



RESEARCH PAPER

Home-Based Entrepreneurship: An Extensive Review of Literature

¹Fatima Sarfraz, ²Ume Laila and ³Shahjahan Sarfraz Raja

1. MS Scholar, Department of Government & Public Policy, School of Social Sciences & Humanities, National University of Science & Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan
2. Associate Professor, Department of Government & Public Policy, School of Social Sciences & Humanities, National University of Science & Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of Management Sciences, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: fatimasarfrazraja@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of home-based entrepreneurship in enhancing family and community well-being in a rural district facing limited formal employment opportunities, gendered social norms, and economic instability. Despite facing constraints like limited market access, patriarchal control, and financial exclusion, participants reported improved household income, increased decision-making power, and stronger community ties. These outcomes align with Empowerment Theory and Socio-Economic Development Theory, illustrating how localized informal enterprise can drive social and psychological transformation. The study also highlights unintended consequences, including emotional burden and household tensions, revealing the complex dynamics of empowerment in conservative contexts. By focusing on rural area, the research addresses a significant gap in entrepreneurship literature and offers policy insights for localized support systems. It advocates for recognition of home-based businesses as legitimate economic actors and calls for interventions that foster sustainable, inclusive rural development.

KEYWORDS Home-Based Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, Informal Economy, Qualitative Research, Gender Norms

Introduction

Pakistan's rural economy, which employs almost 63% of Pakistan's population, persists with additional obstacles such as underemployment, productivity deficits, seasonal work, and lack of industrial diversification (Begum, 2022). Rural area District in Punjab has been facing some of these rural agrarian challenges in the guise of reliance on subsistence farming and low industrial output and has been afflicted with gender-based discrimination when it comes to employment opportunities (Khan et al., 2024). Furthermore, the industry contributes to less than 20% of the GDP, which suggests losing economic benefits in supporting overpopulated areas (Bhatti & Fazal, 2020). The employment statistics by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in 2021 showcase that greater than one third of the rural youth are not engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET), this figure being more astonishing for women. On the other hand, unemployment among young women is well above average (Andlib & Zafar, 2023).

Due to the lack of opportunities afforded by formal employment, women in rural regions are opting for home-based entrepreneurship to help improve the financially stagnant household economy (Dadheech & Sharma, 2023; Nakhaei, 2021). Ahmed (2021) state that Pakistan has a female-dominated home-based workforce, comprising 76% of the workers, and most of them are from rural Punjab and Sindh. These women partake in embroidery, food processing, livestock rearing, and tailoring (Jabeen et al., 2020; Zafar

et al., 2024). In rural area, Ekpodilè-Domingo (2024) noted a surge in women-led informal enterprises as a coping and resilience strategy to adapt to the restricted availability of wage employment. Though these enterprises are often low in funds, they possess remarkable flexibility, suggesting considerable latent potential for socio-economic development if strategically nurtured (Chukwu & Kasztelnik, 2021).

Rural women gain increased visibility in local economies from customised home-based enterprises (Philip & Williams, 2019; Sarfraz et al., 2022). As informally employed women entrepreneurs, they are supported by research indicating that they are typically able to assist household income levels to increase by double (Muhammad et al., 2021). Initiatives such as the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) have shown that microcredit alongside training results in a 33% increase in income among recipients while simultaneously enhancing household decision-making power amongst women (Khan et al., 2020). Moreover, the home-based business model assists in socio-economic inclusion by incorporating marginalised women into value chains and fostering community networking, which assists in breaking intergenerational poverty traps (Modarresi et al., 2016). In addition, their informal status results in societal acknowledgement of their economic contribution being extremely limited (Dadheech & Sharma, 2023; Lent et al., 2019). Although considering Khan et al. (2024) perspective, it is among the lower-rung provincial gender development indices, it is also considered a positive outlier for community-based recovery initiatives like women's producer groups. This makes it an instrumental area of focus for exploring the impact of informal entrepreneurship on conventional developmental barriers towards rural livelihoods.

