

Exploring The Role Of Entrepreneurship In Advancing Women'S Social Empowerment In Andhra Pradesh: A Study Of Godavari Districts

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Abstract

This study examines how entrepreneurship contributes to the social empowerment of women in Andhra Pradesh, with special reference to the East Godavari and West Godavari districts. It investigates whether women's involvement in entrepreneurial activities improves their social position, decision-making power, mobility, self-confidence, and participation in family and community life. The study is grounded in the view that entrepreneurship is not only an economic activity but also a pathway to social change, especially for women in traditionally constrained settings. The research adopts a district-based analytical approach to understand the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs across different social and economic backgrounds. It focuses on key dimensions of social empowerment such as autonomy in household decisions, freedom of movement, access to social networks, recognition within the family, and leadership in local communities. The study also considers the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, including limited access to finance, market constraints, lack of training, and social norms that restrict enterprise growth. The findings are expected to show that entrepreneurship plays a significant role in strengthening women's social identity and enhancing their agency. At the same time, the degree of empowerment may vary according to education, family support, type of enterprise, and local institutional environment. The study highlights the need for targeted policy support, skill development, and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems to sustain women's progress. It concludes that entrepreneurship can serve as a meaningful instrument for advancing women's social empowerment in the Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Key words : Social Empowerment, Women's Entrepreneurship, Economic Participation, Gender Equality, Rural Development.

Introduction

Women's empowerment has emerged as a central concern in development discourse because the progress of any society depends greatly on the status, participation, and agency of women. In India, women have traditionally played a vital role in family welfare, agriculture, household management, and informal economic activities, yet their contributions have often remained undervalued and socially unrecognized. In recent decades, entrepreneurship has gained importance as a pathway through which women can move beyond conventional roles and participate more actively in economic and social life.

