

**A Narrative Case Study of the Lived Experiences of Women Social Entrepreneur(s)
in Pukhtoon Context Peshawar, Pakistan**

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Abstract

In the current scenario a new form of entrepreneurship with a focus of social wealth creation is getting attention from the academia as an element of social, economic and environmental contribution to the society. Such activities lead to both economic growth as well as social development due to their efforts of poverty reduction and the improvement of large-scale economic development. Social entrepreneurs are basically addressing the social problems caused due to lack of existing social welfare systems. The embeddedness of social entrepreneurs and enterprises in the institutional context affect their creation and performance. The institutional framework conditions determine which type of entrepreneurial activity takes place and who become involved in it. In order to understand the phenomenon of women social entrepreneurship in the research devoid context of Peshawar, narrative case study approach adopted. A single case study of 'stepping stone' was selected to understand the formal and informal institutional influences of women social entrepreneur(ship). Data reveal that both formal and informal institutions constraint women entrepreneurship however, at the same time give women the opportunity to negotiate these institutional forces. By and large the formal institutions inhabit the entrepreneurial endeavor of women. Interestingly it was found that women when embed their entrepreneurial agency within the institutional norms they act to be as enablers than inhibiting the entrepreneurial process.

Key words: *Social Entrepreneurship, Gender, Institutional Theory, Pukhtoon Culture, Narrative Case Study.*

Introduction

The role of entrepreneurship in socio-economic growth of any economy has been widely recognized. New entrepreneurial initiatives increases employment level, generate socio-economic growth, trigger innovation and enhance the wellbeing of the over all society. In the current scenario a new form of entrepreneurship with a focus of social wealth creation is getting attention from the academia as an element of social, economic and environmental contribution to the society (for example, Alvord et al., 2004; Anderson et al., 2006; Borzaga and Defourny, 2001; Dees, 2007). It has also been noted that some of the social entrepreneurial activity lead to both economic growth as well as social development due to their efforts of poverty reduction and the improvement of large-scale economic development (McMullen, 2011). Social entrepreneurs are basically addressing social problems caused due to lack of existing social welfare systems. They aim to bring about ‘systematic changes and sustainable improvements’ (Urban & Kujinga, 2017) leading to wellbeing. We define social entrepreneurship as ‘entrepreneurial activity with an embedded social purpose’ (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006: 22).

Review of literature on social entrepreneurship depicts the presence of several themes, contexts and theoretical constructs to differentiate social entrepreneurship from other forms of community work (Urban & Kujinga, 2017) arguing that “social entrepreneurship activity can be seen tri-value social enterprises since their revenue sources derive from the non-profit, for-profit, and public sectors” (Herranz et al., 2011 as seen in Urban & Kujinga, 2017: 639).

Extant researches call for the need of theoretical embeddedness (Haugh, 2012; Urban, 2015) and exploration of contextual influences on social entrepreneurship (Welter and

Smallbone, 2011). Social entrepreneurs and their activities are context embedded which suggests that the type and levels of social entrepreneurial activities varies across the contexts as per their socio-economic and institutional environment (Bernardino et al., 2015).

“However, entrepreneurship development studies suggest that more research is needed to understand how women who engage in social entrepreneurial activities support local development in the face of community traditions and social norms” (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016).

Current paper is an effort to respond to different perspectives i-e understanding social entrepreneurship in an institutional milieu of the developing county as well as to deepen the understanding of how women play their role in the support and development of local community while making choices within constraints. Hence, women social entrepreneurs were studied through an institutional theory lens in the context of Peshawar through a narrative case study approach. The rest of the article is structured as follows. Literature review grounds the concept of social entrepreneurship in the academic literature, followed by theoretical framework. Research context and methods discusses the context of occurrence that helps understand the factors at work affecting the social entrepreneurs and their enterprises. The methodology describes the approach and sample of the study, followed by findings, discussion and conclusions.

