

Examining motivation challenges of women entrepreneurs in Georgia

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Abstract

The aims of this research are twofold: to explore the evolution of female's motivation to choose an entrepreneurship as a career choice in two-time frames – pre- and post- pandemic periods; and to study internal and external factors that build Georgian women's motivation.

The reach method is heavily qualitative due to exploratory nature of the research. Desk study was performed which consisted of collection and analysis of literature, information from governmental agencies, reports of national and international organizations. Primary data from surveys conducted by national (Geostat) as well as international organizations (PricewaterhouseCoopers Georgia LLC, UNECE, International Trade Centre, Asian Development Bank, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) are used. Women entrepreneurs in Georgia are studied as a country-specific case. A number of in-depth interviews with Georgian women entrepreneurs were conducted. Since 2021 Georgian economy has demonstrated economic recovery that relies on sustainable and inclusive growth. Women's entrepreneurship is an integrated part of it. This sub-sector of Georgian economy has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic crisis. The pandemic enhanced necessity-driven motivation. Subsequent restructuring of economies opens new opportunities and creates additional motivation for establishing new businesses.

Keywords: Entrepreneur, motivation and start-up

JEL: D03 and D21

Introduction

Since 2021 Georgian economy has demonstrated economic recovery. Entrepreneurship including women entrepreneurs contributes to sustainable and inclusive growth. Understanding women entrepreneurs' potential is meaningful for furthering the country's economic growth and development.

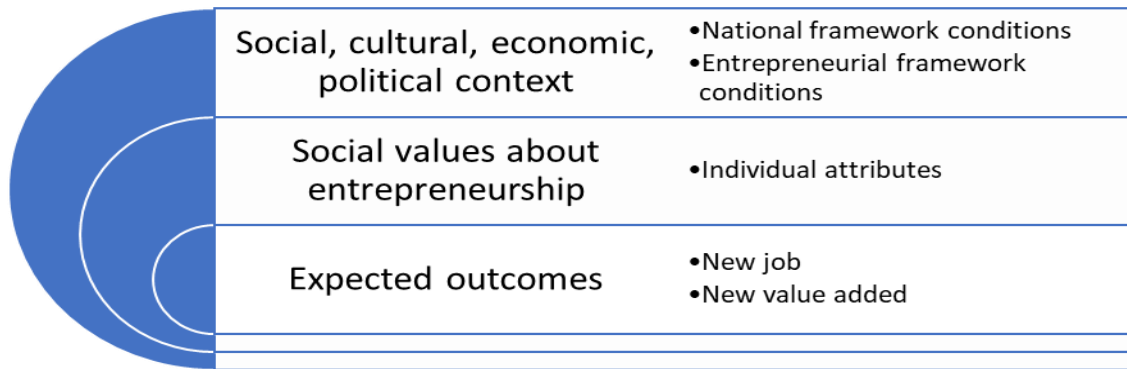
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As noted in the literature, the entrepreneurial lifecycle includes several stages: intentions, nascent activity, new business, established business, and business exit (GEM, 2022). Entrepreneurial motivation is the beginning of any story and the first necessary step to subsequent entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial motivation and intentions serve as a total indicator of business confidence and are very sensitive to market and social conditions. Importantly, practice evidences that entrepreneurial intentions are typically two to three times higher than total entrepreneurial activity rates (Ibid, p.14), and the rates of movement to the next steps are even lower.

Entrepreneurial motivation and intentions are formed in specific conditions of the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Fig. 1 presents its three main parts. All of them together and each individually affect women’s decision for entrepreneurship activity.

Fig. 1. Entrepreneurship ecosystem of decision-making



Source: modified by the authors based on GEM: Diagnosing, 2020, p.19-20

Thus, even though a decision to become an entrepreneur is always individual, it is strongly influenced by external general factors - national framework conditions (such as social, cultural, economic, and political ones) as well as existing social norms and stereotypes that form individual assessments, attitudes, and behavior partners. A decision-making process aims to achieve a desirable goal. That’s why it includes expectations of output (outcomes) as the first and the last component of the system (French, Maule & Papamichail, 2009). One can see that there is close interdependence and mutual influence among the three parts of the entrepreneurship ecosystem in decision-making process.

In other words, only keeping in mind the total ecosystem as a ‘precondition’ for entrepreneurship, it is possible to understand people’s motivation and decision whether or not to start or be engaged in entrepreneurship. On another hand, entrepreneurial activity is also a function of personal characteristics such as demographics (age, gender, education, etc.) and psychological (entrepreneurial talent, self-assessment of entrepreneurial capabilities, level of fear of failure, perceived ease of starting business, ability to spot business

opportunities and readiness to act on them, so forth).

The goals of this research are twofold: (a) to explore the evolution of Georgian females' reasons, motivation, and expectations for choosing entrepreneurship as a career choice in three-time frames – pre-, during, and post-pandemic periods; (b) to study internal factors that build Georgian women's entrepreneurial motivation and expectations.

To achieve these goals, the following **research questions** were formulated:

RQ1: What are (if any) country-specific characteristics of female entrepreneurship?