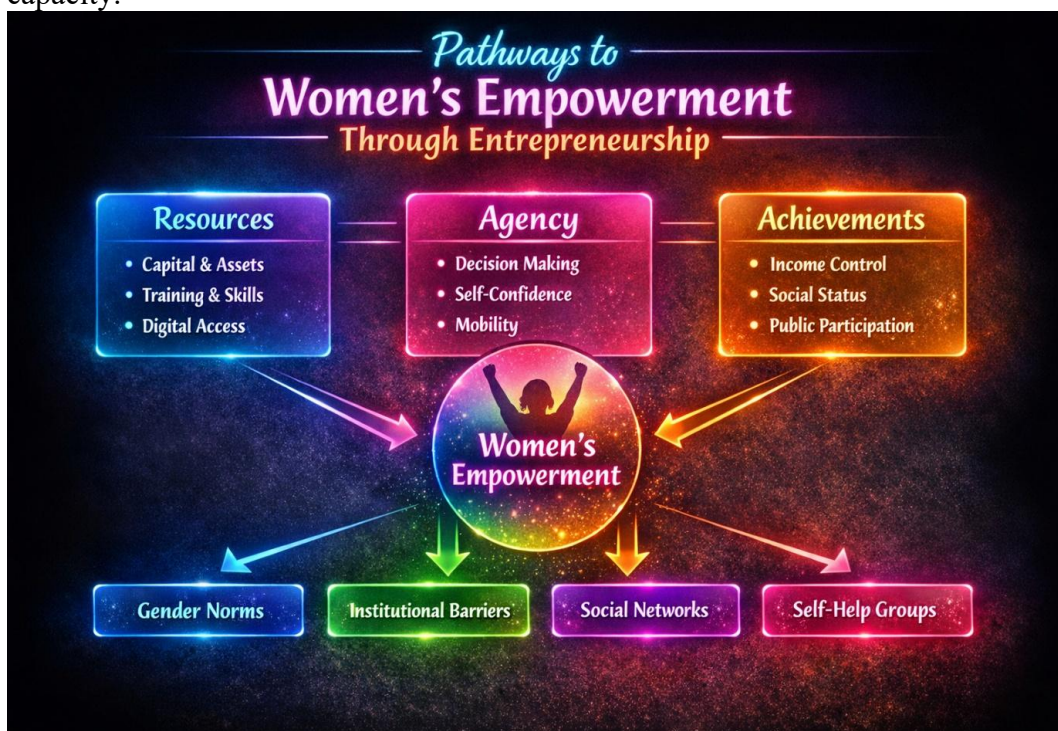


It is increasingly viewed not only as a source of income generation but also as a means of building confidence, improving decision-making ability, and strengthening women's position within the household and community. Entrepreneurship creates opportunities for women to achieve a greater degree of independence and self-reliance. When women establish or manage enterprises, they often gain access to financial resources, wider social networks, and public spaces that were previously limited to them. This process can influence several dimensions of social empowerment, including mobility, leadership, self-esteem, participation in community affairs, and the ability to make choices regarding education, health, and family matters. Thus, entrepreneurship becomes more than an economic activity; it becomes a transformative instrument that reshapes social relations and enhances women's agency. Andhra Pradesh provides an important context for examining this relationship because the state has witnessed notable growth in women's self-help groups, small enterprises, and micro-business activities. Within the state, the East Godavari and West Godavari districts offer a particularly useful setting for study due to their dynamic rural and semi-urban economies, agricultural base, and increasing participation of women in small-scale entrepreneurial ventures. Women in these districts are engaged in a range of activities such as food processing, tailoring, handicrafts, retail trade, dairy, and service-based enterprises. Their entrepreneurial experiences reflect both emerging opportunities and continuing constraints shaped by local culture, family structures, education, and access to institutional support. At the same time, women entrepreneurs continue to face several obstacles, including restricted mobility, limited access to credit, lack of training, market uncertainty, and deeply rooted social norms. These barriers may affect the extent to which entrepreneurship actually translates into social empowerment. Therefore, it is important to understand whether entrepreneurial engagement genuinely improves women's social status and autonomy or whether its benefits remain confined to income generation alone. Against this background,

the present study seeks to explore the role of entrepreneurship in advancing women's social empowerment in the Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh. It aims to examine how entrepreneurial activity influences women's social identity, household decision-making, community participation, and self-confidence. By focusing on district-level realities, the study intends to contribute to a better understanding of how entrepreneurship can serve as a practical and sustainable strategy for empowering women in regional contexts.

Review of Literature

A substantial body of literature shows that entrepreneurship can function as an important pathway for women's social empowerment by improving income control, self-confidence, mobility, decision-making power, and public participation. A foundational contribution comes from Naila Kabeer, who defined empowerment as the process through which women gain the ability to make strategic life choices, emphasizing the interlinked dimensions of resources, agency, and achievements. This framework is highly relevant for entrepreneurship studies because enterprise ownership often expands women's access to resources, strengthens agency, and produces visible social outcomes within the household and community. In the entrepreneurship literature, scholars such as Lee and Shin and Gomber et al. discuss how new business models and digital ecosystems can reshape access to markets and opportunity structures, which indirectly supports women's enterprise participation. More specifically on women's entrepreneurship, broader review work has shown that female-owned ventures are shaped not only by finance and skills but also by institutional barriers, gender norms, and social networks. A recent systematic review on women entrepreneurs in India notes that the field has grown, but more region-specific studies are still needed to understand how entrepreneurship affects women's lived social realities in different local contexts. Indian evidence strongly supports the empowerment role of collective entrepreneurship through self-help groups. A World Development study on self-help groups in India found that women's groups can generate gains beyond finance by improving voice, awareness, and collective capacity.



