

Culture, Emotional Intelligence, and Psychological Well-Being among Women Entrepreneurs

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Abstract: This study explores the multifaceted relationship between culture, psychological well-being, and the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs in India. As women increasingly participate in entrepreneurial ventures, they confront unique challenges embedded in socio-cultural expectations, gender norms, and emotional labour. Drawing on a review of scholarly literature and socio-psychological theory, this paper investigates how cultural constructs and emotional intelligence affect the psychological resilience and success of women entrepreneurs. The study emphasizes that psychological well-being—manifested in self-esteem, autonomy, emotional balance, and purpose—is significantly shaped by women's ability to negotiate cultural roles and develop emotional competencies. Emotional intelligence is particularly crucial, acting as a buffer against stress and a catalyst for interpersonal effectiveness. The paper concludes by recommending gender-sensitive policies, emotional intelligence training, and culturally supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems as key interventions for advancing women's mental health and entrepreneurial capacity.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Culture, Psychological Well-being, Emotional Intelligence, Gender Norms.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Indian society has witnessed a significant transformation in the role and status of women. Once primarily confined to domestic spaces under traditional patriarchal norms, women have gradually carved out their presence in public, professional, and entrepreneurial spheres. Despite the deeply entrenched socio-cultural expectations that often position women as primary caregivers and homemakers, Indian women have made commendable strides across various sectors, including science, education, politics, and business. Among these domains, entrepreneurship has emerged as a particularly powerful platform for women to assert their economic agency and redefine societal roles.

Women entrepreneurs in India today are increasingly recognized for their resilience, innovation, and leadership. Yet, their journey is far from easy. Unlike their male counterparts, women often have to navigate a dual burden of managing both their professional aspirations and personal responsibilities. The demands of business ownership, combined with traditional familial expectations, result in unique challenges that can affect both their emotional and psychological well-being. As Verma and Mulani (2018) point out, Indian women who engage in professional work or entrepreneurship frequently face physical and mental hurdles while attempting to balance their personal and professional lives.

The rise of women entrepreneurs in India represents a significant transformation in the socio-economic landscape. No longer confined solely to domestic roles, women are increasingly asserting themselves in the professional and entrepreneurial domains. This transition, however, occurs within a complex socio-cultural context where traditional expectations often clash with modern aspirations. Women entrepreneurs frequently bear the dual burden of business management and familial responsibilities, leading to significant emotional and psychological stress.

Entrepreneurship for women is not merely an economic pursuit; it is also a site of identity negotiation, emotional labour, and resilience. Psychological well-being—defined by positive mental health, autonomy, life satisfaction, and emotional balance—is essential for sustained entrepreneurial engagement. Yet, the psychological dimensions of women's entrepreneurial experiences are frequently overlooked in mainstream discourse. In this context, emotional intelligence (EI) emerges as a key moderating variable that enhances resilience, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Though female entrepreneurship is gaining visibility worldwide, there is still a persistent gender gap in ownership, access to capital, mentorship, and institutional support. Winn (2005) highlights that women continue to lag behind men in terms of economic independence and business ownership despite increasing participation. However, this view is

countered by more recent studies. For instance, Farhat and Mijid (2018) argue that there is no significant gender gap in business performance. Their research indicates that when women entrepreneurs have access to equal resources, they perform on par with their male counterparts, if not better. This suggests that the perceived gender disparity may be more about access and opportunity than about competence or capability.

Understanding the emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of women entrepreneurs is not only important for supporting individual success but also for shaping inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems. These elements play a critical role in determining the sustainability and growth of women-led ventures. A focus on psychological factors provides deeper insight into the non-economic dimensions that influence entrepreneurial outcomes. Therefore, it becomes imperative to explore how emotional intelligence contributes to enhancing psychological well-being and resilience among women entrepreneurs in India. Such an exploration is essential to formulating policies and support systems that enable women to thrive in business without compromising their mental and emotional health. This paper seeks to analyse how socio-cultural norms and emotional competencies shape the psychological well-being of women entrepreneurs in India. It also investigates how traditional gender roles, societal expectations, and emotional labour contribute to entrepreneurial stress, and how the cultivation of EI can help navigate these complexities.

2. CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS AND GENDER ROLES

India's deeply rooted patriarchal culture continues to influence women's participation in the economy. While legal and educational reforms have increased women's access to resources, cultural scripts that prioritize domesticity and caregiving remain powerful. In many communities, women are expected to prioritize family over career, leading to internalized guilt and societal scrutiny when they pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

The intersection of entrepreneurship and culture creates a paradox. On the one hand, entrepreneurship offers women a path to financial independence and social mobility; on the other, it challenges traditional gender norms. This cultural dissonance can significantly impact women's psychological well-being. Women often report feeling torn between professional goals and familial obligations, leading to emotional exhaustion, self-doubt, and anxiety. Furthermore, collectivist values prevalent in Indian society emphasize harmony, conformity, and relational obligations. These cultural norms often inhibit assertiveness, risk-taking, and autonomy—qualities necessary for entrepreneurial success. As a result, women must develop adaptive strategies to reconcile cultural expectations with entrepreneurial demands.

3. CULTURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Culture profoundly shapes individual behaviours, social norms, and institutional practices, all of which influence the entrepreneurial journey of women in India. Rooted in centuries of patriarchal traditions, many cultural expectations continue to assign women the primary responsibility of caregiving, household management, and emotional labour within families. These deeply embedded norms create role strain and identity conflicts for women entrepreneurs, who must constantly negotiate between fulfilling societal expectations and pursuing professional growth.

The influence of cultural values on psychological well-being is particularly pronounced in collectivist societies like India, where familial cohesion, social approval, and relational harmony are highly valued. While such values may provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, they can also generate psychological stress for women who deviate from traditional roles. Studies by Hofstede (2001) and Triandis (1995) highlight that collectivist cultures often discourage individual assertiveness and risk-taking—traits essential for entrepreneurial success. Consequently, women entrepreneurs in India must constantly navigate these cultural contradictions, balancing aspirations of autonomy with the demand for conformity.

This cultural tension significantly impacts women's psychological well-being. Feelings of guilt, anxiety, and self-doubt are common among women entrepreneurs, particularly those from conservative backgrounds or smaller towns. As noted by Sinha and Sinha (2012), the internalization of societal judgments can impair women's self-esteem and increase their vulnerability to burnout. On the other hand, women from more progressive or urban milieus often report greater psychological autonomy and confidence, suggesting that subcultural variation plays an important role in moderating entrepreneurial stress.

Cultural narratives that valorise sacrifice, emotional endurance, and relational dependency also influence how women perceive and handle stress. While resilience is often celebrated, this resilience may come at the cost of unacknowledged psychological strain. For instance, the idealization of the "selfless woman" may discourage women from seeking mental health support or expressing vulnerability, thus undermining their long-term well-being (Rameshkumar, et al., 2020). Research by Nayar and Kaur (2018) suggests that gender socialization from an early age shape coping styles, often making women internalize blame and suppress emotional distress in professional settings.

Moreover, cultural norms can influence the development and application of emotional intelligence. In environments where emotional expression is discouraged or misunderstood, women may find it difficult to practice self-

regulation or assertive communication, key components of EI. Conversely, in supportive cultural ecosystems that promote gender equity and emotional literacy, women entrepreneurs are more likely to flourish both emotionally and professionally.

To counter the adverse psychological effects of rigid cultural norms, it is essential to foster a cultural shift that redefines success, leadership, and emotional well-being for women. Initiatives such as gender-sensitive training, community support networks, and media narratives that celebrate emotionally intelligent women leaders can help reshape cultural perceptions and normalize women's dual roles as caregivers and entrepreneurs.

4. SOCIO-CULTURAL CAPITAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Cultural capital, including education, access to information, and social networks, significantly impacts women's entrepreneurial experience. Women from more progressive, urban, or educated backgrounds often report higher levels of self-efficacy and psychological autonomy. In contrast, women from traditional or rural backgrounds may face stricter gender norms, limited mobility, and skepticism toward their entrepreneurial capabilities.

