

# SUSTAINABILITY IN FEMALE INDIGENOUS ENTREPRENEURS' IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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## ABSTRACT

### **Purpose**

*The aim of this study is to contribute to the indigenous female entrepreneurship literature by investigating the factors contributing to the unique constraints, currently facing indigenous entrepreneurs in Australia and to articulate the corresponding consequences for the sustainable economic development of their communities.*

### **Design/methodology/approach**

*Due to the social ties embedded in the indigenous communities by the indigenous entrepreneurs, a triangulation research design was used. Ten purposely selected informants added to the data from the secondary sources and a self-administered questionnaire via an online platform.*

### **Findings**

*The results suggest that there are a unique constraints facing Australia indigenous women including racial and gender discrimination. These indigenous entrepreneurs faces challenges which include: perceived racial discrimination; the limited amount of government and institutional support to these indigenous women; lack of entrepreneurial skills and management capability and experience; absence of technological skills and assimilation to the mainstream economy; lack of self-confidence by these women; pressures of work-life balance; lack of role models in the community and personal motivation; and lack sustainable markets and distribution channels of their products.*

### **Research limitations/implications**

*The paper acknowledges the limitations of the study on other areas outside the contextual and scope of the study. However the implications are pertinent in providing the current status of the challenges affecting indigenous, women entrepreneurs in South Australia. It adds to the few contemporary studies taken into the context of women entrepreneurship – especially in the indigenous community of South Australia. A much needed discourse was needed in women entrepreneurship and the context of racial, gender and political bias and its implications in their business sustainability.*

### **Originality/value**

*In turn, this research findings should be given attention and provide a model for the development of policy and infrastructure to support contemporary indigenous female entrepreneurs in their contextual implications. On a crucial and wider basis, the implications of this study are pertinent in efforts towards ensuring sustainability of start-ups and livelihoods in the indigenous communities.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship, sustainability, female Indigenous Australians, South Australia*

## INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown that women entrepreneurship activities in the largely male-controlled society have improved employment opportunities, social well-being and economic growth in their communities (De Vita, L.A. 2013; Cabrera et al., 2017). However, studies have shown that these developments and community growth accrue, after a lot of challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in all communities (Li C, Ahmed N, Qalati SA, 2019, Pugalia & Cetindamar, 2021). This is more so in the indigenous communities where already have a lot of constraints compared to their women counterparts in the mainstream economy (Pugalia & Cetindamar, 2021, Collins et.al, 2017). Several Australian studies shows that women in indigenous communities areas are among those considered least potent in securing employment as compared to their Australian women counterparts (Collins et.al, 2017, Wood, and Davidson, 2011). This

has a subsequent negative impact on their general access to many opportunities to financial capital for their start-ups success and sustainability (Foley, D. 2010, Collins et.al, 2017) .

The past 50 odd years have developed the circumstances of mainstream Australian women entrepreneurs, but their indigenous counterparts are still lagging behind in terms of challenges and sustainability of their start-ups (Collins, 2014). In fact its documented that the rate of indigenous involvement entrepreneurial activity is quite low in Australia, when compared with other countries with indigenous populations such as Canada and the United States of America (Hindle 2002, Zapalska A, Brozik D, 2018). This is because the socio-economic disadvantages in the indigenous communities in Australia remains stubbornly entrenched despite many government policy initiatives and hence these start-ups do not mature, survive and or grow to be sustainable. Therefore, a discourse with these entrepreneurs on their contextual constraints would support their own understanding of their issues in the growth of their business activities as well as inform the government decision and policy-making of indigenous economic sustainability in their communities.

There is a dearth of literature on women entrepreneurs compared to their male counterparts (Brush and Cooper, 2012). More so, there is a serious lack of current research in developed or developing on the experiences of female indigenous entrepreneurs. Hence the paper aims to explore the depth and context of issues that encompass gender, race, and identity faced by Australia indigenous women entrepreneurs in order to examine barriers to their businesses success and sustainability. All genders face challenges in their start-up business activities (Pugalia & Cetindamar, 2021, Zapalska & Brozik, 2018). Nevertheless, due to the historical impact of inequality between races indigenous women entrepreneurs faces contextual constraints unique to them (Ratten, V., and L. P. Dana. 2017). In such this study will explore as a primary objective the capture of their experiences – gender, race, and identity – in order to move into the space of meaningful engagement and examine barriers to their success and survival. The relationship between cultural context, race, gender and entrepreneurship in the lives of Australia indigenous entrepreneurs is dynamic and significant knowledge which will extend research that adds to the discourse of a broader spectrum of entrepreneurs.