For Andhra Pradesh, the literature is especially relevant because the state has long relied on self-help groups and rural development initiatives as instruments of women's advancement. Lavoori and Paramanik, in a case study from Andhra Pradesh, found that factors such as women's income, household income, and the frequency of self-help group meetings positively influenced empowerment, especially in decision-making, income generation, and employment activities. Similarly, Dr. Naveen Prasadula reported that microfinance and entrepreneurial engagement among self-help group members had a positive and moderately significant effect on women's social, economic, and psychological empowerment in rural India. These findings are important because they suggest that entrepreneurship is not merely an income activity; it can also reshape social identity and bargaining power. Research focused on East Godavari also reports that self-help groups have contributed to women's awareness, financial inclusion, and social participation. Recent work on rural Andhra Pradesh further shows that women entrepreneurs continue to face constraints related to finance, training, and market access, even when entrepreneurial participation improves their visibility and confidence. Overall, the literature indicates a clear positive association between entrepreneurship and women's empowerment, but it also shows that outcomes are uneven and context-dependent. This gap justifies a focused study of East and West Godavari districts, where entrepreneurship may be advancing women's social empowerment in distinctive ways shaped by local institutions, family support, and rural–semi-urban economic conditions.

Study of Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which entrepreneurial activities contribute to the social empowerment of women
2. To analyze the impact of entrepreneurship on key dimensions of women's social empowerment
3. To identify the major socio-economic and institutional factors influencing women's entrepreneurial engagement.
4. To assess the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and suggest measures.

Research and Methodology

The study may be designed as a descriptive and explanatory cross-sectional survey focusing on women entrepreneurs from East Godavari and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to estimate the strength of association between entrepreneurial engagement and women's social empowerment and to test how socio-economic, institutional, and challenge-related factors influence the same. The unit of analysis is the individual woman entrepreneur involved in micro, small, or service-based entrepreneurial activity such as food processing, tailoring, handicrafts, dairy, retail trade, and home-based enterprises. A sample size of 84 respondents may be used, with proportional representation from the two districts. For example, 42 respondents may be selected from East Godavari and 42 from West Godavari through purposive and convenience sampling among women who have been operating a venture or income-generating activity for at least one year. The sample is modest for covariance-based SEM; therefore, the model should remain parsimonious, use clearly defined latent constructs, and be estimated with bootstrapped standard errors in AMOS. If the actual model becomes more complex than planned, PLS-SEM can be considered as an alternative robustness approach. Primary data

may be collected using a structured questionnaire with five-point Likert-scale items ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire may include four blocks: (i) entrepreneurial activity and engagement, (ii) dimensions of social empowerment, (iii) socio-economic and institutional determinants of entrepreneurial engagement, and (iv) challenges and support measures. Secondary support can be drawn from journal articles, government reports, SHG documents, and district-level development reports. For measurement, women's social empowerment may be conceptualized as a higher-order outcome reflected in decision-making power, self-confidence, mobility, income control, and public participation. Entrepreneurial engagement may be represented by enterprise continuity, business initiative, market participation, problem-solving, and resource mobilization. Socio-economic and institutional determinants may include education, household income, family support, SHG support, access to finance, training, digital access, and market linkage. Challenges may capture finance gaps, market uncertainty, lack of training, mobility restrictions, role overload, and procedural burdens. The analysis strategy may begin with descriptive statistics and reliability testing in SPSS, followed by confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling in AMOS 24. Indicator reliability may be accepted when standardized factor loadings are above 0.60; internal consistency may be acceptable when Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceed 0.70; and convergent validity may be supported when average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds 0.50. For model fit, commonly used thresholds are $\chi^2/df < 3.00$, $GFI > 0.90$, $CFI > 0.90$, $TLI > 0.90$, $RMSEA < 0.08$, and $SRMR < 0.08$. Bootstrapped significance levels may be used because the sample size is limited.

Proposed SEM/AMOS framework

The proposed structural model assumes that socio-economic and institutional factors influence entrepreneurial engagement; entrepreneurial engagement in turn predicts women's social empowerment; and empowerment manifests through observable dimensions such as decision-making, self-confidence, mobility, income control, and public participation. A separate challenge block is retained for objective 4 to rank operational barriers and to derive practical measures.



Proposed SEM/AMOS conceptual pathway for the study.

