

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Preliminary investigation of Emirati women entrepreneurs in the UAE**

**Murat Sakir Erogul<sup>1\*</sup> and Declan McCrohan<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management, College of Business Sciences, Zayed University, P. O. Box 19282, Dubai/ United Arab Emirates.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor of Applied Economics, College of Business Sciences, Zayed University, P. O. Box 19282, Dubai/ United Arab Emirates.

Accepted 29 September 2008

This study presents an exploratory investigation of Emirati female entrepreneurs in the United Arab Emirates. In depth interviews with seventeen Emirati entrepreneurs were conducted exploring their motivation for establishing their own business as well as the level of support they received from within their personal social network. Findings indicate that the primary motivating factor driving Emirati women to start their own business is a desire for independence. In other words, their desire is to gain control over both their working and personal lives. Women who receive support from their male family members were less inhibited in starting their own business. Further research is needed with female non-entrepreneurs in order to better understand what barriers or inhibitors may be preventing them from becoming an entrepreneur. It is hoped that the findings of this paper will enable decision makers in the UAE to better formulate policy and support programs aimed at creating an environment more accepting of female Emirati entrepreneurs, empowering them to harness their entrepreneurial talents while at the same time satisfying the demands placed on them by both their families and society.

**Key words:** Women, Entrepreneurs, United Arab Emirates, motivation, social network support, male network partners.

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is limited empirical evidence on the reasons why United Arab Emirates (UAE) women choose to become entrepreneurs as well as the level of support they receive from within their social network. Given this important gap in the literature, it is hoped this paper will enable a better understanding of a range of important issues pertinent to female Emirati entrepreneurs and provide a foundation from which appropriate measures can be taken to address the current low levels of female entrepreneurial activity in the UAE.

This study explores some of the motivating factors driving Emirati women to develop their entrepreneurial capacity in the UAE, a country where the level of female entrepreneurial activity is relatively low compared to other countries with similar levels of GDP per capita such as Singapore, Finland, and Norway. This study also

examines the support Emirati women are receiving from within their personal social network. A personal network consists of all those persons with whom an entrepreneur has direct relations. Usually, these are persons the entrepreneur meets on a face-to-face basis, and obtains advice, service, and moral support. For example, family members, partners, suppliers, customers, and bankers may all be considered in a personal network (Hagan et al., 1990). This study is particularly interested in exploring male family members within Emirati women entrepreneur personal social networks and how their support, or lack of, may be inhibiting female Emiratis from starting their own business.

Within the UAE, women face a number of unique social norms which can make it difficult for them to become involved in entrepreneurial activity. The UAE society is strongly influenced by religion and culture, especially in respect to women's role in society. Even today, some conservative sections of society frown upon females starting-up and running their own business. This makes it

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [murat.erogul@zu.ac.ae](mailto:murat.erogul@zu.ac.ae). Tel.: +9714 2082 473, Fax: +9714 4672 258.

difficult for female Emiratis to harness their entrepreneurial talents, while at the same time meeting the demands placed on them by both their families and society. As Goffee and Scase (1985) suggest, female entrepreneurs differ from male entrepreneurs in that they tend to view their business as one component of a wider system of relationships including family, community and friends. In this respect, there is a tendency for female entrepreneurs to run their business in a way that does not interfere or cause conflict with the interests of their family (Carter and Cannon, 1992).

Despite the strong influence of religion and culture, the role of Emirati woman in the UAE society is undergoing significant changes with increasing numbers of female Emiratis joining the labour market. The 1985 census indicates 3,997 National women in the labour force. By 1995, this figure rose to 15,729 and in little over a 10 year period, according to the 2005 national census, the number has grown to 51,580 (United Arab Emirates Yearbook, 2006). Recently the minister of social affairs told the UN General Assembly in March 2008 that the number of females in the labour force had risen to 22.4% compared to 13% in 2004. Whereas the figure stood at 5% in 1980 (Abouzeid, 2008).

In parallel, the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women which was established in 2002 declared its strategy's purpose as to activate the role of women and their positive participation in eight major and significant fields, including education, the economy, information, social work, health, legislature and the environment, in addition to political and executive fields (United Arab Emirates Yearbook, 2004). A further important achievement of the UAE National Strategy for the Advancement of Women was for Businesswomen's Councils to be attached to each of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry throughout the UAE in order to assist women in business and to provide a link with public policy makers. This was done to influence policy makers and legislators and to encourage skilled groups to lend support and to act as advocates for the strategy. Through these efforts, greater numbers of women have been taking part in the labour force; yet still only a small number of these women are choosing to become entrepreneurs. Preiss and McCrohan (2006) found that 0.29% of women compared to 5.87% of men are involved with start up and young businesses in the UAE. In fact, they state that men are twenty times more likely than women to be involved in a start-up or young business venture. Given this, it is critical to better understand the factors that are motivating Emirati women to develop their entrepreneurial capacity as well as those factors which may be inhibiting it.

