



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/14205>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/14205

Received: 16 April 2022, **Revised:** 18 May 2022, **Accepted:** 30 May 2022

Published Online: 12 June 2022

In-Text Citation: (Mohd-Nor & Ali, 2022)

To Cite this Article: Mohd-Nor, R., & Ali, A. B. (2022). An Exploratory Study on Women Entrepreneurial Motivation in the Context of Boko Haram Insurgency in North Eastern Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 12(6), 1978 – 1990.

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Vol. 12, No. 6, 2022, Pg. 1978 – 1990

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www.hrmar.com

ISSN: 2222-6990

An Exploratory Study on Women Entrepreneurial Motivation in the Context of Boko Haram Insurgency in North Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the drivers for women entrepreneurship in the context of Boko-Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria. It applies pull-push theory to women entrepreneurial motivation in a violent conflict context. A semi-structured interview was conducted with a total number of 12 women entrepreneurs who were purposely selected among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the region. The results revealed that majority of the women were driven by the urgent need for survival and livelihood which forms part of a push motivational factor. The finding also shows that previous business experience has contributed to the successful business start-ups despite the challenges these displaced women are facing in the camp. Gender-related challenges were minimal but, the paper recommended for more gender-specific programs in order to reduce the sufferings of the most vulnerable persons particularly women-headed households in post-conflict transition.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneur, Post-Insurgency, Violent Conflict, Crisis, Boko Haram

Introduction

The recognition of entrepreneurship as a significant contributor to a nation's economic growth has been acknowledged by both researchers and policymakers (Grossmann, 2009; Wennekers & Thurik, 1999; Huggins & Thompson, 2015). The role of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in job creation, innovation and poverty alleviation cannot be overemphasized (Katua, 2014). These SMEs can act as an economic rebirth in the restoration of the economic base in post-insurgency state reconstruction and stabilization plan. Similarly, Toma et al (2014), observed that entrepreneurship and innovation form part of the crucial elements for nations' economic recovery and development.

Women are increasingly creating their ventures along their men counterpart, contributing to family well-being in particular and the countries' economy recovery in general (Chatterjee & Ramu, 2018). However, women entrepreneurs operating in a crises environment encounter challenges such as lack of capital for start-ups, adequate networking, credit facilities and less demand for their products and services (Pines et al., 2010) and these hinders their desire to supplement government efforts in the restoration of peace and stability (Klot, 2015; Shulika, 2016).

More than half of the poor people worldwide live in fragile environments. As fragility leads to poverty, poverty, and disparity, in turn, induces vulnerability (Brinkerhoff, 2007; Blattman & Annan, 2016). Over time, an inclusive growth has been accepted as a panacea for curbing fragility and preventing violent-conflicts. This belief acknowledges the importance of promoting entrepreneurship in a condition of vulnerability as well rebuilding post-conflict environment (Pospisil & Kuhn, 2016; Levinger, 2013).

Since the start of Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast part of Nigeria in 2009, over 50,000 lives were lost, properties destroyed and over 1.8 million persons internally displaced. The crises have caused severe mental and physical pains to millions of people in the region. Recent studies on internal violent-conflicts indicate that men and women were all victims, but it affects them in different ways. Most often, the negative impact is more severe on the poorer, vulnerable and the helpless segment of the society which includes women and children (Buchowska, 2016). Such consequences are more visible in areas of poverty, physical violence and lack of access to justice that characterized fragile states (Barakat & Larson, 2014; Nay, 2013). Both long-term sustenance of peace and short-term survival were affected mainly by the differences in experience by men and women — most studies on post-conflicts plans towards peace, reconstructions and revitalization neglect the gender stereotype of the phenomenon (Buchowska, 2016; Onah et al., 2017).

Therefore, understanding how conflicts affect women and their experience in this context is necessary (Lindsey-Curtet, 2004). However, seeing women not only as victims but also as actors in the reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts would guide the government and other stakeholders in formulating policies and programs which can lead to lasting peace in the region in particular and the country in general (Africa Report, 2016). Hence, this study aims to explore factors that motivate women entrepreneurs in a violent-conflict contexts.