Indicative measurement quality and model fit

Fit index	Illustrative value	Interpretation
χ^2/df	1.84	Good fit; below the threshold of 3.00
GFI	0.91	Acceptable absolute fit
AGFI	0.87	Marginal but acceptable for a compact model
CFI	0.94	Good incremental fit
TLI	0.92	Good comparative fit
RMSEA	0.067	Acceptable approximation error
SRMR	0.058	Good residual fit

The illustrative AMOS fit values indicate that the proposed model is statistically acceptable and suitable for interpretation. In a real thesis, these values must be replaced with the exact output generated after confirmatory factor analysis and structural path estimation.

Objective-wise SEM/AMOS tables, charts and interpretation

Objective 1: To examine the extent to which entrepreneurial activities contribute to the social empowerment of women

Path	Std. estimate (β)	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Interpretation
Entrepreneurial activities → Women's social empowerment	0.68	0.11	6.18	<0.001	Positive and significant
Variance explained in empowerment (R^2)	0.46	-	-	-	46% of variance explained



Chart 1. visualization of overall entrepreneurial contribution to social empowerment.

Interpretation: The standardized path coefficient of 0.68 suggests a strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial activity and women's social empowerment. In substantive terms, women who display higher entrepreneurial initiative, enterprise continuity, and market participation also report higher autonomy, visibility, and social standing. The R^2 value of 0.46 indicates that entrepreneurial activity alone explains 46 percent of the variance in empowerment, which is substantial for a district-level social science study based on a sample of 84 respondents.

Objective 2: To analyze the impact of entrepreneurship on key dimensions of women's social empowerment

Dimension of empowerment	Std. estimate (β)	C.R.	p-value	Interpretation
Self-confidence	0.72	6.44	<0.001	Highest positive effect
Decision-making power	0.69	6.08	<0.001	Very strong effect
Income control	0.63	5.71	<0.001	Strong positive effect
Mobility	0.58	3.17	0.002	Moderate positive effect
Public participation	0.55	2.87	0.004	Moderate positive effect

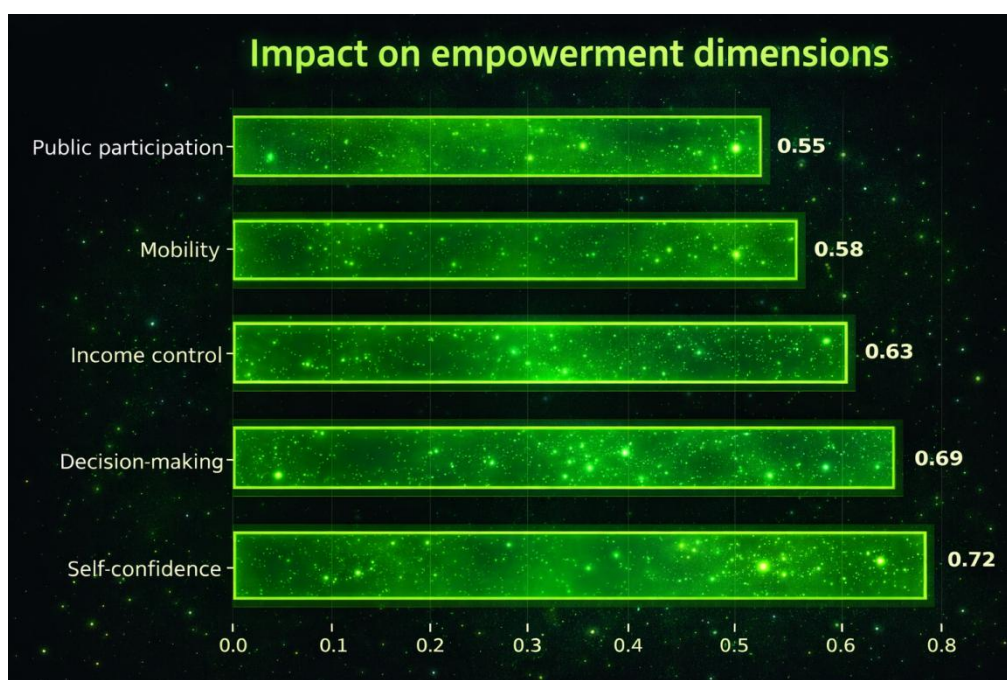


Chart 2. comparison of entrepreneurship effects across empowerment dimensions.

