

**AN EVALUATION OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN OWNED
SMALL TO MEDIUM ENTERPRISES AND THEIR IMPACT ON
ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF KATTER
INCUBATION CENTRE, THOMAS REGION, NAMIBIA**

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ABSTRACT

Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a dynamic role of driving a country's economic growth by contributing significantly to the economy through creating more employment opportunities, generating higher production volumes, introducing innovation and entrepreneurship skills. Competitive pressures are exerted on SMEs arising from factors such as globalization, loosening of trade barriers and market expansion due to advances in technology and innovation. The area of female entrepreneurship has gained attention worldwide especially in developed countries but research in developing countries is lagging behind mainly due to scarcity of information on women entrepreneurship. The aim of this research was to investigate whether the women owned SMEs at Katutura Incubation Centre faced any challenges in their business operations and the impact any resultant challenges had on organisational performance. The research instrument used to gather data was a questionnaire. The study targeted the total population of eighteen respondents at the incubation centre and achieved a 100% response rate.

Key Words: Challenges, Organizational Performance, Economic Growth, Employment Opportunities, Innovation, Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role in the economic growth of transitional economies and are deemed to be economic drivers of a country (Mahembe, 2011:7). The SME sector is aligned to the overall economic performance of a country. A healthy SME sector contributes prominently to the economy through creating more employment opportunities, generating higher production volumes, increasing exports and introducing innovation and entrepreneurship skills. Thus, the dynamic role of SMEs in developing countries ensures them as engines through which the growth objectives of developing countries can be achieved. It has been particularly evident that SMEs have contributed significantly to the economic growth of Namibia, and an insight into how they operate is worthy of investigation. The Ministry of Trade and Industry estimates that the SME sector provides 27-30 percent of total employment in the economy (World Bank, 2011). This study assesses the SME

sector by investigating the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and the impact of such challenges, if any, on the organisation.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To investigate the challenges faced by women owned small to medium enterprises at the Katutura Incubation Centre.
- To assess the impact of these challenges on the organisational performance.
- To make recommendations to the organisations and other relevant stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Overview of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is one of the four mainstream economic factors: land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship. The word itself, derived from 17th century French *entreprendre*, refers to individuals who were “undertakers,” meaning those who “undertook” the risk of new enterprise. They were “contractors” who bore the risks of profit or loss (Holt, 1992:3).

Coulter (2003:3) comments that defining entrepreneurship is not a simple task. There are about as many definitions of entrepreneurship as there are people who have written about the subject. Below are a few definitions of entrepreneurship put forward by various authors:

- Entrepreneurship is the process of identifying opportunities in the market place, arranging the resources required to pursue these opportunities and investing the resources to exploit the opportunities for long term gains. It involves creating wealth by bringing together resources in new ways to start and operate an enterprise (Kumar, Poornima, Abraham and Jayashree, 2003:7).
- Entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of creating incremental wealth. The wealth is created by individuals who assume the major risks in terms of equity, time and/or career commitment or provide value for some product or service. The product may or may not be new or unique, but value must somehow be infused by the entrepreneur by receiving and locating the necessary skills and resources (Ronstadt, cited in Hirsch and Peters, 2002:10).
- Entrepreneurship is the phenomenon associated with entrepreneurial activity that is the enterprising 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 (Ahmad and Seymour, 2008).

Coulter (2003) concludes that some common themes are found in the definition of entrepreneurship namely: the important role of the entrepreneur, innovation, creating value, organisation creation, growth and uniqueness. Kumar et al. (2003) also concur that the definitions of entrepreneurship highlight the innovation aspect, and also risk bearing, resource organising aspects, and an individual or group of people achieving goals through production or distribution of services.

From the definition of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activity made by Ahmad and Seymour (2008), they offer the following definition of an entrepreneur as being those persons (business owners) who seek to generate value, through the creation or expansion of economic activity, by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets. Moreover, different definitions of the word entrepreneur from various authors (Coulter (2003), Hirsch and Peters (2002), Rwigema, Urban and Venter (2008)) display the entrepreneur to be an individual who is a risk taker, innovative, resourceful, achievement oriented, opportunity recogniser, open minded, motivated, hard worker, flexible, involved and a good negotiator.

Golshan (2014) determines that several feminine traits are absent from the definition of an entrepreneur, such as affection, compassion, understanding and being sensitive to the needs of others. The feminine traits are those traits that are evaluated to be more suitable for women than men and are based on the society's perceptions of what traits are suitable for women. These traits were identified as important not only to venture creation but also to venture performance. Social skills for instance, are competencies that help entrepreneurs interact effectively with potential customers, venture capitalists, and employees. Such interactions enhance the entrepreneur's success by creating a favorable reputation and direct personal contacts. Thus the area of women in entrepreneurship is one worthy of researching.

Definitions of Small to medium enterprises (SMEs)

International Definitions

The EU defines small enterprises as enterprises which employ fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover or annual balance sheet total does not exceed 10 million euro. Micro enterprises are defined as enterprises which employ fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover or annual balance sheet total does not exceed 2 million euro (EU, 2003).

The SABEQ (2007) booklet on standardized small and medium enterprise definitions offers definitions of SMEs from the following organisations: European Commission (EC), Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)/International Finance Corporation (IFC), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).

- Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and International Finance Corporation (IFC) Definition:

The MIGA and the IFC define small enterprises as those that meet two of the following three conditions (Dababneh and Tukan, 2007: 5):

1. Less than 50 employees
2. Less than \$3 million total assets
3. Less than \$3 million total annual sales

Meanwhile, medium enterprises are those that meet two of the following three conditions:

1. Less than 300 employees
2. Less than \$15 million total assets
3. Less than \$15 million total annual sales.

- Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Definition

The most common criterion used within the economies of APEC is the number of employed personnel within the business itself, therefore, APEC defines SMEs as enterprises with less than 100 people, whereby, a medium sized enterprise employs between 20 and 99 people, a small firm employs between 5 and 19, and a micro firm employs less than 5 employees which includes self-employed managers (Dababneh and Tukan, 2007:6).

- United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) Definition

According to UNIDO the definition of SMEs is a significant issue for policy development and implementation and depends primarily on the purpose of classification. Hence, SME definitions vary among various countries as well as within the country over a period of time. For the purposes of policy development, UNIDO generally advises countries to take into account the quantitative and qualitative indicators for SME definition (Dababneh and Tukan, 2007: 6).

Local Namibian Definition of an SME

The Namibian government launched its Policy and Programme on Small Business Development in 1997. This policy, driven by the Ministry of Trade and Industry was in recognition of the important role played by the SME sector in the country's socio-economic development. The Ministry of Trade and Industry definition of a small enterprise is based on employment numbers, turnover and capital employed in the business venture. There is also a distinction between manufacturing and other (non-manufacturing) business sectors. The definition is as follows:

Table 2.1: Namibian Definition of an SME

Sector	Employment	Turnover (N\$)	Capital Employed (N\$)
Manufacturing	Less than 10persons	1 000 000	500 000
Other Business	Less than 5persons	250 000	100 000

(Source: Namibia: Policy and Programmes on Small Business Development (1997))

Note: To be classified as a small business the criterion of number of employees must be fulfilled and one of the two other additional criteria met (turnover and capital employed).

Challenges Facing Entrepreneurs

The word 'challenge' is defined as 'A *task or situation* that tests someone's abilities' in the Oxford dictionary (Anonymous, 2014). The research investigates the situations that test the abilities of women owned SMEs' that affect their operations and organisational performance.

In India, Badi and Badi (2005:58) identified general entrepreneurial problems as:

- Procedural delays, problems and corruption in government offices for various licenses, electricity, water and shed allotments.
- Raw materials price and availability are not consistent. Middlemen play a major role in creating artificial shortage.
- Competition in low technology items is too high and hence the entrepreneurs have to work at very low margins and constantly lookout for cost reduction.
- Financial problems due to blockage of funds in work in progress, finished goods and raw materials. Added to this non receipt of payments from customers is always a worry.
- Indians also face technology obsolescence due to non-adaptation or slow adaptation to changing technology.

Zimmerer and Scarborough (2008:38) analyse the challenges facing entrepreneurs from the angle of mistakes that entrepreneurs make. They cite the 10 deadly mistakes of entrepreneurship as: management mistakes, lack of experience, poor financial control, weak marketing efforts, failure to develop a strategic plan, uncontrolled growth, poor location, lack of inventory control, incorrect pricing, and the inability to make the 'entrepreneurial transition'. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, GEM, is the largest international research initiative that analyses the propensity of the adult population of a country to participate in entrepreneurial activities and the conditions that enhance these entrepreneurship initiatives (GEM, 2012). Financial reasons were cited in 2012 as among the main causes of business discontinuance. In Namibia, 39% of business cessations were claimed to be because of difficulties in raising finance (GEM Namibia Report, 2012).