RQ2: How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect female entrepreneurship in Georgia?

RQ3: Are there any changes in women's entrepreneurial motivation and expectations in the current post-COVID time?

The research method applied in the article is heavily qualitative due to the exploratory nature of the research. A desk study was performed which consisted of the collection and analysis of literature, information from governmental agencies, and reports of national and international organizations. While empirical national evidence is scarce, primary data from surveys conducted by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Time Use Survey, 2020-2021) as well as international organizations (International Men and Gender Equality Survey) IMAGES report (2022), UNDP and UNFPA Georgia (2020), Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, Pilot Survey on Measuring Asset Ownership and Entrepreneurship (Asian Development Bank, 2018), others are used.

In addition, in order to reveal the actual picture of women's entrepreneurial motivation, in June-August of 2023, the authors conducted 13 in-depth face-to-face interviews with Georgian women entrepreneurs. The aim of the interview was to explore their entrepreneurial motivations, combined with expectations and real-life entrepreneurial experience. Using the methodology of the early researchers, we study the behavioral dimension of women's entrepreneurial motivation by asking interviewees questions related to the social values towards entrepreneurship (GEM, 2014; GEM, 2016-2017; GEM, 2020, GEM, 2022). In particular, whether entrepreneurship is

- a good career choice ('to support my family', 'to be self-employed than have a boss', 'to be self-dependent', 'to realize my dreams and opportunities'),
- a way to get high social status and family and society support,
- supported by good media coverage in the country.

For a better sense of how women may be individually affected by cultural support for entrepreneurship, we need to turn to individual perceptions, such as the ease of starting a business, and the sufficiency of skills, knowledge, and experience where individuals tend to make very personal assessments.

Georgian female entrepreneurship: pre-pandemic times

Article 11 of the Constitution of Georgia and the Law of Georgia on Gender Equality provide women and men with equal rights and opportunities.

Female entrepreneurship is often classified as '*inclusive entrepreneurship*' (OECD, European Union, 2019), even though the major trends and characteristics are common for all entrepreneurs.

From a historical perspective, entrepreneurship in Georgia began after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some researchers called this type '*entrepreneurship for survival*' because it is poverty-related and is quite far from modern understanding and interpretations of entrepreneurial activity (Rudaz, 2012). Thus, there is a sense to distinguish '*entrepreneurship for survival*' from *necessity-driven* entrepreneurship or *entrepreneurship 'of need'* (Kelley, Singer, Herrington; 2012). The highest motivation to choose entrepreneurship as a career choice is created by '*entrepreneurship 'of opportunity*' (Hassid and Komselis, 2007; p.46) - opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, and its type '*improvement-driven opportunity*'. "Improvement-driven motivated entrepreneurs are the ones who started business because they want to earn money or to be more independent (GEM: 2016-2017, p.31).

The type of entrepreneurial motivation is associated not only with academic interests, but it is a matter for country's economic growth and development. Specifically, Acs and Varga (2005) showed that entrepreneurial activities driven by opportunity motives had positive effect on economic development, whereas entrepreneurial activities driven by necessity motives had no effect at all. Moreover, Block and Wagner (2007) found, enterprises based on opportunity motives were more successful and profitable than firms based on necessity motives.

The Georgian researchers showed that in the pre-pandemic time, majority of the female population (53.3% in 2014 and 55.4% in 2016) had necessity-driven motivation to start entrepreneurial activity while the rest 46.7% (2014) and 44.6% (2016) had opportunity-driven motivation (GEM, 2014, p.14; GEM: 2016-2017, p.48). In other words, women reported job scarcity and the strong need to support the family as a startup motive.

In this article, we evaluate women's attitudes toward entrepreneurship by applying the GEM methodology of analysis of social values of entrepreneurship (GEM, 2014, p.9-11). In particular, the survey revealed that in the pre-pandemic period, Georgian women were quite optimistic as they planned

- ✓ to start a new business as a desirable career choice (68% of the adult female population),
- ✓ to get the high status and respect of successful entrepreneurs within the Georgian society (77% of the adult female population),
- ✓ to get social support through media attention to entrepreneurship (59.9% of the adult female population).

Despite such optimistic expectations, the real picture was quite different for the reasons that translating intentions into startup activity and a wage-paying business was difficult. Indeed, traditionally Georgian women had to do a lot of unpaid domestic work which was caused by gender roles and family stereotypes. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) report (Equimundo, 2022) revealed that in Georgia, about 94 percent of women usually or always did the washing, and about 89 percent of men confirmed that their

partner usually or always did this task. Childcare responsibilities also remained the primary domain of women—with over 2 in 3 women reporting being always or usually responsible for childcare (UNDP and UNFPA, 2020, p.32, 34). Importantly, more women (67%) than men (63%) disagree that men should be more involved in housework. Remarkably, data from 2013 showed similar patterns in respondents' sharing of household tasks and satisfaction with the existing division of tasks between men and women (Ibid, p.35). In other words, the patterns of division of household tasks between men and women have largely remained the same over the last years.