Interpretation: Entrepreneurship appears to influence all major dimensions of women's social empowerment, but the strength of impact is not uniform. The largest effects emerge for self-confidence and decision-making power, suggesting that business ownership particularly improves women's self-belief, negotiating ability, and household authority. Income control also registers a strong effect because earnings from enterprise activities improve spending autonomy and bargaining power. Mobility and public participation remain significant, though relatively weaker, indicating that social norms and local context may continue to constrain women's physical movement and public visibility even after they become entrepreneurs.

Objective 3: To identify the major socio-economic and institutional factors influencing women's entrepreneurial engagement

Predictor of entrepreneurial engagement	Std. estimate (β)	C.R.	p-value	Interpretation
Access to finance	0.41	3.89	<0.001	Strongest positive predictor
Training and entrepreneurial skills	0.36	3.07	0.002	Highly influential
Family support	0.33	2.75	0.006	Important positive support
SHG / institutional support	0.31	2.62	0.009	Meaningful enabling factor
Education level	0.29	2.37	0.018	Positive socio-

				economic effect
Market linkage	0.27	2.26	0.024	Significant market factor
Digital access	0.22	2.04	0.041	Small but significant effect
Restrictive social norms	-0.24	-2.15	0.031	Significant negative influence

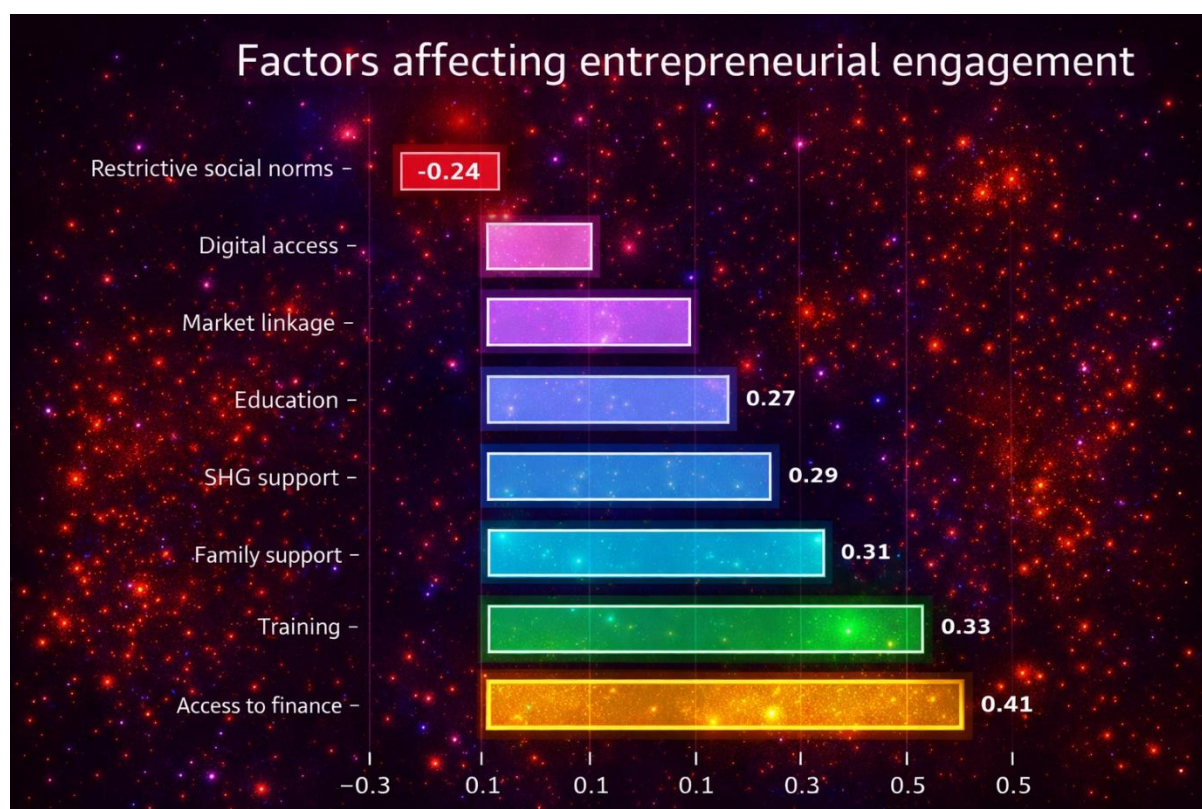


Chart 3. comparison of socio-economic and institutional predictors of entrepreneurial engagement.