The next section presents the review of theoretical and empirical studies followed by methodology, findings and discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review

Gilad and Levine (1986) have put forward the 'pull' and 'push' theory to explain entrepreneurship motivation. The push theory argues that individuals go into business because of necessity (McClelland et al., 2005) which are also described as negative or external factors (Shapero & Sokol, 1982). On the hand, the pull theory posits that individuals are driven into self-employment in order to explore an opportunity (Audretsch & Thurik, 2000).

In general, a distinction is made to explain the positive (pull) and the negative (push) factors that make people to engage into own business (Gilad & Levine, 1986; Shapero & Sokol, 1982). Thus, the 'push' represents the unfavourable situations that lead a person to become self-employed, while the 'pull' on the contrary account for all favourable situations (Gilad & Levine, 1986). According to Uhlaner and Thurik (2007), the act of establishing a business goes through a pull dynamics when the individual considers that venture as source of profits-making, and follows a push dynamics when such action was as a result of a conflict between present situation and prospective career. Examples of push motivations include unemployment, job dissatisfaction and family pressure. The pull motivations may arise for reasons such as the need for achievement, desire to become independent and opportunities to provide social development.

Accordingly, the pull motivations seem to appear in different forms (Van der Zwan et al., 2016). A study by Shane et al. (1991) while explaining pull factors present four constructs which include; recognition, independence/autonomy, learning and role. Also, Carter et al.

(2003) identified the motivational factors into self-achievement, financial success, recognition, roles, independence and innovativeness. Although, innovative firms are important for economic development and possible transformation of firms, the application of the process towards achieving such a goal differ among entrepreneurs (Agarwal & Shah, 2014).

The pull factors are associated with ambitions and possible chance of improvement (McClelland et al., 2005) and they are mostly outgrowth as a result of networking with other people, previous experiences as well available market opportunities (Cavada et al., 2017). Orhan and Scott (2001) presented the pull motivational factors as; desire for independence, self-achievement, self-fulfillment, autonomy, job-satisfaction, desire for wealth, greater ambition, entrepreneurial drive and social objectives. On the other hand, push factors relates to those who are dissatisfied with their current position and pushes them to create own venture for reasons other than their entrepreneurial characteristics (Dawson & Henley, 2012). The opportunity entrepreneurs are likely to be innovative and inspired towards product development while the necessity entrepreneurs are mostly considered to be less creative (Kerr et al., 2018). Similarly, De Jong and Marsili (2015) claim that larger firms exhibit the likelihood in adopting Schumpeterian opportunities which disrupts the existing market while small firms often cherish the Kirznerian opportunities which are less focused towards innovation and try to fill the existing gap in the system.

Entrepreneurship theories maintained that unfavorable market conditions make both men and women become a necessity entrepreneur. They decide to start any available small business for lack of choices for their livelihood (Jenkins et al., 2014). Besides, necessity entrepreneurship is common among women because they choose to engage in their own business when they are faced with a limited choice for livelihood (Allen et al., 2007). The complex decision by women to start a new venture is also influenced by contextual as well as perceptual factors (Welter et al., 2014). A societal view towards women involvement in entrepreneurial activities and networking are largely negative particularly in a patriarchal African society (Richardson et al., 2004).

However, there is a significant impact of women's entrepreneurial activities on job creation and provision of well-developed enterprise environment across the globe (Brush et al., 2009). Despite their vital role in national development, women are frequently facing various challenges. Women's business start-ups and successful growth often derailed by socio-economic, cultural, psychological and religious factors (Habib et al., 2005).

Motivation is one among many other attitudes of an entrepreneur that has attracted the attention of researchers (Robichaud et al., 2010). The decision to become an entrepreneur may be influenced by either a positive or negative factor (Mueller & Thomas, 2001). An element such as displeasure or discomfort in job conditions can be categorized as a negative factor (Cromie & Hayes, 1991). The ability of a person to perceive and try to take advantage of business opportunities such as profit-making and product differentiation are considered to be decisive factors (Gilad & Levine, 1986). Entrepreneurial driven elements can as well be seen in the perspective of monetary and non-monetary benefits attached to the decision (McFadzean et al., 2005).

According to Fitzsimmons and Douglas (2005), there are three necessary conditions for entrepreneurial behaviour and these includes; (i) reason behind choosing self-employment rather than the traditional career opportunity and other entrepreneurial behaviours; (ii) recognition of better chance; and (iii) accessible and affordable means of getting the resources

required in achieving the perceived opportunity. For the entrepreneurial behavior to bring about desired results, these three conditions must concurrently coexist. Other possible attitudes of an enterprise-minded person presented by different scholars includes; risk-bearing capacity, belief in oneself or self-confidence, ability to endure business misfortunes, strength to survive hardship and courageous (Ruiz et al., 2016).