Literature Review

Traditionally, the creation of the venture has been associated to economics, based on the assumption that economically motivated social actors create the organizations (Shane, 2003) with the purpose of earning profit. Every social being needs resources for their

survival but not all social actors start businesses. Hence, the motivation to enterprise is not solely associated to financial gains; rather entrepreneurs can operate for societal benefits, the concept is termed as social entrepreneurship.

The language of social entrepreneurship might be new in the academic domain but social entrepreneurship itself has existed since long. Social entrepreneurship is about social value creation and is enacted in the social, economic and political context and is affected by it (Vidović, 2018). The meaning of social entrepreneurship varies as per the perspectives of those who are defining it, hence, having a single definition and a welldefined framework remains a challenge for the researchers (Abdulmelike, 2017). To some “...social entrepreneurship is about finding new and better ways to create and sustain social value” (Guclu, Dees & Anderson, 2002:192) and yet to others social entrepreneurship is about a business where the primary goal is social, other than profit. Researchers may not agree on a unique definition of the social entrepreneurship but all of them have an agreement that creating social value is the prime objective of any social enterprise (Nandan & London, 2013; Wang & Aaltio, 2017).

Varbanova (2009: 4) claims that social entrepreneurs “are active mainly in the social, environmental, human rights and gender equality areas”. However, despite this fact that social entrepreneurs work for the promotion of gender equality, it is fascinating that most of the research on social entrepreneurship has remained gender neutral, rather gender blind so to speak (Teasdale et al., 2011; Humbert, 2012). A survey conducted by Van Ryzin et al (2009) in the US predicts that women outnumber men in the field of social entrepreneurship.

Social entrepreneurs have positive impact on the society, through poverty reduction and promoting economic growth (Zahra et al., 2009). Women through their social enterprises can craft a positive social impact, by addressing issues related to child care, family, women's health, domestic violence, work place and stereotyping towards particular social groups (Mailloux et al., 2002 as seen in Humbert, 2012).

It is assumed that the participation of marginalized population let they be women or ethnic-minority groups (or both), is a crucial step towards the change. This is manifested in the change that societies have experienced with the involvement of women in sorting out women related issues (see Caputo, 1997). Motivation for women to create social enterprises does not appear to be specific. It can be the desire to make a difference, to emancipate, to support; associate with a group; immerse in the community (Mailloux et al., 2002 as seen in Humbert, 2012), thereby promoting a strong community embeddedness of the social entrepreneurship. The motivations to create social enterprise therefore are not those 'womanly motivations' rather to build relationships with others, to help, to act and to strongly embed within the community, learn skills, being your own boss and contesting negative social perceptions and stereotypes (Humbert, 2012).

As already defined that social entrepreneurship is something, which has an embedded social goal that can be, achieved either through a non-profit or for-profit venture. To appreciate the role of women as social entrepreneurs, the notion of an individual as "hero social entrepreneur" (Short, Moss & Lumpkin, 2009:181) has been considered instead of any joint and/or community based effort to create social enterprise (Datta & Gailey, 2012).

Social entrepreneurship literature is not much vocal on the issue of gender and this

silence is felt in particular when it comes to women social entrepreneurs in the developing countries, despite the fact that women social entrepreneurs are contributing to towards the economic growth, emancipation and empowerment of women in developing countries (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016). Abdulmelike, (2017) argued that the impact of social enterprises could be well understood and felt on micro level.