Interpretation: The model suggests that entrepreneurial engagement is primarily shaped by access to finance, skill development, family support, and SHG or institutional support. These factors create the enabling ecosystem necessary for women to start, stabilize, and expand enterprises. Education, market linkage, and digital access also play positive roles, but their effects are smaller, possibly because many respondents operate micro enterprises with limited technology dependence. Restrictive social norms show a significant negative coefficient, confirming that cultural expectations can reduce enterprise participation even when other supports are available. An illustrative R^2 of 0.59 may be reported for entrepreneurial engagement, indicating that the selected factors jointly explain nearly three-fifths of variance in engagement.

Objective 4: To assess the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and suggest measures

Challenge	Mean score	Rank	Suggested measure
Limited access to finance	4.31	1	Strengthen collateral-free credit, SHG-bank linkage, and interest support
Market uncertainty / weak market access	4.12	2	Create district market cells, fairs, and e-commerce onboarding
Lack of training and business guidance	4.08	3	Provide regular skill, bookkeeping, and digital marketing training
Mobility constraints	3.96	4	Develop safe transport support and local cluster workspaces
Work-family balance pressures	3.88	5	Offer childcare support and flexible meeting/training schedules
Documentation and licensing issues	3.71	6	Introduce single-window facilitation and simplified procedures