Therefore, the paper will explore and describe the contextual constraints of indigenous entrepreneurs in contemporary Australia and their effects on the growth and sustainability of their businesses. The objectives of the study are:

1. To explore and describe gender and racial discrimination on Australia indigenous women business activities.
2. To establish the major barriers these women entrepreneurs face in their start-ups.
3. To investigate the implications of these major challenges on their business sustainability.
4. To recommend strategies that contributes to solving the constraints faced by Australia indigenous, women starts-ups and their growth and sustainability.

From the study participants might equally appreciate and recognise the important part they serve as drivers of economic growth in their communities. Their conversations are unique and would describe their contextual challenges as contemporary, indigenous female entrepreneurs in Australia. This might enforce them to think to find solutions to the challenges they uniquely face. This could inspire them to continue contributing to their communities, as their businesses provide jobs for the indigenous community and can be a channel to further economic development.

The paper starts with an introduction of the study followed by a literature review whereby theories on women entrepreneurship, indigenous women in entrepreneurship, challenges, survival and growth are reviewed. The paper then points to the basis behind the definition of indigenous entrepreneurship used and the challenges indigenous women face in this endeavour in contemporary Australia. It includes: constraints faced by women entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurship in indigenous communities, business survival and growth of women-owned businesses dimensions. The article then discusses the methods used for data collection and analysis, followed by the results of the study. The last section gives the conclusions and the recommendations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theory on Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been defined as the presence of business openings and the human capital capable of taking advantage of these opportunities (Venkataraman, 1997). OECD, (2014:12) has define it as a “human action in pursuit of the generation of value, through the creation or expansion of economic activity, by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets”. Baron and Henry (2011) describe it as a process that is initiated by self-motivation; opportunity identification; resource acquisition and finally performance; which fits the activities of the Australian indigenous woman entrepreneur. Many societies recognise entrepreneurship as a contributor to change and improve the living standards of society (Talib *et al.*, 2012, Terjesen, & Amoros. 2010.). Others have advocated for research to take into account the cultural nuances of individuals in entrepreneurship (Francesca Croce 2020, Hardy & Tolhurst 2014). In fact, indigenous scholars believe this is very crucial that indigenous collectivist values should work with western-oriented business methods to provide frameworks from contemporary conceptions, frameworks and models which will be sustainable for indigenous entrepreneurs (Stewart & Pepper 2011, Francesca Croce, 2020)

### Women Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly popular on the global scale and has become a separate field of research (Al Issa, 2020), as women are now viewed as important contributors of their families and communities' economic growth (Pugalia, and Cetindamar, 2021). Their gendered aspect has made women entrepreneurship as necessary for the economic growth of their communities as well as for strengthening the social fabrics of the communities (Li, Ahmed, & Qalati, 2019).

It is argued that the focus on women entrepreneurship stems from the economic and social value they bring to their communities (Terjesen and Amorós, 2010; Li, Ahmed,& Qalati, 2019; ). The economic value is related to the income, employment, and economic development that entrepreneurship promotes in these communities. The social value is related to the notion that women entrepreneurs use the income from entrepreneurial activities toward the benefit of their families and community at large (Foley, D. 2010, Kantor, 2001). It has recently been observed that these women entrepreneur's approach in the activity is focused on the power of controlling their own fate, enhancing relations with their customers and or communities and making valuable products for the community (Romero, M., and Z. Valdez. 2016, Elenurm and Vaino, 2011).

