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The Role of Entrepreneurship in Empowering Women and Girls with Disabilities

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Abstract

Objectives: This study explores the role of entrepreneurship in empowering women and girls with disabilities, aiming to understand how entrepreneurial engagement influences their socio-economic status. The research focuses on the experiences of women and girls who have pursued entrepreneurship, particularly within the Dakhla Centre in Egypt.

Methods: A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, utilizing structured face-to-face interviews with women and girls with disabilities engaged in entrepreneurship. A probability sample of 20 participants was selected through a multi-stage sampling method to ensure diverse representation. The study examines the relationship between entrepreneurial activities and participants' empowerment, emphasizing social and economic outcomes.

Results: The findings indicate that individuals with entrepreneurial traits—regardless of gender—are well-positioned to establish successful businesses. However, most projects led by women with disabilities in the Dakhla Centre focus on consumer services with modest financial returns, limiting their broader economic impact. Additionally, most participants work outside their educational fields, underscoring entrepreneurship's role in job creation. While 15 out of 20 participants were familiar with the concept of entrepreneurship, some equated it with small businesses due to limited education and awareness. Notably, 95% of participants did not perceive disability as a barrier to entrepreneurship, and 18 participants confirmed that their ventures enhanced their social capital.

Conclusions: The findings highlight that entrepreneurial success is driven by innovation, risk-taking, and community awareness. Despite challenges, entrepreneurship serves as a powerful tool for the social and economic empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, empowerment, women and girls with disabilities.

دور ريادة الأعمال في تمكين النساء والفتيات من ذوي الإعاقة

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ملخّص

الأهداف: تستكشف الدراسة دور ريادة الأعمال في تمكين النساء والفتيات من ذوي الإعاقة؛ بهدف فهم تأثير ريادة الأعمال على وضعهن الاجتماعي والاقتصادي، وهي تركز على تجارب النساء والفتيات اللاتي خضن تجربة ريادة الأعمال في المجتمع، خاصة داخل مركز الداخلة في مصر.

المنهجيَّة: استخدمت الدراسة منهجًا نوعيًا وصفيًا، وجمعت البيانات عبر مقابلات وجاهية باستخدام دليل دراسة حالة مع النساء والفتيات من ذوي الإعاقة اللاتي انخرطن في ريادة الأعمال. جرى اختيار عينة احتمالية مكونة من 20 بطريقة العينة الطبقية متعددة المراحل لضمان تمثيل متنوع للتجارب. وستكشف الدراسة عن العلاقة بين هذه الأنشطة الريادية وتمكين المشاركات، مع التركيز على النتائج الاجتماعية والاقتصادية.

النتائج: تكشف الدراسة عن أن الأفراد الذين يمتلكون صفات ريادية -بغض النظر عن الجنس- لديهم فرصة أكبر لبدء مشاريع ناجحة، وعن إن معظم المشاريع التي تديرها النساء من ذوي الإعاقة في مركز الداخلة تتركز في الخدمات الاستهلاكية ذات العوائد المحدودة؛ مما يقلل من تأثيرها الاقتصادي الأوسع، ومعظم المشاركات يعملن خارج مجالات دراستهن؛ مما يبرز دور ريادة الأعمال في خلق فرص العمل. أظهرت النتائج أن 15 من أصل 20 مشاركة كنّ على دراية بريادة الأعمال، لكن البعض خلط بينها وبين المشاريع الصغيرة بسبب محدودية التعليم والوعي، كما أن 95% من المشاركات لم يعتبرن الإعاقة عائقًا أمام ريادة الأعمال، وأكدت 18مشاركة أن ريادة الأعمال عززت رأس المال الاجتماعي لديهن.

الخلاصة: تشير النتائج إلى أن نجاح ريادة الأعمال يعتمد على الابتكار، وتحمل المخاطر، وزيادة الوعي المجتمعي. وبالرغم من التحديات، فإن ريادة الأعمال تمكّن النساء والفتيات من ذوي الإعاقة اجتماعيًا واقتصاديًا.

الكلمات الدالة: ريادة الأعمال، التمكين، النساء والفتيات من ذوي الإعاقة.

Introduction

The concept of empowerment, fundamentally linked to providing equal opportunities for all, emerged in the 1960s and has continuously evolved, influenced by its implementation across various fields. Initially, empowerment was tied to citizenship rights, focusing on equality and participation within communities. By the 1970s, however, it began to acquire a more human rights-oriented dimension, largely influenced by feminist critiques of development programs. This shift was particularly prominent in Egypt and other Arab countries, where feminist movements criticized development programs for perpetuating women's dependency on men (Lailah, 2007).

Empowerment underwent significant transformations over time. Originally viewed as a liberating concept for marginalized groups, it gradually shifted toward an assimilationist approach that sought to integrate these groups into the larger development ecosystem (Al-Baghdadi, 2018). Once rooted in political power, empowerment has become a widely applied concept in international policy. A significant example is the women's empowerment strategy in the United Nations documents, which evolved through key international conferences, starting with the 1975 Mexico City Conference and culminating in the 1995 Beijing Conference. These conferences emphasized gender equality and women's social and economic empowerment, particularly as states struggled to address these issues.

In the current global context, the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities has emerged as a critical yet often overlooked aspect of the empowerment agenda. This issue is of global significance, underscored by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), particularly Goal 5, which aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". Egypt, a steadfast advocate for these initiatives, launched its Vision 2030 in 2016, aligning national development with the UNSDGs. In pursuit of this alignment, the Egyptian government has launched an inclusive entrepreneurial program *"Women Economic Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Egypt"*, a joint effort by UNIDO and UN Women aimed at enhancing women's access to employment and entrepreneurship (*Rabeha*, 2023).