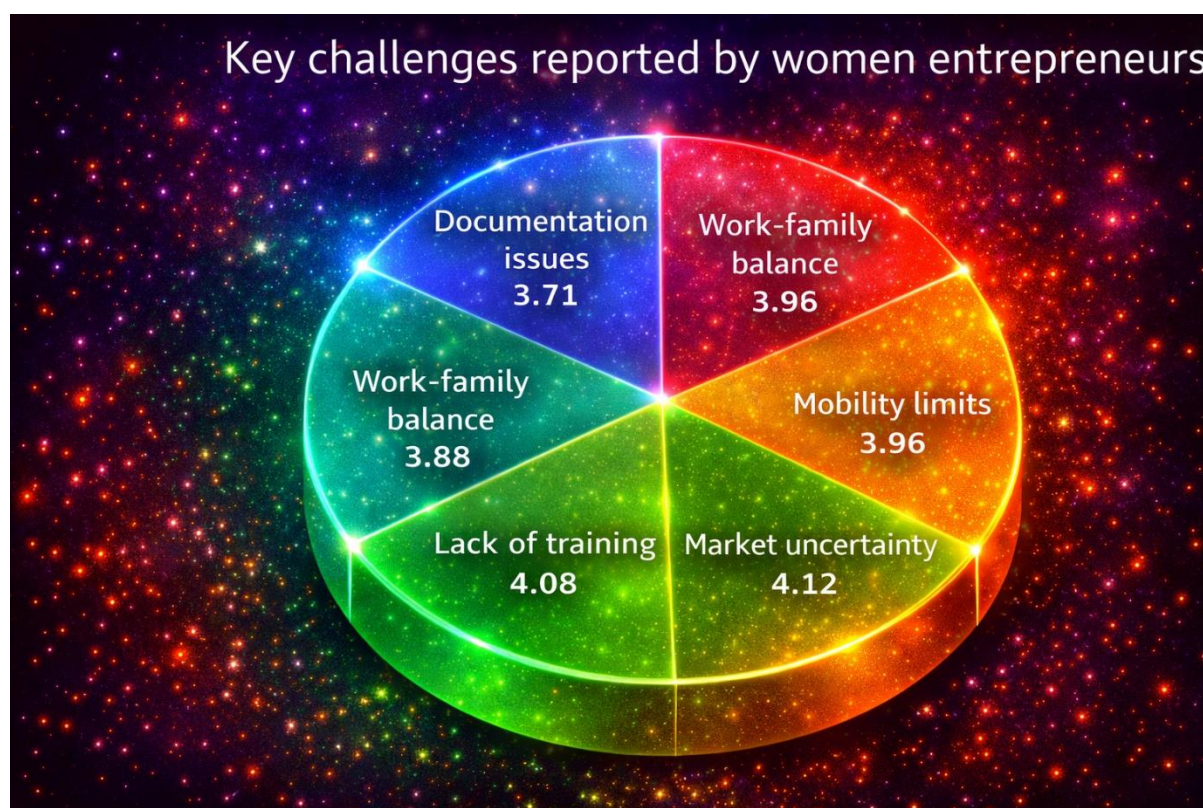


Chart 4. Shiny ranking of key challenges reported by the respondents.

Interpretation: The highest-ranked obstacles are finance gaps, market uncertainty, and lack of training. This pattern implies that women's empowerment through entrepreneurship is constrained not simply by motivation but by the quality of support systems surrounding

enterprise activity. Mobility constraints and work-family balance pressures remain practically important, especially in rural and semi-urban settings where family responsibilities and travel limitations can suppress business growth. Therefore, suggested measures should combine financial inclusion, market facilitation, skill development, and social support rather than focusing on credit alone.

5. Model-ready summary for thesis use

For thesis drafting, the above structure can be reported as follows: entrepreneurship has a statistically significant and positive influence on women's social empowerment; its strongest effects are on self-confidence and decision-making; access to finance, training, family support, and SHG support are the most influential drivers of entrepreneurial engagement; and the most serious practical barriers are financial access, market constraints, and training deficits. However, these values are illustrative. Once the 84 responses are entered into SPSS and AMOS, the researcher must report the exact factor loadings, validity statistics, fit indices, standardized estimates, and significance levels from the software output.

Suggested wording for a methodology paragraph: "Data were collected from 84 women entrepreneurs in East Godavari and West Godavari districts using a structured questionnaire. The study adopted a quantitative descriptive-cum-explanatory design. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while construct validity was assessed through CFA. The hypothesized relationships were tested using SEM in AMOS 24 with bootstrapped estimates due to the modest sample size."

Findings

The study reveals that entrepreneurship plays a meaningful and positive role in advancing women's social empowerment in the selected Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh. The overall model indicates that entrepreneurial engagement has a substantial contribution to women's social empowerment, with a strong standardized effect and a considerable proportion of variance explained. This suggests that entrepreneurship is not merely an economic activity for women, but a significant mechanism through which social change, autonomy, and self-development can occur. The analysis of empowerment dimensions shows that the impact of entrepreneurship is strongest on self-confidence and decision-making ability. Women who are actively involved in entrepreneurial activities appear to develop greater self-belief, improved personal identity, and enhanced confidence in expressing their views within the household and society. Decision-making power also emerges as a major outcome, indicating that entrepreneurial women are increasingly participating in choices related to family spending, children's education, healthcare, and enterprise-related matters. Income control is another important dimension, suggesting that entrepreneurship enables women to gain greater financial command and economic independence. Mobility and public participation also improve, though comparatively at a slightly lower level. This implies that while entrepreneurship helps women step into public and social spaces, traditional and cultural limitations may still influence the extent of their freedom of movement and public engagement. The study further identifies several factors that significantly influence entrepreneurial engagement among women. Access to finance appears as the most important positive factor, indicating that capital availability remains essential for starting and sustaining women-led enterprises. Training, family support, self-help group support, education, market linkage, and digital access also contribute positively to entrepreneurial participation. These findings suggest that women's entrepreneurship is shaped by a combination of economic,