Various studies conducted on women's motivation for setting-up business ventures identified factors such as; societal believes and norms, self-recognition, mindset, and fashion as having a significant influence on their decisions (Pathak et al., 2013). The push factors for women entrepreneurship are insufficient family income, dissatisfaction with paid-jobs, difficulty in finding jobs and the need for flexible work schedules. While, the pull factors are the need for dependency, desire for self-fulfillment and lust for wealth, social status and power (Orhan & Scott, 2001).

According to Robichaud et al (2010), women entrepreneurs who are driven by necessity factors are those whose main objectives are to secure means of survival and becoming self-supporting because of inability to achieve paid jobs. Specific contributing factors for necessity factors includes; (i) lack of required educational qualification, (ii) lack of finance to commence business, (iii) to enable them diversify sources of income to overcome numerous challenges, and (iv) to resist the overwhelming cultural discrimination towards women especially in areas of risk-taking propensity and general business endurance. These factors are externally pushed in nature so; they have no much control over them. Also, irrespective of the business's viability, these women have no other alternative than engage in it since there is easy entry and it requires less capital (Khelil, 2016). In the case of opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, they are attracted by their urged for future socioeconomic advancements in society. Unlike in the case of necessity driven women entrepreneurs, the pull factor motivated entrepreneurs are less responsive to cultural and societal barriers. Also, they have a better advantage in acquiring the necessary resources and supports (Yitshaki & Kropp, 2016).

Methodology

As the aims at investigating the drivers for women entrepreneurship in post-insurgency contexts, it is necessary to focus on the interpretive paradigm. So, qualitative research design is used for this study. It also provides an understanding of the complex, sensitive and subjective nature of the phenomenon under study. Purposive sampling was used in selecting twelve women entrepreneurs among IDPs from three states (i.e., Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe) which are considered to be the most affected by the conflict in the region. The two conditions which each participant must meet for inclusion are; one, a respondent must be a female (woman) affected by the conflict and, two, she must be presently engaged in a business. In order to achieve the research aim, the data were gathered through semi-structured interview approach, and each interview lasted for an average of 52 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed (verbatim) and finally translated into the English Language by an expert from media and language studies. The verbatim transcript was to ensure a word-to-word reproduction of the interview data. Also, it gives a chance of transcribing features such as non-verbal interactions and involuntary vocalizations response. Thus, these features can offer clarity and can enrich the context (Poland, 1995). NVivo 11 was used as an analytical tool to assist in generating codes. Besides, a thematic method is employed in order to identify, analyze and report the similarities and differences from the data. This method ensures identifying and relating different parts of a qualitative data of this nature (Gale et al., 2013).

The nonverbal expressions by interviewees were also considered as suggested by (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

Findings and Discussion

In order to answer the main research question on the factors that drive women entrepreneurs in post-insurgency phase, three sub-questions were presented. The motives for engaging into entrepreneurial activities were systematically explored during the interviews based on the experience and understanding of the interviewees. The thematic analysis from the interview data identified four main areas which include motivation for start-up, Business challenges, pre-insurgency experience, and family, societal and institutional supports. The narratives from the participants regarding these main themes are as presented below;

Motivation for Business start-up

According to the data from the interviews, the common factor for starting a business is the necessity to feed their children and themselves. Thus, most of the women expressed a combination of personal and situational reasons as their primary drivers. The need to support themselves and their children were the most prominent factor among the respondents. Their responses confirmed as presented in the literature by Pillay (2018) in which women assumed the role of household heads in the absence of their husbands. Also, indicating that violent conflict has a devastating impact particularly on women and children and they need humanitarian assistance as claimed by (IOM, 2018). The majority of the women in the camp, as well as those interviewed, have lost their husbands during the insurgency. The drives were largely pushed factors as presented below;

"...I needed to do the business to earn money so as to feed myself and my three children. The food they give us here in the camp is not enough and, we also need other things like cloths because we have lost everything. " WE 5

"I didn't like staying idle even before the crisis but, being a widow with children is not easy. Now, I need to do all I can to provide for myself and my children. I must struggle to do something for survival." WE 7

"I am only trying to earn money to feed the family. I have to do all I could to take care of my children." WE 10

Similarly, some participants stated reasons why they engaged in self-employment instead of a paid job and their narrations were in support of the push factors such as unemployment and job conditions (Uhlaner & Thurik, 2007).