Further reinforcing this commitment, the Egyptian government's efforts include the transition of the Social Fund for Development into the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (MSMEDA), which has significantly supported women entrepreneurs. Additionally, initiative like the *"Tanmia wa Tatweer"* project aim to bolster the entrepreneurial ecosystem, focusing on youth and women in key sectors (Bank, 2023).

The success and empowerment of women in entrepreneurship are widely documented and reflect a broader trend of achievement among women entrepreneurs in both governmental and private sectors across multiple nations, including Arab women. However, the path to achieving sustainable development and empowerment is not always easy for women. Regardless of these positive strides, challenges persist for marginalized groups, including women and girls with disabilities. Gender disparities in investment and entrenched patriarchal norms continue to hinder progress in governorates such as Egypt's New Valley. Institutional barriers further exacerbate these challenges, complicating processes like project proposal submissions, feasibility studies, and tax filings. Additionally, marketing obstacles, including high shipping costs from rural areas, impede business growth. The customs and traditions of New Valley Governorate further restrict opportunities for female entrepreneurs, particularly those with disabilities. However, despite these challenges, many women entrepreneurs with disabilities have demonstrated resilience and success.

This study makes a unique contribution to the literature by examining the role of entrepreneurship in the social and economic empowerment of women with disabilities in the Dakhla Centre, Egypt—a population that is rarely explored in entrepreneurship research. It offers a distinct perspective by focusing on the experiences of women with disabilities in a remote desert environment, a demographic often overlooked in entrepreneurship studies. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study provides in-depth insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by these women in the New Valley Governorate. By exploring the intersection of gender, disability, and entrepreneurship within a specific cultural and geographical context, the study enhances the understanding of these concepts. Finally, the findings offer targeted insights for policymakers and practitioners aiming to promote inclusive economic development in the region.

1. Research Methodology

2.1 ***Study Approach:*** The study adopts both descriptive and case study methods, including continuous and direct communication, focus on study cases, and indirect participation by virtue of the affiliation of one of the researchers with the study community based on Galabi' notion (Galabi, 2000). It aims to describe and define the role of entrepreneurship in the social and economic empowerment of women and girls with disabilities in Dakhla in the Governorate of New Valley. Data and information are collected from study cases, and female entrepreneurs with disabilities are adopted as the study sample (Abdulbaset & Hassan, 1990). The unique contribution of this study lies in its focus on intersectional marginalization—examining how disability, gender, and rurality collectively shape entrepreneurial experiences in a region underrepresented in existing literature. Unlike prior studies on Egyptian entrepreneurship, which predominantly focus on women without disabilities and in urban settings (e.g., Borham et al., 2024; Elkafrawi, 2020), this work centers on remote desert communities where traditional gender roles and limited infrastructure amplify barriers for women with disabilities.

2.2 ***Study Community:*** The study community consisted of female entrepreneurs with disabilities in Dakhla in the Governorate of New Valley, which is in the southwestern part of Egypt and extends west of the Nile Valley in the Western Desert. The New Valley Governorate covers 45.8% of the total area of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and has a population of about 115 thousand people, and its population density does not exceed 2 individuals/km^2.

1.3 ***Study Sample & Sample Selection Methods****:* A probability sample was selected using a multi-stage sampling method (Naeem, 2005) to select participants from different segments of women and girl entrepreneurs with disabilities in four villages: Sheikh Muftah, Asmant, Al-Maasara, and Sheikh Wali. The sample selection aims to enrich the study findings with different points of view and experiences from all levels and categories of women and girls with disabilities, who have become entrepreneurs in the study community. The case study was applied to 24 cases, 6 cases from each village. The cases were selected according to a set of criteria, including years of experience in the field of entrepreneurship and the type of disability. The activities and projects led by the selected female entrepreneurs had to be over 3 years old, and the women had to be officially and medically categorized as disabled. They also had to have worked as their project's manager for at least three consecutive years and in the same activity.

1.4 ***Participant Recruitment:*** From an initial pool of 24 eligible women, 20 completed interviews (83% response rate). Four declined due to familial restrictions or workload conflicts, reflecting cultural barriers.

This is explained in section 5 study findings.

1.5 ***Survey Distribution and Respondent Contact:*** The researchers visited the Dakhla Oasis on three separate occasions during the data collection period. Prior to each visit, the research team contacted local community leaders and organizations working with people with disabilities to explain the purpose of the study and seek assistance in identifying potential participants. With the help of these local partners, the research team identified women entrepreneurs with disabilities who met the study's inclusion criteria. The researchers' assistant then contacted these women by phone or in person to explain the study in detail, answer any questions they had, and invite them to participate in an interview.

1.6 ***Three Site Visits:*** For those who agreed to participate, individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in January, March, and May 2024, totaling 21 days. The interviews, which averaged 90 minutes, took place in participants' homes (n = 15) or workplaces (n = 5).

1.7 ***Sample Representativeness:*** While the study sample was designed to capture a diverse range of experiences among women entrepreneurs with disabilities in the four selected villages, it may not fully represent the broader population of women with disabilities in the Dakhla Oasis. The absence of comprehensive demographic data on this population makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the sample reflects the overall characteristics of the community. Nonetheless, efforts

were made to include participants from different age groups, types of disabilities, educational backgrounds, and business sectors to ensure a variety of perspectives. Despite this diversity, three key factors limit the representativeness of the sample. First, women with severe disabilities, particularly visual or cognitive impairments, were underrepresented, reflecting Dakhla's low survival rates for children with these conditions. Second, economic homogeneity within the sample was evident, as all participants had stable government salaries, excluding poorer women who rely solely on entrepreneurial income. Finally, cultural gatekeeping played a role, as parental restrictions prevented access to unmarried women, skewing the sample toward older, married participants. Future research with a larger and more representative sample would be necessary to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

1.8 ***Study Tools:*** The primary data collection tool used in this study was a case study guide. The guide was prepared based on the following steps:

1. Review of recently published articles and reports on women's entrepreneurship in the study community.
2. Review and analyze the literature and theoretical heritage of entrepreneurship and empowerment of women and girls, namely those with disabilities.
3. Review feminist theory and entrepreneurship theories and their views on the issue addressed by this study.