Women in Entrepreneurship and SMEs

There are various types of entrepreneurs. IKED (2007) offers several classifications based on, for example education, motivation, age, business characteristics and gender. Further, they divulge that women owned enterprises (WOEs) are a grouping which is briskly expanding and therefore requires attention for a number of reasons. Although women represent half of mankind, the prospects of women are hugely underdeveloped in many societies. Through the formation of WOE's, women are often able to triumph over traditional boundaries. According to IKED (2007) WOE's now account for a growing share of all new enterprises in many economies. In addition, societal and organisational changes, coupled with new technologies present great prospects for their enterprises. However, impediments to operations of WOE's still remain.

Women constitute about 50% of the world population (Naidu and Krishna Rao, 2008: 171). The Labour Force Survey of 2013 reports a population of 355492 in the Khomas Region, a region which has the highest number of inhabitants in Namibia. Of these 355492, 178796 are women, a little over 50%. Of the 266 360 inhabitants of the active population (both private-formal and informal- and public employment) women again make up a higher number of 134 534 (50.5%) working age people compared to 131 826 (49.5%) males. Thus it can be concluded women are more participative in business activities in the region.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) (2014) in its article on Banking on Women concluded that women entrepreneurs are changing the face of the global economy, helping to sustain job creation and economic growth. It is estimated that women-owned entities represent over 30% of registered businesses worldwide. Yet on average about 10% of women entrepreneurs have access to the capital needed to grow their businesses. Further, women have impact on sustainable economic growth, for instance although women comprise 50% of the population in Sub Saharan Africa they produce more than 80% of the food for the continent. Less than 12% of agribusiness investments are directed at women smallholder farmers. According to the Harvard Business Review, women control about \$20 trillion global consumer spending and earn about \$18 trillion extending their circle of economic influence. Yet, unfavourable business and regulatory environments are among the barriers that still impede women entrepreneurs from accessing finance. According to an IFC-McKinsey study this has resulted in a credit gap of approximately \$320 billion.

Naidu and Krishna Rao (2008:171) define women entrepreneurs as "a woman or group of women who initiate, organise and run a business enterprise". The Indian government's definition of a woman entrepreneur is based on women participation in equity and employment of business enterprise. The government of India has defined a woman entrepreneur as "An enterprise owned and controlled by a woman having minimum financial participation of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of employment generated in the enterprise to women" (Naidu and Krishna Rao, 2008).

There are several push and pull factors that attract women to the world of entrepreneurship. The GEM Namibia Report (2012) shows that women are almost as likely as men to be involved in early-stage entrepreneurship, (18% and 19%, respectively). There is a difference in their motives for becoming entrepreneurs, however. Whereas 32% of male entrepreneurs cite necessity as having driven them into business, the figure rises to 43% for women, suggesting that they see setting up their own business as a survival strategy. Zimmerer and Scarborough (2008:20) assert that small business has been a leader in offering women opportunities for economic expression through employment and entrepreneurship. In addition, increasing numbers of women are discovering that the best way to break the "glass ceiling" that prevents them from rising to the top of many organisations is to start their own companies.

Challenges Facing Women Entrepreneurs

The concerns that women-owned enterprises encounter are not necessarily dissimilar to those encountered by their male entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs in general. Nevertheless the emphasis may be different, as may the suitable answers. Coulter (2003) comprehends that with all the challenges to being a successful entrepreneur, facing additional obstacles because of your race or gender seems unbelievable. Yet, women entrepreneurs do face all sorts of challenges. Coulter (2003) further dispenses some of the problem women entrepreneurs face to include: access to capital, getting credit lines to start and grow business, conflict between work and family, managing business growth successfully, finding and keeping qualified employees, and keeping abreast with technology and other market place changes.

Women's problems in India deal with tradition, socio-cultural values, and ethics and motherhood issues. Subordinate to husband and men, physically weak, avoids tension, avoids hard work areas, avoids vehicle driving and cannot be tough; are very common and general remarks made on women (Badi and Badi, 2005:58). Naidu and Krishna Rao (2008) concur with the previous authors by presenting similar challenges which include: problem of finance, lack of education, limited mobility, family ties, scarcity of raw materials, stiff competition, low bearing risk capacity, social problems and male domination. In addition, women owned enterprises in African countries are constrained by harassment, extortion and arrest for illegal activities (DTI, 2005). The challenges are explored in detail below:

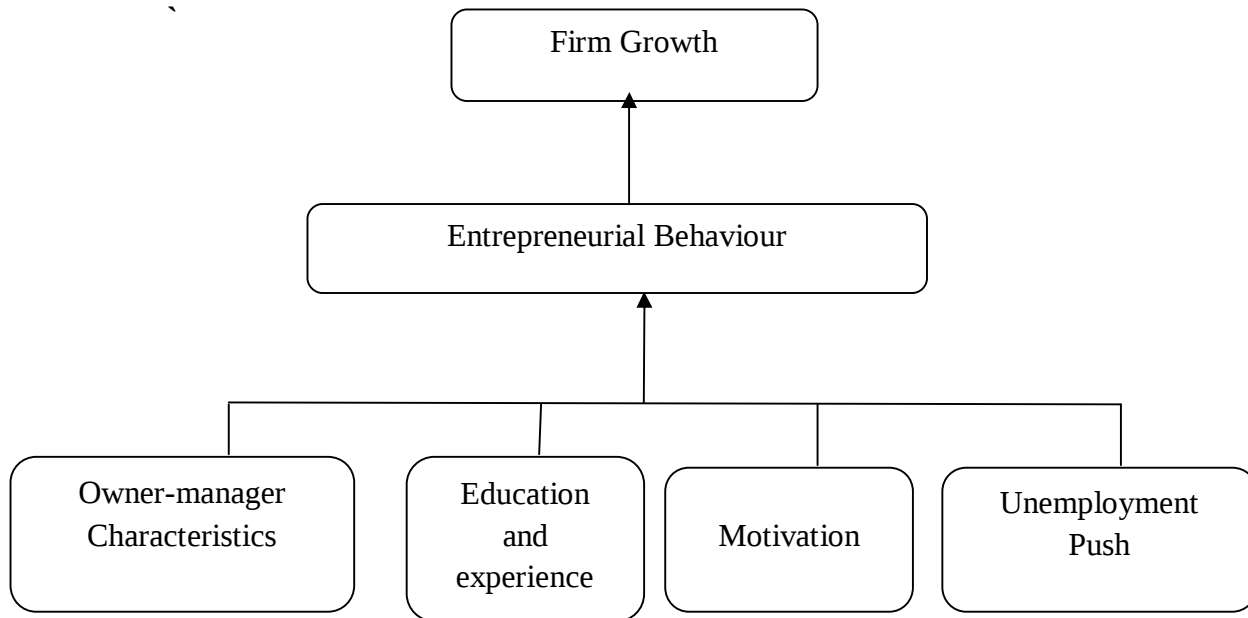
Factors Affecting Performance of Entrepreneurs

The study examined factors which included: entrepreneurial traits, characteristics and skills of the entrepreneur; age of entrepreneur; educational background and gender of entrepreneur, to determine the extent to which they impact the performance of entrepreneurs and subsequently the growth of SMEs.

Entrepreneurial traits, characteristics and skills

Rwigema et al. (2008:127) contend that the entrepreneurial process unfolds because individual entrepreneurs' act and are motivated to pursue opportunities. The entrepreneur's characteristics – traits, values and attitudes are often cited as the most influential factors related to the performance, growth and competitiveness of SMEs. Cheng (2006) argued that the traits of the entrepreneur significantly affect the firm performance and growth. He further cited that factors such as age, gender, education, past experience and entrepreneurial behaviour have been discussed by numerous scholars. In his research, Cheng (2006) conceded that the entrepreneurial characteristics of greatest relevance where personal attributes and behaviour, the owner-manager background and experience, and how they were affected by motivation and unemployment threats. This is shown in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1: The Relationship between Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Firm Growth



Source: Cheng (2006:47)

Cheng (2006) concluded that “The characteristics of owner managers associated with firm growth presumably relate to their experience. Entrepreneurs with better growing firms can be expected to have more educational background and better levels of management experience. It can also be expected that the acquisition of experience in the sector prior to the establishment of the business, rather than setting up without such experience, would be associated with faster growth. There is also some previous evidence from past research that firms still run by their founders grow faster and businesses run by more than one individual are more likely to grow than single person owned firms. Motivation is a factor that should explain why a business is established and to relate to firm growth. Positive motivation may possibly relate to the growth of a business more than negative motivation. Alternatively the unemployment push can act as a reverse factor, in that those businesses established by unemployed individuals are more likely to grow rapidly than those businesses operated by employed workers.”