Emotional support networks—such as women's cooperatives, entrepreneurial groups, and peer mentoring—offer a buffer against cultural and psychological pressures. These networks not only provide practical business knowledge but also offer spaces for emotional exchange, solidarity, and empowerment.

Relational networks that emphasize shared experiences, mentorship, and emotional encouragement enhance psychological resilience and reduce feelings of isolation. They also create collective identities that challenge traditional cultural expectations and promote a more inclusive model of entrepreneurship.

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study holds significant value in the context of India's evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem, where women are increasingly stepping into leadership roles despite enduring socio-cultural challenges. While the economic contributions of women entrepreneurs are well-documented, there remains a substantial gap in understanding the psychological and emotional dimensions of their entrepreneurial journey. This research addresses that gap by exploring how cultural expectations, gender roles, and emotional intelligence intersect to influence the psychological well-being of women entrepreneurs. By highlighting emotional intelligence as a critical factor in coping with stress, managing interpersonal relationships, and sustaining business ventures, the study provides a nuanced understanding of women's entrepreneurial resilience. It brings to light the often-overlooked emotional labour and mental health challenges women face while balancing professional aspirations with traditional responsibilities.

Moreover, the study's insights can inform the design of gender-sensitive policies, entrepreneurial training programs, and mental health support systems. It offers practical recommendations for governments, NGOs, and educational institutions to foster emotionally intelligent, culturally aware, and psychologically resilient women entrepreneurs. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader goal of inclusive and sustainable development by advocating for a holistic approach to women's empowerment through entrepreneurship, ensuring not just economic success but also emotional well-being.

6. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the influence of socio-cultural norms and gender roles on the psychological well-being of women entrepreneurs in India.
2. To analyse the role of emotional intelligence in enhancing resilience, leadership effectiveness, and mental health among women entrepreneurs.
3. To identify strategies and policy interventions that can support the emotional and psychological needs of women entrepreneurs within culturally complex environments.

7. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research design based on secondary data to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being among women entrepreneurs. The research relies entirely on qualitative and quantitative data from existing scholarly articles, journals, books, government reports, and credible organizational publications. Sources were selected based on their relevance to key themes such as emotional intelligence, leadership behaviour, psychological well-being, and gender-based entrepreneurial challenges. A thorough literature review was conducted to synthesize insights on how emotional intelligence contributes to the personal and professional success of women entrepreneurs. Particular attention was given to empirical studies from the last two decades, with a focus on South Asian and Indian contexts. The analysis involves comparing and interpreting findings to identify recurring

patterns, conceptual frameworks, and practical implications. This secondary research method offers a broad understanding of the subject without engaging in primary data collection or fieldwork.

8. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The review of secondary literature reveals several significant insights into the relationship between emotional intelligence and the psychological well-being of women entrepreneurs. The findings highlight that EI plays a pivotal role in not only enhancing leadership effectiveness but also in maintaining mental well-being and work-life balance—two crucial components in the entrepreneurial journey of women.

Firstly, studies consistently show that emotional intelligence contributes positively to personal growth, decision-making, and stress management. Women entrepreneurs who exhibit high levels of EI demonstrate better adaptability, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness, which are essential for managing business uncertainties and maintaining psychological resilience. Goleman's EI framework—comprising self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—is particularly relevant to women entrepreneurs navigating complex emotional and social environments. These competencies allow them to deal with personal stressors while also fostering productive business relationships.

Secondly, emotional intelligence enhances transformational leadership qualities among women entrepreneurs. Leaders with high EI are more likely to exhibit inspirational behaviour, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation—all of which are markers of transformational leadership. The literature indicates that such leadership styles contribute to higher team morale, innovation, and long-term business success. According to Allameh et al. (2015) and Gardner & Stough (2002), entrepreneurs with strong emotional awareness are more effective in mobilizing teams, managing conflicts, and fostering a collaborative work culture.