After developing the components of the case study guide, they were presented to 4 referees, two of whom were specialized in sociology, one in social statistics, and one in philosophy of science and logic. The guide was modified based on the feedback received from the referees. The final guide revolves around three themes: the first addresses the general characteristics of the study sample, the second tackles the role of entrepreneurship in empowering women and girls with disabilities in desert communities in Egypt, while the third deals with the nature of the relationship between entrepreneurship and the socioeconomic empowerment of women and girls with disabilities in the study community.

3. Literature Review

3.1 *Entrepreneurship*

Entrepreneurship has traditionally been recognized as a powerful force for social and economic empowerment. In recent years, the field of entrepreneurship has embraced concepts like social entrepreneurship, which has become a central focus across disciplines such as sociology, politics, and business. It has emerged as a valuable solution to socio-economic challenges, such as unemployment and social exclusion, in both developed and developing countries. Social entrepreneurship addresses critical issues like poverty and healthcare through models aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Priyadi & Mulyani, 2024)

In emerging economies, entrepreneurship fuels both economic development and social mobility through frugal innovation, offering scalable and cost-effective solutions for underserved communities, despite resource and institutional constraints (Hossain & Sarkar, 2023). Policymakers now view entrepreneurship as a powerful tool for empowering marginalized groups—such as women and individuals with disabilities—by integrating them into the entrepreneurial process (Bučalina & Pejović, 2022; Riad Shams et al., 2020) In response, governments and international organizations are increasingly supporting entrepreneurship as a means to reduce inequality and promote sustainable growth by enhancing access to finance, training, and technology (Asare et al., 2024; Régnier, 2023).

3.2 *Women's Empowerment*

Women's empowerment is central to feminist theory and a critical global issue. Recent literature refines its conceptualization across economic, political, psychological, social, and health dimensions, crucial for gender equality and sustainable development (Miskiyah et al., 2021; Petroia & Stegarescu, 2024). It aims to enable women to realize their rights and contribute to societal development (Al-Gharib, 2021; Ziaur Rahaman, 2024), improving the socioeconomic status of marginalized women and enhancing community well-being (Khulbe & Chandra Joshi, 2024). Libertarian feminism highlights women's economic independence as key to empowerment (Iqubal & Bhattacharyya, 2023). Economic

empowerment enhances women's access to employment, financial services, and entrepreneurship opportunities (Ajabnoor et al., 2023; MTWU, Kodaikanal et al., 2024). Financial literacy is critical in empowering women, impacting their ability to start businesses and make informed financial decisions (Dangcil et al., 2024; Shingla, 2024).

Numerous studies on women's empowerment have been conducted, focusing on the key barriers that hinder women's empowerment, such as gender-based violence, unpaid care work, and discriminatory laws (Kharkwal & Ali Khan, 2024; Trivedi & Dwivedi, 2023). Women's empowerment, therefore, is not an isolated concept. It is connected to broader goals that aim to break down barriers of marginalization and gender-based discrimination across various societal dimensions.

Additionally, feminist theory, particularly through the lens of intersectionality, has made a significant contribution to understanding how women's empowerment is affected by the intersections of various social identities. According to Crenshaw (2015), intersectionality refers to the overlapping and interconnected nature of social identities such as gender, race, and disability, which together produce unique experiences of oppression and exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities within society .In recent scholarship, scholars have expanded on intersectionality to explore the disadvantages faced by Indigenous women, Black women, migrant women, and women from other marginalized communities (Bose, 2012; Ivanov, 2024). Although this lens is particularly useful in understanding the compounded barriers faced by women with disabilities due to the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination—including ableism, gender biases, and other socio-cultural prejudices—these factors profoundly impact their ability to achieve empowerment and financial security (Alfaytouri Baddah, 2024; Maroto et al., 2019).

3.3 *Women with Disability: Barriers and Enablers*

Women with disabilities face dual marginalization and discrimination rooted in cultural and social norms (Chan & Hutchings, 2023). They endure inequities such as wage disparities, unemployment, and reduced income opportunities (Chitapi et al., 2024), which limit their participation in society (Wayack-Pambè & Kouanda, 2022). Historical narratives and cultural practices portray them as burdens (Thompson et al., 2023). Mobility limitations due to inadequate transport designs impact women with physical impairments (Ali & Abdullah, 2023; Mijailović et al., 2024), hindering access to job training and essential services. They face barriers to education, leading to underrepresentation in academic and professional spheres (Diwakar, 2023).

Despite studies showing disabled employees are reliable (Zhao & Wibowo, 2021), women with disabilities face a pay gap and are underrepresented in managerial roles (Ballo, 2023; Marshall et al., 2020), exacerbated by prejudice and ableism. They experience lower employment rates and higher poverty levels (Hirano et al., 2024). Global frameworks inadequately address disability as a critical part of personal identity (Wickenden, 2023), hindering effective policies for equality. Women with disabilities in developing countries face attitudinal, physical, and financial barriers (Mudzingwa, 2017), compounded by gender biases and ableism. Mainstream feminist movements often neglect the experiences of women with disabilities (Traustadottir, 1997), while the disability rights movement has not adequately addressed their marginalization (Blackwell-Stratton et al., 1988).

