

Social Risk in Female Entrepreneurship

[Roshni Narendran](#)

The aim of this chapter is to introduce an alternate means of conceptualising risk, as well as, intercede the concept to the situation of Indian female entrepreneurs. In most contexts, risk tends to be associated with finance (Buttner & Rosen 1988; Jianonkoplos & Bernasek 1998; Verheul & Thurik 2001); however, other intricacies hindering the growth of female entrepreneurship need to be considered. This aspect is trivial when studies are conducted in a culturally rich country like India. When analysing the situation of women in India, researchers refer to the Manusmriti to highlight the social stigma against women in India. Manusmriti is ‘an encyclopædic treatise in verse on human conduct, morality and sacred obligations’ (Bayly 1999, p. 14). The Manusmriti evinced that a woman is not fit to be independent, and she is dependent on either on her father, husband or son (Manusmriti translated by Wendy Doniger 1992, p. 197). This questions women’s role in the society hence leading to the assumption that there are many society based constraints. In the paper titled, ‘Social Risk and Female Entrepreneurs in Kerala, India – A Preliminary assessment’ the authors analysed the response from 40 female entrepreneurs and derived 5 categories from the qualitative analysis. These concepts are highlighted as society based constraints and named as Social Risk.

The concept ‘social risk’ is widely used in risk analysis research. Burris (2000, p. S122) defined social risk as, ‘the danger that an individual will be socially or economically penalized should he or she become identified with an expensive, disfavoured, or feared medical condition’. Albeit, Burris’ (2000) definition is related to medical conditions like AIDS, ‘feared medical condition’, i.e. these individuals are socially and economically penalised. This could be apparent among Indian women as Indian women are said to have been victims of physical and emotional harassments (Karuppappan & Puthisigamani 2007; Holmes, Sadana & Rath 2010). Hence, it is to be assumed that Indian women could be experiencing negative emotions to successfully running a business, as it hinders their social connections. Studies like Gustafson (1998) and Kahan, Braman, Gastil, Slovic and Mertz (2005), highlighted different perception of fear among women than in men, this is because women are more susceptible to rape, and other forms of sexual assault. In India, in public places, women are vulnerable to being sexually assaulted (The Times of India 2011 cited in Narendran 2011; Razdan 2011). There are many newspaper articles, revealing issues related to eve-teasing. ‘Eve teasing’ refers to and ranges from verbal sexual taunting and bodily touching to physical assaults on women (Rogers 2008, p. 79) in India. Similar behaviour will create negative emotional effects, which will adversely affect entrepreneurial activities.

The following model is developed to demonstrate the link between social risk and barriers to female entrepreneurship in Kerala, India (see Figure 1).

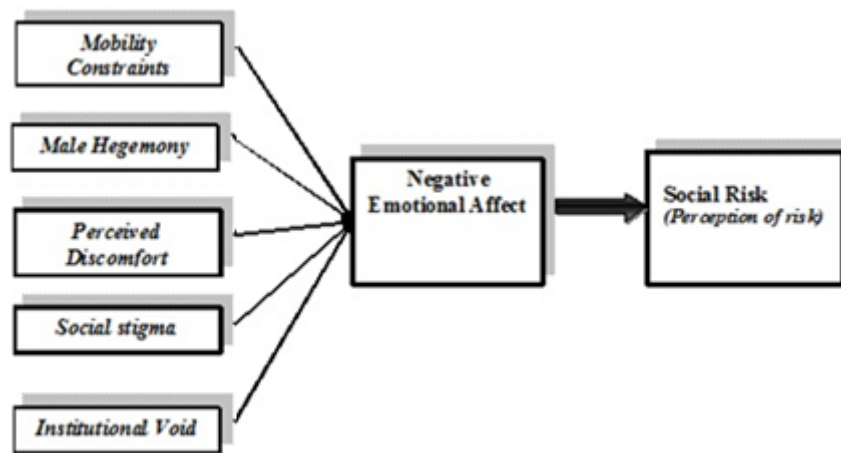


Figure 1. Conceptual model of social risk (Narendran 2012)

This model is developed from the responses of 40 female entrepreneurs in Kerala, India. Kerala is considered as a suitable platform to develop a preliminary assessment. The state of Kerala has gained international recognition for its societal development parameters, such as infant mortality rates, which were more or less comparable to the advanced countries (Subrahmanian 1990; Parameswaran 2007). Even though the state of Kerala is an attractive platform, it is also renowned for its official red tape (Navaprabha 2000) and harassment against women (The Hindu 2006, 2007).

The non-monetary issues from the qualitative analysis were classified into five categories: mobility constraints, male hegemony, perceived discomfort, social stigma and institutional void; mobility constraints are associated with the fear of sexual harassment in public places. Sexual harassment is considered to be a controlling gesture to diminish a woman's power (Wilson & Thompson 2001). Such behaviour reinforces male hegemony in Indian society. This leads to the third concept of 'Perceived discomfort'. It is called 'perceived discomfort' because women highlighted hindrance in doing business with men, and however, there were no evidence of experiencing any harm. For instance, one of the entrepreneurs felt uncomfortable buying raw materials from a storage facility with only male employees. To avoid the situation, this female entrepreneur asks a friend or a family member to accompany her. Similar responses were evident in the study. Simultaneously, this can be presumed to be a social stigma. Perceived discomfort or afraid of being alone with men is a flow-on-effect of the social conceptions instilled in the minds. Lastly, institutional void in this context is the problem faced with government procedures. In addition, to experiencing problems with government procedures, female entrepreneurs also stated fear of approaching the officials without a male companion. Female entrepreneurs may have expressed institutional void because of their fear of approaching the officials.

These five factors were identified to create negative emotions, which lead to social risk. Based on the conclusion, the five variables are interlinked with societal perceptions. The above mentioned model can further be modified with a more in-depth analysis. Hence, this warrants a further investigation of the concept of social risk.

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Note: This is an abstraction of the article: Narendran, R 2012, 'Social Risk and Female Entrepreneurs in Kerala, India: A Preliminary Assessment', *The Business Review*, Cambridge, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 51-58.