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THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ON MICRO ENTERPRISE SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract:

Women's contribution to the economic growth takes many forms including entrepreneurship. Existing literature suggest that women can play a significant role in the larger entrepreneurship landscape and economic development. Unfortunately, the level of women entrepreneurial success is still low. Most of women failed to sustain in entrepreneurship due to psychological characteristic issue for instance lack of empowerment among themselves. Consequently, many countries have been focusing on empowering women for the economic development and to relieve the plight of women living in poverty. Therefore, women empowerment emerges as one of the crucial issues in the entrepreneurship field especially among low income household. Increasing empowerment element among women is seen as one of the ways to improve entrepreneurial activity and increase the access for economic opportunity. Since the success of micro enterprise among women entrepreneur are still being debated among scholars, therefore the understanding on the concept of psychological women empowerment in depth is crucial. The limitation on the explanation concerning the concept of the psychological women empowerment on women entrepreneur requires for further investigation. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the role of psychological women empowerment that may assist in women entrepreneurial success. The study employed quantitative method and time horizon of the study covers three years starting from 2018. The total of 410 women entrepreneurs categorised as low income household who conducting micro enterprise in Malaysia participated in this study voluntarily. The data was analysed using descriptive and linear

regression analysis. The finding obtained from this study indicated that there was significant positive relationship between psychological women empowerment and women entrepreneurial success. In addition, the findings showed that women had greater level of autonomy, independence and having control on their business. The findings offer evidence that women in low income household engaged in entrepreneurial activities feel much empowered that lead to business sustainability. This result provides valuable insight for agencies involved in women entrepreneurship development especially on micro enterprise.

Keywords:

Micro Enterprise, Psychological Characteristics, Psychological Women Empowerment, Women Entrepreneurial Success

Introduction

In the late 1970s, women entrepreneurs have been the main topic of many studies and lead to the emergence of sub-domain of women entrepreneurship (Marr, 2020). Amanda et al., (2019) noted in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) project that entrepreneurship is now centre stage in the public policy arena of most countries. This follows crucial changes in the area entrepreneurship when the economy has shifted from P-economy to K-economy that emphasize on the importance of new technologies, requirement of creativity and knowledge-based work among entrepreneurs.

The 1st ASEAN Forum on Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship argued that increasing women's economic participation and entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia will be critical in realizing both the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025. In Malaysia, several efforts have been made to improve the number of small business ownership among women especially among the low-income household. These initiatives include Women Empowerment Year 2018 (TMW18), Women Director's Program, I-KIT, I-KeuNita, Get Malaysian Business Online and etc. Thus, when the area of entrepreneurship itself is subjected to necessary changes as a result of a shift from P-economy to K-economy, the issue of women entrepreneurs has come at the right time. A report by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in 2017 in three ASEAN countries (Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand) found that women prefer to hire 17 per cent more women employees as compared to male. In addition, women also tend to use their incomes around 90 per cent for every dollar they earn on their families and communities including on children's education, health and nutrition. Several studies have indicated that despite the improved number of women involves in workforce in various sectors of the industry, the rate of women owned business are still at deplorable level as compared to male (McIntyre, 2020; Reiger, 2012).

Marr (2020) argued that many female entrepreneurs face lot of obstacles to start a business and during the development phase of their undertakings. In fact, according to Stillman (2014) and Alam et al., (2011), Malaysia is one of the countries that have to put significant effort to develop women entrepreneur due to the tendency to be less growth oriented than man. Although a few initiatives have been devised by the Government of Malaysia to empower women entrepreneur, however, there are still a number of barriers that hinders its success. Indeed, recent reviews of the literature have acknowledged the gaps that exists among female entrepreneurs (Solesvik,

et al, 2019; Yadav & Uni, 2016). Thus, Malaysia provides an interesting opportunity to study women entrepreneur of micro enterprise among low-income household.