Feminist disability theory highlights the needs of disabled women (Fine & Asch, 1988; Hannaford, 1986).Garland-Thomson (2005), critiques mainstream feminism's ableism and Wendell (2013), challenges the emphasis on autonomy . Efforts to integrate the experiences of women with disabilities into feminist scholarship and activism have gained momentum in recent years. Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018), advocates for the creation of accessible feminist spaces that meet the needs of disabled individuals. Shakespeare (2013), highlights the systemic discrimination that limits disabled women's access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities (Shakespeare, 2013). Feminist activism has been instrumental in advocating for inclusive policies, particularly through initiatives like, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979, which highlight the importance of intersectionality in fostering economic independence and entrepreneurship among women with disabilities. Further, increasing recognition of these challenges has spurred international conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 2006.

The existing literature highlights that investments have been made in education and women's development initiatives

to enhance labor force participation and career advancement for women with disabilities by national governments in advanced economies, as well as in some developing and emerging economies (Alruwaili, 2023; Bakola et al., 2022; Cabatay & Hermanto, 2022; Nasser & Al-Gharaibeh, 2023). These initiatives align with international human rights standards such as CEDAW and the CRPD but recent reports and studies acknowledges notable gaps remain in career motivation and equitable opportunities (GSMA, 2020; ILO, 2023; UN Women, 2017). Only a quarter of economies protect the rights of women with disabilities (Charlotte, 2022). Targeted interventions and policies are needed to enhance their living conditions and promote social integration (Bamashmoos, 2024; Maroto et al., 2019).

3.4 *Entrepreneurship and Opportunities to Empower Disabled Women*

Empowering women with disabilities is essential for achieving gender equality, promoting financial independence, and advancing their economic rights. A comprehensive literature review highlights that entrepreneurship emerges as a beacon of hope, offering a pathway to empowerment and self-determination. With its potential to foster innovation, economic self-sufficiency, and social inclusion, entrepreneurship holds immense promise for women with disabilities seeking to assert control over their economic futures and actively engage in their communities (Iytha et al., 2024). It presents opportunities for them to gain skills, confidence, and challenge societal norms and stereotypes about disability (Bukari et al., 2023; Dhar et al., 2022).

Recent decades have seen immense recognition of female participation as entrepreneurs and their role in societal development, leading to significant research on various aspects of women's entrepreneurship and their advantages. Studies have demonstrated how societal perceptions of women entrepreneurs have begun to change significantly. For example, Abed Dahleez (2009), highlights the role of female entrepreneurs in addressing youth unemployment and promoting sustainable development within the economy. Alsagoor et al. (2022), emphasize the crucial role of social support, particularly from families, in empowering women entrepreneurs. Additionally, Hashim et al. 2024), explores the context of women in family businesses within the Gulf States, while Paul et al. (2022), discusses how young female entrepreneurs' skills contribute to family business development. As a result, these women are no longer seen as an untapped force that does not contribute to society. Instead, they are increasingly recognized as valuable assets—assets that society can invest in and employ to foster economic growth and empowerment for both women and the broader community (Deepa et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023).

While the success of women in entrepreneurship is widely recognized, including among Arab women, significant challenges persist, particularly for those in rural and desert Bedouin communities. Despite growing interest in women's entrepreneurship, there remains a lack of research on the career motivations and opportunities of women with disabilities in these marginalized areas. Existing studies on Egyptian entrepreneurship have predominantly focused on women without disabilities and in urban settings (e.g., Borham et al., 2024; Elkafrawi, 2020) overlooking the unique barriers faced by women with disabilities in remote regions. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the experiences of women with disabilities in Dakhla, located in the New Valley Governorate of Egypt, where traditional gender roles, geographical isolation, and limited infrastructure further constrain entrepreneurial opportunities.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted entrepreneurship theory and feminist theory as a theoretical framework for analyzing the issue it addresses. Below are the theoretical hypotheses of the study:

4.1 Hypothesis 1: Entrepreneurship contributes significantly to the success of the social and economic empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

Western and Arab economic schools of thought have been busy studying the issue of entrepreneurship, and the period from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century was rich in many intellectual contributions in this field. As such, the concepts of entrepreneurship varied according to each school of thought and its directions. During its early development stages, entrepreneurship was influenced by different economic schools of thought, such as the classical French

and Austrian schools, as well as the neoclassical school with its three branches: the Lausanne, English, and Austrian schools. The classical economic school focused on the three factors of production: land, labor, and capital, and explained the role of each in creating wealth. It assumed that entrepreneurs were the main source of capital, and a tool for achieving continuous progress. This was confirmed by David Ricardo and Carl Marx (Hebert & Link, 2009).

Said (2015) believes that an entrepreneur is a person who has the ability to deal with the conditions of imbalance in the market. Moreover, Smith (1967), Gartner (1989), Zidan (2023) and Carland et al. (1984) focus on the entrepreneur as the unit of analysis and apply several psychological criteria to identify the motivations that drive entrepreneurs.

4.2 ***Hypothesis 2****:* Feminist activism contributes to the successful social and economic empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

Historical evidence confirms the emergence of feminist thought between 1790 and 1865 and stresses its connection with the French and American revolutions. The French Revolution gave European women an opportunity to put an end to the old feudal and patriarchal system. In the USA, feminist thought emerged with the civil war from 1861 to 1865 (K. R., 2016). After that, many theoretical currents emerged to express women's opinions and demands in life under the umbrella of feminist theory (Ramadani, 2012). In light of this, the issue of Egyptian women and improving their conditions began to evolve. The Egyptian Constitution was enacted in 1923. However, it did not recognize the contributions of Egyptian women to the 1919 Revolution. This was a strong reason for the founding of the Egyptian Feminist Union on 16 March 1923, led by Hoda Shaarawi. Egyptian women were able to become an active partner in building Egyptian society. Among the most famous pioneers of the Egyptian feminist movement in the 20th century were Mrs. Hoda Shaarawi and Mrs. Nabawiyya Musa (Al-Sobky, 1986).