### Indigenous Women in Entrepreneurship

Studies on indigenous entrepreneurship has focused on defining the different factors influencing entrepreneurial behaviour and isolating, where possible, the interplay of the socio-cultural context of the minority entrepreneur and their subsequent entrepreneurial behaviours (Romero, and Valdez. 2016, Witbooi, M., and W. Ukpere. 2011. Hardy & Tolhurst (2014) believes that cultural differences of individuals in entrepreneurship should be included in defining the 'Indigenous entrepreneur'. The link between cultural identity and pursuit of opportunity and development lends a complex underpinning to the development of the female Indigenous entrepreneur (Francesca Croce, 2020, Foley 2003, p. 136).

Calls for consideration of a multidimensional model of entrepreneurship had been made earlier on by Johnson (1990). This call is echoed by leading Canadian Indigenous academic Wuttunee, shattering conceptions of the Indigenous entrepreneur in the Canadian experience (2007, pp. 8- 19). Today, the identity of the Indigenous entrepreneur is born and reborn, shaped by both historical restraints and by new market opportunities (Walter, 2010), as well as a confidence in them and market confidence to some extent in Indigenous entrepreneurs and products (Collins 2014, p. 36).

This study will use (Foley, 2008) definition which is based on empirical evidence following qualitative case study analysis, is that of Foley, who wrote:

“The Indigenous Australian entrepreneur alters traditional patterns of behaviour, by utilizing their resources in the pursuit of self-determination and economic sustainability via their entry into self-employment, forcing social change in the pursuit of opportunity beyond the cultural norms of their initial economic resources” (Foley 2000, 2008b, p. 11).

Collins (2014) study is cited as the most comprehensive work done on Indigenous self-employment in Australia. He advocates indigenous entrepreneurship as it plays a role in reducing the indigenous socio-economic disadvantages, a strategy adopted by countries such as Canada (Anderson & Giberson, 2004). Indigenous women's participation in the Australian labour force has been limited (52%) and hence their abilities of forming social relationships and combining their business with their other concerns of social and relatives' relations supports the contribution that Indigenous entrepreneurs make to the standard of living of their families and the economic development of their communities by providing jobs for Indigenous workers and alternative pathways for Indigenous advancement (Collins et al., 2017; Hunter 2013, p. 13).

## **Constraints Faced By Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs**

In general, financial, human, social, physical, organisational, and technological capitals are very relevant to entrepreneurs (Schulte-Holthaus, 2019; Firkin, 2003). In fact if any entrepreneur lacks access to these forms of capital, this is likely to have negative outcomes for their start-ups. These has been observed in other studies of entrepreneurs in other Pacific nations found that lack of capital affected the start-up of small businesses (Attahir, 1995). Likewise, Indigenous communities in Australia often lack access to financial institutions and financial capital with many communities lacking basic financial services (Daly 1994a; de Bruin & Mataira, 2003).

Several studies posit that there are multitudes of constraints that face indigenous women around the world and their full economic potential is not fully exploited by both the society and government (Francesca Croce, 2020; Elam and Terjesen, 2010). This is because their economic activities are embedded in their cultural and social aspects as well as their challenges are gender specific and racially related compared to their counterparts in the mainstream businesses (Romero, and Valdez, 2016)

There are also emerging writers in the space of Indigenous female leadership and entrepreneurship (Collins et al. 2018; Evans 2012; Pearce 2014; Collins and Low, 2010) in Australia, who note that although the scholarship in the field of entrepreneurship is largely bound by business and economic discourses (Stayaert & Katz 2004), gender and race are major factors impeding the indigenous community's economic development.

Collins and Low (2010) note that the study of female indigenous entrepreneurs highlights several key intersections between social, cultural and racial context that shape what might be considered as key tenets of the female 'minority entrepreneur. Recent years have also seen the emergence of government policy and programs for Indigenous people which genuinely seeking to eradicate poverty, and more recently programs to assist Indigenous people in general to move into the marketplace (Australian Taxation Office, 2021; Collins et al., 2018). However, poverty remains entrenched with disproportionately higher numbers of young Indigenous women today relying on government support. This is real poverty, coupled with the problems of programs that are not always suited for Indigenous people (Australian Taxation Office, 2021; Collins et al. 2014, p. 20).