Many studies were examining the unique characteristics of women entrepreneurs and whether these qualities influence the sustainability of women-owned businesses in micro enterprise (Samantha Cheh, 2018). Based on previous studies, Knowledge-based industries (KBI) and manufacturing were two sectors that did not appear to attract as many women entrepreneurs. These two sectors, which are key sectors driving the country's growth and innovation, attracted only small percentage of women entrepreneurs (Yusoff, et al., 2018; Sajilan et al., 2015). Similarly, Department of Statistic Malaysia (Economic Census, 2020) indicated that, the majority of women entrepreneurs involved in service sector were almost more than 50 per cent out of total number of women-owned established sector. This figure shows that most of women entrepreneurs still prefer less risky business compared riskier sector such as manufacturing that will contribute towards higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In view of this, there is a need to study the psychological characteristic among women entrepreneur that were identified by vast literature to have influence on entrepreneurial success as well as business sustainability (Ramadani et al., 2015). As a result, the purpose of this paper is to explore the psychological characteristic among women entrepreneur in micro enterprise by focusing on psychological women empowerment. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, the brief review of the entrepreneurial success definition. Second, the role of psychological characteristic on women entrepreneurial success Third, the overview of the concept of psychological women empowerment and how does it relate to women entrepreneur that represent as a crucial driver in the stimulation of success. Next, we present the methodology employed such as the instrument used and respondents involved. Finally, based on the result generated, we make a conclusion on how the study conducted may assist the future studies in entrepreneurship stream.

Literature Review

There are three points will be discussed in literature review. First, the discussion focus on definition of entrepreneurial success. Second, how psychological characteristics influence women entrepreneurial success. Finally, the review on concept of psychological women empowerment and how it relates to women entrepreneur.

Definition of Entrepreneurial Success

Entrepreneur success is a phenomenon to be understood by implication or context. Theoretically, the literatures indicated that there are lack of mutual agreement on how to determine the measurement and indicators of successful entrepreneur (Mamun et al., 2018; Mustapha & Subramaniam, 2016; Fisher, et al., 2014). Despite much are known about the economic, individual, and environmental factors that contribute to entrepreneurial success, its exact component, measurement, and indicators for its achievement are not generally agreed in the literature. This lack of clarity in this core concept is an issue for entrepreneurship scholars and required one worthy detailed investigation. Generally, the word of "success" is defined as favourable or prosperous termination of attempts or the achievement of one's goal. However, favourable perception of one individual will be different as another. Similarly, the indicators of achievement may differ in some point of view or domain. Hence, there are so many definitions on entrepreneur success or success start-up. According to Przepiorka, (2017) and

Rauch and Frese, (2007) entrepreneurial success is informed by cultural issues or is dependent on individual perspective. For example, venture capitalists and the entrepreneurs who are seeking their funds were found to have different perceptions of entrepreneurial success (Black et al., 2010). Based on categorization by Jennings, et al (2016), successful entrepreneurs are defined as those who have excelled and reached the top in their chosen fields and have become multi-millionaires.

Although the procurement of wealth is a typical indicator of success (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), yet other researches showed that many entrepreneurs do not necessarily consider procurement of wealth as a measure of their success (Basit et al, 2020; Alstete, 2008). Successful entrepreneur can be assumed by referring at on-going venture when other ventures have left the market (Hogarth & Karelaia, 2008; Douglas, 2001). Gender differences also affect perceptions of success. Men use external standards to benchmark success, such as gaining prestige or recognition for accomplishment; whereas women use internal definitions of success, such as whether they accomplished what they set out to (Burger, 2008; Cliff, 1998). Thus, there is evidence that women entrepreneur tends to feel that their interpersonal skills are their internal value for them to be considered successful. Moreover, determination of criterion for success by Brockhaus (1986) and Batool and Ullah (2017) which defined as the business continued to exist three years after the manager created the company. Whereas, the definition provided by Witt (2004) who defined for a success as the completion of the idea and planning phase, for instance, the founder has moved from idea development and business planning to business start-up. Based on extensive literature review as above, the inconsistency in measuring the successful entrepreneurship might give consequence on accuracy of estimating the factors related to entrepreneurial success. Accuracy is essential to entrepreneurial success especially for women, as it is important to understand how the entrepreneurs will struggle in the great challenge of economy.

Based on the above discussion, most literature often regarded firm survival or sustainability and success as the same thing. With respect to the empirical evidence, therefore this study treat business survival and success as two related where the business managed to sustain within the first three years after its formation due to its liability of newness as suggested by Freeman et al, (2004); Brockhaus, (1986) and Batool and Ullah, (2000). This definition also consistent with Burger, (2008), Witt (2004) and Cliff (1998). Since, our subjects are women entrepreneurs of micro enterprise and belong to low income household category, thus, the definition of success used in this study is appropriate for this context.