Over time, the feminist movement had demands that became statements and principles of feminist theory, for example: - The best service to the nation is guiding women and girls towards education and employment. - Employment is a basic right of women in their society. - Education is the path to awareness, enlightenment, and women's full awareness of their rights (Ramdani, 2013). Based on the above, the authors have formulated the theoretical hypotheses of this study as shown in the following research model (Figure 1):

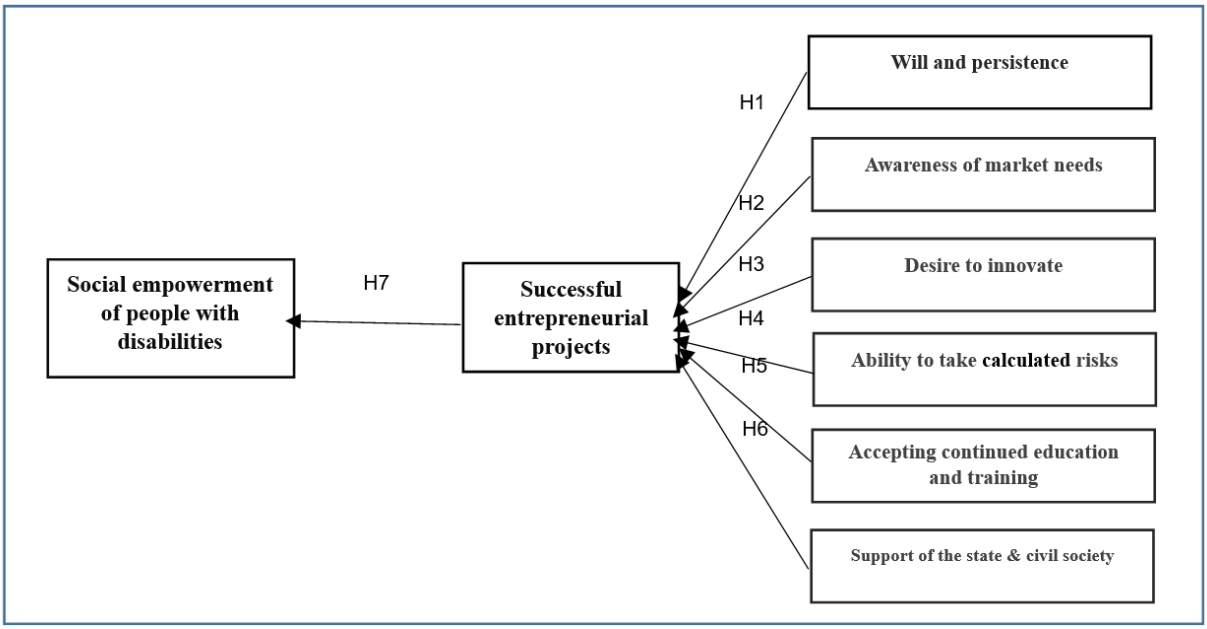


Figure 1: Research Model Depicting Theoretical Hypotheses of the Study

Source: Authors' own work

5. Results and Discussion

The study follows several steps to analyze qualitative data, including organizing and classifying accurate and realistic data as received from the study cases, after collecting this data from the study sample through in-depth interviews. The following table shows the demographic characteristics of the study sample:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

Variable	Variable Elements (number=20)	Repetition	Variable	Variable Elements (number=20)	Repetition
Age	21-29 years	4	Marital Status	Married	20
	30-39 years	6		Divorced	-
	40-50 years	10		Widow	-
Number of Children	1-2	6	Educational Level	Secondary	6
	3-4	14		University	14
Specialization	Bachelor of Arts and Education	4	Disability Type	Hearing	6
	Bachelor of Arts in English Language	1		Mobility in the left foot	7
	Bachelor of Science and Education	9		Hemiplegia (mobility)	1
	Industrial Technician Diploma	3		Physical disability (mobility)	6
	Readymade Clothing Technician Diploma	3			
Project Type and Name	Commercial (grocery and scraps shop)	2	Project Age (years)	1-4	3
	Children/adult clothes sewing project	4		5-9	9
	Agricultural greenhouse (palm nursery)	5		10-14	4
	Poultry farming	4		More than 14	4
	Shoemaking and garment manufacturing	3			
	Medical analysis laboratory	1			
	Fish farm	1			
Monthly income (Egyptian pound)	Less than 5,000	12	Type of Accommodation	Private house	2
	6,000-10,000	6		House/home shared with family	13
	More than 10,000	2		Privately owned apartment	5

Source: Authors' own work

Based on Table 1, it is evident that the total number of study cases is 20, consisting of married women with disabilities. It is also evident that there are no entrepreneurship projects owned by girls with disabilities. This is due to their families rejecting the idea, especially the father, and the parents taking full responsibility for the girls. Moreover, girls with disabilities in the study community benefit from full social and economic solidarity characterized by functional and humanitarian support provided by their families. The study community is a young community, where the 40-50 age group ranks first with 10 cases. This age group is characterized by vitality, energy, motivation to work hard, and attempts to prove

oneself. The 30-40 age group ranks second with 6 cases. This group represents the beginning of maturity and self-in-progress. The 20-29 age group comes in last place with 4 cases. This is because the study community offers comprehensive social and economic solidarity for this age group, whether with or without disabilities, both male and female.

The table shows that 14 cases have a university degree, with 9 holding a Bachelor of Science and Education and 4 a Bachelor of Arts and Education. Six cases received a secondary education, 3 of whom hold an Industrial Technician Diploma, and 3 a Readymade Clothing Technician Diploma, noting that the latter have worked in the field of sewing and garment manufacturing projects. As for the disability type in the study cases, it is evident that most of them suffer from mobility disability, with 7 cases suffering from foot mobility disability, especially the left foot, 6 cases from physical (mobility) disability, 1 case from hemiplegia (mobility) disability, and 6 from hearing disabilities.