Literature discusses the macro-level encompasses external and societal factors that are largely beyond the control of the Indigenous women (Reza, Manurung, Kolmakov, & Alshebami, 2020). These include finance, infrastructure and services; market, commercialisation, supply; and social issues, such as racism and risk-taking behaviour (Li, Ahmed, & Qalati, 2019). The participants in this study identified finance as a chief inhibitor to the development of Indigenous enterprise, and yet from as early as the 1970 it is identified by Glazer and Moynihan (1970, p. 36). Fairlie writes: 'business is in America the most effective form of social mobility for those who meet prejudice (Fairlie 2005, p. 3).'

The indigenous communities are ecologically based and have natural resources at their disposal; however, other factors such as human capital, social capital and financial resources are missing, which relegates them to being disadvantaged in the Australian societies (Collins et al., 2018; Elder 2003; Tedmanson 2007). However, the efforts of Australian government policy to recognize and support Indigenous communities still fails to consider that these women still suffer from historical and cultural disadvantages, and the lack of a sustainable independent Indigenous workforce and economy (Collins et al. 2018; Goodall & Huggins 1992; Atkinson 2000; Hocking 2006).

## Sustainability of Indigenous Women Start-Ups

This study focussed on the constraints faced by indigenous women entrepreneurs and how to engage their discussion to find solutions and models suitable for their contexts. The literature has shown that these women enter into entrepreneurship in order to overcome their socio-economic disadvantages in a way that is controlled by them. Their main broad objectives include as expounded by (Reza, Manurung, Kolmakov, & Alshebami, 2020; Fuller, Bultjens & Cummings 2004;):

1. To increase contribution of indigenous enterprises to the development of training opportunities for Indigenous youth and to optimal community functioning
2. To remove intergenerational disadvantages, chiefly in their impoverished communities.
3. To increase the inclusion of indigenous women in Australia mainstream economies.

Undoubtedly, these objectives hinge on the success and sustainability of Australia indigenous women-owned businesses. The indigenous women entrepreneurial spirit shape the dynamics, success and outcomes of their business enterprises (Collins et al. 2018; Longenecker et al., 2014; Wood, and Davidson, 2011). Sustainability and success of these activities can be expressed as dependent variables through indicators (Fisher et al. 2014). These can include: organisational, economic or financial result indicators and or work-family balance and achievement of independence. Or success can be expressed by other indicators that are subjective for the entrepreneur (Weber, 2014).

Several factors which have encouraged growth of women entrepreneurship include: family ties and network of social contacts in their communities (Minniti and Naudé, 2010; Moutinho et al., 2014); the goal of the entrepreneur's activities and her entrepreneurship competencies (Seunake et al, 2015 and Rey Marti et al, 2015); intrinsic and extrinsic motivations including growth expectations and work satisfaction (Minniti and Naudé, 2010); government politics for indigenous entrepreneurship support (Collins, 2014).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A triangulation of secondary data, interviews with 8 informants from the community and a quantitative data collection was used to explore and describe the contemporary female indigenous businesses constraints, sustainability and growth. As an empirical study on a disperse unique correspondents, which is presumably small compared to the mainstream Australians female entrepreneurs; the different methods for data collection allowed quality reasonable analysis based on the sample. Since this was an exploratory type of research, the inclusion criteria were broad and aimed to include any type of entrepreneurial initiative including self-employment.

The study began with the selection of respondents based on purposive sampling to gain representative samples by including the indigenous women entrepreneur's group only. A small-scale preliminary study was done using 15 respondents in order to evaluate the feasibility and test for errors in the instruments and subsequent data analysis. Apart from the sampling, the interviews processes were also conducted with the 15 pilot study respondents. Since no errors were identified the results were included in the main study. The respondents were chosen based on the research criteria of business ownership and ethnicity. The study's geographic boundary is limited to female indigenous entrepreneurs within South Australia. While the study was limited only to women entrepreneurs who are indigenous women Australians, it is uncertain whether non-indigenous partook in the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section highlights the results and analysis of the demographic profile. Table 1 outlines the demographic profile of the 50 respondents. More than 86% of respondents are under 50 years of age, and most are married (60%). Around 80% have qualifications in Primary and Secondary School Certificates. The indigenous Australian ethnicity and ownership was 98% which validated the selection criteria.