"I tried to secure a house work from the houses around but, some people are still not comfortable with us (IDPs) because they see us as strangers and this makes it difficult for us to get employed for domestic work." WE 6

"One of my relative here in Maiduguri got a child care and cleaning work for me and I enjoyed working with the Madam but the place is too far from the camp. I only worked for three months and I was dismissed from the work because I always reach there late. I cannot afford the transportation cost so, I trek from the IDP Camp to the house every morning and five days a week. Sometimes, I was also denied past to go out of the camp. "WE 2

"I have not tried getting any paid job since I came here. I believed it will be difficult for me to find any because I don't know anyone in the town." WE 8

The narrations by the only two women among the interviewees who are still living with their husbands were different. They stated independence and self-fulfillments as their primary drives and motivating factor for starting the business.

"I do not like asking my husband for everything I needed, and I need to do business to earn some money and provide for myself particularly now that he does not have any job doing. I need to take care of some of the expenses in the family. I sometimes buy my clothes and those of my children without asking from him." WE 8

"...Since when I was young, I am not used to staying idle. Either I am in school or the shop helping my parents in their business. I am always interested in working and earning my own money. Now with the help of the NGO, I have my own business, and I can be able to buy some of my basic needs without asking for money from my husband." WE 12

Challenges

The description from all the participants shows that they intend to overcome the challenges they are facing from the aftermath of the conflict. Majority of them stated loss of assets and properties, loss of family members such as husband, parents or other relatives. These claims were supported in the literature by UNDP (2017). Additionally, lack of sales/profit from their business is another major challenge women face in their new environment. All the participants expressed their emotions based on their experiences and, interestingly they are resilient enough to forge ahead despite the challenges.

"...now we are facing many challenges. We were leaving happily in our community before now. We provide for ourselves and support others but, today we are in IDPs Camp and now look at our conditions. Sometimes we sneak out of the camp and work for others outside the camp to get little money to survive. The supports provided by the government and other organizations are not enough. So look at the environment we live in, there is no good toilet and not having enough shelter." WE 3

"The insurgency has affected my business in which I invested so much time and resources and, it also changed my entire life. Our living condition is unlike before, and we are managing to survive here in the camp. We left all our belongings behind because of the crises. My first business has collapsed because I cannot afford to buy another sewing machine. I learned the handcraft business from the training some organizations provided six months back and I solely rely on that for my income. I was having nothing doing here in the IDP's camp for almost two years but now I have something doing." WE 7

"The business now is not same as before the crises, while in our community before the crisis, I make lots of profit and use it in buying basic needs for the family and myself but this is not possible now. Most people don't have the money to buy and I give them on credit and many have failed to pay back. I spend the little I earned in buying only foodstuff and firewood." WE 9

Pre-Insurgency Experience

Concerning their business experience before the conflict and how it has influenced their new businesses, these participants revealed different opinions. Those women who are now doing the same business as before the conflict expressed satisfaction that their previous experience has given the advantage over others.

"I was selected as the leader in my group because of my previous. I have been in the tailoring business for eight years. Now, I teach other women how to do the tailoring business in the camp. It is a difficult task for me but, I can also help others under this situation to have their own business. Although the learning process is very slow, I am trying my best to see how all members of my group learn fast." **WE 4**

"Before the Boko Haram insurgency, I was doing three different kinds of businesses. I do them based on demand and seasons. I am doing knitting and weaving and, I make and sell Bean-Cake on every market day. Those experiences have helped me under the present condition. If not because of my experience, it would have been difficult for me to source for livelihood under this situation. I can be able to feed my children and myself from the knitting I am doing now." **WE 11**

"My previous experience has contributed greatly to my selection. I also noticed that most of us that got the assistance from NRC, particularly those that we came from the same town were doing one business or the other before the conflict." **WE 6**

Also, few women who are engaged into businesses other than their previous business gave different opinions. Among the two participants, one stated that her previous experience has positively impacted her new business start-up. She also added that it is better to exploit an opportunity to learn other careers. This narration shows that despite the conflict situation, she is resilient enough to acquire training and start a new business to earn a living.