## Context

The limited international literature on women entrepreneurs primarily focuses on women in North America and

Europe. From these studies, three schools of thought on woman entrepreneurship research have come about. The first school of thought assumed that there were no differences between men and women. Men occupied the business world (Kyrö, 2001) and there was little study carried out on the ways in which women organized themselves and developed and managed their businesses (Allen and Truman, 1993). There has also been an almost complete neglect of the contribution that women have made to the creation and growth of a business, primarily in small-scale enterprises (Goffe and Scase, 1983). Women were expected to marry and have children. Women's jobs were part-time and secondary to their husbands in importance and wages. They were care takers of their families and supporters of their husbands. Women lived through their spouses' job experiences (Hagan et al., 1990).

Starting from the late 1970's, the success of women entrepreneurs have been studied and compared to those of males (Allen and Truman, 1993; Fabowale et al., 1995; Cromie, 1987; Watkins and Watkins, 1986). The research found that if women's behaviours do not reflect male traits then they are less likely to be considered entrepreneurial. Women's entrepreneurial identity in the first school of thought was non-existent and in the second school of thought her identity as an entrepreneur was purely compared to a man's's entrepreneurial identity.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were seen as unique individuals from a gender perspective (Kyrö, 2001). In this individual category, women begin their own businesses and become their own bosses. They attempted to make their dreams come true and developed their own ideas. Many women entrepreneurs were considered creative and exhibited a strong desire for action and getting things done (Yeager, 1999; Moore and Buttner, 1997; Tang, 1995). Although, in this third school of thought, women entrepreneur's identity is seen as a unique individual, the 'norm' of an entrepreneur is still that of a male and individuals engaging in entrepreneurial activities should exhibit male characteristics. Women are continually viewed as 'the other' in these male dominated reserves (Bruni et al., 2005).

Unfortunately, the literature on female entrepreneurs in the UAE is almost non-existent. There are only three studies which focus on female Emirati entrepreneurs. The first is Baud and Mahgoub (1999) who conducted interviews with female Emirati entrepreneurs, briefly exploring issues such as their personal background, ownership and establishment difficulties, management techniques and social network utilisation. The second study by Haan (2002) interviewed ten female Emiratis who were running small businesses with a special home business license in Dubai. Haan found that small home-based businesses are an effective way to encourage female entrepreneurial activity in the UAE as they required minimal capital and could be operated more easily in conjunction with a regular career. The third study by Haan (2004) presents its

findings on the start-up and operational constraints UAE women entrepreneurs face in small enterprises. Interestingly, Haan identifies the existence of two different segments in the women managed small enterprise sector in the UAE – 1) traditional activities including handicrafts and perfume mixing and 2) modern activities including knowledge and information based businesses. The traditional activities consisting of trading and simple manufacturing (e.g. perfume mixing, traditional cloth-making and various handicrafts), are often carried out by relatively elderly, modestly educated women entrepreneurs who operate from their homes. The modern activities refers to small businesses engaged in economic activities of more recent origin, making use of advanced information and communication techniques and up-to-date business practices, managed mostly by young, well-educated and more business-oriented UAE women entrepreneurs.

### **The role of Emirati women in UAE society**

Emirati women have contributed in the social, economic, and political history of the country from early on. According to Al Khateeb (1994), prior to the discovery of oil, the average woman was an active member of society. However, the discovery of oil has dampened the survival skills necessary for entrepreneurial development within the Emirati population and in particular has affected the lifestyle of the Emirati woman. Al Khateeb (1994) states that after the discovery of oil, most women no longer needed to work outside of their homes as most households could now afford housemaids and other help. While the increased oil wealth has dramatically improved the standard of living of most citizens of the UAE, whether it has improved the status of women is debatable.

In the UAE, the family is central to most aspects of a woman's life. Since women are responsible for maintaining the household, the primary concern for many women is the combined responsibility of work and family (Buttner and Moore, 1997b). However, in the traditional Arab environment, women should not work in an environment where they would mix with men. Due to several socio-cultural and legal-political factors, UAE women are limited in their career and occupational choices, and for this reason they less prefer to chose traditional male professions (Rhoudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2004). The remuneration packages offered to women are not equal to men's due to the belief that a woman will be supported by a father or husband as the responsibility of financially supporting the family is shouldered by men. As Sayed (2002) highlights, women are not required by society, tradition, or religion to contribute financially to the family. Compounding this situation, social status is measured by the amount of leisure time a woman has on her hands (Al Khateeb, 1994). Restrictions put on women's geographic mobility also create further limitations on the options that

are available to Emirati women in terms of acceptable employment (Baud and Mahgoub, 2001). The UAE, as any other country, cannot sustain long-term development unless it improves women's economic, social and political status. If the UAE government wants to maintain or improve its competitive position, it requires instigating the potential of its entire human capital.