The study cases have small and medium-sized entrepreneurship projects. Greenhouses, especially palm nurseries, rank first in terms of age and number, with 5 projects, and poultry farming comes in second place with 4 projects. The remaining projects share the same rank and include clothes sewing and trading, shoemaking, and grocery stores. Fish farming comes in last place, with only one project, although the study community needs this type of project because it is a landlocked community. However, nobody is willing to undertake these projects due to the high costs of their establishment.

As shown in the table, the monthly income of these projects is low, with 12 cases ranking first with less than 5,000 Egyptian pounds in monthly income. Six cases rank second with 6,000 to 10,000 Egyptian pounds, followed by two cases with more than 10,000 Egyptian pounds. Through the indirect monitoring of study cases, it was found that this income gained from entrepreneurship projects - or, as described by the women “the small project” - is a secondary source of income. The primary source of income is the government salary, as all study cases work in the government sector. This is due to the government’s appointment of people with disabilities who have completed their education, be it secondary or university education (appointment order). The data analysis also revealed that most study cases live with their families, totaling 13 cases.

5.1 *Findings Related to the Role of Entrepreneurship in the Social and Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities*

The descriptive qualitative data analysis steps outlined by (Galabi, 2000) were employed to process the information and data collected from the case studies, addressing the research questions as follows:

5.1.1 *Awareness and Concept of Entrepreneurship Among Women and Girls with Disabilities*

Findings related to the first sub-question*: What is the nature and concept of entrepreneurship among female entrepreneurs with disabilities in the study community?* The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that a majority (15 out of 20) of the study cases expressed a general awareness of entrepreneurship, associating it primarily with small-scale projects. These women viewed entrepreneurship as a way to provide a secondary source of income to improve their livelihoods. According to them:

"Entrepreneurship consists in the private projects undertaken by individuals, not the state. It helps women with disabilities to establish small projects. Everyone should strive to have a private, productive project that helps satisfy basic needs."

However, five cases reported a lack of awareness, stating that they had never heard of entrepreneurship. These responses reflect a more limited understanding of the concept, with some participants only familiar with the idea of small projects:

"I do not know anything about entrepreneurship, but I have heard of businessmen’s projects. I only know small projects, but I have never heard of entrepreneurship."

From these responses, it is clear that while there is a general recognition of entrepreneurship, the understanding of its full scope and potential is superficial. Participants were often unaware of the broader concept of entrepreneurship, which suggests that community-based civil society institutions have not adequately raised awareness about entrepreneurship among women and girls with disabilities.

This finding aligns with the conclusions of study by Zarezankova-Potevska (2021), who highlights the significant role of media and education in spreading the culture of entrepreneurship and empowering individuals. Furthermore, this finding

supports feminist theory, particularly the perspectives of Arab feminists such as Al-Sobky (1986), who argue that guiding women and girls toward education and employment is essential for societal development.

5.1.2 *Personality Traits of Female Entrepreneurs with Disabilities*

The second sub-question posed was: *Do female entrepreneurs with disabilities have personality traits and characteristics that differ from other female entrepreneurs?* According to the data, 18 of the 20 study participants reported that female entrepreneurs with disabilities in the study community possess unique personality traits that distinguish them from their non-disabled counterparts. The most commonly cited traits includer, responsibility; determination and willpower; the ability to challenge their disability; self-confidence; leadership and perseverance

As one participant noted:

"Yes, we have personal traits and characteristics that differ from other female entrepreneurs. We, people with disabilities, always try to achieve our goals and prove to people that disability is neither a barrier nor a constraint. We have a role like non-disabled people in society."

Another participant shared:

"I can run my project myself (marketing the product). Yes, I have leadership traits, and I have managed to prove myself to people."

However, two participants disagreed, asserting that there is no difference between them and non-disabled entrepreneurs:

"There are no differences between us as entrepreneurs with disabilities and our counterparts without disabilities. For me, there is no difference between female entrepreneurs with disabilities and non-disabled entrepreneurs who have the same project."

Based on the findings, it is evident that the women in the study sample exhibit a range of key personality traits, including determination, persistence, self-confidence, and the ability to overcome challenges that may hinder their success. They also demonstrate resilience and benefit from the support and assistance provided by local civil society organizations. This confirms the validity of the first hypothesis, which highlights the significance of traits like determination and persistence in entrepreneurship theory. It aligns with the studies by Nasser & Al-Gharaibeh (2023) and Alsagoor et al. (2022), which emphasize the importance of these traits in overcoming the obstacles faced by women, particularly female entrepreneurs with disabilities. Additionally, the findings affirm the validity of the second hypothesis rooted in feminist theory, which asserts that employment is a fundamental and legitimate right of women within their society. The research also underscores the importance of utilizing the social support and aid provided by civil society and official institutions.

5.1.3 *Challenges Hindering the Growth and Progress of Entrepreneurial Projects*

The third sub-question posed was: *What challenges and difficulties do you face that hinder the growth and progress of your project?* The analysis of the data revealed several significant challenges and difficulties faced by the female entrepreneurs with disabilities in the study. The key challenges cited include:

One participant noted:

"The poor prevailing economic conditions that do not encourage any business; the lack of capital; the scarcity and high prices of resources."

One participant explained:

"The conditions of Dakhla and its distance from other areas; the difficulty of finding transport and the high cost of transport due to the quality of the roads."

As one participant pointed out:

"We face many difficulties, including the large number of agricultural pests in palm nurseries, the complex laws and regulations related to licensing and practicing the activity, the lack of labor, and the high daily wages paid to the workforce, as well as the high prices of poultry feed that hinder any large or small project. Moreover, the feed is not available in the Governorate. Wet buy it from Cairo or Assiut."