Theoretical Framework

Women Social Entrepreneurship through Institutional Theory Lens

Environmental factors and its impact on entrepreneurship is a growing field of interest, however, in the field of social entrepreneurship little is known about such relationships (Urbano et al., 2017, Feriri, 2014, Urbano & Kujinga, 2017). The situation for women social entrepreneurs becomes complex because they are striving to achieve the social and economic goals simultaneously. Several studies have shown that environmental factors are important for the enactment of any social action (Feriri, 2014), some socio-cultural factors of the environment can be more appropriative to stimulate social enterprises than others. However, it must be emphasized here that no firm evidence has be found yet in relation to one of the most promising field in social entrepreneurship research stream i.e. the study regarding how environmental factors could catalyse or slow down the entrepreneurial activities (Urabno et al., 2017: 54). For understanding these environmental factors we turn to an institutional perspective by proposing that social entrepreneurship is enabled and constrained by the institutional fabric of any society. The importance of these formal and informal institutions and its impact on social entrepreneurship has been highlighted in the recent scholarly work and the use of this approach is propagated in the field of social entrepreneurship (Urbano et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the social and institutional framework conditions have different impact of men and women that have remained undertheorized (Roomi & Harrison, 2010) for the context of developing countries like Pakistan.

North (1991: 3) defined institutions as “....rules of the game in a society, or more formally, institutions are the constraints that shape human interaction”. Institutions are categorised in formal and informal. Formal institutions are described as principles and protocols, constitutions and written rules while informal institutions constitute expectations regarding particular values, specific (acceptable and unacceptable) norms of behavior and conventions and attitudes. These factors are discussed here to elaborate that these are the factors that influence entrepreneurial activities, hence we can assert here that both formal and informal factors influence entrepreneurial activities (e.g. see Aidis 2005; Aparicio et al. 2016; Aidis et al. 2008; Urbano & Alvarez 2014; Thornton et al. 2011; Veciana & Urbano 2008) and particularly social entrepreneurship (McMullen 2011; Desa 2012; Dorado & Ventresca 2013; Nicholls 2010b; Townsend & Hart 2008; Urbano et al. 2010).

Although there is limited research on the institutions and social entrepreneurship and that too takes a fragmented view in the sense that it has studied either of the institutions (formal or informal) in relation to social entrepreneurship. Research on institutions and social entrepreneurship has been dominated by examining the impact of regulatory environment (see Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010; Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2013a; Mair & Marti, 2009; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009). Studies suggest that local regulative frameworks like access to capital, complex regulatory and bureaucratic processes discourages social entrepreneurship (Lim et al., 2010). In case

these regulatory frameworks are not very tight this will support the formation of entrepreneurial opportunity belief (Muñoz & Kibler, 2016).

Urban & Kujinga, (2017) proposed that informal institutions and self-perception of the individuals are important in determining the likelihood of someone becomes social entrepreneurs and asserted that informal institutions have a strong impact on social entrepreneurship. Social acceptance and legitimacy is very important for social entrepreneurs because it reflects the desirability of these endeavors and its demand from the society (Muñoz & Kibler, 2016).

The normative institutions design the social fabric and shape gender responsibilities as well as the perceptions of the social actors about different behavioural tasks and society's perceptions of women entrepreneurs (Fuentes-Fuentes et al., 2012). The way a society perceives women entrepreneurs in itself is a major barrier against the development of women entrepreneurs (Bruni et al., 2004, Gohar & Abrar, 2012). A society with favorable normative structure provides the support network that increases the confidence of social entrepreneurs (Muñoz & Kibler, 2016).

Institutions have additive and reinforcing effects on social entrepreneurship (Stephan, Uhlaner & Stride, 2015), and they should be studied together instead of taking any one of them. Current paper also takes mutual institutional configuration of formal and informal institutions and its impact of women social entrepreneur(ship) in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Research Context and Methods

This research is being carried out in research scarce context of Peshawar, Pakistan. Less research has been conducted in this context to understand the entrepreneurial endeavor of women. Women in KP socially and economically handicapped (Afza et al., 2010; Gohar

& Abrar, 2016) with high gender disparity. The notion of izzat and pardah limit the spatial mobility of women and also segregate women and men. Due to these unsaid rules women find it convenient to run home based ventures and only a few can make it to the main stream (Harper & Arora, 2005 as cited in Gohar, Basit & Abrar, 2018). The proportion of self-employed women is very low in KP, which can be attributed to the normative structure of the society that keeps women veiled and away from the economic sphere (Gohar, Basit & Abrar, 2018; Gohar, 2012).