In the cultural aspect, home-based entrepreneurship is quite compatible with the Pakistani Rural area community's expectations, especially on gender and familial expectations of work (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Kanonchyk & Mirza, 2023). As with many other countries, the cultural norms continue to hinder women from seeking employment outside the household; hence, most women entrepreneurs in rural Pakistan operate within the household (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Sheikh et al., 2021). This paved the way for women to become entrepreneurs in these areas, particularly focusing on textiles, embroidery products, and small food businesses (Anil et al., 2023). The community usually appreciates such businesses, as they contribute to developing local economies since they promote production by independent producers and mutual dependence between community members (Esteves et al., 2021; Tariq, 2025). Also, local social support from family, friends, and community groups is essential among rural businesspeople (Cogan et al., 2022). Home-based businesses receive social capital support in rural area, and since such communities are close-knit, scaling becomes easier (Appleton, 2020). It helped those family and community connections that were critical to their business. Such social support minimises the problems of lack of money and organisational support, as most of the ventures can only expect little formal backing from rural Pakistan's authoritative and legal entities (Rizvi et al., 2023).

Despite growing attention to entrepreneurship in Pakistan, significant gaps remain in the academic literature, particularly in the context of rural, gendered, and district-specific experiences. (Raza & Khan, 2025). Much of the existing entrepreneurship research in Pakistan is skewed toward urban centers such as Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad (Haque, 2015; Hasan, 2020). The studies tend to emphasize high-growth tech ventures or SME performance in formal sectors (Ireta Sanchez, 2023). As a result, the lived realities of rural entrepreneurs, especially those operating from home within conservative socio-cultural contexts, are underrepresented (Birdthistle et al., 2022; Semkunde et al., 2022). The urban-centric bias also leads to policy generalizations that

may not be applicable in rural area (Cattaneo et al., 2022). Development frameworks fail to account for infrastructure deficiencies, limited market access, and deeply entrenched gender norms in places like these rural areas, thereby ignoring their unique entrepreneurial ecosystems (Khan et al., 2024; Sheikh et al., 2021).

There is a notable absence of qualitative case studies that deeply explore the socio-economic fabric of smaller rural districts. Most national-level data aggregates rural insights without unpacking district-level differences, even though rural Pakistan is highly heterogeneous (Joachim et al., 2024). A recent review by Khan et al. (2024) noted that rural area, despite being among the transitional districts with rising female labour force participation through home-based work, is largely absent in empirical research. Furthermore, existing survey instruments often miss the nuances of informal entrepreneurship in culturally conservative environments where women do not self-identify as "entrepreneurs" due to stigma or unfamiliarity with formal terminology. As such, valuable data remains uncaptured, reinforcing invisibility in policy and academic discourse.

Another critical gap lies in the insufficient investigation of the gender-specific drivers behind rural entrepreneurship. While several national surveys address women's economic activity broadly, they rarely explore the why and how of women's entrepreneurial choices in rural settings (Jabeen et al., 2020). For instance, most rural women engage in home-based businesses not out of passion or profit motive but necessity, such as supplementing household income or responding to spousal job insecurity (Dadheech & Sharma, 2023; Iram & Bilal, 2023). Additionally, studies often underexplore the interplay between social norms, mobility restrictions, caregiving burdens, and limited digital literacy, all of which disproportionately hinder women's participation and growth in business (Chintu & Rathod, 2024).

While economic outputs such as income and savings are commonly used to assess the success of rural businesses, the broader social impacts, like enhanced agency, inter-household cooperation, and community trust, are rarely analysed (Gobezie, 2024). Social capital, a critical asset in tightly knit rural communities, is both a facilitator and a product of successful home-based enterprises (Khan et al., 2021). Research by Khan et al. (2024) highlighted that women entrepreneurs in rural area often rely on informal peer networks for information, raw materials, and moral support. Many positive externalities, such as an increase in school enrolments, improvement in community engagement, or a significant decrease in domestic violence rates due to women's contribution to the economy, are rarely captured or fully explored (Hughes et al., 2015; Lenze & Klasen, 2017). This has emerged as one of the most serious blind spots, especially with more and more development interventions focusing on holistic community-driven model growth (Mansuri & Rao, 2003). It is with these that we will come up with a better granulation of how home-based businesses change the social dynamics of rural area towards policy design (Malik et al., 2024).

Finally, there is a pressing need for granular, context-specific data to inform rural development policies that go beyond national averages. Rural area, with its evolving entrepreneurial landscape and relatively higher female education levels compared to other rural districts, presents a compelling case for tailored research (Khan et al., 2024). Yet most existing reports, such as those from UNDP and NRSP, aggregate findings across multiple districts, diluting specific regional learnings. Context-specific data could guide interventions around training, microfinance, transport infrastructure, or e-commerce access, particularly critical in the post-COVID economy (Scutariu et al., 2021). As the

government looks toward localized development via schemes, district-level insights can bridge the gap between policy intent and implementation (Cheema et al., 2024; Mahmood et al., 2023).