Certain aspects of entrepreneurial personality assist in conducting and improving the performance of the entrepreneurial venture. Bolton and Thompson (2013:20) identify six facets (themes) that define the entrepreneurial profile. These are summarised below:

- *Focus*: The ability to lock on to a target and not be distracted, to act with urgency and not procrastinate, to get things done and not just talk about them
- *Advantage*: the ability to select the right opportunity. It is this facet that enables entrepreneurs to pick winners and to know instinctively what ‘falls to the bottom line’.

- *Creativity*: The ability to come up with new ideas habitually either simply as ideas in themselves or else translated into opportunities or solutions. This facet allows entrepreneurs to think differently, to 'break the mould', to see patterns others miss.
- *Ego*: Inner ego provides confidence, creates passion and delivers the motivation to achieve and to win. Outer ego that others see is the ability to carry heavy responsibility lightly but not flippantly, to be openly accountable and to be instinctively courageous.
- *Team*: The ability to pick the best people and get them working as a team, to know when you need help and to find it, and to build an extensive network of supporters.
- *Social*: The ability to espouse a cause and deliver on it. This facet invades the ego facet providing a motivation and passion all of its own. It is the distinguishing facet of the social entrepreneur.

Age of the entrepreneur

Cheng (2006:47) concluded that the growth of an enterprise is closely associated to the age of the owner of the owner-manager. Hirsch and Peters (2002:7) divulge that in terms of chronological age, most entrepreneurs initiate their entrepreneurial carriers between the ages of 22 and 45. Although a career can be initiated before or after these years, it is not a likely because an entrepreneur requires experiences, financial support, and a high energy level in order to launch and manage a new venture successfully. Cheng (2006) further added that younger owner-managers have the energy, commitment and is highly motivated resulting in their businesses being successful. However, older owner-managers are less likely to have the physical energy for such hard work and thus have more realistic and modest ambitions for the growth of their businesses.

There is other evidence suggesting that levels of firm growth and age are correlated positively. Cheng (2006:48) argues that whilst the younger owner-managers may have more energy, they lack business experience in the market place and more likely to be financially constrained. However, firms run by older managers are more likely to survive since the need for risk – taking is lower due to lower motivation for growth and the possession of higher levels of skills and experience. For these reasons the older owner-manager is more likely to have a growing business and tend to report somewhat higher levels of satisfaction (firm growth) than younger individuals. It is important to note that researchers in these instances only compared the young versus the old entrepreneurs but did not mention the middle-aged category. Further research and study is required in this middle-aged category.

Educational background

Education continues to play a major role in helping to cope with problems entrepreneurs confront as it provides a good background, particularly when it is related to the field of the venture (Hirsch and Peters, 2002). Further, a firm's capacity to compete is embedded in the incumbent's education which is related to knowledge, skills, problem-solving, ability, discipline, motivation, self- confidence and behaviour of entrepreneurs. This allows them to identify market opportunities and gather resources required to set up the business. Cheng (2006) determines that a higher level of education provides an individual with greater confidence in dealing with business. In addition, he articulates that education is a key constituent of the human capital needed for business success, as educated owner-managers have high earning expectations in achieving business success.

However, Cheng (2006) also disputes that business ownership is not an intellectual activity. He concludes that individual entrepreneurs are often poorly prepared for their task and this situation can

come about because of the absence of other choices. Instead, entrepreneurship is seen as an opportunity that allows individuals who are less academically successful to earn high incomes. The mundane tasks associated with business ownership pose as an insufficient challenge to individuals who are more academically successful.

Gender

Cheng (2006:49) carried out research on the impact of gender on individual perceptions and found out that there are differences between men and women in levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation, with the outcomes of these influencing firm growths. In addition, despite a number of female entrepreneurs; most small business owner-managers have traditionally been male, married and middle-aged. Although characteristics of both male and female entrepreneurs are generally very similar, female entrepreneurs differ on some aspects. Hirsch and Peters (2002) admit that in terms of personality, there are strong similarities between men and women entrepreneurs. Both tend to be energetic, goal oriented, and independent. However, men are often more confident and less flexible and tolerant than women, which can result in very different management styles. In addition, Hirsch and Peters (2002) summarise that the differences between male and female entrepreneurs are as a result of their differences in motivation, departure point, occupational backgrounds, personality characteristics, background, support groups, source of funds and type of business started. These differences have a significant impact on the growth and performance of a business as they affect such areas as the organisations earnings, finances, markets and human relations among other things.

Cheng (2006) alludes to the fact that the female business owner is faced with challenges of career discrimination, business development, inexperience and financing. Other issues cited were;

- Dual responsibility of household and family versus employment;
- Inability to work long hours due to commitments to children and family;
- Lack of personal confidence in business matters;
- Operating in a traditionally male dominated industry;
- Less credibility with financial institutions in taking the business seriously;
- Lower levels of income; and
- Problems in developing networks with customers, suppliers and advisors.

However Cheng (2006:50) argues that the gender of owner-manager is not a key influence upon subsequent business performance- there being no differences in the performances of firms run by males and females. There has been a lot of success stories demonstrating that business success and growth can be achieved by female-owner managers and that female owner-managers starting businesses for economic reasons with lower initial expectations of their venture's success were perceived to have a greater level of satisfaction in business performance than their male counterparts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Target Population

The research population is described by Saunders et al. (2009) as the full set of cases from which a sample is taken. Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) conclude that the population selected should be those to whom the research question applies. The research question applied to women entrepreneurs in the Khomas Region in Namibia. The target population of this research were the women owned SMEs operating at Katutura Incubation Centre in the Khomas Region in Namibia. The Katutura Incubation Centre has 43 stalls of which 40 are occupied and 3 are used for storage facilities

of repossessed goods from defaulting tenants. Of these 40 stalls under occupation, 18 are women owned.

Limitations of the Research

There were several limitations encountered in the research. These included an initial lack of cooperation from some of the respondents and unwillingness to assist the researcher. Some of the respondents had low educational backgrounds which created some negligence in the completion of the questionnaires. Stringent work schedules of some of the respondents made it difficult completing the questionnaires. Family commitments and work life balance hindered the researcher in conducting the study. In order to narrow the research down, the study was limited to a specific entrepreneurial aspect that is entrepreneurial challenges. Further, the research was regional as it was confined to Namibia only.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Analysis of Data

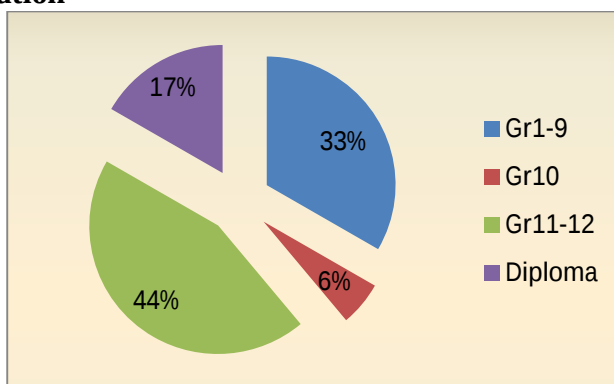
The findings are presented in three main sections: respondent profiles; business operations and challenges faced; and organisational performance and metrics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the information obtained from the study findings. Simple statistical methods were used to calculate the results which are summarised in the tables and depicted graphically. The outputs were generated using Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Respondent Profiles

Questions one to four aimed to get the profiles of the respondents in terms of what their highest level of educational qualifications were, their family sizes, the various reasons attributed to starting their own business and membership in existing business networks. The following section presents and interprets the respondent profiles:

4.1.1 What is your highest level of education?

Figure 4.1 Level of Education

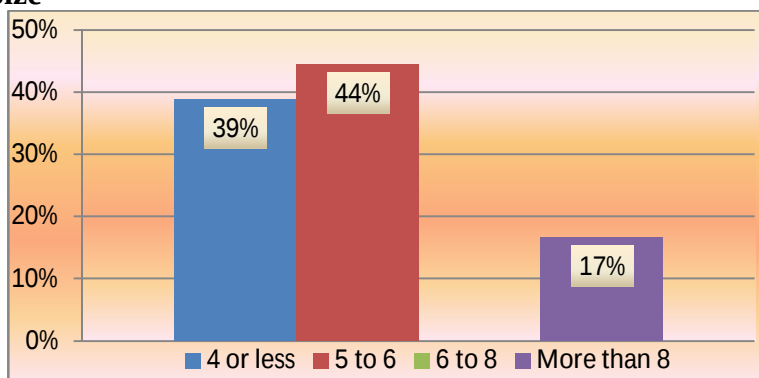


As can be seen from Figure 4.1 the majority of the respondents are in possession of Grade 11-12 qualifications (44%), followed by those with Grade 1-9 qualifications (33%). The remaining 17% and 6% of the respondents are in possession of a Diploma and Grade 10 respectively. The capacity of a business to compete is embedded in the incumbent's education which is related to knowledge, skills, problem-solving, ability, discipline, motivation, self-confidence and behaviour of entrepreneurs (Hirsch and Peters, 2002). This allows them to identify market opportunities and gather resources required to manage the business. Respondents with tertiary levels of education such as diplomas

possess a key component of human capital needed for confidence in dealing with business and business success. Cheng (2006) also pointed out that entrepreneurs who have more educational backgrounds should be expected to realise growth of the entrepreneurial venture. Therefore, respondents with low educational qualifications who aspire to improve performance and grow their ventures should further their education.