The Psychological Characteristics and Women Entrepreneurial Success

Women-owned businesses contributes quite significantly to the economic development. In spite of that, most of them are micro and small business that belong to the low-income households. Often women run the business out of desperation in order to provide a better living condition for the family. Nonetheless, couple with their inherent skills and competencies, many of them tend to succeed. Fundamentally, psychological characteristics, also known as personal characteristics or personality traits lead the way in research on entrepreneurs. Based on the bulk of recent literatures in psychological characteristics theory, these literatures seek to answer two main questions: (1) Do certain traits predict an individual's likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur, and (2) Do certain traits predict an entrepreneur's likelihood of achieving "successful" outcomes as entrepreneur? Based on research within the entrepreneurship field, the finding showed that entrepreneur possessed some characteristics or competencies that

contribute to his or her new venture creation and this contributed to their success (Carlos Pinho & Sampaio de Sá, 2014). For instance, Bygrave (1989) presented a model of psychological characteristics that includes the need for achievement, internal locus of control, tolerance for ambiguity and risk-taking propensity as vital components in analysing the entrepreneurial process. While, Robinson et al (1991) have listed achievement, innovativeness, locus of control and self-confidence as entrepreneurial attitudes. Hence, understanding the psychological characteristics that are unique to entrepreneurs (vis-à-vis non-entrepreneurs) is a logical first step in studying entrepreneurship (Yusoff et al, 2021).

Since small scale business owner among women represent highly diversified group, it is reasonable to focus on psychological characteristics model. Psychological characteristics of business owners were not only studied with respect to the emergence of entrepreneurship but also the preferences that allowed them to sustain in their chosen field and to be successful. Hence, there is a solid reason to be concerned in psychological model since previous research have overlooked the significant advances that have been made in entrepreneurship research during the last 20 years (Mamun et al., 2018). The capabilities of the entrepreneurs to perform their role successfully provide the meaningful creation of the firm and this revealed the connection of specific entrepreneurial traits to the entrepreneur's ability to achieve certain organizational success (Beattie, 2016). Hence, many of the previous research were conducted to investigate the entrepreneur characteristics that led them to be successful (Kerr et al, 2017; Sajilan et al, 2015).

Psychological Women Empowerment and Women Entrepreneur

Women is perceived to have high influence for economic development due to their high proportion among the world population which is approximately 49.6 per cent. Lot of efforts have been taken by many developing countries to empower women. Empowerment is the expansion in people's ability to make choices in long-term planning of their life in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (Malik et al., 2021). Similarly, Carr (2003) and East (2000) stressed that empowerment is a process instead of a goal and mostly directly applied to those who lack of power through peripheral, social inequality and discrimination. This concept of empowerment has been widely accepted by previous studies. The concept is directly relevant to those who lack of power (Vaish & Arrawatia, 2021) through social exclusion and social inequality. Vast literature had indicated that the concept of empowerment best suited women rather man because man as an individual generally holds a favoured position in patriarchal contexts.

Empowerment has been identified as one of the elements to increase the motivation exhibited in employees' perception about their work role. According to Sugiyanto et al., (2021), empowerment is one of the psychological elements that assist women's motivation to have more autonomy in doing their work role. In fact, some researcher used the term of psychological women empowerment which are defined as an individual's cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, competence, and goal internalization (Oladipo, 2009). These cognitions are said to encompass the meaning or the fit between an individual's values and her work role; competence, or belief in one's ability to perform the job; self-determination, or a sense of autonomy on the job; or a sense of having an influence over job outcomes. As a result, psychological women empowerment is said to have influence on women's decision to embark in entrepreneurship activity. The finding from Sengar et al (2020) reported that women who are empowerment were not afraid of failure in business.

Recently, Chakraborty and Biswal (2021) investigated dimension of psychological empowerment among women entrepreneurs. The study conducted netnography in the Twitter to discover whether entrepreneurship is associated with integration in business life. The study reported that the women entrepreneur set up their businesses for reasons such as goal internationalization, perceived control, perceived competency, and self-esteem. This implied that empowerment was related to entrepreneurship. In addition, previous study also proved that the location where women had high spirit, self-confidence, and capability to involve in business indicated higher rate of entrepreneur (Amanda et al., 2019). Huis et al., (2019) and Okyireh (2016) perceived the problem in developing the concept and analytical core of empowerment due to lack of agreement among the researchers. Consequently, using broader definitions of empowerment, Al-Dajani (2013) suggested that women's empowerment is a continuous cycle involving abilities enhancement to control choices, decision and actions based on seven construct namely:

