

# **Female entrepreneurship and work-life balance mechanisms**

Michela Mari  
[michela.mari@uniroma2.it](mailto:michela.mari@uniroma2.it)

# Masculine connotations



Schumpeter (1934/1983, pp. 93–94) describes the entrepreneur as a **man** of daring and decisiveness who is motivated by “the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually, but not necessarily, also a dynasty,” which offers him a sense of **power** and **independence**.

He is driven by the will to conquer: “the **impulse to fight**, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but of success itself . . . Our type seeks out difficulties, changes in order to change, delights in ventures.” According to him, such men **are unusual**.

*“Many men can sing, but the Carusos are rare”*

# Masculinity vs Femininity words

## Masculinity words

Self-reliant  
Self-centered  
Assertive  
Strong personality  
Resolute  
Has leadership abilities  
Skilled at organizing, visionary  
Willing to take risks  
Seeks difficulty  
Optimistic  
Individualistic  
Competitive  
Wants to fight and conquer  
Wants to prove superiority  
Ambitious  
Achievement oriented

## Femininity words

Gentle  
Cautious  
Loyal  
Follower  
Dependent  
Sensitive to the needs of others  
Shy  
Subordinate  
Fatalist  
Avoids power  
Avoids struggle and competition  
Sympathetic  
Affectionate  
Understanding  
Compassionate

# GEM

- **Global**
- **Entrepreneurship**
- **Monitor**
- The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) project is an annual assessment of the entrepreneurial activity, aspirations and attitudes of individuals across a wide range of countries

<http://www.gemconsortium.org/What-is-GEM>

- **GEM is the largest ongoing study of entrepreneurial dynamics in the world.**

# Data (I)

---

“In 2014, more than 200 million women entrepreneurs are starting or running new businesses in 83 economies across the globe. An additional 128 million are running established businesses.”

GEM, 2015

# Data (II)

*Women Entrepreneurs (WE) as driver for economic development*

WE are not only creating jobs for themselves and their co-founders, but they also employ others.

“A projected 48 million female entrepreneurs and 64 million female business owners currently employ one or more people in their businesses. In addition, these women plan to grow their businesses” (GEM, 2013).

# Myths about female entrepreneurship

According to previous studies on female entrepreneurship:

- ❑ Women-owned firms are smaller than men-owned firms;
- ❑ Women entrepreneurs are generally younger than men and face greater difficulties in the access to credit;
- ❑ Educational levels are often the same for men and women entrepreneurs, but women are less likely to have a formal education in business or financial issues.
- ❑ Women entrepreneurs show lower performance than male entrepreneurs.



# **Research on Female Entrepreneurship: Most Relevant Themes**

1. Entrepreneurial characteristics
2. Financing
3. Management & Strategy
4. Performance
5. New research patterns

# Entrepreneurial Characteristics

- Why does an individual decide to become an entrepreneur?
  1. *pushed* into entrepreneurship because of a lack of (or dissatisfaction with) employment opportunities.
  2. *pulled* into the endeavor to exploit some business opportunities.
  3. The most traditionally cited 'pull factors' are *the need for achievement* and *the need for independence*.

# Financing

- New insights:
  1. The need to control for structural factors (e.g. age, sector, size)
  2. Homophily
  3. The study of the personality, experiences, beliefs and perceptions of loan officers.

# Management & Strategy

---

1. Papers that directly analyze the export activities of female entrepreneurs;
2. Papers focused on female entrepreneurs' growth orientation.

# Performance

---

- The academic discussion is around two issues:
  1. Performance measures
  1. Statistical analysis and sample size

# New streams of research

---

1. Female ethnicity
2. The role of women entrepreneurs in developing countries.

# **Family and work-life balance mechanisms**

Evidences from Italian female service firms

# The Service Sector in Italy

- In Italy, as in other advanced economies, the service sector plays a pivotal role.
- Since 1992, its contribution to Italian gross domestic product (GDP) has increased from 66.5% to 73.8% (Istat, 2014).
- The same long-term trend has also occurred for the number of employees increased from 61.8% to 69.4%.
- Strong *entrepreneurial dynamism* of the Italian service sector (Confcommercio, 2014).

# Service Sector and Women's Employment in Italy

- Although Italian women with a high level of education succeed in entering the labour market, they are more likely than men to have atypical contracts and problems in achieving high career levels (i.e. Glass Ceiling).
- Although women generally have higher probabilities of losing their jobs, they also show a higher likelihood of being absorbed into the service sector than men (Istat, 2014).
- The service sector in Italy has a key role in women's employment.
- In 2013, 69% (894,585) of Italian female firms were established in the service sector (Unioncamere, 2014).