A peculiarity of the UAE local society is that certain occupations, outside of the usual gender biases, are considered inappropriate or undesirable for Emiratis and, in some cases, more so for women (Nelson, 2004). Traditional and cultural constraints serve as a barrier to entry into various positions within the public and private sectors. For example, positions that require travelling over night cannot be accepted by most Emirati women or other requirements such as being exposed to large audiences, due to the fact that most families will not be comfortable with it and as a result will not allow it. Sayed (2002) found that the most common reason women terminated their employment was for family related reasons. Primarily, maternity leave legislation does not support the retention of women in the labour market. Work-place selection and availability is similarly constrained by the idea that it is unacceptable for Emirati women to work after sunset and this is supported by labour legislation (Sayed, 2002). For example, an Emirati woman can work in a hospital but is not required to perform shift work.

Despite the dominant cultural beliefs towards the role of Emirati women in the UAE, Sheikh Zayed, the late president of the UAE, believed that both men and women need to play their part in society. He recognized that in the past, a lack of education and development had prevented women from playing a more active role in many streams of society; hence he addressed the situation by saying,

"Women have the right to work everywhere. Islam affords to women their rightful status, and encourages them to work in all sectors, as long as they are afforded the appropriate respect. The basic role of women is the upbringing of children, but over and above that, we must offer opportunities to a woman who chooses to perform other functions. What women have achieved in the Emirates in only a short space of time makes me both happy and content. We sowed our seeds yesterday, and today the fruit has already begun to appear. We praise God for the role that women play in our society. It is clear that this role is beneficial for both present and future generations" (UAE Yearbook, 2004)".

The UAE government is now more committed to promoting the pivotal role of women in the social, economic and political development of UAE society. This has led to a strong increase in the Emirati female participation rate in the labour force - women's presence in the public sector comprises 41.5% of all employees in education, 35% in the health sector and 20% in social affairs.

Furthermore, women account for nearly 28% of civil servants in twenty-four Federal Ministries, while women total 57% of nationals working in the banking and financial services sector (United Arab Emirates Yearbook, 2006). Moreover, the number of female Emiratis completing their studies has risen drastically to the point where Emirati women now represent 76.8% of total enrolment in UAE national universities (AlKassadi, 2000).

In the last ten years, Emirati women have reached and overtaken the educative level of men. There is a steady growth in the number of women with Masters and PhD degrees in the UAE (UAE Yearbook, 2008). However, Emirati women still prefer to choose educative specialties considered feminine, which means that, although their education level is similar to or higher than Emirati men, they are having more difficulties matching their skill set with the technical needs of the labour market. There is a clear mismatch, and several reasons why the ratio of female to male participation in the workforce is relatively low. Firstly, the number of males between the ages of 15 and 65 years (2.12 million in 2005) far exceeds the female figure (838,941), mainly because foreign workers are predominantly male; secondly, some companies restrict the numbers of females employed; thirdly, UAE society is patriarchal and the changing of traditional views concerning a woman's place in the family is a slow process; fourthly, although women are well-represented at every educational level, it is no longer enough for women to gain a qualification – it is vital that what women choose to do in tertiary education should be relevant to the needs of the ever more technologically challenging workplace. In addition, many UAE women cease working after marriage and bearing children, partly because of an insufficiency of childcare centres and partly because maternal care is considered to be more beneficial for their children (UAE Yearbook, 2008). This situation causes a range of problems for women such as the difficulties in creating their own spaces for professional activities; and confrontation with the power of a patriarchal society that does not offer opportunities for their total development. Hence, gender inequality remains an issue requiring renewed focus to ensure that individual success stories are no longer exceptional but the norm.

Our exploratory research is guided by the following key questions:

- i) What are the factors motivating Emirati women to become involved in entrepreneurship.
- ii) What type of support do Emirati women receive from their social network, especially from male family members

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There is a large pool of literature of various methodologies and approaches that are appropriate to the category of qualitative

research. These range from case study, interviewing, visual methods, politics and ethics to inter-pretive analysis. As Becker (1998) states, the qualitative researcher is a 'bricoleur' or maker of quilts who uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand. Since the topic of woman entrepreneurship is a complex phenomenon due to the unique individual's personal history and dreams for the future (Holmquist and Sundin, 1991), the qualitative method, allows us to better understand the chosen subject.