Not surprisingly. Georgian men evaluated their own business as the main activity while for women it was a subsidiary (Asian Development Bank, 2018, p.47).

Many studies suggest that work-life balance and family care responsibilities have a great influence on entrepreneurship activities by women, particularly if they have dependent children (OECD/European Union, 2017, p.5). In this regard, Georgian women are no exception. It is simply more significant for them even though there has been a substantial shift in views on women's role in work. According to international surveys, in 2013 the majority of respondents

(66% of women and 80% of men) believed that a woman's primary duty was to look after the home and family rather than pursue their professional or career development. In 2019, the percentage of respondents agreeing with this idea changed dramatically - 38 percent of women and 60 percent of men agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Additionally, over 83 percent of women aged 18–24 years disagreed with the statement that women's main responsibility is to take care of their families. A remarkable fact is that most men (74.8%) believed that a woman was more appreciated because of her family than her success in her career and the majority of women (56.3%) agreed with this statement (GEM, 2014, p.27-30).

All entrepreneurs face a number of challenges in setting up and maintaining their businesses. While many of these barriers are common to both men and women, in many cases they are more significant for women entrepreneurs. Specifically, due to the lack of traditional involvement of females in entrepreneurship, most of them had no "connections" or networks. Social networks exert tremendous influence over individual perceptions and behaviors. What looks normal and doable in business startup and growth is heavily influenced by proximity to other entrepreneurs. Network relationships typically provide access to funding, connections, and expertise that are critical to successful business startups and growth.

Finally, it can be highlighted that women had a lack of social support after starting a family. In Georgian regions, women faced even greater pressure from their families to quit their jobs and take care of their families and children (Papiashvili & Dzabakhidze, 2021).

Summarizing this part, it is clear that while it was acceptable for a woman to start a new business, in fact, it was not really very encouraged or supported by society and family.

Besides social and cultural environment factors influencing women's decisions to become entrepreneurs, there were also objective (from the ecosystem side) ones that limited women's motivation and opportunities to realize self-employment perspective. The main ones were the difference between man and female levels of asset

ownership, lack of own resources, limited access to finance, etc. (Papiashvili, 2022).

A decision to become an entrepreneur is heavily influenced by individual assessments and perceptions (GEM, 2014, p. 18-64).

The Georgian pattern can be seen in survey responses. In particular, 43.3 percent of the male population reported that they had enough capabilities to engage in entrepreneurial activities, and 38.0 percent perceived opportunities in the environment. Female respondents showed the opposite tendency – only 26.7 percent stated that they had enough capabilities to engage in entrepreneurial activities and 32.8 percent perceived opportunities in the environment (GEM, 2014, p.10-11). Thus, Georgian men were much more confident in their entrepreneurial capabilities than women.

Here, gender stereotypes play an important role in supporting different types of intentions and activities. In turn, these gendered patterns of entrepreneurial motivation affected on who started a business, what types and why. As we see, the Georgian pattern analyzed above is quite consistent with the classic gender-role theory.

Pandemic impacts on women's entrepreneurial motivation

The two-year pandemic period had complicated the picture. The pandemic negatively affected all economies in terms of increased unemployment, shrinking job pool or alternative employment opportunities, reduced incomes, high inflation, and weakened social security systems (UNECE, 2021b, p.14; GeoStat.).

In terms of women's entrepreneurship, the impact of the global pandemic has been disproportionately negative. Globally, business exit rates for women rose from 2.9 percent to 3.6 percent over the two-year pandemic period, in contrast to the higher rates for men (3.5% to 4.4%). Women in upper-middle-income countries showed the largest pandemic impact on business exit with a 74 percent increase from 2019 to 2021, compared to 34 percent for men (Mc Kinsey, 2022).

The pandemic changed peoples' attitudes, expectations, and intentions increasing uncertainty and making expectations more pessimistic (UNECE, 2021a). The drop in entrepreneurial intentions was most pronounced in lower-income countries, where entrepreneurial intentions for women declined from 40 percent to 31.8 percent (GEM, 2022, p. 34)

The results are not surprising. The pandemic further exacerbated existing inequalities and reinforced barriers that women entrepreneurs faced before in terms of unpaid domestic work which further increased due to the closure of kindergartens and schools, remote education for even the youngest children, and lack of access to non-institutional forms of family care. Women felt excess stress that created additional barriers to business activity. During the first wave of the pandemic, women entrepreneurs were not very successful in adjusting to the new reality by using new sales channels (online sales, delivery service, etc.) or searching new markets (Papiashvili & Dzabakhidze, 2021).

Globally, the pandemic and the following slowdown in economic activities have led to a rise in both female and male necessity-driven entrepreneurship (Global Gender, 2021, p.44-46). Our last research also proves

that in Georgia the entrepreneurship ‘of need’ has become actual as never before for both women and men (Papiashvili & Dzabakhidze, 2021). Due to the lack of any other real alternative, they choose entrepreneurship as a career choice. At the same time, the pandemic effect on motivation cannot be called unequivocal. The ongoing restructuring of economies opened new opportunities. For instance, online education, entertainment, online sales, healthcare services as well as remote working, and others present new opportunities for entrepreneurs and innovative minds, the fields in which small businesses are the most efficient and competitive. Accordingly, this combination of ‘old’ challenges and ‘new’ opportunities creates a unique economic environment in the country (Papiashvili & Dzabakhidze, 2021) and globally reduced gender stereotypes, increased women’s self-confidence (Laguía, Wach, , Garcia-Ael, and Moriano, 2022).