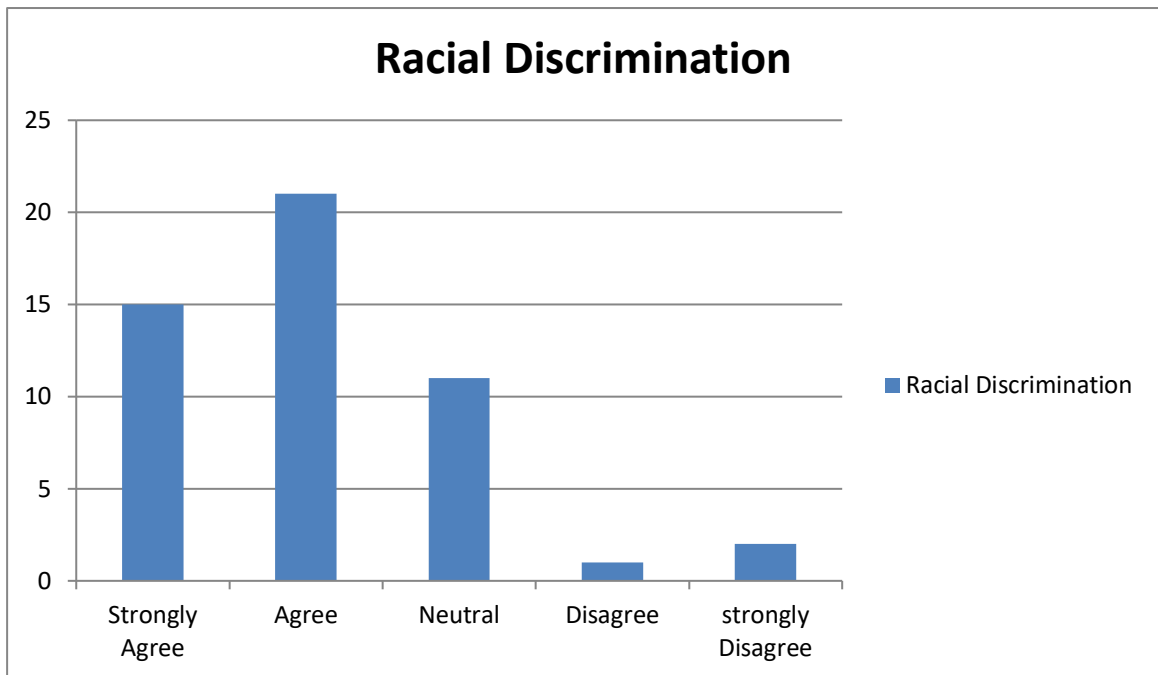
**Table 1: Demographic Profile**

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	20-30	6	12%
	30-40	12	24%
	40-50	25	50%
	50 and above	7	14%
Marital status	Single	16	32%
	Married	30	60%
	Widowed	4	8%
Education Level	Primary school	15	30%
	Secondary School	25	50%
	Other Certificate	10	20%
Ownership	Yes (Valid)	49	98%
<b>*Source: Present study</b>			

## Racial Discrimination

From the interviews of the informants and the literature on indigenous women entrepreneur’s contextual views, statements on indigenous historical and contemporary inequalities were added in the instrument to add a merged impression on its impact on the current success and sustainability of indigenous business owned enterprises. The factors are found to have significant relationships with the performance and sustainability of the indigenous women entrepreneurs

**Figure 1: Indigenous women entrepreneurs Experience of Racial Discrimination**



**\*Source: Present study**

The strong response on the historical and contemporary inequalities status of the respondents indicates that these women experience racial discrimination in their entrepreneurial participation. The results indicate that 68.9% of respondents strongly agree or agreed that they experience race and gender discrimination in terms of the factor statements. Results from the informants and the respondents of the surveys indicated that they perceive racial discrimination because they were indigenous Australians compared to the mainstream white Australians by: the notions of indigenous incapacity’ is entrenched in government perspective which hinders their access to many social and financial capitals; they experience problems dealing with customers/suppliers because they prefer to not work with indigenous, women business-owners; they

experience race discrimination from other Australian female business competitors. The regularity of gender and race discrimination on Australian indigenous women entrepreneurs has been previously highlighted by (Collins et al, 2018; Pearce et al. (1999). Williams (2008) study on African Americans women identified the prevailing influence of both race and gender based negative stereotypes that act as challenges to the entrepreneurial and innovative practices necessary for successful progress in business. The study made observations about the interrelationship of gender, race, and spirituality in moving beyond these social blockages for this group of women.