# Work-life balance

**Work-life balance** is a broad concept including proper prioritizing between “work” (**career** and **ambition**) on one hand and “life” (**health**, **pleasure**, **leisure**, **family**) on the other hand.



# Work-family conflict

---

“Form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect.”

(Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p. 77)

# **Work-life balance mechanisms: some examples**

- Flexible working hours
- Part-time options
- Maternity/paternity leaves
- Life management services (gym membership, dry cleaning services, etc.)
- Childcare/eldercare services

# The Service Sector and Women's Employment

- As far as the difficulties in balancing work with family life are concerned, having children has a strong impact on the occupation rate of women in Italy.



- The lower possibilities for Italian women with children to remain in paid work seem to be related to two factors:
  - 1) **The weak development of welfare services:** e.g. the national coverage of early childcare services is very poor and does not reach even **10%** (Istat, 2010). It is far from the objectives of the Barcelona Summit (2002), requiring at least **33%**.
  - 2) **A weak division of domestic and caring work:** unequal division of family work between men and women, with a consequent sharp decrease in paid working hours for women.

# **Work-life balance and family embeddedness**

- High levels of family support seem to promote entrepreneurial persistence and risk-taking propensity.
- Family support can be strategic, moral and/or financial.

# Work-life balance mechanisms and female entrepreneurship

«female entrepreneurs do not view their businesses as separate economic entities but rather as endeavors entwined with other aspects of their lives – particularly their familial relationships and responsibilities» (Jennings and Brush, 2013)

Women entrepreneurs *de facto* ‘struggle to achieve work–family balance in practice’ and that entrepreneurship may not be a panacea for achieving such balance.

# Work-life balance mechanisms and female entrepreneurship

- Appropriate balance between domestic and business life remains a daily challenge for WVE in Italy.
- Women's choices and behaviours are influenced and constrained by institutional structures and normative environment.
- If a society mainly defines women through roles connected with family and household responsibilities, contextual values implicitly interpret women's entrepreneurship as **less desirable** and, as a result, provide **lower normative supports**.

# Objectives of the study

---

- To analyse how the family embeddedness and the availability of work–life balance mechanisms influence Italian female service firms' performance.
  
- Sample: 200 Italian female firms.

# Results (I)

- The analysis conducted shows that, unconventionally, the interviewed WE show a high degree of need for achievement and for independence.
- The support of the family in improving these firms' performance seems to be relegated to a marginal role.
- The family counts especially in terms of strategic support.

# Results (II)

## *Flexible working hours*

The desire to achieve professional satisfaction and good performance seems to push the interviewed entrepreneurs towards a stable and continuous presence in the company: more than 50% of the sample in fact worked more than 50 hours a week.

The entrepreneurs who use flexible schedules to reconcile work and life are those whose firms record lower performance.

# References

1. **Mari M.**, Poggesi S., De Vita L. (2016), “Family embeddedness and business performance: Evidences from women-owned firms”, *Management Decision*, vol. 52, n.2, forthcoming).
2. **Mari M.**, Poggesi S., De Vita L., «Female Entrepreneurship in Italy: An Empirical Investigation», in Diaz C., Brush C., Welter F., *Women’s Entrepreneurship in Global and Local Contexts*, Edward Elgar Publisher (forthcoming).
3. Poggesi S., **Mari M.**, De Vita L. , What's new in female entrepreneurship research? Answers from the literature, *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal* (forthcoming).
4. Poggesi S., **Mari M.**, De Vita L. (2015), Family and work-life balance mechanisms: what is their impact on the performance of Italian female service firms? *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 16(1): 43-53.
5. De Vita L., **Mari M.**, Poggesi S. (2014), Women entrepreneurs in and from developing countries: Evidences from the literature, *European Management Journal*, 32(3): 451-460.
6. De Vita L., **Mari M.**, Poggesi S. (2014), Le imprese femminili in Italia: i risultati di un'indagine esplorativa, *Impresa Progetto*, 2.
7. De Vita L., **Mari M.**, Poggesi S. (2012), “Female Entrepreneurship Research: A Classification of Results”. MILANO: The McGraw-Hill Companies, ISBN: 978-88-386-9088-4.