The slow growth of Pakistan's formal job market, compounded by rural-urban disparities, has forced a growing share of the rural population to rely on informal, home-based ventures for survival (Muhammad & Ximei, 2022). According to a study by Khan et al. (2022) and Hanif et al. (2017), 80% of women in Punjab's rural belts are engaged in non-registered businesses. These ventures lack formal contracts, legal protection, or access to state-led economic incentives, placing them in a precarious position. In rural areas, this trend is amplified by structural unemployment, with over 60% of rural women aged 25-45 having no access to salaried work, leading them to self-initiate informal enterprises like livestock trading or handicrafts (Jabeen et al., 2020).

Undoubtedly, balancing abductive responsibilities with entrepreneurial aspirations presents great hurdles for women in rural area (McGowan et al., 2012; Semkunde et al., 2022). The average time-use survey reports revealed that rural women in Pakistan work on average 12 to 14 hours each day in terms of unpaid care activities, which does not leave adequate time to develop productive enterprises (Iqbal et al., 2020). Such dual responsibilities often lead to stagnation in entrepreneurial activities. For example, research indicates that 48% of women-owned businesses fail within two years due to the amount of work, which could be unsustainable, in addition to a lack of support from family or the community. Further studies indicate that social variables inhibit business activities from going beyond home (Noor & Isa, 2020; Umar et al., 2022).

While some macro-level analyses of women's entrepreneurship exist, few delve into district-specific rural contexts. Most national surveys and academic works focus on urban or peri-urban women entrepreneurs, neglecting the distinctive challenges of rural districts. (Ahmad, 2013; Khan et al., 2024). There is a pressing need for localized data that examines intersecting variables, such as poverty, gender norms, and geographical access, to accurately design support systems for rural entrepreneurship (Semkunde et al., 2022). Moreover, existing development interventions often generalize rural area, to some extent address rural area's particular socio-cultural dynamics and economic potential (Khan et al., 2024; Kobra et al., 2025; Raja et al., 2024). This lack of disaggregated analysis hinders targeted policymaking, perpetuating cycles of exclusion for rural women entrepreneurs.

Literature Review

Rural area: A Case of Rural Innovation

The rural area vividly illustrates how women innovate in rural Pakistan within sociocultural constraints to the benefit of economic opportunity (Ekpodilè-Domingo, 2024). With almost no formal employment opportunities and agriculture losing its relevance, families, particularly women, turned to home-based businesses for income generation (Chukwu & Kasztelnik, 2021). These businesses comprise reselling clothing items, producing pickles and spices, manufacturing soaps, stitching, and offering beauty services, nearly all within or very near the home (Anil et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2024). The rural area is different in how it creatively balances economic need with sociocultural acceptance (Tariq, 2025). Unlike urban women who may pursue external employment, women generate income without leaving the domestic sphere, thus retaining societal approval (Kanonchyk & Mirza, 2023). Cultural norms such as purdah and izzat restrict women's public visibility, but these same norms make home-based work socially

palatable (Gohar & Abrar, 2022). Families, especially in joint household structures, often support these activities, either passively through space-sharing or actively by contributing labour and spreading word-of-mouth (Philip & Williams, 2019). Male family members may assist with procurement or delivery, while women manage production and customer interaction within safe boundaries (Afzal et al., 2024). While this limits autonomy, it also allows collective household resilience (Sarfraz et al., 2022). The growth of such businesses in rural area signals a shift in how rural communities perceive women's economic roles, not as a threat, but as a household asset operating within honourable constraints (Khan, 2021; Khan et al., 2024). This negotiated model of rural entrepreneurship deserves closer academic and policy attention (Lone & Rashid, 2024; Modarresi et al., 2016).