## Barriers to Entrepreneurial Participation

**Table 2:** Mean scores for major barriers

Barriers	N=	Mean*	Std. Dev.
Lack of access to key business services and advice	50	2.8	1.02
Absence of technological skills and assimilation to the mainstream economy	50	2.3	1.46
Lack of entrepreneurial skills and management capability and experience	50	2.51	1.16
Lack of self-confidence	50	1.5	0.83
The limited amount of government and institutional support to indigenous women entrepreneurs	50	3.4	1.37
pressures of work-life balance	50	1.67	1.29
lack of role models in the community and personal motivation	50	1.9	0.97
lack of sustainable markets and distribution channels	50	3.32	1.60

\*Source: Present study

The above eight challenges were derived from the literature review (Terjesen and Amoros, 2010; Folley, 2008; Collins, 2014) and are applicable to communities like the indigenous communities in South Australia. The statements excluded the challenge of gender and race discrimination as it was dealt with separately. The above ranking is therefore representative on the basis that it excluded gender and race discrimination, a challenge which is argued by many scholars as one of the foundational challenges of indigenous women entrepreneurship.

The study's results supported to an extent Chattarjee et al.'s (2018) overall results, which indicated that the biggest constraint was the within the political and environmental support factors, followed by the "Financial and Economic" factors. The other two categories appeared in rank order as: (third) "Family, Self and Social", and (fourth) Marketing and Mobility. Further contrasting results on major challenges was presented by Amrita et al., (2018) based on study results of female entrepreneurs in India. Their results indicated the major types of challenges to be "financial support, domestic and local competition, and family- versus business-related obligations". The authors argue that the challenge of financial support is related to the challenge of gender discrimination.

## Impact of the Constraints on Sustainability

**Table 3:** Group Descriptive Statistics of Impact of the Constraints on Sustainability

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Lack of self-confidence	50	3.96	1.972
Absence of technological skills and assimilation to the mainstream economy	50	4.80	2.620
Lack of entrepreneurial skills and management capability and experience	50	3.04	2.036
Lack of access to key business services and advice	50	5.11	2.463
The inadequate amount of government and other institutional support to indigenous women entrepreneurs	50	5.41	2.386
lack of role models in the community and personal motivation	50	3.54	1.633
lack of sustainable markets and distribution channels	50	4.30	1.945

\*Source: Present study

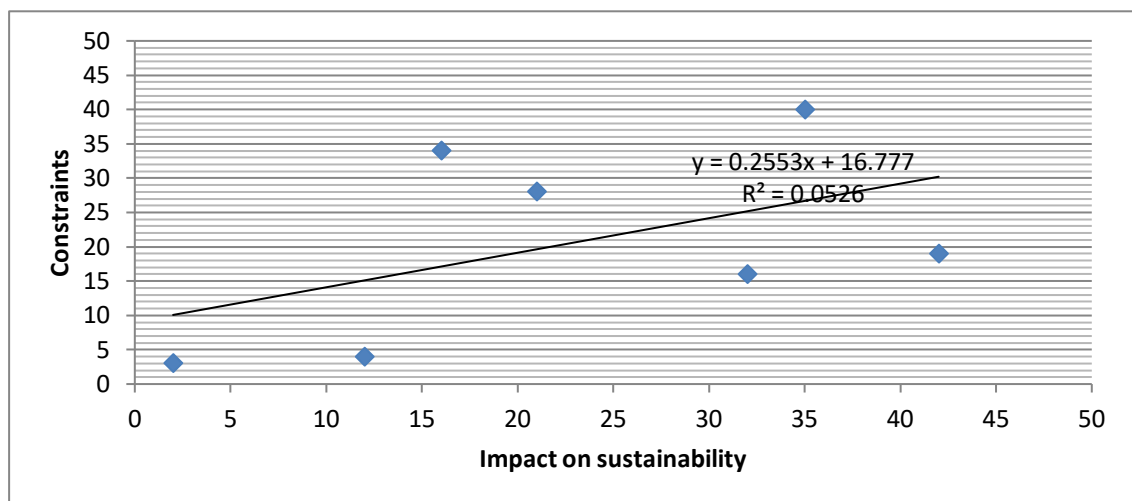
The results of Table 3, were equally mentioned by (Pugalia, and Cetindamar, 2021; Terjesen and Amoros, 2010; Robb and Watson, 2012; Weber et al. 2015; Dalborg et al. 2012; Ligthelm, 2011), as relevant to the factors which affect the sustainability and growth of enterprises of women entrepreneurs.