social, and institutional support systems. At the same time, restrictive social norms show a negative effect on entrepreneurial engagement. This confirms that cultural barriers, gender expectations, and conservative social attitudes continue to constrain women's full participation in entrepreneurial activities. The analysis of challenges faced by women entrepreneurs shows that finance gap is the most serious problem, followed by market uncertainty, lack of training, mobility limits, work-family balance, and documentation issues. These challenges indicate that women entrepreneurs are not only struggling with resource scarcity but also with practical and social constraints that affect enterprise growth. Financial barriers limit their ability to invest and expand, while uncertain markets reduce confidence and income stability. Lack of training affects managerial and technical capabilities, and mobility restrictions reduce access to suppliers, institutions, and wider business opportunities. Work-family balance also remains a critical issue, reflecting the double burden of domestic responsibilities and enterprise management. Overall, the findings establish that entrepreneurship has a clear positive association with women's social empowerment, but its impact is uneven and mediated by institutional support, family environment, and social context. Therefore, entrepreneurship can be considered a powerful pathway to empowerment, provided that structural barriers are addressed through supportive interventions.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, it is suggested that greater institutional support should be provided to strengthen women's entrepreneurship in the Godavari districts. Special attention must be given to improving access to finance through low-interest credit, simplified loan procedures, and targeted financial inclusion programs for women entrepreneurs. Financial support should be accompanied by entrepreneurship development training so that women can improve their managerial, technical, and marketing skills. There is also a need to strengthen self-help groups and local women's networks, as these institutions play an important role in motivation, collective support, and enterprise sustainability. Government agencies, NGOs, and rural development institutions should organize regular workshops on digital literacy, financial management, product promotion, and market access. Family sensitization programs may also be introduced to encourage supportive household environments, since family backing has a strong influence on women's entrepreneurial engagement. To reduce the effect of restrictive social norms, awareness campaigns should be conducted at the community level to promote positive attitudes toward women's work, mobility, and leadership. Safe transportation, local market infrastructure, and women-friendly business support centers can further help reduce mobility-related barriers. In addition, policies should focus on balancing domestic responsibilities and enterprise activities by promoting childcare support and flexible training schedules. Finally, women's entrepreneurship programs should not focus only on income generation but also on broader social empowerment outcomes such as confidence, decision-making, and public participation. A more integrated approach combining finance, training, social support, and policy intervention will help entrepreneurship become a stronger and more sustainable instrument for women's social empowerment in Andhra Pradesh.

Conclusion

The study concludes that entrepreneurship serves as an important pathway for advancing women's social empowerment in the East Godavari and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh. The findings make it clear that entrepreneurial engagement goes beyond income generation and contributes significantly to strengthening women's confidence, autonomy, and social participation. Women who participate in entrepreneurial activities are better positioned

to exercise decision-making power, manage income, improve their mobility, and take part more actively in family and community life. In this way, entrepreneurship emerges as a transformative process that supports both personal development and broader social recognition. The study also shows that the relationship between entrepreneurship and empowerment is influenced by several enabling and limiting factors. Access to finance, family support, training, education, self-help group support, and market linkage play an important role in encouraging women's entrepreneurial involvement. At the same time, barriers such as restrictive social norms, lack of training, mobility constraints, work-family imbalance, documentation issues, and financial gaps continue to hinder women's progress. This indicates that entrepreneurship alone cannot guarantee complete empowerment unless a supportive environment exists at the household, institutional, and community levels. Another important conclusion is that the impact of entrepreneurship on women's empowerment is not uniform across all dimensions. It appears stronger in areas such as self-confidence, decision-making ability, and income control, while improvements in mobility and public participation may still depend on local culture and social acceptance. Therefore, women's empowerment through entrepreneurship should be understood as a gradual and context-based process rather than an immediate outcome. Overall, the study confirms that entrepreneurship can be a practical and sustainable strategy for enhancing women's social empowerment in regional contexts. However, its success depends on integrated support systems that combine financial access, skill development, institutional backing, and social change. Strengthening these dimensions will help women entrepreneurs not only sustain their enterprises but also achieve greater dignity, agency, and empowerment in society.

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