What is your family size including yourself?

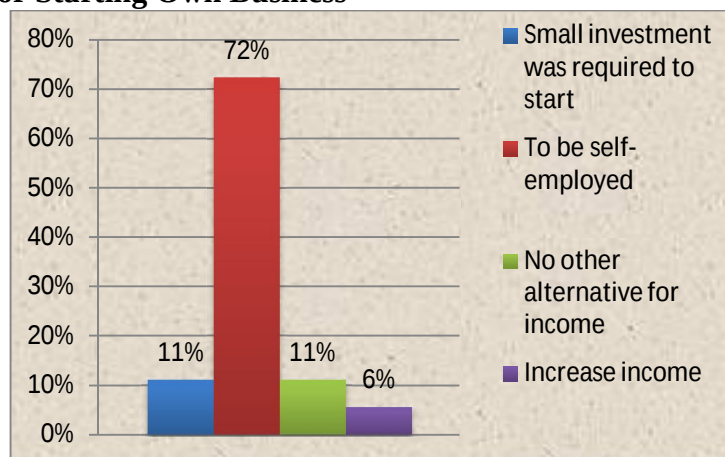
Figure 4.2 Family Size



The findings in Figure 4.2 reveal that 39% of the respondents have a family size of 4 or less family members including themselves, whilst 44% and 17% have a family size of 5-6 and more than 8 family members respectively. None of the respondents had a family size that fell in the category of 6-8 family members. Women are at most times the primary caregivers for children (and sometimes parents). The average household size for female entrepreneurs ranged from three in developed countries like Europe and the United States of America to five people in Sub-Saharan Africa (GEM, 2013). This is evident in the collective 61% of women entrepreneurs who had family sizes of 5 and more, with 17% of them having family sizes as large as more than eight people. As a result, the respondents spend significant amounts of time and earnings on their families which could possibly affect their business operations as well as business performance.

Why did you start your own business?

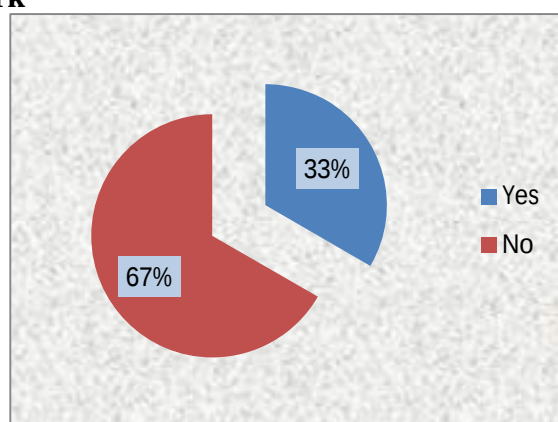
Figure 4.3 Reasons for Starting Own Business



The motivations behind establishing own businesses are many in number and vary from individual to individual as there several push and pull factors that attract women to the world of entrepreneurship. Figure 4.3 above shows the reasons attributed to the establishment of their own business. As can be seen from the above figure, small businesses offer women opportunities for economic expression through employment and entrepreneurship as 72% of the respondents started their own business because they wanted to be self-employed. Most women see setting up their own business as a survival strategy (GEM, 2012). It is also evident that 11% had no other alternative for income and another 11% established their own business because only a small investment was required. The remaining 6% wanted to increase their income levels.

Are you currently a member of a business network (with suppliers or customers)?

Figure 4.4 Business Network



Women's business networks are an important first step to the strengthening of women's negotiating positions and advocacy for common interests and goals (Tandon, 2007). Regarding the current status of membership in a business network, the majority of the respondents (67%) were not in a business network with either suppliers or customers. The remaining 33% of respondents were members of a business network. Business networks are advantageous as they enable local organisations to respond to local clients and local needs, and to act as local change agents, while moving their organisations' in a common direction. Business networks facilitate this through building a system of shared mission and vision, principles and values, and performance standards (Tandon, 2007). The respondents would also find value in taking advantage of advances in technology by using tools such as mobile phones with internet access to enable them to have constant communication with their suppliers and customers.

Business Operations and Challenges Faced

Questions five to fourteen established how the businesses of the respondents' operated and sought to discover if they were any challenges faced by the respondents in conducting their business operations. In addition, the questions attempted to discover any issues that the respondents thought had any significant impact on the success and growth of their businesses.

I consider my gender to be a disadvantage in operating my business

Figure 4.5 Gender and Business Operations

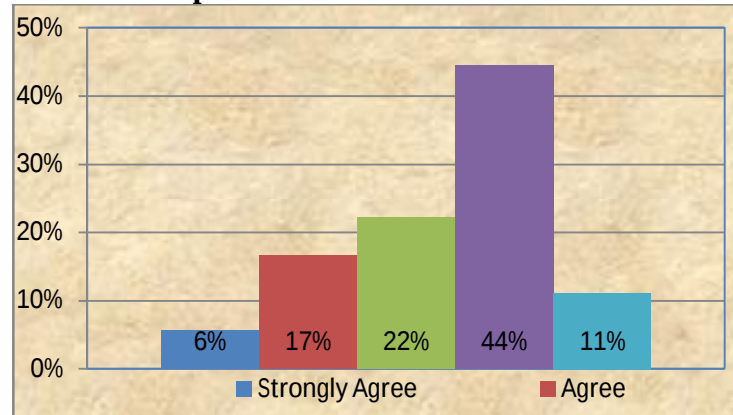
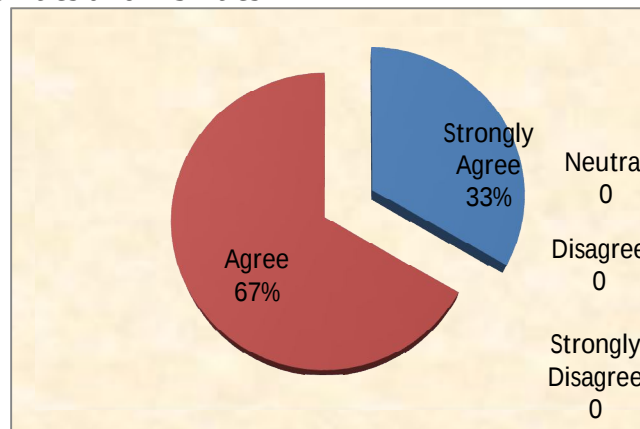


Figure 4.5 shows that the issue of gender is not a disadvantage in business operations for the respondents. Respondents agreed (44%) with Cheng (2006) that gender is not a key influence on business performance. The respondents disagree with a mean of 2.61 and standard deviation of 1.06 that their gender is a disadvantage in operating their business. A collective 23% agreed with Coulter (2003) that with all the challenges of being a successful entrepreneur, women entrepreneurs faced additional challenges due to their gender. The remaining 22% of the respondents were neutral. They were unsure of whether gender played a role in their business operations. The area of gender and business performance may need further investigation as most literature reviewed weighed more on the opinion that women did indeed face additional operational hurdles due to their gender.