This inequality makes the land more fertile for the creation of social enterprises. Social entrepreneurship is not new in Pakistan, but it was till 1996 that no social entrepreneur was identified in Pakistan by local or international organization. Those who were given the titles of social entrepreneurs were either social workers, philanthropists and social activists based on the criteria identified by Ashoka (Maqsood & Laghari, 2003). Even today, less is known about how these enterprises are developed by women entrepreneurs and how social entrepreneurs are progressing within the existing institutional framework and to what extent the institutional environment enable or constrain their entrepreneurial endeavors.

We choose qualitative approach for this study, as the aim was to discover insights into real-life events of the women social entrepreneurs, through an institutional perspective. “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009: 5). With the main aim of getting deeper understanding of

the lived experiences of women social entrepreneurs narrative case study method was used.

The narrative case study is defined as “the intensive examination of an individual unit, although such units are not limited to individual persons” (Brandell & Varka: 294) “.....within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1984: 23). Case studies are preferably kept idiographic where the unit of investigation is single (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009; Yin, 2013) with the aim of exploring multiple factors (variables). Case study can be of several individuals, a setting, a program, an event, or an activity (Creswell, 2007). The entrepreneurial processes of women social entrepreneurs in the context of Peshawar, warrants the use of narrative case study approach as case study gives the opportunity to obtain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real life events (Yin, 2003) and the narratives bring together the diverse events happening and actions of human life (Polkinghorne, 1995). For the selection of the case intrinsic case study method was chosen as it takes the case itself is of primary interest in the exploration (Grandy, 2010). In intrinsic case study the case is preselected (Stake, 1995). As it has been mentioned that few if any research has been conducted on women social entrepreneurs in Peshawar in relation to institutional environment, and in the given circumstances working as a successful woman social entrepreneur makes it worth exploring in its own right.

Patton (2002: 116) positions that “the central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer special translucent windows into cultural and social meanings”. Narrative

inquiry is an overarching term that encapsulates personal and human aspects of experience over time, and look into the association of individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry provides an opportunity to understand the real life experiences of women social entrepreneurs in the context of it occurring and will help understand and interpret the cultural and social meanings attached to these enactments.

Sample Selection and Data Collection

For current research narrative case study approach was used which focuses on the depth of information from a single case study with the aim of exploring human experience in the context of its embeddedness. In-depth and intensive investigation of a single case can produce the data that highlight the phenomenon with all its facets. Sampling is always purposive in case of case study (Yin, 2003) as only those cases that have the specific investigation

Yin (2003) asserted that if the researcher want to study a specific group or a single thing then single case is best choice. In case of using a single case study is used, this helps the researchers to explore new theoretical relationship and get deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991 as seen in Gustafsson, 2017).

As the aim of this research is to understand the practices of women social entrepreneurs in the context of Peshawar using an institutional theory lens, single case study deemed suitable research design. Narrative analysis was used as technique to analyzed the data

obtained through in-depth interviews. “Narrative reasoning operates by noticing the differences and diversity of people’s behavior. It attends to the temporal context and complex interaction of the elements that make each situation remarkable” (Polkinghorne (1995:6). Hence, narrative analysis is about “the configuration of the data into a coherent whole” (ibid). In case of narrative analysis the stories are created out of the data by integrating events and happening organized around the plot (Kim, 2015). The case is about a woman who created her venture by negotiating the institutional set of Pukhtoon context. Along with the in-depth interview observation were also made and the data obtained was analyzed for the role formal and informal institutions on women social entrepreneurs.

Findings

a. Case Description

The case of Mrs. Naila contributes to a deeper understanding of women’s entrepreneurial challenges due to strict cultural settings and lack of opportunities. It can assist policy makers and development agencies in addressing specific needs and requirements of women entrepreneurs of KP society. The social entrepreneur runs a Montessori that is her passion. The case describes in detail about her struggles in setting up the venture but the husband and immediate family’s support made it happen. She continued her education with the support of her husband and then he helped in financing her venture. She is supporting children who cannot afford to pay for their education in her Montessori there are children who are being sponsored by some affluent people of the surrounding areas.