One participant shared:

"We encounter other challenges such as small markets due to the small population, and the lack of a shopping culture among the residents of El Wahat. Shopping here is seasonal and active only during holidays. Furthermore, people believe that foreign products are better than local products."

One participant remarked:

"Other challenges consist of high prices and the late payment of installments and annual debts to banks."

Based on these findings, it is evident that the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs with disabilities significantly hinder the growth of their projects, exposing them to risks associated with unstable raw material prices, transportation costs, and market limitations. These challenges confirm the validity of the fourth hypothesis, which asserts that external factors such as economic conditions, market demand, and logistical issues play a critical role in the success or failure of entrepreneurial ventures. This is consistent with the findings of Alanazi (2022) and Thomas (2020), who emphasized the importance of addressing these challenges to empower disabled women and protect them from social and economic marginalization.

5.1.4 *The Role of Disability as an Obstacle in Entering Entrepreneurship*

The fourth sub-question asked: *Did your disability constitute an obstacle or barrier to your entry into the field of entrepreneurship?* The responses were overwhelmingly positive, with 18 out of 20 participants confirming that their disability, regardless of its type or severity, did not present an obstacle to entering entrepreneurship.

According to the general statement of 18 participants:

My disability was not an obstacle or a challenge, but rather a motivation. It was never an obstacle or a barrier. On the contrary, my disability enabled me to fulfill myself, and I sent a message to society that disability is not a crime that disgraces the disabled person or their family. It did not constitute an obstacle to me, because I have ambition. It did not prevent me from entering the field of entrepreneurship or small projects earlier.

Despite the positive responses from most participants, two cases did indicate that their disability posed a challenge, particularly with regard to bureaucratic processes such as laws and licensing. As one participant explained:

"Laws and licenses conflict with the type of disability—or, in other words, they prevent people with disabilities from working in this field or activity."

These findings challenge the conventional notion that disability inherently limits the scope of entrepreneurial activities. This aligns with the findings of Al-Gharib (2021), and Al-Shammari (2020), all of whom suggest that, with the right support and mindset, disability does not hinder women from entering or succeeding in entrepreneurship. In fact, it can act as a source of strength and resilience, motivating individuals to challenge societal expectations and prove their worth.

5.1.5 *Necessary Skills and Knowledge for Success in Entrepreneurship*

The fifth sub-question asked: *From your point of view, what skills and knowledge must a female entrepreneur possess to succeed?* Data analysis revealed the differing viewpoints of the study participants regarding the skills and knowledge that a disabled entrepreneur must have, including education, training, and experience. The following skills and knowledge were most frequently mentioned:

As one participant noted:

"It is necessary to learn marketing skills and how to form public relationships."

one participant stated:

“It is also necessary to have a sense of adventure, courage, and fearlessness, as well as good planning, the ability to handle urgent risks, especially in the field of poultry farming, and the desire to continue learning and making use of situations and lessons.”

This confirms the validity of the fifth hypothesis, consistent with Al-Taii (2023), which emphasizes the importance of training, education, and vocational qualification in building the skills and capabilities of entrepreneurial women as a major hypothesis of entrepreneurship theory. This also confirms the validity of the third hypothesis of feminist theory that education is the path to awareness and women’s full awareness of their rights in society.

5.1.6 ***The Impact of Entrepreneurship on Social Status and Position***

The sixth sub-question inquired: *Can you explain how your project improved your position among your friends, family, or even your society?* Entrepreneurship projects gave women with disabilities in the study community a good social status, whether within the family or society, due to the economic success they achieved. Moreover, the entrepreneurship projects helped them form strong social relationships with officials in charge of sponsoring entrepreneurship projects in the study community. This is confirmed by the female entrepreneurs with disabilities themselves, who said:

"My project improved my position because it was the first analysis laboratory to open in the center and at the highest level. I have also had the honor of dealing with doctors. My project is the first in the village and in the center in the field of fish farming. It has helped me form many social relationships. Yes, my project put me in a higher position among my family and my village."

This confirms the validity of the seventh hypothesis, which indicates that successful female entrepreneurship projects play a major role in the social and economic empowerment of women in the study community.

5.1.7 ***Formation of New Social Networks***

The seventh sub-question asked: *How did your project help you form a new network of social relationships, especially with the public figures and leaders of your village or community?* Entrepreneurship projects provided women with disabilities in the study community with the opportunity to build strong social networks, particularly with influential public figures and local leaders. This is confirmed by 17 out of 20 female entrepreneurs with disabilities themselves, who confirmed the following:

"My project improved my position because it was the first analysis laboratory to open in the center and at the highest level. I have also had the honor of dealing with doctors. This has helped me form a very strong network of social relationships and I can help people thanks to these relationships. My project is the first in the village and in the center in the field of fish farming, and it has helped me form many strong social relationships. Yes, my project raised my position among my family and my village thanks to my relationships with officials and local leaders in the village and the center. These relationships help when renewing licenses and paying annual taxes, etc., as you know, Doctor."

These findings indicate that successful entrepreneurship projects help disabled women form social networks that enhance their business operations and personal development.

5.1.8 ***Income from Entrepreneurial Projects and Economic Empowerment***

The eighth sub-question asked: *Do you make a monthly or annual income from your project that provides you with a decent social and economic life?* The analysis revealed that female entrepreneurs with disabilities in the study community were able to generate a stable income from their entrepreneurial activities, providing them with a decent standard of living. While the income may not be substantial, it was sufficient to protect them from poverty and social marginalization.