In qualitative research, Creswell (2003) argues that researchers use the literature in a manner consistent with the assumption of learning from the participant, and not prescribing the questions that need to be answered from the researcher's standpoint. He continues to explain that one of the chief reasons to conduct qualitative study is that there may not be much written about the topic or the population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on their ideas. From this standpoint, this paper generates qualitative data through interaction with a number of female Emirati entrepreneurs. It aims to learn and interpret from the entrepreneur's own experiences, perceptions and expectations and seeks to understand the motivations and experiences of Emirati women entrepreneurs and the meaning they make of these experiences.

The paper seeks to explore Emirati women's social network dynamics, in particular placing emphasis on the support provided by their male family members. From the numerous numbers of methods to collect and analyse data this project selects the questionnaire and interview method. It is said that interviewing is one of the main methods used to understand entrepreneur's behaviours (Luthans et al., 1995). The interview method is aligned with the assumptions and objectives of the research project which is to gain an insight into the world of others which is women entrepreneurs in the UAE. To enable participants to think and then discuss issues of importance, a questionnaire followed by an in-depth interview was used.

### Sample selection

The selection of respondents for the empirical research was done through referrals. The questionnaire was delivered in-person to seventeen Emirati women entrepreneurs. The questionnaire was carried out in both Arabic and English. From the seventeen questionnaires, fifteen of them were completed in English and two of them in Arabic. If the Arabic questionnaire was completed then it was translated into English. The Emirati cultural beliefs are based on traditional Islamic values. Therefore, male and female interaction is usually a difficult situation among non-family members. Yet, access to Emirati women entrepreneurs in most cases was granted with ease as sampling was primarily based on a referral system. After each interview we asked the participant to recommend us an Emirati female entrepreneur to interview. Yet, it was very difficult and nearly impossible to interview some Emirati women who came from more conservative backgrounds. Overall, the authors were able to meet with eleven of the women face-to-face, five of them through telephone conversations, and one entrepreneur through Instant Messaging. The authors were able to conduct the meetings with all of the English speaking entrepreneurs alone without a translator; and were accompanied with an Arabic speaking translator to two interviews. All the interviews were recorded and translated into English. The women entrepreneurs are identified by pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

### Survey analysis

The categories for analysis are in two parts:

**Table 1.** Respondents' age

Age (years)	% of Respondents
18 to 34	82
35 to 44	18

**Table 2.** Respondents' level of education.

Completion of Education Level	% of Respondents
High School	6
Bachelors Degree	82
Masters Degree	12

i) The first section consists of background data of the business and the personal data of the women entrepreneurs. Our aim was to collect general information about the respondent's business including: the type of business, the age of the business, the ownership format, the number of employees, the resources required to create the company and whether it was a formal or informal business. We also wanted to collect a range of personal data including information on the age, marital status, family composition, education, and previous work experience of the respondent.

ii) In the second section, questions were developed for the purpose of gaining insight into the respondent's experience as an entrepreneur. Questions were asked on the respondent's motivation for opening their business, difficulties in opening and managing the business, their perception of success, the amount of support received by the respondent from their social network, and also their perception of how men regard women entrepreneurs in the UAE.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables 1 and 2 present a breakdown of the respondent's profile. Most of the respondents were relatively young with more than 80% of them are less than 35 years old. Just over half of the respondents were married and had children, and more than 80% of them had completed some form of post secondary education.

The types of businesses that the women ran included beauty saloon's, tailoring shops, retail outlets, jewellery stores, boutiques, event planning, interior designing, landscaping, and private day care. All but one of the women had complete ownership of their business with one of them partnering with her father. 41% of the businesses were home-based and only 71% of the business were registered. Home-based business owners were asked for the reasons why they were not registered. Some of the answers they provided are below:

There are a lot of expenses when we want to legalize our business. To register the company we have to pay high taxes when we are not competitive. We have to pay for the social security of the employees and these costs are high. I prefer to work at home to avoid some expenses. My family are my employees.

This was the only way I could convince my husband.

### Motivating factors driving female Emirati entrepreneurs

For some women, the motivation for entrepreneurship arises from positive opportunities while for others it is negative conditions that motivates them (Langenfeld, 1999). Within the UAE, the traditional push and pull factors are leading some women to become entrepreneurs; however, there are also a number of changes within society that are enabling women to play a more active role in the economy. Issues such as 'Emiratisation' which is the nationalization of the workforce, increasing education opportunities for women as well as a softening in the conservative beliefs regarding women's role in the society have all led to increased opportunities for women to pursue a career in entrepreneurship.