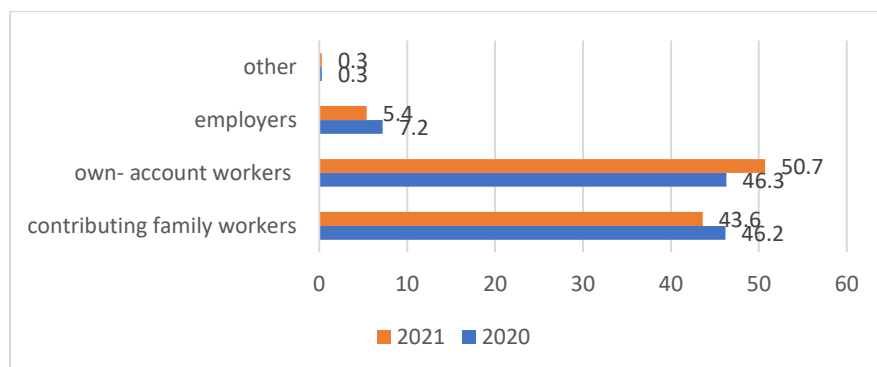
Hence, it is a recognized fact that women entrepreneurs have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mastercard Index, 2022, p.25). Despite this negative impact, out of the 65 reviewed economies, twelve recorded an increase in the indicator “women’s entrepreneurial activity rate” (Ibid, p.42).

Brief overview of recent female entrepreneurship in Georgia

First of all, it is clear that to observe any change in trend, the researcher should analyze data over a sufficient period of time. So, today we can only talk about the first signs.

A brief gender analysis of the business sector shreds evidence that Georgian men traditionally constitute the major part of the active labor force in the country (Papiashvili, 2022). Not surprisingly, the picture of entrepreneurship is very similar, at least in terms of the number of entrepreneurs and business owners. Particularly, the number of self-employed women who are employers is not significant and it decreased from 7.2 percent (2020) to 5.4 percent (2021). The majority of women are own-account workers and/or contribute to the family business (Fig.2) that is the latest available national statistics. Thus, Georgian female entrepreneurs are still very close to their families though, at least, family businesses.

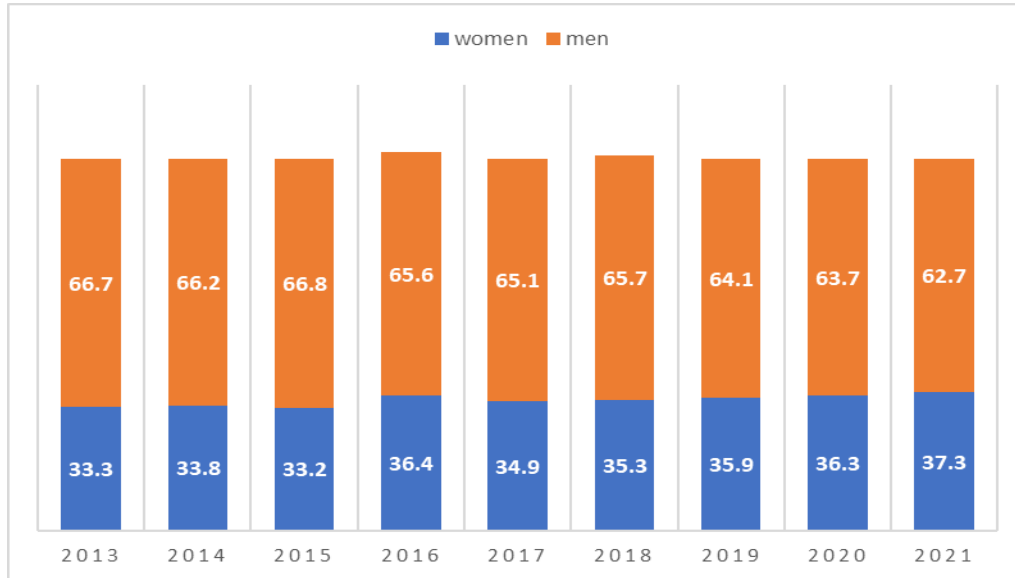
Fig. 2. Distribution of self-employed women by status in employment, 2020-2021 (%)



Source: Based on *Women and Men in Georgia, 2021*, p.69; *Women and Men in Georgia, 2021*, p.67

