



Woman in Development and Politics

The Lived Experiences of Female Heads of Household in Home Businesses: A Phenomenological Exploration

Zahra Eskandari¹ | Rasoul Abbasi² | Mohammad Reza Fallah³

1. Master of Business Management, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management and Accounting, Hazrat-e Masoumeh University, Qom, Iran. E-mail: zahraeskandari1991@gmail.com
2. Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management and Accounting, Hazrat-e Masoumeh University, Qom, Iran. E-mail: r.abbasi@hmu.ac.ir
3. Associate Professor, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management and Accounting, Hazrat-e Masoumeh University, Qom, Iran. E-mail: mfallah@hmu.ac.ir

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	Introduction In addition to contributing significantly to a nation's gross domestic product, home-based enterprises establish a connection between domestic space and economic activity. These enterprises can be especially beneficial for women, particularly female heads of households in developing countries, as they provide a crucial tool for empowerment and economic independence. Female-headed households have resorted to home-based enterprises as a result of specific circumstances, including the loss of a spouse, cultural biases, and financial constraints. These enterprises have the potential to empower these women and alleviate the poverty of vulnerable households. Women in home-based businesses, especially those who are heads of households, face numerous limitations and challenges. Investigating their experiences in entering the entrepreneurial domain and starting a home-based business can provide valuable guidelines for government officials in smoothing the path and supporting entrepreneurship for this particular group of women. The limitations of female-headed households have been the subject of previous research; however, the lived experiences of female chiefs of households in establishing a home-based business have not been investigated. Therefore, given the lack of prior research on the experiences of entrepreneurial female heads of households, this study aims to examine the lived experiences of female heads of households in establishing and managing home-based businesses in Iran.
Article history: Received: 7 January 2025 Received in revised form: 14 April 2025 Accepted: 17 June 2025 Published online: 23 July 2025	Methodology This research employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of female-headed households in establishing and developing home-based businesses. The primary objective was to ascertain the experiences of these women in order to offer valuable information to policymakers and legislators. In this study, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted with entrepreneurial women who have been operating home-based enterprises for a minimum of three years. Data collection was conducted until data saturation was achieved through the use of purposeful sampling. The interview queries concentrated on the challenges associated with product sales, resource acquisition, and social, cultural, and gender-related barriers to starting a business. Data analysis was conducted using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method. Initially, the data was analyzed through coding and the extraction of essential concepts. Subsequently, the categories were established to designate the fundamental concepts. The reliability of the analysis was assessed through inter-coder reliability, with a 92% agreement rate between two coders. Moreover, the validity of the results was confirmed through participant feedback. In general, this research examines the obstacles and variables that contribute to the success of home-based enterprises operated by female-headed households and offers a suitable instrument for comprehending this phenomenon.
Keywords: <i>Female Heads of Household,</i> <i>Home Business,</i> <i>Lived Experience,</i> <i>Phenomenology.</i>	Findings The results suggest that the experiences of the participants can be categorized into three primary categories: the challenges encountered by female-headed households, the prerequisites for home-based businesses, and the proficiency in sales management. <p><i>A. Prerequisites for home-based businesses</i></p> Female heads of households cited several reasons for choosing home-based businesses, including spousal loss, financial responsibilities, and cultural restrictions discouraging women from working outside the home. Additional considerations such as preserving personal dignity, overcoming societal stigmas, and balancing professional and familial responsibilities also influenced their decisions. They were further motivated to pursue entrepreneurship by unique circumstances, such

as imprisonment, previous legal issues, or limited education. These women acquired the requisite skills through a variety of methods, such as familial mentorship, expert training, vocational programs, and self-guided learning through online platforms. Their skill development was also influenced by hands-on experience and charitable organizations. Additionally, technology adoption—such as using YouTube for education, social media for marketing, and design software for innovation—enhanced their business success.

B. Proficiency in sales management

In an effort to market and sell their products, entrepreneurial women implemented a variety of strategies, such as traditional print promotions, social media advertising, and word-of-mouth referrals. At first, their sales were restricted to acquaintances; however, they gradually broadened their clientele to encompass strangers and institutional purchasers. Many businesses increased their visibility by participating in local events and markets and utilizing online sales platforms. Some adopted intermediary-based sales strategies or established direct contracts with institutions such as schools and production workshops, allowing them to increase market reach and achieve financial stability.

C. Challenges faced by female-headed households

Female heads of households encounter substantial environmental and individual obstacles, despite their unwavering resolve. Limited knowledge of digital technologies, the absence of permanent product display spaces, and physically taxing work with low financial returns are among the personal challenges. Isolation, low customer engagement, and early-stage losses also impede progress. Moreover, securing loans remains difficult due to the absence of guarantors and inadequate legal and marketing knowledge. Bureaucratic loan approval processes, competition with low-cost imports, shortages of raw materials, and the absence of insurance or trade unions significantly obstruct business expansion on an environmental scale. Gender-based discrimination, including skepticism regarding women's capabilities and demands for financial guarantees, further complicates their entrepreneurial journey. Nevertheless, these women exhibit resilience and creativity by leveraging their resourcefulness to overcome challenges and advance their enterprises.

Conclusion

Home-based businesses not only create job opportunities for female-headed households but also play a crucial role in reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for vulnerable families. This study highlights the transformative potential of such enterprises in enabling women to achieve financial independence while fulfilling their familial responsibilities. Despite the positive outcomes, significant barriers persist. Systemic changes in societal attitudes and structural frameworks are imperative, as gender biases and cultural prejudices continue to be significant impediments. Institutional and governmental support is essential for the development and sustainability of home-based businesses. This encompasses the provision of low-interest or collateral-free financing, the provision of vocational training, and the establishment of robust support systems, such as unions and insurance schemes. Additionally, policy measures should prioritize the promotion of an inclusive environment that empowers women by confronting cultural norms and raising awareness. Furthermore, practical steps such as organizing regular markets, enabling access to technology, and providing financial incentives are essential to help these entrepreneurs thrive. In conclusion, home-based businesses represent a viable solution for alleviating poverty, promoting economic empowerment, and challenging traditional gender roles in society. It is possible to enhance the living conditions of female-headed households and contribute to the broader objectives of sustainable economic and social development through strategic planning and targeted policy interventions. This study offers valuable insights and a foundation for future research on the role of social capital, technology, and institutional support in improving the outcomes of home-based businesses. It is suggested that future research incorporate a broader and more diverse sample of individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds in order to resolve the limitations of this study. Additionally, to enhance the reliability of the data, it is suggested that the findings of this study be tested quantitatively on a larger statistical population.

Cite this article: Eskandari, Z., Abbasi, R., & Fallah, M. R. (2025). The Lived Experiences of Female Heads of Household in Home Businesses: A Phenomenological Exploration. *Women in Development and Politics*, 23(2), 203-237. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jwdp.2025.388389.1008507>



© The Author(s).

Publisher: The University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jwdp.2025.388389.1008507>