The respondents' motivation for starting their own business is presented in Table 3. The main motivating factors driving Emirati women to become entrepreneurs include a desire to be independent, a desire to contribute to society as well as a desire to develop their own capabilities through self improvement and professional development. The respondents' desire to be independent could be a reflection of the restricted lifestyle many Emirati women face in the UAE. It is still uncommon for Emirati women to go anywhere alone, and they often require a male family member chaperone if going out in public. It could also reflect restrictions they faced in their previous employment; a common trait amongst entrepreneurs is their dislike of the restrictive work parameters traditional employment places on them.

As Maitha stated:

I wanted to be independent after working for 19 years as a teacher for the Ministry of Education. I can now finish the majority of my work in the morning and spend the rest of the day with my family.

Rana stated:

I was not happy with my previous work. I was controlled in the place I worked for, and limited. My ideas and creativity were not appreciated.

Rima stated:

After high school my husband didn't allow me to work or to complete my study, so I got really bored and felt worthless. I wanted to use the free time I have. The respondents' strong desire to contribute to society is not surprising giving the collectivist society that exists in the UAE. Respondents believe that by starting their own business they can contribute to the economic development of their country in a manner which contrasts quite starkly from the more traditional view that they should

**Table 3.** Motivations for starting a business.

Motivation	% of Respondents
Independence	24
Contribute to Society	19
Self Improvement	13
Professional Development	11
Job Dissatisfaction	9
Income	7
Standard of Living	6
Employment	6
Other	5
Total	100

solely contribute to the country by being a good wife and mother.

Interestingly, in this study, a desire for a higher level of income was not a main motivating factor for female Emiratis wishing to become an entrepreneur. This runs in stark contrast to a large pool of research which found women usually become entrepreneurs to overcome financial difficulties. For such women, social problems and life circumstances such as poverty and/or lack of job opportunities usually forced them to help financially support their family (Inman, 2000; Holmquist and Sundin, 1991; Langenfeld, 1999; Rani, 1996; Allen and Truman, 1993).

Research has also identified a number of more positive factors driving women to become entrepreneurs including a desire for greater career advancement, an opportunity to increase earnings, the chance to fulfil a dream and to challenge and embark on an adventure with a desire to do something new, and finally the opportunity to be more independent and flexible (Holmquist and Sundin, 1991; Langenfeld, 1999; Rani, 1996; Allen and Truman, 1993). Our study found that besides independence, the respondents wanted to also realize their personal talents and capabilities along with a desire to develop and use their knowledge acquired through their education.

In some circumstances, men can play the role of encouraging women to start running their own business through negative forms of behaviour such as the husband being unemployed or irresponsible and not financially supporting his family. These negative circumstances can force women to take on the responsibility of supporting their family.

As Aisha explained:

When I got divorced I had to look after my children and myself. My ex -husband left all the responsibility on my shoulders. So I had to think of a way to support my family.

The role of men is important in motivating female entrepreneurs and encouraging women to start or run their

own business. Men can persuade and provide initiative to the woman to become an entrepreneur. However, in some circumstances a lack of support, as was the case with Rima's husband in our study, can become a motivating factor in a woman's decision to start running her own business.

### Support

The support and encouragement of family members usually has a positive influence on women entrepreneurs. It has been found that women entrepreneurs tend to rely more on informal social ties for information and referrals. In studies made in different continents about women entrepreneurship, it was revealed that women tend to have personal connections, such as family and friends who support them in difficulties concerning life and entrepreneurship (Inman, 2000).

Inman (2000) states that through their relationships with individuals, groups, or organizations, women entrepreneurs can gain help, information, skills, knowledge, encouragement, and money to start and operate their business. However, in the UAE, a common perception is that the social network of an Emirati woman, particularly the male family members, limits the woman's ability to tap into their social network structure in order to facilitate their business operations. The lack of support from husbands can be seen in the direct personal network contact, which is a direct tie that woman entrepreneurs have in order to establish relations, get support and advice concerning entrepreneurial issues among other matters (Hagan et al., 1990). It is this support from their close ties that is vital to make the necessary connections in the wider social context. In absence of support UAE women struggle in making connections to outside sources. In general, the men in their lives are the bridge to establish and maintain weak tie relationships.