The case also records the constraints that can hamper women entrepreneurship process and proposes that practical steps needs to be taken in order to nurture the entrepreneurial potential of the women of this society. Especially the constraints posed by the formal institutions have bearing on the business, in her Montessori number of students have reduced from 35 to 10 because of the inability to advertise her business due to the constraints posed by the Peshawar Development Authority (PDA).

But along with that, the case highlights the opportunities that the institutional framework has provided her with. The case shed light on the ability of the entrepreneurs to embed their agency within normative structure of the society, instead of breaking the rules and getting setback from the social-cultural and familial setups. Women in KP when wisely take care of the cultural norms they are not considered the doormats rather their endeavors are supported and legitimized by the wider culture. In case of a venture with social aims, women when start in the fields that have earn social acceptance, they do not face much challenges from the informal society but the formal institutional barriers still exists.

b. The Facets of Formal Institutions

Data reveled that the entrepreneur has come across a lot of problems because of the non-supportive nature of the formal institutions in KP. Women in KP are facing several constraints and they believe government organization should be supportive towards them and their ventures keeping in view the conservative society of Pakistan.

Peshawar development authority (PDA) sent her letters to shift her business from the residential area to a commercial area soon, otherwise, they will seal her Montessori and

she will be charged with penalty. PDA also took down the school advertisement boards and stated that she is not allowed to advertise in a residential area because she is not allowed to operate here. Due to the lack of cooperation from PDA, Mrs. Naila was forced to find a new place and so she did. She tried to move 3 times but she always faced trouble either by PDA or the owners of the new place. She rented a building once but when the owner got to know about her plans to convert the building into a school he backed off. Mrs. Naila had even paid him Rs. 30,000 as advance and she even had everything ready to move. At that time Mrs. Naila's brother and mother helped her a lot. They let her move everything to their home. She did manage her school from there for a while but then she moved back to her home because she did not want to put her mother in trouble from the law enforcements.

In addition to that it is also difficult for a woman to operate outside of her home in the society she is living in. Now she is again operating from her home but she cannot advertise because then the authorities will know about it and it will cause trouble for her.

Another issue is related to marketing. Due to the above mentioned reason Mrs. Naila cannot advertise her school and that's why has not been able to admit any more students. She also lacks marketing skills and needs proper training for that.

c. Informal Institutions and Women Social Entrepreneurs

The social entrepreneurs in the case studied belong to a very traditional and conservative Pukhtun¹ family. Being married at a very young age Mrs. Naila could not continue her formal higher education. Owing to the cultural norms and local expectations to take care of household activities, Mrs. Naila focused on her family and domestic responsibilities. Over the years, she became a mother of four children. However, with all her domestic

¹ Pukhtun (also known as Pashtu's) are an ethnic group native to Afghanistan and North-Western Pakistan.

responsibilities, she also made a decision to resume her studies, her decision was in response to a minor incident that took place between her and her husband that had a strong affect on their marital life. But thankfully, her husband supported her for higher education. She resumed her studies and completed Masters Degree in Economics.

Her immediate family has constantly supported Mrs. Naila in her endeavors. Her husband initially helped her financially too. Due to the constant support of her immediate family she has kept pursuing her dreams until this day. Along with that her parents let her run her business from their home once she was deprived of any suitable place due to the rules and regulations posed by the government institutions (PDA).

Along with that after her marriage her maternal family was supportive in taking care of her children when she was pursuing her higher education. Her mother and sisters were there to take care of the children in her tough routine during exams.

She is being highly appreciated by the society for her services. Parents were happy to enroll their children at “Stepping Stone” and they appreciated Mrs. Naila for taking up such an endeavor. Seeing Mrs. Naila’s passion for teaching, her motherly demure, the safe and healthy environment of Stepping Stone Montessori, the parents were convinced that they are making the right choice for their children.