According to them: "Yes, I have a monthly income, thankfully. I've come a long way from where I used to be. Of course, the income is not significant, but it protects me from poverty, deprivation, and the need for people. Praise be to Allah for His blessings, I am happy with the income. It keeps me afloat and protects me from asking family or people for help."

These testimonies confirm that entrepreneurial projects are a means of economic empowerment for women with disabilities, helping them avoid social marginalization. This is in line with the findings of Al-Hamaki (2012) and Al-Taii (2023), which highlight the significant role of entrepreneurship in providing women with financial independence and social stability

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5.1.9 ***Government Support for Female Entrepreneurs with Disabilities***

The ninth sub-question asked: *We hear on television that the state provides many facilities to support and assist female entrepreneurs with disabilities to ensure the success of their projects and their success as entrepreneurs. What do you think? Can you tell us about the most important facilities you received?* The study cases had varying opinions about the facilities and support provided by the Egyptian government to female entrepreneurs with disabilities in the study community. Some confirmed that they had benefited from government support, while others indicated that they had not

benefited from it. In total, 14 cases emphasized the role of the government and its continuous support, such as reduced taxes, facilitated licensing procedures, and the freedom to choose the project location, pointing out that these factors helped them succeed.

According to them: "Yes, the state supports us financially and morally, by reducing taxes, and allowing us to choose the project location. Moreover, some projects are not subject to taxes to encourage us, and annual licensing procedures are facilitated."

On the other hand, 6 cases confirmed that they had not benefited from government support and that the government has not provided them with any support in terms of annual licensing and tax procedures.

According to them:

"There are no significant facilities, as announced on Egyptian television. The support is limited. We do not receive any kind of facilities. I receive the same treatment as any non-disabled entrepreneur. I have not received any facilities or support from the government. I started my project from scratch, and it has helped me increase my income."

This confirms the validity of the sixth hypothesis, which indicates that the more the state and civil society support women entrepreneurs, the greater the success of their projects. This is also consistent with the studies of Alsagoor et al. (2022) and Redko (2024), as both emphasize the importance of official and unofficial support to the success of women's entrepreneurship projects.

6. Conclusions

Regardless of gender, a person who possesses leadership traits – namely, will, desire, innovation, ability to take risks, continuous training, awareness of their community's needs - and knows how to benefit from civil society, is qualified to establish a successful entrepreneurial project.

Successful entrepreneurial projects play an important role in achieving and sustaining social and economic empowerment, regardless of the gender of the entrepreneur.

All entrepreneurial projects in the Dakhla center (especially projects led by women with disabilities) are limited consumer service projects and their monthly income is limited. About 60% of the study cases make a monthly income from their projects that is less than 5,000 Egyptian pounds.

In total, 18 cases work in fields irrelevant to their educational specializations, which confirms the important role of entrepreneurship in providing and creating job opportunities and contributing to solving unemployment problems in society.

The majority (15 out of 20) of participants were generally aware of entrepreneurship, while others confused it with small projects and cannot differentiate between them. This is due to the absence of the role of civil society in raising awareness and spreading the culture of entrepreneurship in the study community. There is no educational material in the pre-university education curricula on entrepreneurship in the study community.

Regardless of its type, disability does not constitute an obstacle to the disabled person in terms of their entry into the field of entrepreneurship and the success of their project. The majority (18 out of 20) of participants, about 95% of the study cases confirmed this.

Successful entrepreneurship projects play an important role in creating social capital of all kinds for their entrepreneurs, regardless of the gender of the entrepreneur, and 17 study cases confirmed this. Young people, especially women and girls, are not aware of the services and support that the government provides to entrepreneurs in the study community.

There are many challenges and difficulties that hinder the success of entrepreneurship, such as rising fuel prices and associated obstacles like the rising prices of transporting goods, and the high prices of raw materials such as feed and fertilizers. Moreover, the distance between the study community and other communities hinders and limits external marketing.

In addition, other challenges include high fees for the clearance of quarantined goods and licenses to transport goods and products from the study community to marketing centers in other governorates.

The patriarchal culture and the belittlement of female entrepreneurs are widespread in the study community. In addition, female entrepreneurs are accused by the youth in the study community of deviating from the customs and traditions of their society.

7. Recommendations & Future Research

The role of civil society institutions and media centers in the study community should be activated to spread the culture of entrepreneurship, promote its importance, and raise awareness about how to benefit from state and civil society services to establish a successful entrepreneurial project.

Female entrepreneurs in the study community should be encouraged and supported by the state to evolve and adopt a culture of productive projects, rather than focusing solely on establishing consumer service projects in the local community.

The study suggests that the government exempts entrepreneurs from all exit fees and licenses of goods - such as quarantine fees for agricultural food commodities and animal production, and licenses from the Ministry of Interior - as required to transport commodities from the place of production to marketing locations in other centers and governorates.

Different educational phases should include courses aimed at spreading the culture of entrepreneurship and providing society members with scientific knowledge and building their professional capabilities in the field of entrepreneurship.

The study proposes conducting scientific research on how to confront the spread of patriarchal culture and entrepreneurship challenges and raise the status of female entrepreneurs in the study community.

8. Limitations of the Study

This study is geographically confined to the Dakhla Oasis in the New Valley Governorate of Egypt, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other regions of Egypt or different countries with distinct cultural, economic, and social contexts. Additionally, the small sample size (20 cases) constrains the statistical power of the study and its broader applicability. The study relies on self-reported data obtained through interviews, which may introduce potential biases, such as recall bias or social desirability bias. Sensitive topics, including income levels and familial opposition, may have been underreported due to cultural reporting biases.

Furthermore, the inability to interview four selected participants due to workload or family restrictions may have resulted in selection bias, as their experiences and perspectives might differ from those of the interviewed participants. Lastly, the recruitment of participants through local leaders may have inadvertently excluded women without institutional affiliations, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives represented in the study.

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