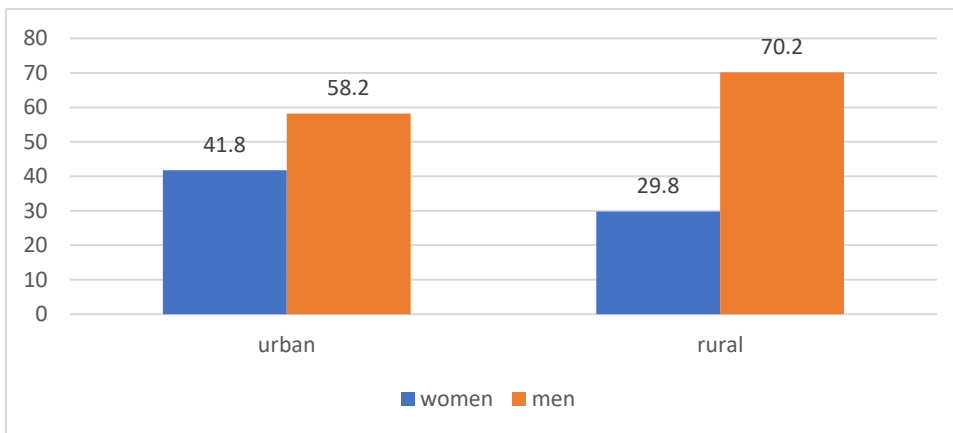
The data of Fig. 3 evidence that the traditional stereotype of the Georgian family when a man is the head of the household or the main decision-maker has not changed significantly last decade. However, the trend is positive in terms that more women (and less men) agree with this statement. The differences are stronger when we compare urban and rural areas (Fig. 4).

Fig. 3. Distribution of households by sex of the head of household (%)



Source: *Women and Men in Georgia, 2022*, p.80

Fig. 4. Distribution of households by sex of the head of household in urban and rural areas, 2021, (%)

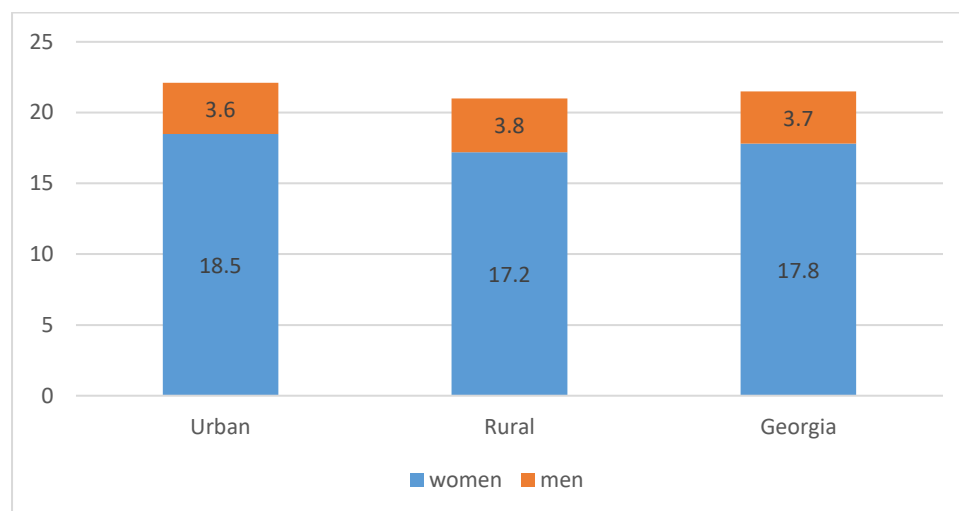


Source: Based on *Women and Men in Georgia, 2022*, p.80

Not surprisingly, in terms of time spent on activities, the biggest difference between women and men is still observed in the case of unpaid domestic services, in which women spend 4.9 times more time per day than men. A similar picture is in unpaid caregiving services for households and family members. Women’s time spent on these activities is 0.9 hours per day, which is 4.5 times more than time spent by men (0.2 hours). Compared rural to urban areas, women in rural areas spend even more (3.6 hours) than women in urban areas (3.2 hours) while the time spent per day by men does not differ and equals 0.7 hours (National Statistics Office, 2020-2021, p.7-8).

Analysis of the overall proportion of time spent by women and men on unpaid domestic and caregiving work shows that Georgian women spend 17.8 percent, which is about 4.8 times that of men's time (3.7 percent) (Fig. 5). The reason is not only a cultural stereotype but lack of sufficient affordable support services (i.e. childcare, home services, after-school programs, eldercare, etc.). In such circumstances, women should continue to run their businesses after they have married and had children.

Fig.5. Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work (%)



Source: Time Use Survey Results (2020-2021). National Statistics Office of Georgia, p. 9

So, everyday Georgian women still spend much time on unpaid domestic and care work. The pattern of distribution of domestic work did not change meaningfully in the last two years. Work-life balance and family care responsibilities still have a great negative influence on the entrepreneurial motivation of Georgian women. Not surprisingly that a significant gap exists in data on newly established enterprises by gender of the owner (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Newly established enterprises by sex of the owner (in 1 000S)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Women	29	32	32	31	31	29	29	30	29
Men	61	62	57	55	51	52	56	59	58
Not identified	10	6	11	13	18	19	15	11	13

Source: Based on *Women and Men in Georgia*, 2015, p.54; *Women and Men in Georgia*, 2017, p.65; *Women and Men in Georgia*, 2018, p.71; *Women and Men in Georgia*, 2019, p.68; *Women and Men in Georgia*, 2020, p.98; *Women and Men in Georgia*, 2022, p.103

Hence, in the last decade, we have observed a stable trend that the number of men founding businesses is almost twice as high as the number of women. However, in some sectors of the economy such as education, health and social services, and other service provider sectors, female owners far outnumber male

owners (Women and Men in Georgia, 2022, p.97).