Moreover, empirical studies such as those by Mohanty et al. (2015) and Kundu (2019) establish a strong correlation between EI and personality traits conducive to entrepreneurship, including self-confidence, resilience, and optimism. Women entrepreneurs who score high on these traits tend to handle work pressure better and are more capable of sustaining entrepreneurial ventures. Bahadori (2012) and Zampetakis et al. (2010) also affirm that high EI improves entrepreneurial behaviour and decision-making capacity, directly influencing business performance.

Furthermore, gender-based studies reveal that women generally score higher in perceptive skills and overall, EI than men (Brackett et al., 2004; Reddy et al., 2012). These findings suggest that women possess innate emotional competencies that, if nurtured, can give them an edge in leadership and business management. However, despite this advantage, women continue to face challenges in balancing professional commitments with family responsibilities. Emotional intelligence helps mitigate these challenges by enabling women to regulate emotions, manage time effectively, and seek social support when needed.

The results also emphasize the importance of EI training and development programs. Organizations and entrepreneurial ecosystems that integrate EI skill-building have better outcomes in terms of innovation, employee retention, and customer satisfaction (Ngah & Salleh, 2015; Beck & Libert, 2017). These programs are particularly beneficial for women entrepreneurs who often operate in emotionally taxing environments due to societal expectations and gender roles.

In summary, the literature reviewed provides robust evidence that emotional intelligence is a critical determinant of psychological well-being, leadership capability, and business success among women entrepreneurs. It not only enhances their ability to manage stress and build relationships but also equips them to become resilient, innovative, and impactful leaders. Investing in EI development thus holds strategic importance for supporting women in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the psychological well-being of women entrepreneurs, policy interventions must go beyond economic incentives and address the emotional and cultural dimensions of entrepreneurship. Key recommendations include:

- **Incorporate Emotional Intelligence Training:** Entrepreneurial development programs should include modules on emotional intelligence, stress management, and psychological resilience.
- **Promote Gender-Sensitive Ecosystems:** Government schemes and incubators must be tailored to acknowledge gendered challenges and provide culturally appropriate support.
- **Strengthen Support Networks:** Encouraging the formation of women's entrepreneurial networks, mentoring circles, and support groups can enhance emotional well-being and business sustainability.
- **Normalize Mental Health Conversations:** Awareness campaigns and mental health services should be made accessible and destigmatized for women in business.

- Engage Men and Families: Transformative gender change requires involving male family members in conversations around shared responsibilities and emotional labour.

10. CONCLUSION

The study underscores the significant role emotional intelligence plays in enhancing the psychological well-being and entrepreneurial success of women. Through an extensive review of secondary literature, it becomes evident that EI is not merely a soft skill but a critical asset that influences leadership behaviour, stress management, and personal growth among women entrepreneurs. The five core components of EI—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—enable women to navigate the multifaceted challenges of entrepreneurship, particularly in balancing personal and professional responsibilities.

Findings from various studies reveal that women generally possess higher emotional sensitivity and perceptive abilities, allowing them to lead with empathy, foster strong relationships, and create inclusive business environments. These traits contribute positively to transformational leadership, which is associated with higher team engagement, innovation, and sustained business performance. Moreover, emotional intelligence equips women to handle societal pressures, overcome gender-based constraints, and maintain psychological resilience in demanding entrepreneurial settings.

Despite these strengths, the findings also highlight the need for structured support in developing emotional competencies. Training programs, mentorship opportunities, and organizational practices that promote EI can empower women entrepreneurs further, allowing them to thrive in competitive business landscapes.

Women entrepreneurs in India operate at the intersection of ambition and tradition, navigating complex socio-cultural norms while striving for professional success. Their psychological well-being is shaped not only by external challenges but also by internalized expectations and emotional burdens. Emotional intelligence emerges as a vital skill set that supports resilience, leadership, and well-being.

Understanding the cultural and emotional dimensions of women's entrepreneurial experiences is crucial for creating inclusive, supportive, and psychologically healthy entrepreneurial ecosystems. By integrating emotional intelligence into training, reshaping cultural narratives, and promoting mental health literacy, India can unlock the full potential of its women entrepreneurs and advance towards a more equitable and emotionally intelligent economy.

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