$	1	.747
Political Environment	$\chi^2=.595$	1	.440
Women Empowerment	$\chi^2=1.220$	1	.269

**Table 07: Cross tabulation for three levels BUSINESS TENURE by different dimensions of perception of Women Entrepreneurs**

Dimensions	Chi-Square Test Statistics	Degree of freedom (d.f)	p-Value
Financial Supports	$\chi^2= 0.990$	1	0.610
Family, Friend & Relatives	$\chi^2=0.145$	1	0.704
Society	$\chi^2= 0.997$	1	0.318

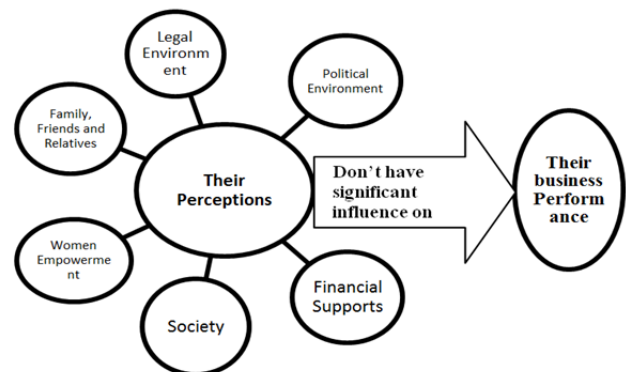


Fig. 04 Framework of this study

So it could be concluded that the women entrepreneurs with positive perceptions on different dimensions of the society don't have high business performance significantly more than the women entrepreneurs who have poor perceptions on different dimensions of society.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study has tried to identify the levels of perception of women entrepreneurs and their relations with business performance in Sylhet city. By using sample survey method and systematic analysis, the study has attempted to draw a conclusion on different perceptions of women entrepreneurs in Sylhet city. So this study concludes that the demographic characteristics of women entrepreneurs (such as age, educational qualification and business tenure) as well as their business performance are not significantly associated with their different perception levels about several dimensions of society such as financial supports, family, friends and relatives, society, women empowerment in society, legal and political environment. From this finding, it also could be concluded that the negative perceptions of women entrepreneurs might have negative impact on their future growth in Sylhet city but their negative perceptions won't have any significant influence on their real business performance. So this study provides good news for those women who still perceive negatively about different aspects of society. This finding will also make potential women encouraged for taking entrepreneurial initiatives more and more in Sylhet city. Furthermore the study reveals a framework (**Table 04**) to show the relation between

perceptions of women entrepreneurs and their performance in business. This framework might be studied more comprehensively in future throughout the country to understand the overall perception of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Brindley, C. (2005) Barriers to women achieving their entrepreneurial potential: Women and risk, *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, 11(2), 144, 161 Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13552550510590554>
- [2] Issa Ahammad and Huq, S. M. (July, 2013) Women Entrepreneurship Development in Bangladesh Challenges and Prospects, *International Journal of Innovative Research & Development*, Vol 2, Issue 7, Retrieved from [www.ijird.com](http://www.ijird.com)
- [3] Nawaz, F. (May, 2009) Critical Factors of Women Entrepreneurship Development in Rural Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Development Research Working Paper Series*
- [4] Rahmatullah, M. and Zahan, F. (July, 2014) Female Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: Constraints, Motivation and Success, *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, Volume 11, No 2
- [5] Sarker, S. and Palit, M. (2014) Determinants of Success Factor of Women Entrepreneurs in Bangladesh - A study Based on Khulna Region, *Business and Economic Research*, ISSN 2162-4860, Vol. 4, No. 2
- [6] Sharma, P and Varma, S. K. (2008) Women Empowerment through Entrepreneurial Activities of Self Help Groups, *Indian Res. J. Ext. Edu*, 8 (1) <http://www.seea.org.in/vol8-1-2008/14.pdf>
- [7] Bangladesh Economic Review, (2014)