Drawing upon evidence from in-depth interviews, insights are presented into women's motivations and expectations of what entrepreneurship would offer and the realities of their experience. In particular, all of our interviewees' businesses are service providers, e.g. a business advisor, a master craftsman, a decorator, a designer, a clothier, a stylist, a retailer, etc. Two women own businesses in the field of winemaking and agro-tourism.

Yet again, to understand the reasons for the existing gaps, objective, as well as subjective factors, should be considered as a basis of motivation and limitations for starting a business. It should be noted that social attitudes and cultural norms do not change quickly. Of course, in a couple of years after the pandemic, we cannot expect drastic changes in women's behavior and desires to start businesses, as well as in women's self-confidence. However, national experts found that in the post-COVID period, one of the main incentives for women to start their own businesses is a desire to have their own income and independence (Margvelashvili, Meshveliani, Khorbaladze, & Guruli, 2020). According to our interviewees, when asked '*Why do you decide to be an entrepreneur?*', they often answered 'I want to be self-dependent' or 'I want to be self-employed than have a boss' or 'I want to realize my dreams and opportunities'. Only one woman said that she needed a job to support her family.

Therefore, one can see that COVID-19 encouraged Georgian women to see new business opportunities, also called opportunity recognition or *entrepreneurship 'of opportunity'*. For instance, our interviewees said 'I want to realize my dreams and opportunities', and 'We turned a hobby into a business'.

Starting a business, of course, women think about the challenges and risks they face. Globally, women are more likely than men to report that a fear of failure prevents them from starting a business. For instance, at the European Union level, 52 percent of women indicated that a fear of failure would prevent them from starting a business relative to 42 percent of men (OECD/European Union, 2017, p. 12).

According to our interviews, women noted that the biggest difficulties in starting a business were 'to find the right people to team up', 'to demonstrate one's abilities, financial independence, combining dreams and business', 'to enter the market because of high competition', 'to raise awareness' and etc. Many of the entrepreneurs surveyed (5 out of 13) cited a lack of finance as the main startup problem. Consequently, unfortunately, the list of start-up challenges has not changed significantly in the last decade (Saksonova & Papiashvili, 2020). In other words, lack of finance, lack of qualified labor force, lack of experience, and lack of network are still hurdling for female startups.

As we have seen, in most cases entrepreneurial intentions depend on individual self-assessment and self-confidence. For instance, at the European Union level, one-third of women indicated that they had sufficient skills, knowledge, and experience to start a business over the 2010-14 period (OECD/European Union, 2017, p.13). Our interviews also reveal that the majority of our interviewees (7 out of 13) did not feel

that they had sufficient skills, knowledge, and experience. But there are differences in the answers. Women (3) with a Master's degree and Ph.D. degree (1) believed that they had theoretical knowledge and universal business skills (negotiations, sales, process management, logistics, etc.) and quick learning skills but not enough practical skills in a specific field. Only two women noted that they were absolutely ready to start their businesses. Interestingly, women who started fashion businesses or opened beauty salons, needed and had more practical experience than academic education. They trusted their practical knowledge more and took less risk in starting the business. Unexpectedly, the interviews did not reveal the direct effect of education on risk-avoidance behavior. In particular, women with a Bachelor's degree said that they researched the market for a long time before starting the business while females with Master's degrees felt high risks.

In this case, the prevalent opinion is that while it's acceptable for a woman to start a new business, it's not very encouraged. However, the support of friends and family could be one of the reasons why females finally decide to start new entrepreneurship in Georgia. Indeed, majority of our interviewees (9 out of 13) said that family and friends were supportive of their decision to become an entrepreneur, and some of them even started a business on the initiative of friends and family members.

Again, unexpectedly interviewed females confirmed that they felt the support of the Georgian society and a high level of reputation and respect within society. It's clear in the case of unique businesses such as fashion and handmade hot enamel jewelry and accessories production, as the respondent said 'partition enamel and its craftsmanship have been preserved for centuries, it is part of Georgian art'. But women who established beauty salons are satisfied with their social status as well.

To sum up, the interviews reveal that most of our interviewees show optimism and a move towards opportunity-driven entrepreneurship when they say '*Dream comes true*', '*We are continuing the family tradition, learning the craft of the ancestors, and passing it on to future generations*', '*We are combining dreams and business*'. Most of them felt satisfaction with their business and plan to continue it: '*Yes, I am satisfied and will definitely continue*', '*This is an art that you cannot do without a lot of love*', '*I am satisfied and continue with great attitude*'. Only two women expressed disappointment – '*I am not satisfied, my business has many things to improve, but I will continue my work*', '*I have already closed the business. The work was very good, it was no longer worth doing anything in Georgia, where, along with everything else, the business environment is deteriorating day by day*'. So, serious obstacles to entrepreneurship still exist and undermine the entrepreneurial motivation of women.