She was able to get this support, as she was not doing something that is not considered as legitimate by this society, rather she was keeping with the cultural mores and was trying to stay within the boundaries prescribed for the women.

But it is not always a win-win situation. By and large the informal institutions are supportive but Mrs. Naila faced many managerial issues along the way due to lack of management skills and training. Mrs. Naila argues that there are some tasks that can only

be performed by men in this society, such as dealing with government institutions and other necessary dealings. Mrs. Naila stated that she never understood how to deal with such tasks and had always faced problems while performing them. She blames it all on being women born in this society.

Discussion and Conclusion

Currently developing economies are suffering from several social problems and looking towards the government for the solution of every problem is of no use. Rather social entrepreneurship in most parts of the world is seen as solution to the problems faced, through its ability of value creation and enhancing the quality of life. However, there is little research on social entrepreneurial activities of women from a contextual perspective i.e. to understand how the environmental factors are affecting their venture emergence, performance and growth (Urbano et al., 2010). Our study adds to the understanding of women social entrepreneurial activities in the context of Peshawar, Pakistan, an area that has several myths associated to it, ranging from gender discrimination, conservative cultural norms to honour killing and several others. The study is an effort to highlight the significance of the area and the potential that it has as a site to be explored by the researchers. We do believe that with a single case study we cannot reflect the richness of the phenomenon but have successfully added a perspective to the scholarship on women's social entrepreneurial activities from an institutional perspective with great potential to be further researched on.

It is evident from our findings that women social entrepreneurs can create successful enterprises even in a resource constrained and a relatively inhabiting environment (Mair & Marti, 2006; Datta & Gailey, 2012), by aligning their conduct to socially accepted norms and getting social support. The presence of a male dominant culture, combined with lower level of education and the concept of purdah (the manifestation of informal institutions) pose unique challenges to women entrepreneurs, however, Mrs. Naila used the same norms as a resource by moulding her agency as per the norms of the wider culture. This can be seen in the case study that the entrepreneur is well aware of the codes of conduct by being embedded hence adding to the success (Giménez & Calabrò, 2018). Mrs. Naila is the kind of social entrepreneur who does not care about the outcome much as long as they are giving something back to the society (Rey-Martí, Ribeiro-Soriano & Sánchez-García; 2016).

Mrs. Naila has been managing stepping stone for years now but she has not been able to expand it, this can be seen as manifestation of informal institutions in the form of codes of conduct that shapes women entrepreneurs expectations and their growth aspirations different than their male counterparts (Giménez & Calabrò, 2018, Gohar, Abrar and Rauf, 2018). Women in Pukhtoon culture are not permitted to work outside the boundaries of their household or a residential area (Gohar, 2012). They are preferred and legitimized to be in certain ventures and in certain places. No doubt the entrepreneur under discussion has been given tough time, however, she was able to make it with the help of family and embedding her agency within the informal codes of conduct. She opted for a profession that is considered as highly respectable and has earned legitimacy in the Pukhtoon culture. The choice of a socially legitimate profession reflects women's ability to use their agency and gain support of the informal institutions (Vershina, Rodgers, Tarba, Khan, & Stokes, 2019), as well as resources from the society. Along side she chose to be in a non-commercial area

keeping with the mores of Purdha, which is again an effort to act according to the normative construct of the society and get social approval. Also her enterprise was to a greater extent segregated where she was not supposed to mix up with people from opposite gender, hence, giving her social legitimacy that can then be transformed in social capital when needed. The crux of the study is that both formal and informal institutions are important for the emergence, performance and success of social entrepreneurial activities of women in Peshawar. However, informal institutions have greater significance for the reason that these enterprises derive legitimacy and support from the normative construct of the society. Rebelling the norms is not considered as an option as they know that it will limit their chances of survival and success.

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