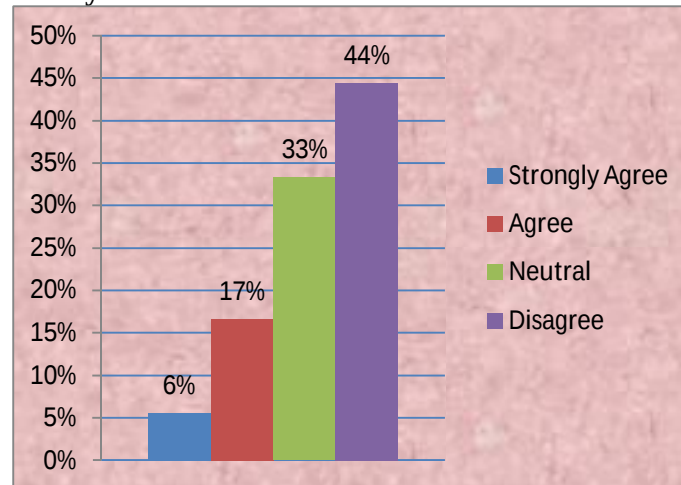
The skills, capabilities and abilities I possess are adequate enough to be running my business
Figure 4.6 Skills, Capabilities and Abilities



The respondents were in unanimous agreement that they were adequately equipped with the skills, capabilities and abilities to operate their businesses. There was agreement (67%) that the skills, capabilities and abilities respondents possessed were adequate while 33% strongly agreed. The respondents agreed with Cheng (2006) that the traits of the entrepreneur significantly affect the firm performance and growth such as personal attributes and behaviour, motivation, background and experience. Their entrepreneurial traits as evidenced by their skills, capabilities and abilities were adequate for the operation of their businesses. Respondents possessed some of the six aspects of entrepreneurial personalities identified by Bolton and Thompson (2013) that assist entrepreneurs in

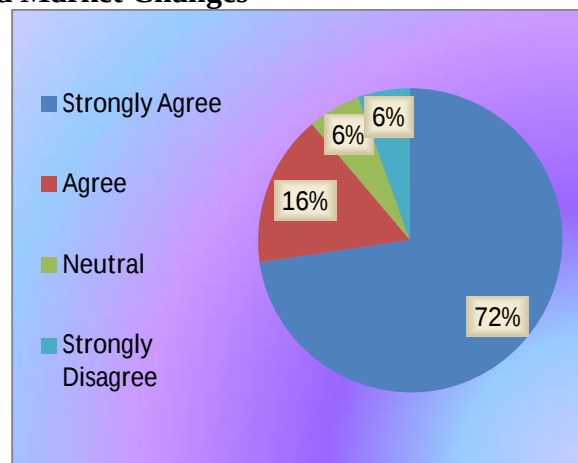
conducting and improving the performance of the entrepreneurial venture that is focus, advantage, creativity, ego, team members and social skills.

Balancing time between work and family affects my ability to manage my business
Figure 4.7 Works and Family



This statement intended to establish whether balancing time between work and family affected the respondent's ability to manage their businesses. The respondents disagreed (44%) that balancing time between family and work affected their ability to manage their businesses. It is possible that the respondents have support from family members that makes it easier to concentrate on the business. However, the GEM (2013) report findings concluded that women entrepreneurs often needed to balance both family and entrepreneurship, and this often restricted their ability to grow their businesses. This is evidenced by 23% of the respondents who agreed that balancing time between work and family affected their ability to manage their business. Badi and Badi (2005) discovered that family responsibilities like extra attention to husbands, children and in-laws take away a lot of time and energy from women. The remaining 33% of the respondents remained neutral.

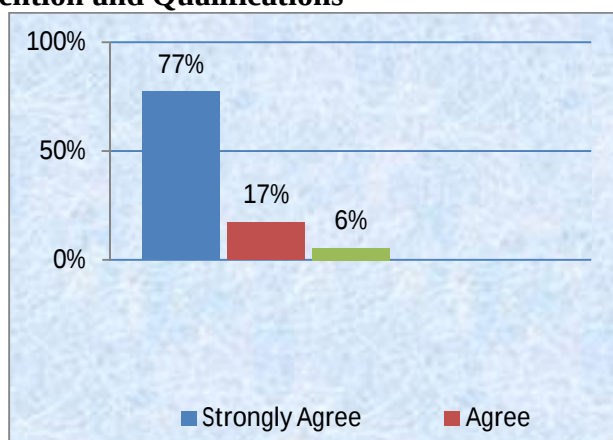
I find value in keeping up with technology and market place changes
Figure 4.8 Technology and Market Changes



This statement aimed to establish whether the respondents found value in keeping up with technology and market place changes. As shown in Figure 4.8 above 82% of the respondents agreed that access to the latest and cost-effective technology makes the enterprises more competitive. The respondents also found value in keeping abreast with market place changes. In order to keep abreast with changes, it is necessary for the respondents to conduct marketing research which provides information about potential markets, identifies customers and business strategies that need to be implemented. The remaining 6% were neutral and 6% strongly disagreed that they found any value in keeping abreast with technological and market place advancements. This could be attributed to a lack of knowledge of the advantages on keeping abreast with new developments. Furthermore, some of the respondents' inability to keep abreast with market place changes could be attributed to a lack of market research that may be in line with their business strategy and objectives.

It is important to find and keep qualified employees in my line of business

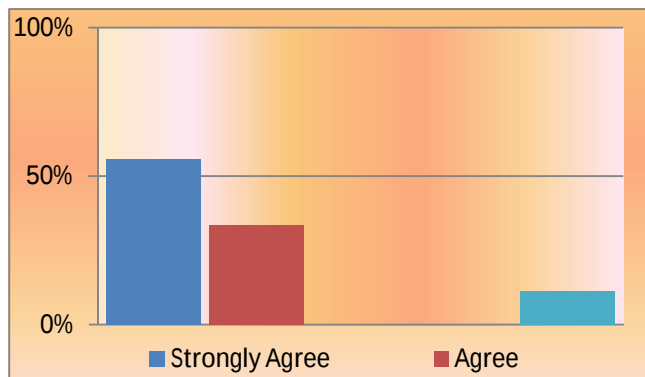
Figure 4.9 Employee Retention and Qualifications



This statement aimed to discover how significant attracting and retaining qualified staff was to the respondents. Coulter (2003) discovered that attracting and keeping qualified employees was one of the challenges businesses faced. Therefore, finding and keeping qualified employees should be taken as an important facet in business operations. Figure 4.9 shows that the respondents agreed that it was important to find and keep qualified employees. The figure shows that the respondents agreed (94%) with a mean of 4.7 and standard deviation of 0.56. Therefore, the average score of the respondents to attracting and retaining qualified staff is 'strongly agree' with low deviation among them. The remaining 6% remained neutral. The performance of an enterprise is affected by its ability to find and retain qualified staff. It is necessary to hire qualified staff as they will be able to communicate effectively with customers and suppliers that are important to the business. Workload is also shared equally among staff as each employee knows their responsibilities hence teamwork is improved. It is also in the best interests of a business to retain employees as this reduces cost of training replacement employees.

Mobility and/or being able to drive myself around helps in the operation of my business

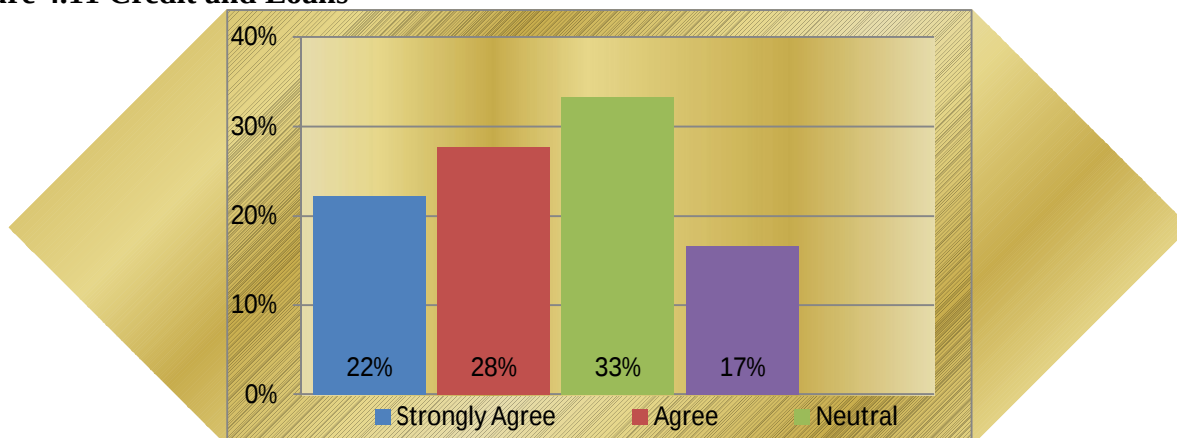
Figure 4.10 Mobility



This statement intended to establish whether mobility affected the respondents in conducting their business operations. The inability to drive one-self was identified by Badi and Badi (2005) as a challenge to women’s entrepreneurship stemming from traditional and socio-cultural values that set out the typical role of women. In order to break these psychological barriers women need to be more assertive and independent. The respondents agreed (89%) that mobility helps to improve their independence and the performance of their businesses. The respondents agreed that mobility and being able to drive one-self in order to reach customers and suppliers was important. Figure 4.10 shows agreement among the respondents with a mean of 4.22, that mobility is also seen as an important marketing element that enables respondents to identify potential markets and customers who are outside their current boundaries. The remaining 11% strongly disagreed that mobility affected their business operations and none of the respondents were neutral or disagreed.

