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# Female Entrepreneurs in Transition: Social Norms, Double Burden and the Next Generation

Nowadays, it is evident that equal participation of both men and women in entrepreneurial activity can boost the world economy, create more diverse teams, and decrease social inequality. While the subject of women-led enterprises is widely discussed and explored, the portraits of women who stand behind these companies are still not complete. This brief focuses on the social aspects a businesswoman faces in a transition economy such as Belarus: Who is she? What are her social roles? And how do entrepreneurial families differ from average families in Belarus?



Female entrepreneurship is widely discussed as one of the potential engines of sustainable economic growth (World Bank, 2018; IFC, 2017). This brief utilizes a recent wave of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor survey to shed light on the key aspects of female entrepreneurship in Belarus - a transition economy with a relatively short history of private entrepreneurship. It looks at the social status and social norms surrounding female businesses to better understand the current situation and future trends in this part of Belarusian society.

The data for the analysis is provided by the **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor** (GEM) surveys conducted in the summer of 2019:

- Survey of the adult population of Belarus (GEM APS): 2002 respondents aged 18 to 64.
- Survey of entrepreneurs based on GEM APS: 208 business owners (107 men and 101 women).

## Women Are More Willing to Study Hard

Following a long-standing tradition, women in Belarus are likely to obtain higher education. Based on the GEM surveys of the adult population, 35% of respondents have completed a bachelor's degree (42% of women versus 27% of men) and 1.5% have completed a master's degree. Among entrepreneurs, 60% of respondents have the first stage of higher education and 15% have the second stage. While most of the interviewed entrepreneurs have higher education (bachelor's degree), women are more inclined to continue their studies: 19% of female and 11% of male entrepreneurs choose to enroll in master's programs.

Access to business education is not a problem in Belarus: almost half of the respondents claim that their education is related to the business they run. A similar fraction also report participating in

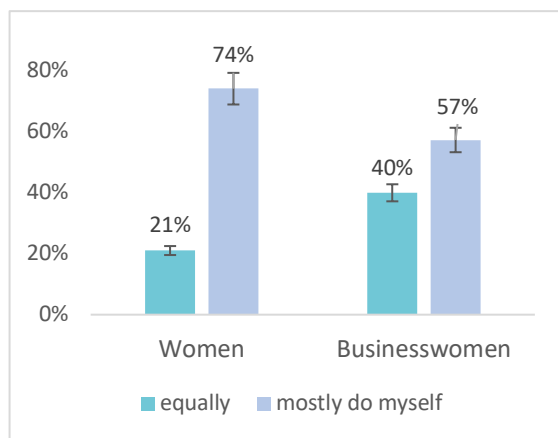
business training programs (with no significant gender differences). A third of respondents report having had a mentor who helped them start a business (42% and 58% of men and women, respectively). Entrepreneurs in Belarus are not inclined to be members of business associations or (in)formal self-support groups for entrepreneurs.

## Are Female Entrepreneur Families More Equal?

Most often, an entrepreneur is married and has 1-2 children under 18 years old (this pattern being the same across genders). The majority of Belarusian families are of the so-called "Soviet" type, in which the most important woman's role is to be a mother and "keep home". At the same time, it is perfectly normal for women to have a paid job. In the case of preparing food, cleaning the house, and washing clothes, a comparable share of male entrepreneurs and men in the general population answer that most of these responsibilities are usually carried by women (65-68%). In contrast, half of the female entrepreneurs report having an equal distribution of these household duties [Figure 1]. We observe similar patterns in the caretaking of children: 68% of women entrepreneurs claim to have an equal distribution versus 44% of non-business women. This greater intra-family equality of women-entrepreneurs can be partially explained by the fact that businesswomen earn more than Belarusian women do on average.