Haan (2004) states that women entrepreneurs in his study seemed to assume that the lack of family support is a frequent reason for keeping women from starting their own business. Similarly, Baud and Mahgoub (2001) asked what constraints needed to be removed to increase the number of businesses run by women - 27% of the women mentioned that the family needed to be more supportive of women's attempts to start and run a business. Parallel to this, a smaller group of entrepreneurs mentioned that husbands needed to be made more aware of the opportunities women have available to them today. This may make husband's more comfortable in giving permission to their wife to start her own business.

The majority of the respondents questioned in this study, indicated that they did receive positive support from their male family members which supports the significant role that male network partners have in facilitating women entrepreneurs' success.

As Rana stated:

My father, he encouraged me to leave my governmental job. He helped me look for courses to study abroad. He also sent me to study in Lebanon and France with his financial support. Finally, after opening my business, he helped me decorate the place and assured me that I can count on him if I needed any financial help.

Umalya stated:

My husband was very supportive. We live in a rented home. I asked him if I can use the guest room where he meets his friends. He said it's ok. Now he can't accept any visitors at home but he doesn't mind.

Maryam stated:

My husband is supportive through his financial and motivational help. My husband joins me in my business trips which allow me to spend more time at my business. I like it when he accompanies me in such visits.

Inman (2000) suggests that spousal support - financial, emotional, and practical - could affect the decision for women to start their own businesses. Findings by Lupinacci (1998), describe that most of the married women's current spouses are very supportive emotionally regarding their wife's entrepreneurial activities, and when necessary, they also give financial support.

As Umalya stated:

My husband supports me emotionally and always tells me that things are going to work out. Knowing that he is with me in this makes me feel more secure.

Eman said:

My husband supports me and takes care of the children. I couldn't do it without his help.

Lupinacci (1998) concluded that for married women entrepreneurs, it is crucial to have the support of their husband because this determines greatly the success of their entrepreneurial career. Some of the respondent's husbands were also involved in their wife's business and provided physical and mental assistance for them.

As Sara stated:

My husband is my main supporter because he always gives me his time by travelling with me to import our products or visit my other branches in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Ajman (other Emirates in the UAE).

Given the positive responses regarding support from their male family members provided by the respondents in this study, this raises an important question – Is the support provided by male family members to female Emirati entrepreneurs, the impetus that allows them to flourish as

an entrepreneur? In other words, is lack of support from male family members preventing other female Emiratis from becoming entrepreneurs? As this study only interviewed female entrepreneurs this is a question that can only be answered by researching female Emirati non-entrepreneurs. This is clearly an important issue and one which requires further research.

Spouses that do not provide support can contribute to dissatisfaction and higher levels of conflict between entrepreneurs and their partners (Barling and Suchet, 1986). One of the respondents interviewed however, did not have a supportive spouse, but was still able to become an entrepreneur.

As Rima stated:

My husband was a major difficulty. He was against the idea of a working woman. It was impossible for him to listen. I went and bought all the needed equipment and he couldn't say no after that, but I know that he didn't like it at all. He was looking at reasons to stop me. Having my work at home helped him a lot. But he started asking me to not allow some of my customers to come in because he didn't like them.

Rima's experience illustrates that it is possible for an Emirati woman to become an entrepreneur with little support from her spouse. Although Rima did not receive support from her husband, she was able to reorganise her network members to facilitate new activities through the provision of support from her sisters.

As Rima stated:

My sisters are my main supporters. They encouraged me to face my husband and make him listen. Plus they brought my first customers.

How Rima was able to do this and the behaviour that she used in order to achieve her goals could be an important avenue of research that needs further exploration. This would lead to a better understanding of how Emirati women can overcome the lack of support they may receive from their male family members and go on to become successful entrepreneurs.

The respondents were also asked who their main supporter(s) were in starting up their business and in which ways did they provide support. Table 4 presents the main support providers from within the entrepreneurs' network. It illustrates the importance of the provision of family support to female entrepreneurs in the UAE. Eight of the women stated their families were their main supporters and three of them said their husbands were their main supporter. Another three mentioned they received no support at all, two mentioned themselves and one said her main support came from other professionals. The answers varied in terms of how they were supported and included: helping out with new ideas and bringing in new

**Table 4.** Primary provider of support to female Emirati entrepreneurs.

Primary Support Provider	Percentage of respondents
Family	55
Self Motivation	18
Husband	27
Total	100

customers, emotional encouragement, provision of facilities, experience and networks, financial help, and assistance with travel and administrative matters.

To better understand how their work and family responsibilities complement one another, respondents were asked to choose if they viewed their work and family responsibilities as interfering or supporting each other. 35% of the women noted that it was an interference, 47% saw it as a support mechanism and 18% of them said it varied.