Access to formal credit/loans is an important factor in growing my business

Figure 4.11 Credit and Loans

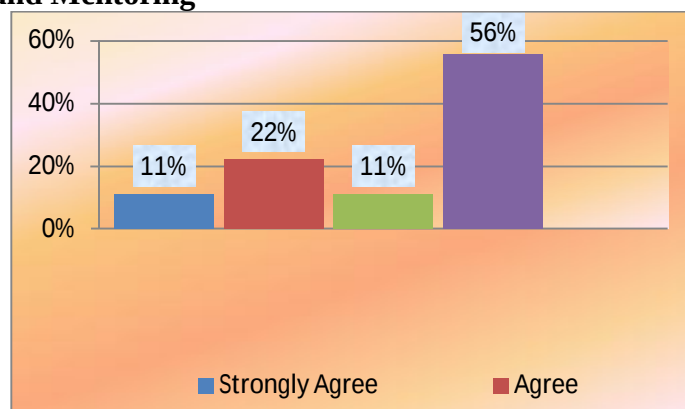


Access to finance for small businesses is an ever present topic in discussions concerning business growth. Question 11 aimed at establishing whether access to credit and or loans was an important factor for business performance and ultimately its growth. Statistical calculations showed that the respondents were neutral with a mean of 3.56 and standard deviation of 1.5. Figure 4.11 shows that 50% of the respondents agreed that access to finance is a crucial factor for business growth and survival. However, the IFC (2014) acknowledges that access to finance is still impeded by several

barriers, on average only about 10% of women entrepreneurs worldwide have access to the capital needed to grow their businesses. This could explain the remaining 50% of respondents who remained neutral (33%) and disagreed (17%) that access to formal credit was an important factor in growing their business as they possibly found other avenues to finance their businesses aside from the traditional formal routes of acquiring credit and loans such as from banks and micro financiers. The issue of collateral for loans is also a major contributing factor to whether small business can qualify for bank loans, as well as whether they have business plans that yield good returns on the investments.

The training and mentoring I have received has been invaluable to my business success?

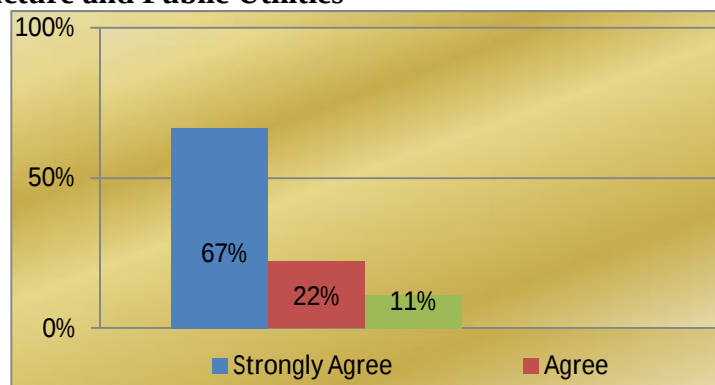
Figure 4.12 Training and Mentoring



This statement intended to ascertain whether the training and mentoring of respondents had been invaluable to the success of their businesses. A collective 33% agreed that the training and mentoring they received was invaluable to their business, while 11% neither agreed nor disagreed. The majority of the respondents disagreed (56%) that the training they received had been invaluable to the success of their business. The GEM (2013) report cited that the entrepreneurial capabilities of women are constrained by the fact that they are less likely to receive training in areas that are relevant to entrepreneurship. To circumvent this problem there is need to target training programmes to the relevant entrepreneurial disciplines. Receiving targeted training equips the respondents with the knowledge and tools to be effective leaders and implement strategies to improve the performance of their businesses. The respondents also considered other areas as being invaluable to their business success such as positive motivation, experience and family support.

Infrastructure and public utilities provided for my business are adequate

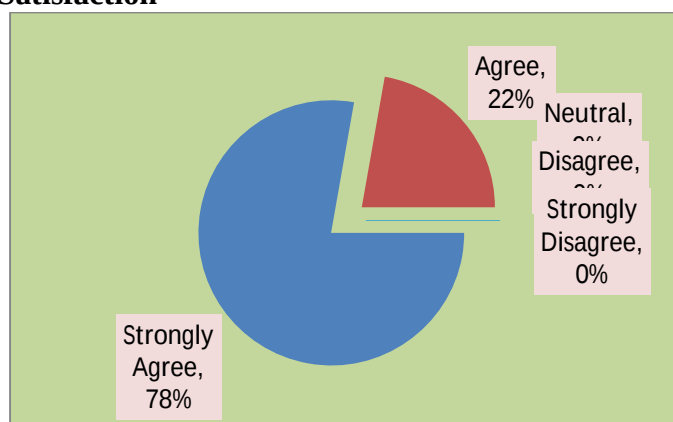
Figure 4.13 Infrastructure and Public Utilities



This statement intended to establish whether the infrastructure and public utilities provided by the local authorities and municipality were adequate. In contrast to Hirsch and Peters (2002) who cited the lack of supportive infrastructure as a hindrance to business operations, the respondents agreed (89%) that the supportive infrastructure and public utilities provided such as transportation, communication, sewage, water and electric systems were all adequate. The respondents agreed with a mean of 4.56 and standard deviation of 0.6 that infrastructure and public utilities were adequate. Availability of utilities like water and electricity help in the smooth flow of business especially for some of the respondents who operate businesses such as hair salons which cannot operate without these utilities. The respondents are all located in an incubation centre owned and managed by the City of Windhoek municipality thus it would be expected that the local authorities provide up to standard infrastructure and public utilities. The same may not be said for other business owners at privately owned premises in and around in the country as the levels of satisfaction with infrastructure and public utilities provided by their local authorities may not be so high. This may need further investigation.

My customers are satisfied with my product price, quality, distribution and overall marketing efforts

Figure 4.14 Customer Satisfaction



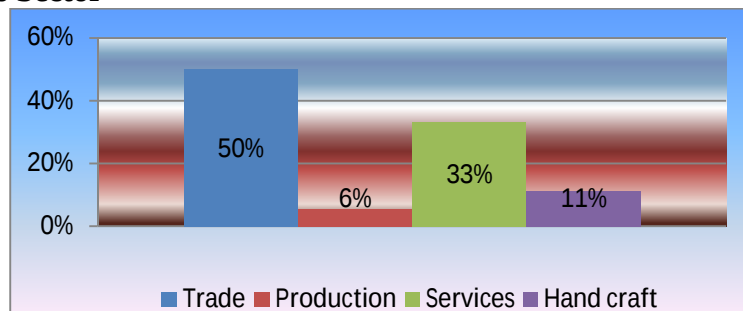
This statement aimed to ascertain the respondents' opinion on the level of customer satisfaction. One of the key elements of the balanced score card focuses on the customer perspective that is customer satisfaction, customer retention, number of customer complaints, service/product quality, and image or reputation (Olson and Slater, 2002). The respondents unanimously agreed (strongly agree 83% and agree 17%) that their customers were satisfied with their product price, quality, distribution and overall marketing efforts. However, most of the women enterprises are small scale enterprises whose market presence is limited consisting mainly of local markets. Finding potential markets and identifying customers poses a potential difficulty for women entrepreneurs (Basargekar, 2007). The respondents expressed concern over the inability to afford fees for various business trade shows and exhibitions which would allow them to interact and obtain feedback from customers about their products. These trade shows would be beneficial to the respondents businesses as they ultimately lead to an improvement in their product offering, widening their market reach and possibly finding potential funding to grow their businesses.

Organisational Performance and Metrics

Questions fifteen to twenty aimed to gather information on the organisational performance and metrics. Quantitative measures were dominant in this part of the questionnaire as they are easily assembled, calculated and compared. The decision as to which performance measure to use is entirely up to the business organisation as there is no universally accepted measure that is a best fit for all organisations. This section asked questions pertaining to the sector the business was in, the annual turnover, the age of the business, number of staff employed, bookkeeping and accounting practices and the registration status of the business.