Of course, based on the results of some limited interviews, one cannot expect the same at the national level. Further research is needed on a national scale. And still actually is to continue a study of the role of different forms and levels of education as an important factor influencing women's entrepreneurial intentions.

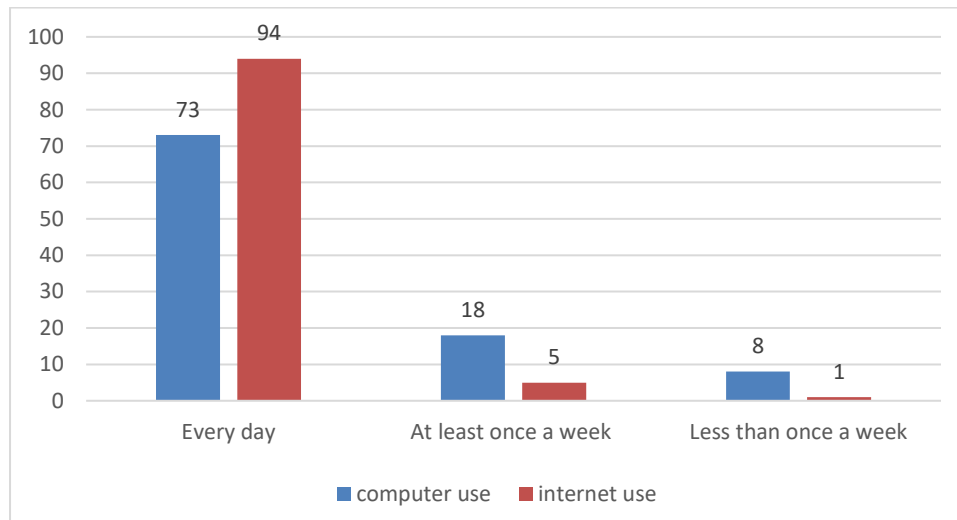
In general, education helps entrepreneurs find valuable solutions to market problems, and identify business opportunities because it broadens individuals' horizons and equips them with a higher cognitive

capability (Shane, 2000). Business education forms creative and critical thinking, develops required

entrepreneurial knowledge and skills which can promote opportunity recognition and form opportunity-driven entrepreneurial intentions (Papiashvili, Gagnidze, and Buchashvili, 2020). Additionally, education creates a good framework for changing social stereotypes.

The importance of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in our everyday life has been strengthened since COVID-19. The use of ICT in education, e-commerce, business, and social communication also makes it an indispensable tool for providing equal opportunities to women and men. Importantly, ICT is an area in which gender-disaggregated indicators are very similar. In Georgia, women and men equally possess computers and mobile phones, and their access to the internet is very much alike across genders (Fig. 6).

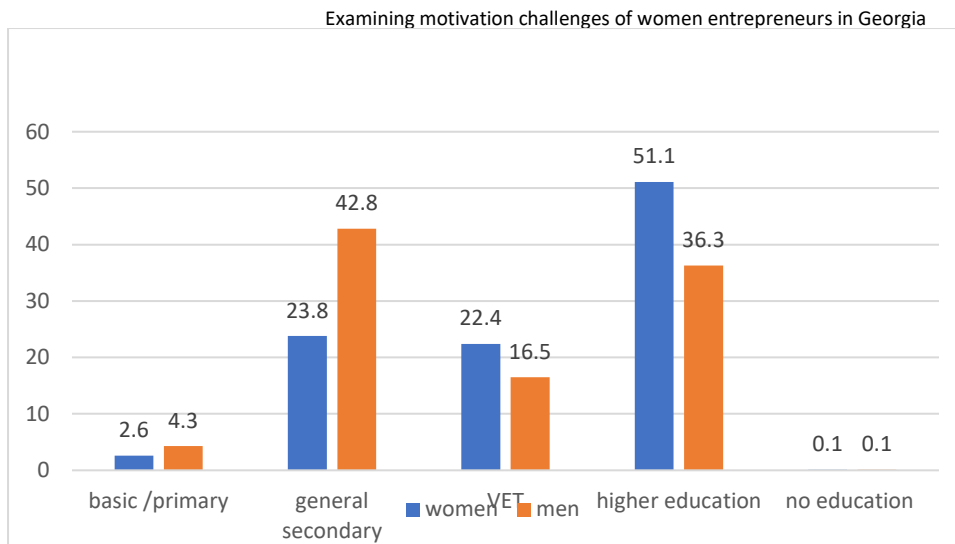
Fig. 6. Share of women who frequently use a computer and the Internet, July 2022 (%)



