

The Experience of Applying a Narrative Research Approach With Female Entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The area of female entrepreneurship has recently received considerable attention, which is dominated by quantitative studies. However, the narrative methodology approach offers the opportunity to gain in-depth, rich information beyond the boundaries of a question-response type of interview. Therefore, the article puts forward researching female entrepreneurship through the application of the narrative design. Fourteen women were purposively approached and interviewed. Findings revealed that researcher characteristics including understanding and respecting others, insider, outsider perspectives, and multiple identities as critical attributes of success in conducting narrative interviews. In addition, interview skills such as building trust and language were crucial to sustaining such characteristics when bringing together the stories of the respondent. Therefore, narrative design can be identified as an essential method that produces new knowledge, permitting, in this case, to better understand the complexity of women's experiences.

Keywords

female entrepreneurship, qualitative research, narrative design, women experience

Introduction

Regardless of the growth of female participation in entrepreneurial activities (Cardella et al., 2020), female entrepreneurship is still an under-researched area that received attention only recently. Many entrepreneurship studies have created identities of female entrepreneurs as subordinates and underperformers (Jayawarna et al., 2020; Marlow & McAdam, 2013) often linked with how women decisively do not expand or develop their businesses due to prioritized family responsibilities (Cardella et al., 2020). This identity often contradicts the neoclassical theory, which explains that entrepreneurs are active individuals who seek profitable opportunities rather than prioritize family responsibilities. In this setting, female entrepreneurship researchers have been made to re-evaluate dominant economic theories to show the strong relationship between gender structure and entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Marlow 2012; Ahl & Nelson, 2010; Hughes et al., 2012). Furthermore, knowledge related to the female entrepreneurship area is mainly constructed through quantitative studies (Ojong et al., 2021, Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2015; Henry, Foss, Fayolle, et al., 2015). There is little qualitative information about why the entrepreneur is involved or about what they add to the entrepreneurial venture. Thus, it is clear that these studies were affected negatively by

methodological predispositions as many of them were quantitative and did not explore the real feelings, experiences, and behavior of research participants deeply.

This research aims to explore women's experiences in constructing their identities. In this regard, researchers argue that quantitative techniques are, in general, less effective in understanding contexts and processes (Gummeson, 2000; Hammersley, 2008). As such, quantitative methods are not sufficient to explain the complexity of many essential aspects of people and communities such as Sri Lankan female entrepreneurs, identities, cultural norms, and the social elements that possibly impact these women's entrepreneurial decisions. These concerns cannot be meaningfully reduced to numbers. Therefore, a qualitative approach is more suitable for this study. Furthermore, this study is based on how female entrepreneurs place themselves in their stories, attach themselves to specific issues, use and combine texts and materials to articulate and make themselves and their actions, including entrepreneurial activities, meaningful. Therefore, the narrative

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