What sector is your business in?

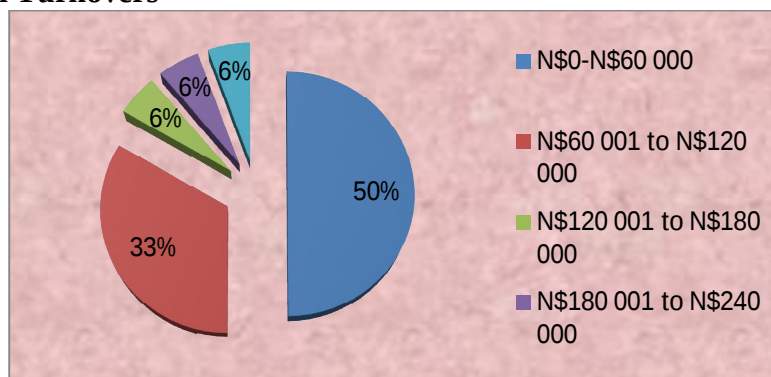
Figure 4.15 Business Sector



This question aimed to establish which sector the respondents' enterprise belonged to. It is clear from Figure 4.15 above that the majority of the respondents (50%) are engaged in trading. The service sector accounts for 33% of the respondents. The production and hand craft sectors account for 6% and 11% respectively. A combined 83% of the respondents in trade and services are engaged in activities that directly interact with customers. These businesses need to have high levels of satisfactory customer service. The respondents all agreed in question 14 that their customers were satisfied with the marketing efforts employed by the respondents namely the product itself, the price and quality of the product.

What is your annual turnover (sales)?

Figure 4.16 Annual Turnovers

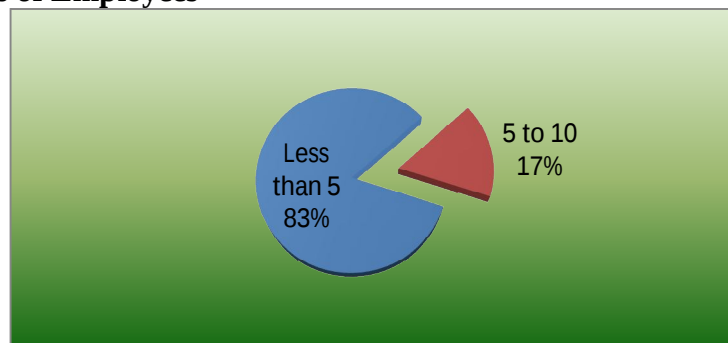


This question intended to ascertain the amount of sales per annum the businesses generated. The annual turnover (sales) of the respondents businesses showed that 50% of the respondents had annual sales of up to N\$60 000, followed by 33% who had between N\$60 001 to N\$120 000. The remaining 18% had annual turnovers of 6% each in the remaining 3 ranges of N\$120 0001 to N\$180 000,

N\$180 001 to N\$240 000 and more than N\$240 001. Sales figures provide an indication of the market performance of an organisation and its financial health. The majority of the businesses of the respondents fell in the lowest turnover category of the ranges provided. This indicates that there is room and potential for growth and improved performance. Further investigation would need to be done to ascertain the actual potential for growth and strategies to implement to achieve higher sales.

How many employees do you have in your business?

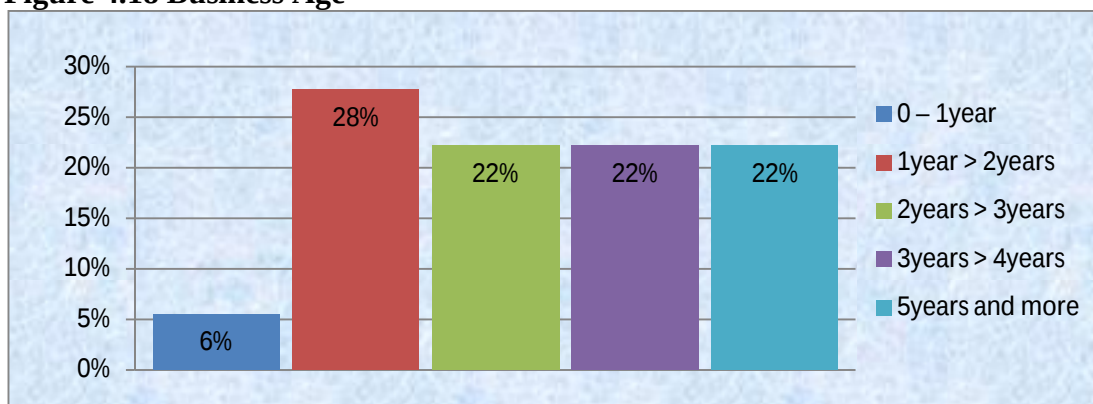
Figure 4.17 Numbers of Employees



This question was aimed at establishing the total number of employees employed within the respondents' businesses. None of the respondents had 11 or more employees. Thus, they were all in line with Ministry of Trade and Industry guidelines on the definition of a small to medium enterprise. The MTI (1997) definition stipulates that the maximum number of employees in a small to medium enterprise should be less than 10. The majority (83%) of the respondents had less than 5 employees working for them while the remainder (17%) had 5 to 10 employees. The literature reviewed revealed that the number of employees under the SME definition varies from country to country and also from one international organisation to another (Dababneh and Tukan, 2007).

How many years has your business been in operation?

Figure 4.18 Business Age

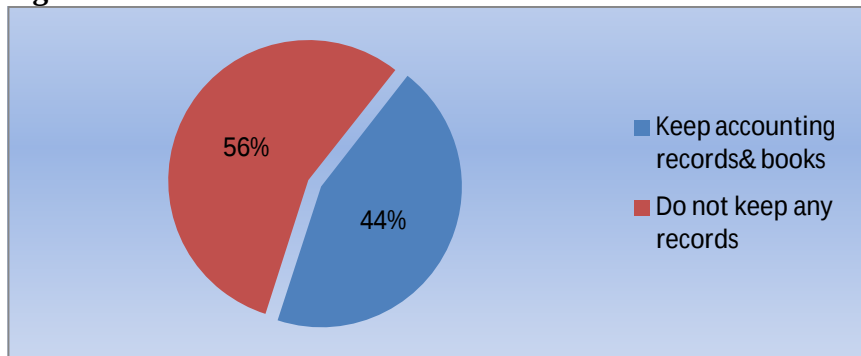


This question intended to ascertain the number of years the various businesses had been in operation. A collective 28% had been in operation between 1 - 2 years. These businesses had progressed past the initial start-up year stage of operations. Those who had been in business for 2 or more years had considerably more experience in the business area. These constituted of business ages of 2 to under 3 years (22%), 3 to under 4 years (22%) and 5 years and more (22%). Only 6% of the respondents had

been in business for under a year. Businesses which have been in operation for less than one year are still in the start-up phase which is usually difficult for many businesses to survive and thus many of them subsequently fail. The respondents with businesses that have been in operation for under a year need to research the potential reasons for high business failure for start-up businesses which include poor management, bad location, insufficient capital and lack of planning; and avoid these potential dangers (Basargekar, 2007).

Do you keep records of your business transactions?

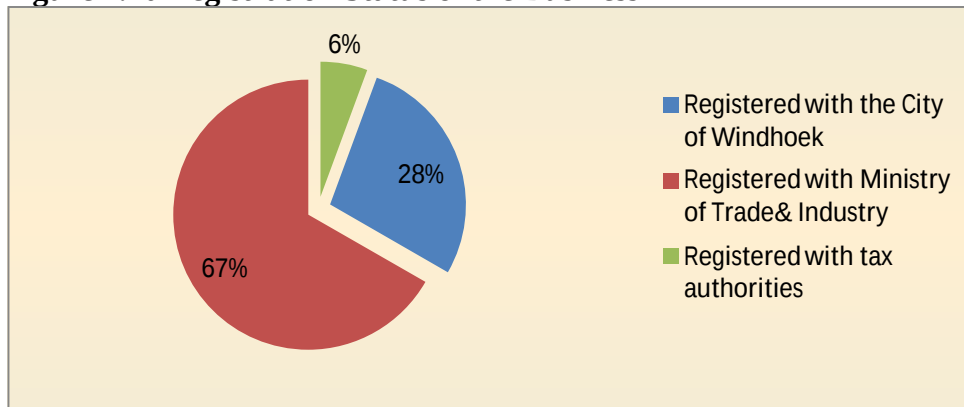
Figure 4.19 Business Transactions



This question aimed to establish whether the respondents maintained any form of records of their business transactions. While 44% revealed that they maintained accounting records books, a significantly high number (56%) of respondents failed to maintain any records of their business transactions. It was also discovered that none of the respondents had an accountant whom they employed to handle any official accounting documentation. Respondents who did maintain accounting records and books had the opportunity to track the performance of their enterprises through use of various financial techniques. For example, through cash flow analysis which assist to track the amount of cash a business brings in and amounts that it pays during a given time period. In addition financial statements such as income statements provide information about the financial health of the organisation at different stages of business growth. These techniques aid in identifying any business area that needs improvement and ultimately deciding which strategies to best employ.