**Figure 1.** How do you and your spouse/partner divide the task of cleaning the house and washing clothes?



Source: based on GEM APS 2019

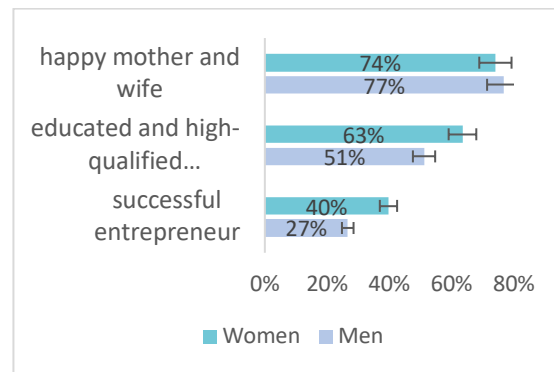
According to data on the daily time use of the population collected by the National Statistics Committee for 2014-2015, women spend twice as much time as men on housekeeping and childcare. But, surprisingly, only 40-45% of women note that the traditional distribution of social roles in the family imposes an unfair constraint on women's work and career possibilities. Therefore, we document a trend towards equal relations between spouses in households where the wife is an entrepreneur. At the same time, even a typical businesswoman bears a large burden of unpaid work.

## A Successful Woman is a Happy Mother and a Wife

The respondents were asked a rather controversial question of what defines a "successful woman" [Figure 2]. Both entrepreneurs and the general population of Belarus were in solidarity in understanding a successful woman primarily as a happy wife and mother (75% of respondents). In second place, in terms of importance, respondents answered that a woman should be an educated and highly qualified professional (about 50% men and 60% women). Only 23% of male and 42% of female entrepreneurs agreed with the statement that a successful woman is, first of all, a successful

entrepreneur. Remarkably, 46% of men in the general population survey completely or to a greater extent disagree with this statement, at the same time, 67% of those with children would like their daughter to run a business.

**Figure 2.** A successful woman is first of all a/an..



Source: Author's calculations based on GEM APS 2019

## Parental Entrepreneurship or Are There Any Predispositions to Become an Entrepreneur?

According to the research on parental entrepreneurship, the probability that children in entrepreneurial families will also have a career in business is 30-200% above that of children from non-entrepreneurial families (Lindquist et al., 2015). In the case of Belarus, half of the surveyed entrepreneurs indicated that their fathers were employees, while 5-10% and 17-25% reported having fathers in business and leadership positions. By comparison, out of the 2000 respondents in the general population survey, 4-8% and 14-15% reported having fathers in business and leadership positions, respectively. As the difference is not very significant, parental entrepreneurship cannot play a decisive role in becoming an entrepreneur. This fact can be explained by the relative juvenility of Belarussian businesses, the absence of entrepreneurship in the USSR, and the attitude of society towards entrepreneurship in the 90s.



Nevertheless, the Belarusian business environment is changing as well as the social attitude. Among the 2000 respondents in the general population survey, about 68% would like their daughter to own a business, and 82% want such a future for their son. Among entrepreneurs, aspirations about their children's future are rather predictable: a third of respondents do not make plans for their children and the majority of the remaining want their children to run their own business. Moreover, among those having preferences for their children's future, both male and female entrepreneurs reached almost 100% consensus regarding their sons. When it comes to their daughters, 95% of women and 80% of men prefer a future in business while 15% of men would like to see their daughter become a homemaker.

## Conclusion

Several key findings can be noted when comparing women entrepreneurs in Belarus with those who are not in business. Entrepreneurs are more likely to obtain higher education, both first and second stage; household chores more equally shared in families with women entrepreneurs. Female entrepreneurs more often want a future in business for their children, especially their daughters. Based on the above, it can be expected that a greater involvement of women in business can positively affect the state of gender equality in Belarus and the quality of human capital.

Nowadays, the promotion of entrepreneurship (let alone female entrepreneurship) is not a priority of the current Belarusian government, and independent development actors, who used to support it in the past, are out of the country. For the future, however, I will outline some general recommendations for developing female entrepreneurship (based on Akulava et al., 2020). With regard to education, the popularization of STEM programs among women can positively affect female involvement in entrepreneurial

activity. Additionally, promoting examples of successful women-led enterprises will help combat stereotypes and inspire women to venture into entrepreneurship. Last but not least, an equal division of domestic responsibilities will allow women to spend more time on their careers.

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