- 1) Increase awareness and knowledge: Women acquire motivation for their social change through their increase awareness and knowledge gained from their experience.
- 2) Improve welfare: The entrepreneurship involvement provides economic gains among women that were directed towards improving their family welfare in terms of better education and health care for children. Such meaningful result was highly motivating to address the issue of poverty which become their life constrained within the community.
- 3) Economic independence: The income generated by the home-based enterprises was crucial in supporting the limited wages available to husbands and fathers as well as to release poverty. Moreover, this source of additional income enables women to gain some power in determining how the income should be spent and invested back to the family. As such, the independent income was seen as the opportunity that provide financial independence for women and to reduce their high dependence on husbands and/or parents. This situation was identified as self-motivation and give rise of autonomy and voice to the women regarding financial management in the family, for instance, the priority should be given to the children's education and health.
- 4) Community organizing: Women with empowerment characteristic has the capability to find acceptable channels to generate income in the face of restraint and regarded the situation as opportunity that motivate them to reach outside of their family and local community.
- 5) Accountability and responsibility: Women business owner has confidence in making decision when they posit positive self-identity. There is high tendency to play a leadership role within her family and immediate community.
- 6) Leadership: Women's awareness and understanding of specific roles in society motivate them to lead initiatives for community especially among the same gender to improve their life.
- 7) Self-identity. Self-identity is continuously challenged and reaffirmed as women adopt and renounce various roles and labels. Women who has empowerment act as a role model for other women indicate positive effect of self-identity.

Therefore, based on the above discussion lead to the proposed hypothesis:

H₀: There is no relationship between psychological women empowerment and women entrepreneurial success

H_A: There is a relationship between psychological women empowerment and women entrepreneurial success.

Methodology

Scope of the Study and Sampling Technique Procedure

This study implemented quantitative method. The time horizon for data collection covers one year due to Covid-19 pandemic issue. The questionnaires were self-administered, participation were voluntary, and the data were processed anonymously and confidentially. The scope of this study only limited to women entrepreneur listed in *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat*, Malaysia who has been considered as successful based on definition highlighted previously. *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat* is one of the agencies involve in supporting low income household or B40 group. Therefore, the respondents selected from this agency regarded as appropriate samples. Furthermore, the owners of this business have an active role for more than 3 years in managing micro enterprise and therefore considered as an eligible criteria used in this study. The sample of the study involved 500 respondents as indicates in Table 1. There were 419 returned and 410 being valid response. The sample size estimation for each state was derived from proportionate stratified random sampling approach based on the following formula:

Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling Formula:

$$nh = (N_h / N) * n$$

Whereby:

nh = Sample size for hth stratum

N_h = Population size for hth stratum

N = Size of the entire population

n = Size of the entire sample

Table 1: Sample Size

Numb	State	Population	Sample	Questionnaire returned	Valid questionnaire
1	Perlis	33	17	17	17
2	Kedah	31	16	13	13
3	Penang	33	17	14	14
4	Perak	45	23	15	15
5	Selangor	62	32	23	21
6	Wilayah Persekutuan, Kuala Lumpur	2	2	2	1
7	Melaka	17	17	16	16
8	Negeri Sembilan	491	252	233	229
9	Johor	50	26	18	17
10	Pahang	41	21	13	12
11	Kelantan	67	35	30	30
12	Terengganu	67	35	20	20
13	Sabah	7	7	5	5
Total		946	500	419	410

Research Instrument

The instruments used have been adapted from previous studies (eg: Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012; Sardenberg, 2008) with some modification for appropriate context of present study. The construct for psychological women empowerment is divided into seven dimensions, namely: increase awareness, improve welfare, economic independence, community organizing, accountability and responsibility, leadership and self-identity. While, for women entrepreneurial success there is one dimension involved which is business sustainability. The set of questionnaire was prepared in dual language which are Malay and English. In order to ensure the consistency of the language, inter-translator checked was implemented by the expert. The questionnaire has been ranked based on a 5- point Likert-scale for all items to ensure the standardize response and avoid confusion among respondents. The Likert-scale is used to construed between how strongly disagree to strongly agree a respondent was, with the statement on the scale. The questions have been stated as sentences that have to be answered by respondents in terms of their agreement rate. There are 18 items used to measure psychological women empowerment and six items for women entrepreneurial success.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS Version 23. The descriptive statistics were used to analyse the background of the respondents. Linear regression analysis was conducted as the main statistical procedure for examining the relationship between psychological women empowerment and women entrepreneurial success. The acceptability of the instrument was assessed by the reliability of the items based on Cronbach's Alpha as indicates in Table 2. Based on suggestion by Sekaran and Bougie (2010) and Pallant (2007) indicated that the value of Cronbach's Alpha more than 0.6 considered as acceptable.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Psychological Women Empowerment	0.900	18
Women Entrepreneur Success	0.894	6