What is your registration status?

Figure 4.20 Registration Status of the Business



The final question in the questionnaire aimed at establishing whether any of the respondents had any formal registration of their businesses either at the local authority, that is the City of Windhoek, or with their relevant line ministry, that is the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and lastly with any tax

authorities. All respondents were registered with one of the 3 above mentioned, but none were registered with both or all of the three. The majority of the respondents (67%) were registered with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. It would be expected that most of the respondents be registered with the ministry as it is the line ministry for local businesses. The remaining 28% of the respondents were registered with the City of Windhoek and 6% were registered with tax authorities. It is beneficial for the respondents to be in possession of an official business registration status as they stand to benefit from government grants and funding.

Cronbach's Alpha

The Cronbach's alpha was calculated in order to measure the internal consistency and scale reliability of the research instrument. As shown in Table 4.21 below a total of 10 variables were tested and produced a Cronbach's alpha result of 0.79. This indicated that the questionnaire had an acceptable degree of reliability and that the items in the questionnaire had an acceptable level of inter-item consistency.

Table 4.1 Cronbach's Alpha

Number of items	10
Number of cases	18
Reliability coefficient	$\alpha = 0.79$

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the Study

The key findings from the study are discussed under two main headings that is; findings from the literature review and findings from the primary research.

Findings from the Literature Review

The relevant literature to the study was reviewed in order to identify the challenges that affected the operations of women owned SMEs at the Katutura Incubation Centre and the impact on performance. A summary of the findings from the literature reviewed are presented below:

- Women start their own businesses as a survival strategy mainly driven by necessity and the need to economically empower themselves through employment and entrepreneurship (Zimmerer and Scarborough, 2008).
- Social expectations, norms, attitudes, and values concerning the typical role of women and family traditions act as potential socio-cultural and psychological barriers on women's expectations, entrepreneurial choices and outcomes (IKED, 2007).
- Fewer opportunities for education particularly at higher levels and high illiteracy numbers among women in some countries mean that women entrepreneurs lack a key component of human capital needed to realise growth of the entrepreneurial venture (Cheng, 2006).
- Entrepreneurs are poorly equipped to manage the business as the training they receive is less likely to be in areas relevant to entrepreneurship, including business and law disciplines (GEM, 2013).
- Education plays a major role in helping to cope with problems entrepreneurs confront as it provides a good background, particularly when it is related to the field of the venture (Hirsch and Peters, 2002).

- Family responsibilities take away a lot of time and energy from women, further, women entrepreneurs confronted with lack of support from family members find it difficult to concentrate on the enterprise (Badi and Badi, 2005).
- Worldwide access to finance is identified as either the number one or number two barrier to growth of women owned enterprises (Raihan, 2007).
- Networking and alliance building are important during the establishment, development and growth of business. However, women entrepreneurs are hesitant to be involved in information sharing (Tandon, 2007).
- Marketing of products is considered to be one of the weakest links of the entire production activity undertaken by women entrepreneurs (Basargekar, 2007).
- Managerial constraints arising from factors such as limited mobility, limited choice of ideas and low levels of production affect the future growth of the business (Basargekar, 2007).
- A lack of critical resources such as poor transportation systems, the collapse of supply systems, the decline in public services and administration severely affect business operations (Basargekar, 2007).
- The entrepreneurs' traits, attitude, skills and capabilities are the most influential factors related to the performance, growth and competitiveness of SMEs (Cheng, 2006).

Findings from the Primary Study

The findings from the study are presented below in line with the extent to which the research questions were answered.

- The majority of the respondents have educational levels of Grade 12 or below, with 44% in possession of Grade 11-12 while only 17% were in possession of tertiary qualifications that is, a Diploma.
- The findings revealed that the majority of respondents started their own businesses to be self-employed (72%), had family sizes of 5-6 persons (44%) and that 67% were not members of a business network.
- The majority of the respondents were engaged in the trade sector (50%), had less than 5 employees on their payroll (83%) and had been in operation for 1-2 years (28%).
- The majority of the respondents did not keep records of business transactions (56%) and 67% of the businesses were registered with the Ministry of Trade and Industry.
- Research showed that a collective 55% of the respondents disagreed that their gender was a disadvantage in their business operations.
- Research indicated that 67% of the respondents agreed that they possessed adequate skills and abilities to operate their businesses.
- Collectively 44% of the respondents disagreed that balancing time between work and family affected their ability to manage their businesses.
- The study reflected that a collective 56% of the respondents disagreed that the training and mentoring they received was invaluable to business success.
- Research showed that the respondents agreed (89%) that the infrastructure and public utilities provided were all adequate to operate their businesses.
- The research revealed that customer satisfaction was high as the respondents strongly agreed (83%) that their customers were satisfied with their product price, quality, distribution and overall marketing efforts.

- The study discovered that the respondents considered the following to be significant factors that impacted the performance and growth of their businesses: keeping abreast with technological and market place changes; attraction and retention of qualified employees; mobility; and access to formal credit and loans.

Conclusions

The primary findings assisted the researcher in answering the research questions that were formulated for this study. The study revealed that the majority of women entrepreneurs' started their own businesses as a means to provide a source of income through self-employment. The respondents had large families of more than five persons which put a strain on their income streams. In addition they also faced challenges of low educational qualifications, inadequate training and weak business records management. Respondents agreed that keeping abreast with technological and market place changes positively impacted business performance. Further, access to flexible financing options, attracting and retaining qualified personnel and the availability of satisfactory public infrastructure and utilities played an important role in improving business performance. To address the challenge of inadequate training, it would be advantageous to the respondents if training and mentoring was provided that was tailor made to their various areas of business in order to equip them with the necessary tools to enhance the performance of their businesses. To track business performance, the businesses would need establish proper records management in order to monitor and track their performance through the use of various performance measures suitable to each individual business.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded to existing and potential women entrepreneurs; relevant stakeholders and government institutions:

- The introduction of additional training centres around the country with a diverse curriculum to equip existing and potential entrepreneurs with the relevant know how that is in line with operating their businesses successfully.
- Develop mechanisms to assist women entrepreneurs increase confidence and accelerate experience in the world of business, such as through training and mentoring activities which assist women entrepreneurs to communicate, negotiate and manage relationships more effectively.
- Increasing market share and access to markets through trade fairs and other promotional activities which enable women entrepreneurs' to show case their products and services.
- Construction of more incubator premises for entrepreneurs in order to provide more accessible, reasonably priced, safe and suitable business premises.
- Banks, micro-financiers and other lenders of finance should extend their portfolios to small businesses and offer flexible and appropriate lending packages. Further, they should also provide a wider range of loan options, with variable interest rates, repayment terms and conditions which are based on the varying needs of the businesses.
- In order to deal with the different economic, socio-cultural and legal challenges women entrepreneurs face, they should form special interest groups to lobby government for policies that support women entrepreneurs.
- The government and relevant ministries should provide platforms through which women entrepreneurs can engage in dialogue with policy makers so that they can come up with SME friendly legislation and incentives such as decreasing tax rates or interest rates on loans for small businesses.

Areas for Further Research

- The inclusion of open ended questions to get respondents to divulge more information on responses to questions asked and raises other relevant issues affecting them.
- A similar study could be extended to the entire Khomas Region and Namibian population.
- The study could be extended to include several other challenges that affect the operations of women entrepreneurs which were not considered in this study.
- In order to obtain detailed information on the issue of gender influence on business operations, a research more focused on gender could be conducted to investigate the extent to which gender may or may not influence business operations of women entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

Conclusions from the study were highlighted which included challenges of low educational qualifications, inadequate training and inferior business records management. Strategies that would address these challenges and enhance the performance of women owned SMEs in Namibia were recommended to existing and potential entrepreneurs. Recommendations were also forwarded to banks, lenders of finance, government, policy administrators, and other relevant stakeholders. Areas of further research were suggested which included extending the research population to include the entire Khomas Region, the inclusion of other challenges not considered in the study and the inclusion of open ended questions to solicit more information from respondents.

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