Source: Based on *Women and Men in Georgia, 2022*, p.90

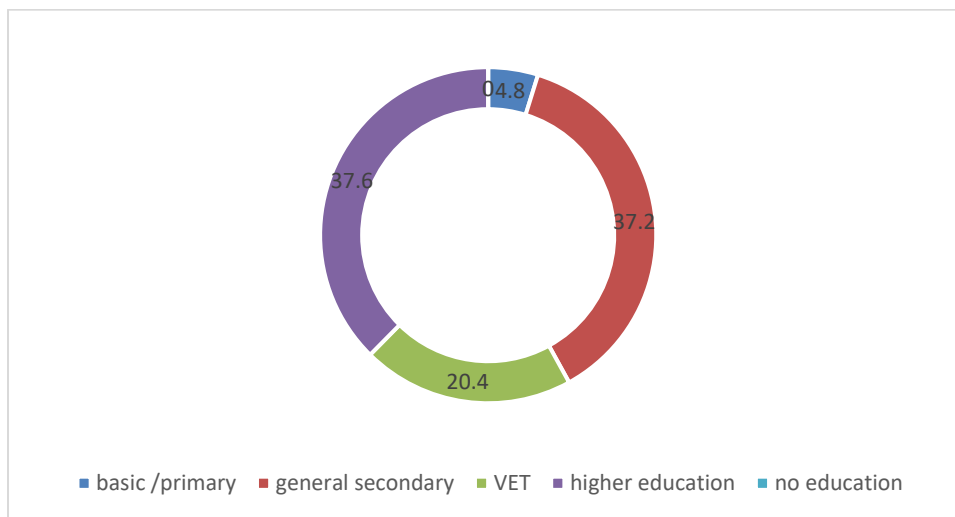
Fig. 7 presents the education level of employed women and men in Georgia. It is noteworthy that the predominant level of education of employed and unemployed women is higher education (Fig.8). Our interviewees' education partially reflects the country's case because out of 13, 6 women had a Master's degree, 1 had Ph.D., 5 Bachelor's degree, 1 Vocational education, and 1 secondary education.

Fig. 7. Distribution of employed persons by level of educational attainment, 2021 (%)



Source: Source: Based on *Women and Men in Georgia, 2022*, p.68

Fig. 8. Distribution of unemployed women by level of educational attainment, 2021 (%)



Source: Based on *Women and Men in Georgia, 2022*, p.73

Thus, in Georgia, there is great potential for the formation of an army of women entrepreneurs because they have a sufficient background in terms of education and high entrepreneurial motivation.

Conclusion

In Georgia, female entrepreneurs have formed an integrated part of the country's economy.

This paper presents findings of exploratory, qualitative research on Georgian women's motivations, expectations, and actual experiences of entrepreneurship conducted in three-time frames – pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods.

The study reveals several country-specific characteristics of female entrepreneurship. In particular, in Georgia before the COVID-19 pandemic

- ✓ the majority of the female population had necessity-driven motivation to start entrepreneurial activity;

- ✓ women were not encouraged to become self-employed or start a new business because it was difficult to balance work and family;
- ✓ for women business was a subsidiary activity while men evaluate their own business as the main activity;
- ✓ women had a lack of social and family support after starting a family.

The impact of the global pandemic on women's entrepreneurship has been disproportionately negative.

Specifically,

- existing inequalities and reinforced barriers in terms of unpaid domestic work, lack of social and family support, etc. were further exacerbated;
- women felt excess emotional stress due to the lack of an enabling environment such as the closure of kindergartens and schools, remote education for even the youngest children, and lack of access to non-institutional forms of family care, etc.;
- women entrepreneurs were not very successful in adjusting to the new reality by using new sales channels (online sales, delivery service, etc.) or searching new markets;
- necessity-driven entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship 'of need' became actual as never before.

The pandemic has created challenges but opened up new opportunities for entrepreneurs. The success of women in entrepreneurship depended on how quickly and effectively they adapted to the new economic reality. COVID-19 enhanced the transformation of the economy and culture. On one hand, Georgian women still perform various functions in the family, namely, educator, controller, keeper, protector, etc. The patterns of division of household tasks between men and women have largely remained the same over the last few years and reasons of necessity-driven entrepreneurship are still strong. On the other hand, conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews show that

- new incentive for women to start their own business is the desire to have their own income and independence;
- behavioral aspects of motivation have changed; Georgian women entrepreneurs have become more self-confident and risk-taking;
- the interviewees felt social and family support and respect;
- finally, women with higher education or business experience are more intensively involved in business and are more likely to succeed due to newly opened opportunities.

Therefore, COVID-19 accelerated the transformation of female entrepreneurs toward opportunity-driven entrepreneurship reducing negative stereotype threats for women. Challenging gender stereotypes within entrepreneurship is one avenue to increase women's entrepreneurial intention and promote women's entrepreneurship. To harness the full potential of female entrepreneurs, the whole entrepreneurial ecosystem must also change. In other words, the intentions and personal ambitions to start a business are important triggers of entrepreneurial activity but decision-making also takes into account opportunities such as access to financial

resources, the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to start and run a new business.

Limitation. A couple of years is too short period to reveal the precise impacts of the pandemic crisis and post-pandemic recovery trends. Also, case study approach cannot provide enough information for generalization.

Further research. The study does suggest that further research is needed to develop recommendation for valuable guidance on gender policy.

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