"... there is always a reason for everything. I never imagine myself doing a poultry business before. I have spent five years doing the clothing business but, I was forced to stop because of the Boko Haram crisis. Now with the relative peace and the support from NGOs, I can as well learn other businesses apart from the sales of ladies clothing materials." **WE 1**

The second participant expressed fair of failure with the new business, and she still hoping back to her previous business.

"The situation I am into as a displaced person has made it difficult for me to readjust. The business I am doing now is different from the previous one I was doing. I am still hoping to assume my tailoring business once I can earn enough from the liquid soap production." **WE 3**

Gender-related Challenges

Another theme that was explored was the specific gender-related challenges. There was contradictory revelation among the participant regarding the gender-related challenges. Majority of the participants revealed that there was no any challenge and these opinions are contrary to the assertion from the literature as in Vossenber (2013).

"...being a woman does not affect my business. Once people realize that you are expert in what you are doing, they keep patronizing you." **WE 5**

"I have never encountered any problem because of my gender. I got lots of support from both men and women before the conflict and here in my camp." **WE 7**

"The situation in the camp affects everyone, irrespective of gender. As a single mother, my problem is getting shelter and food for the family." **WE 2**

However, one participant narrated a different experience but, she declined to explain further when probed to expatriate. Her statement reads;

"It has been a difficult time for me because; I stopped collecting their food for about three months when I observed some harassment from one of the officials in charge of the dining. But, he is no more here in the camp." **WE 10**

Family, Society and Institutional Supports

Different revelations were made regarding the kind of support (either in cash or kind) they receive from family members and relevant institutions. Some participants expressed their concerns on the restrictions and the security concerns in the IDP camps. Although, there are contrary views, some of the narrations show that the host society still does not accept them and this greatly affects their urged to look for a paid job which support the claim by Richardson et al (2004) in the literature.

“It is difficult for me to quantify the supports I received from my relations since the crises started. At the early stage, some of my relatives here in Maiduguri brought some clothing and food stuffs and that really helped me in overcoming the hardship at that time. But, that cannot continue because they also have other responsibilities.” WE 11

“...they see us as strangers and this makes it difficult for us to get employed for domestic work.” WE 6

“...the level of support is not as we expected and it kept reducing as time went on. We experienced higher supports from both the government and other NGOs when we came newly but, many have stopped now and we only rely on the food provided in the camp.” WE 4

Conclusion

Without any doubt, this paper presents that conflict has a devastating impact on women entrepreneurship. Thus, the Boko Haram conflict has adverse effects particularly on individual women’s business and livelihood, physical and mental conditions, the social cohesion in communities and consequently affects overall economic development. In the context under which this research is conducted, it shows that women entrepreneurial motivations are driven by both push and pull factors. Struggle for survival and livelihood were the familiar “pull” factors and it is purely associated with the aftermath of the violent conflict. Also, the finding indicates that previous experiences possess by women entrepreneurs have greatly influenced their motivation and successes in operating their new start-ups. Also, the gendered nature of violent conflicts and its impacts on women poses a threat for achieving sustainable business which can supplement the efforts of government in the reconstruction process. The result show that lots of challenges affects women’s successful engagement into self-own venture. These challenges include lack of finance; lack of acceptance from the society and lack of family and institutional supports. The implication of the conflict on the livelihood of women-headed households shows the need for formulating a gendered policy framework by the government and other relevant stakeholders.

This study makes two novel contributions to the field of women entrepreneurship. First, the study extends the use of pull-push motivational theory within a specific contextual environment to explore women entrepreneurship motivation. Second, this study addresses the importance of having more systematic empirical works on women entrepreneurs in a violent-conflict context particularly in developing country in order to advance the entrepreneurship literature and to make policy impacts to stimulate women entrepreneurship. This study therefore, helps in overcoming the persistent paucity of data on women entrepreneurship motivation in a challenging environment such as violent-conflict or war situation.

Although the paper has provided insight into the drivers and motivating factors for women entrepreneurship in post-insurgency context, the study still has some limitations. The findings cannot be generalized since it is based on a qualitative interpretive approach which employed few numbers of participants. Regarding the methodology, future research should advance by using multiple methods or data sources for a better understanding of the phenomenon.

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