As Rima states:

When I first started my husband warned me if it affected my family I should stop immediately. So my family comes first. If there is any family condition no matter how big or small it is, I don't work that day at all.

Rana said:

They are interference because I work with brides on weekends when everybody is off work. Working with brides takes all day. So, I don't get to share any activities with my family. Therefore, I try to be involved in more family activities during the week.

Tarifa said:

It's difficult. I have not reached a balance yet! I still spend more time with family rather than my business. I am still seeking a balance.

Maitha said:

I do all my work in the mornings so that I can use the rest of the day for my family. I think every job has it's time, so no I cannot say they are an interference or support between them.

Understandably, married women tended to see the relationship between family and work as more of an interference compared to single women. However, clearly most of the respondents saw providing balance between their dual roles of worker and wife/mother as an important issue. This is not surprising given the importance that is placed on a woman's role as a wife and a mother in UAE. Undoubtedly, this is one of the key barriers facing female

Emirati entrepreneurs – the challenge of balancing their role as a wife and a mother in conjunction with their desire to be a successful entrepreneur. This multiplicity of roles is also addressed in the UAE constitution which guarantees the principles of social justice for all in accordance with the precepts of Islam and stipulates that "...laws shall be preserved and formulated in accordance to women's nature and capabilities as mothers and wives and as workers" (The UAE Yearbook, 2006).

## Conclusion

This paper has been a preliminary investigation of the motivating factors driving female Emiratis to start their own business as well as the level of support they receive from within their social network, in particular from male family members. Our research found, the primary motivating factor driving Emirati women to start their own business is a desire for independence which could be a reflection of the many constraints that they face across many aspects of their day to day lives in the UAE. Other important motivating factors included a desire to contribute to the development of their country; this is not surprising given the collectivistic dimension which exists in the roots of UAE society, as well as a desire to realize their personal talents and capabilities. These traits are more often found in an individualistic society. This illustrates the difficult conflict facing Emirati women who wish to contribute to their society through development of their personal talents and capabilities yet society values their contribution primarily in their role as a wife and a mother. The primary concern for many women is the combined responsibility of work and family and in many cases; this creates the need to play a multiplicity of roles – wife, mother and worker/entrepreneur. Therefore, the roles of women and men may need to be re-examined to enable female Emiratis to better contribute to the economic development of their country.

Our research also found that women entrepreneurs consider their families as important support providers; however, conflicts often occur between work and family due to time constraints. Emirati women are being asked to burden responsibilities both at home and at work with limited support from their male family members. Our research found it is important for women entrepreneurs in the UAE to have emotional support and encouragement from their family members. In fact, anecdotal evidence supplied by a number of respondents indicated that lack of support from male family members could be a significant challenge preventing female Emiratis from starting their own business. Further research targeting female Emirati non-entrepreneurs is strongly encouraged in order to determine if this is in fact a key challenge Emirati women must overcome in order to successfully pursue a career in entrepreneurship.

## REFERENCES

Abouzeid R (2008). Emirati women an economic force. The National Business, Wednesday, May 14 [www.thenational.ae]. pp 8-9.