With respect to the challenges affecting women entrepreneurs a holistic representation for factors that impacted the sustainability of the indigenous women entrepreneur’s business include:

- It is difficult to register businesses, apply for tenders or government funding because there is too much red-tape was removed as a challenge as it can be perceived to fall within the challenge of Ineffective government policies to support indigenous women entrepreneurship
- Lack of motivation and Lack of confidence were condensed into a singular challenge
- Gender discrimination from society was added a major challenge based on evidence from the literature review
- Consistent and historical financial access in the indigenous community was added with respects to the macro-economic constraints

Again the inadequate amount of government and other institutional support to indigenous women entrepreneurs was the most mentioned factor as impacting the indigenous women businesses. The least mentioned was lack of entrepreneurial skills and management capability and experience. The rest of the factors included gender and racial discrimination from the mainstream Australia community, absence of technological skills and assimilation to the mainstream economy, lack of access and restrictions to key business services and advice to the community, lack of role models in the community and personal motivation, and lack of sustainable markets and distribution channels

**Figure 2:** Correlation between the constraints and sustainability of indigenous women entrepreneurship



\*Source: Present study

As Figure 2 presents, there is a positive partial, but strong relationship between women's entrepreneurs' challenges and the impact on the growth and survival of their enterprises. This is significant, especially for sustainability of the economic development and its impact on the Australian indigenous community.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

This research employs entrepreneurship theory, race and feminist theory together in a multifaceted effort to develop more understanding and categories of Australia indigenous female entrepreneurship. The knowledge gaps include: how do we understand and assist Australia Indigenous women to succeed as entrepreneurs, and what are policy and programs considerations in contemporary Australia. The performance of entrepreneurship based on gender, racial, social and familial roles highlights the potential for research that engages phenomenological research with social identity theory, entwining the place of female entrepreneurs with their cultural context, among other factors. Entrepreneurship is recognised as a



contributor to change and improve the living standards of communities (Pugalia, and Cetindamar, 2021; Francesca Croce, 2020; Talib *et al.*, 2012). Also supported by Collins et al. 2018, who equally believes that female indigenous Australia businesses provide employment and social stability for their families and community and can be a channel to further economic development.

In responding to the aims of the study, the theory on indigenous women entrepreneurship defined the context, features and constraints specific to these entrepreneurs. The negative impact of gender and racial prejudice on these indigenous women entrepreneurs affected their ability to access credit and funding services, as well support networks and or suppliers. The gender and racial discrimination had a negative on their self-confidence and hence they lose their motivation to continue and grow their business. The reinforcement of negative stereotypes of indigenous women entrepreneurs contributes to the failure or finally shut down of these small businesses.

## **Implications**

Based on the findings of this study, we would like to make few recommendations for government authorities, banks and financial institutions and all current and future women entrepreneurs:

1. Most importantly, this study will help the Australian government and the society understand and appreciate the dynamic and multifaceted definition of indigenous women entrepreneurs to eliminate the historical entrenched poverty and create employment opportunities in their communities
2. These indigenous women entrepreneurs should be given more support to help drive their unique and different small enterprises to sustainable development. Human and financial capitals should be extended to enhance the socially responsible, economically concerned and environment friendly activities in these enterprises achieve their goals and sustainability.

Improving the probability of success for women entrepreneurs requires diligent and continuous efforts on the part of the government. This research is intended to provide recommendations to decision and policymakers to provide facilities for women entrepreneurs to ensure that they take a crucial role in economic development.

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