Analysis of Results

Based on the descriptive statistic conducted as indicates in Table 3, the result found that the majority of respondents' age are between 36 until 40 years (45.6%), received education at Certificate/Diploma/STPM level (43.9%), running their business around 9-11 years (35.6%) and conducting two types of business (55.4%).

Table 3: Result of Descriptive Statistic

Age:	Valid percentage:
Valid less than 30 years	
30-35 years	7.6
36-40 years	16.1
41-45 years	45.6
Above 45 years	24.4

6.3

Educational level:	Valid
Valid Doctoral	percentage:
Master's	1.0
Bachelor	12.0
Certificate/Diploma/STPM	31.0
SPM	43.9
PMR/SRP	11.2
Others	0.2
	0.7
Length of business:	Valid
Valid Less than 2 years	percentage:
3-5 years	0
6-8 years	11.7
9-11 years	20.7
12-14 years	35.6
15 years and above	22.7
	9.3
Number of business project conducted:	Valid
Valid	percentage:
1 business	21.5
2 business	55.4
3 business	19.3
4 business	3.9

Table 4 indicates the result of linear regression analysis. The analysis found that there is significant positive relationship between psychological women empowerment and women entrepreneurial success at the significance level of 0.05 ($p = 0.003$, sig. $p < 0.05$) which indicates that the higher the psychological women empowerment trait leads to the higher women entrepreneurial success. The R square value between the variables is 0.309, which means that 30.9% ($r = 0.556$) variation in dependent variable (women entrepreneurial success) is explained by the changes of the independent variable (psychological women empowerment). Therefore, the equation can be presented as following:

$$Y = 2.6 + 0.17 (\text{PWE})$$

Table 4: Result of Linear Regression between Psychological Women Empowerment and Women Entrepreneurial Success

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	R	R Square
		B	Std. Error	Beta					
1	(Constant)	2.596	.155			16.759	.000		
	Psychological Women Empowerment (PWE)	.138	.050	.169		2.792	.003	.556	.309

a. Dependent Variable: Women entrepreneurial success

Discussion and Future Research

This study focus on the psychological empowerment of women entrepreneurs that influence the micro enterprise sustainability. The finding showed that psychological women empowerment significantly influences women entrepreneurial success. Thus, this finding demonstrated that these women entrepreneurs had a clear purpose for setting up their business, high level of autonomy, independence and awareness in knowledge sharing with their community. Furthermore, the finding also proved that the women entrepreneur has the ability to control, managing as well as sustaining their business. This finding in accordance with previous studies such as Sugiyanto et al., (2021), Chakraborty and Biswal (2021) and Sengar et al., (2020). The finding reported by Sengar et al., (2020) also pointed out that women entrepreneur with psychological empowerment characteristic had the urged to learn new business and are not afraid of failure. Similarly, Biswal (2021) also demonstrated that women entrepreneur who choose to embark in entrepreneurship were highly motivated to improve their family life and lead initiative to other women in releasing poverty issue. This finding offers evidence that women in low income household engaged in entrepreneurship and sustain their business feel much empowered. These outcomes provide important insight for the entrepreneurship stream since research in this context has become increasingly necessary due to the limited studies conducted especially among women entrepreneur in micro enterprise. In addition, the finding may assist *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat* specifically in designing and implementing an entrepreneurship development programme, especially for women to reduce the consequences of business crises among women entrepreneurs operating micro-businesses in Malaysia.

This study has several limitations. First, this study was performed among women entrepreneur listed in *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat* in Malaysia only. Therefore, to enrich analyses of empowerment and women entrepreneurship, it is recommended for the future research to explore empowerment and entrepreneurship relationship among women in diverse sector of economies in different countries other than Malaysia because different population may yield different result from those reported in this study. Second, this study was conducted in limited time frame. Future research may examine the longitudinal effect especially COVID-19 pandemic on the business sustainability. Finally, future research may explore different dimension of psychological women empowerment instead of seven dimensions used in the study.

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