- Al Kassadi A (2000). Women's position on the work and educational map. UAE: Ministry of Labour Publication.
- Al Khateeb M (1994). Beyond the Mystic. John Hopkins University. In Sayed, S. (2002) Women, politics and development in the United Arab Emirates, Emirates Collection, Zayed University Library.
- Allen, S, Truman C (1993). Women in Business- Perspectives in Women Entrepreneur, Routledge Publications, London.
- Barling J, Suchet M (1986). Employed Mothers: Inter-role Conflict, Spouse Support and Marital Functioning, J. Occupational Behaviour, taken from Rogers (1998). 7: 167-178.
- Barnet RC, Baruch GK (1986). Multiple Role Quality, Multiple Role Involvement, and Psychological Well being in Middle Life Women, J. Personality and Social Psychol. 51: 578-585.
- Baud I, Mahgoub HK (1999). Towards increasing national female participation in the labour force: research report 2, June, Centre for Labour Market Research and Information, Tanmia, Dubai.
- Baud I, Mahgoub HK (2001). Enhancing national women's employment opportunities: the challenges and the possibilities, in employment and employability in a small oil economy: the UAE, by Abdelkarim A. (Ed.), Netherlands: Shaker Publishing.
- Becker HS (1998). Tricks of the trade: how to think of your research while doing it. University of Chicago Press.
- Bruni A, Gherardi S, Poggio B (2005). Gender and Entrepreneurship: An ethnographical Approach. Routledge, London.
- Brush CG (1997). Women-owned businesses: obstacles and opportunities, Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship, 2(1):1-24.
- Buttner EH, Moore DP (1997a). Women Entrepreneurs Moving Beyond the Glass Ceiling, Sage Publications.
- Buttner EH, Moore DP (1997b). Women's Organizational Exodus to Entrepreneurship: Self-Reported Motivations and Correlates with Success, J.Small Bus. Manage. 34-46.
- Carter S, Cannon T (1992). Women as Entrepreneurs. London: Academic Press.
- Coleman S (2004). Access to debt capital for women- and minority-owned small firms: Does educational attainment have an impact?, J.Developmental Entrepreneurship, 9(2):127-143.
- Creswell JW (2003) Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cromie S (1987). The aptitudes of aspiring male and female entrepreneurs. Chapter 2 in Small Business Development: Some Current Issues. Edited by K. O'Neill, R. Bhambri, T. Faulkner and T. Cannon. England: Gower Publishing Company Limited.
- Dumas C (1992). Integrating The daughter into family business management, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 16(4):41-55.
- Fabowale L, Orser B, Riding A (1995). Gender, structural factors, and credit terms between Canadian small businesses and financial institutions. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 19(4):41-65.
- Goffe R, Scase R (1983) Business Ownership and Women Subordination: a Preliminary Study of Female Proprietors, London Business School and University of Kent at Canterbury. Women in Business III. Massachusetts.
- Goffe R, Scase R (1985). Women in Charge: The Experiences of Female Entrepreneurs, London.
- Haan HC (2002). Report on a survey of UAE nationals in micro, small and medium enterprises, Policy Research Paper No.6, March, Centre for Labour Market Research and Information, Dubai, UAE: Tanmia/CLMRI.
- Haan HC (2004). Small Enterprises: Women Entrepreneurs in the UAE, Labour Market Study No. 19, Centre for Labour Market Research and Information, Dubai, UAE: Tanmia/CLMRI.
- Hagan O, Rivchun C, Sexton D (1990). Women-Owned Businesses, Praeger Publishers. New York.
- Holmquist C, Sundin E (1991). The growth of women entrepreneurship - push or pull factors, Ingår i Recent Research in Entrepreneurship. Ed by Davies L G and Gibb A. A. (Avebury; Aldershot).
- Inman K (2000). Women Resources in Business Start-up, A Study of Black and White women Entrepreneur, Garland Publishing, New York.
- Kyrö P (2001). The reality of Women Entrepreneurship- Questioning Men's criteria for Success, Presented in Babson Conference Jönköping Summer 2001.
- Lakshmi N (1998). Development of Women Entrepreneurship in India. Discovery, Publishing House.
- Langenfeld C (1999). The Female Entrepreneurs and their Perceptions of Start-up Experience, UMI dissertations Services, Michigan.
- Lupinacci AS (1998). Women and Business Ownership in Dallas, Texas. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Marlow S (2002). Women and self-employment: a part of or apart from theoretical construct?, The Int. J. Entrepreneurship and Innovation, 3(2):83-91.
- Nelson C (2004). UAE National women at work in the private sector: conditions and constraints, Centre for Labour Market Research and Information, Tanmia, Dubai.
- Preiss K, McCrohan D (2006). GEM Global Summary 2006: United Arab Emirates. London School of Economic and Babson.
- Rani VF (1996)., *Women Entrepreneurs*. A.P.H. Publishing, New Delhi.
- Rhoudi-Fahimi F, Moghadam VM (2004). Empowering women, developing society: female education in the Middle East and North Africa, Population Reference Bureau. [Taken 24/02/2007] <http://www.prb.org/pdf/EmpoweringWomeninMENA.pdf>
- Sayed S (2002). Women, politics and development in the United Arab Emirates, Special Emirates Collection, Zayed University.
- Tang J (1995). Differences in the process of self-employment among Whites, Blacks and Asians: The case of scientists and engineers. Sociological Perspectives, 38(2):273-309.
- United Arab Emirates Ministry of Information and Culture (2004). UAE Yearbook 2004, Abu Dhabi, p.20.
- United Arab Emirates Ministry of Information and Culture (2006). UAE Yearbook 2006, Abu Dhabi, p. 239.
- United Arab Emirates Ministry of Information and Culture (2008). UAE Yearbook 2008, Abu Dhabi, 246-250.
- Watkins, J.M., and Watkins, D (1986). The female entrepreneur: Her background and determinants of Business choice--some British data. Chapter 12 in The Survival of the Small Firm: The Economics of survival and Entrepreneurship. Edited by James Curran, John Stanworth and David Watkins. England: Publishing Company Limited.
- Yeager MA (1999). Women in Business, Volume 1, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.