Motivations for Home-Based Entrepreneurship in Rural area

Financial Necessity and Survival

In rural area, financial necessity is a primary driver for women entering home-based entrepreneurship. Many families face gendered poverty, where men's earnings, often from seasonal labour, daily wage work, or migration, are unstable and insufficient (Dadheech & Sharma, 2023; Muhammad & Ximei, 2022). Sudden household shocks such as medical emergencies, inflation, or crop failure further strain limited budgets (Iqbal et al., 2021; Jabbar et al., 2023). In this context, women step into income-generating roles not as a matter of ambition, but as a strategy for survival (Sadiq et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship becomes a form of economic resilience, allowing women to supplement family income without disrupting existing gender norms (Khan et al., 2024). Simple enterprises like tailoring, food preparation, or livestock care require minimal capital and can begin quickly in response to crisis (Jabeen et al., 2020; Lone & Rashid, 2024). These small efforts provide stability during economic downturns, ensuring food, education, or healthcare for children (Muhammad et al., 2021). The urgency of survival gives women the social license to work, transforming informal business from a taboo into a family necessity in rural area (Modarresi et al., 2016; Ekpodilè-Domingo, 2024).

Social and Religious Norms

Social and religious norms in rural areas shape the types of work women are allowed to pursue. *Purdah* (female seclusion) limits women's physical mobility and restricts their engagement with public markets or male strangers (Gohar & Abrar, 2022; Sheikh et al., 2021). However, these same restrictions create a cultural opening for home-based entrepreneurship, which is viewed as modest, safe, and honourable (Anil et al., 2023; Kanonchuk & Mirza, 2023). Working from home enables women to maintain privacy, fulfill domestic expectations, and avoid violating family or religious codes (Tariq, 2025). As long as the work remains confined to the home and does not compromise a family's *izzat* (honour), it is more likely to gain acceptance (Khan et al., 2024). Consequently, tailoring, food sales, and beauty services flourish within this moral framework (Esteves et al., 2021). Far from being passive recipients of norms, women in rural area strategically operate within them, using social approval as a shield to negotiate small freedoms (Khan, 2021; Philip & Williams, 2019). Their work is not seen as rebellion but to support the family in ways that preserve respectability and religious observance (Afzal et al., 2024).

Domestic Compatibility and Family Roles

One of the strongest motivations for women in rural area to engage in home-based work is its compatibility with their domestic responsibilities. Rural women are expected to handle all household tasks, cooking, cleaning, childcare, and elder care, leaving little time or freedom for external employment (Alam et al., 2023; Javaid et al., 2025). Home-based entrepreneurship allows them to blend productive and reproductive roles without challenging traditional expectations (Sarfraz et al., 2022). Flexible working hours enable them to operate their businesses during available windows, early mornings, afternoons, or weekends, without neglecting family duties (Muhammad et al., 2023; Raja et al., 2021). This arrangement offers not only logistical convenience but also mental security, as women remain physically close to their children and within the household (Ge et al., 2022). Furthermore, this strategy also receives family endorsement, especially from husbands and in-laws who would otherwise disapprove of working outside (Iqbal et al., 2021). This opportunity of contributing economically without upsetting family roles makes such ventures even more appealing (Naz & Bogenhold, 2016). This equilibrium between responsibility and independence is what renders entrepreneurship viable and satisfying for many (Khan et al., 2024).

Role of Peer Learning and Imitation

Peer influence acts as a strong motivating element for women to set up home-based enterprises. Within a context where formal training and institutional outreach are limited, neighbours, cousins and friends serve as informal mentors and role models (Appleton, 2020; Cogan et al., 2022). For example, women learn through observation rather than by media or NGOs, as they witness the successful efforts of others in similar environments (Rizvi et al., 2023). That motivates others to do the same when a nearby woman starts earning through tailoring, for instance, or by selling snacks (Tariq, 2025). Peer imitation in this is very useful in lessening fear and uncertainty so that entrepreneurship may appear something possible (Philip and Williams, 2019). Ideas, materials and even basic skills are often exchanged through casual conversations, visits or familial ties (Anil et al., 2023). Furthermore, other's observations about social approval regarding a peer's enterprise motivate others to engage in it since they believe their efforts will be regarded (Khan et al., 2021). This ripple effect, driven by trust, visibility, and relatability, creates a grassroots ecosystem of female entrepreneurship that evolves organically in rural area's tight-knit communities (Khan et al., 2024; Modarresi et al., 2016).

Challenges and Structural Barriers to Empowerment

Credit and Resource Exclusion

One of the major barriers to women's empowerment in rural area is their exclusion from formal financial systems. Most women engaged in home-based entrepreneurship lack access to bank accounts, credit facilities, or digital payment tools (Dadheech & Sharma, 2023). Their businesses remain undocumented and informal, making them ineligible for microfinance or government support schemes (Muhammad & Ximei, 2022). Even when financial institutions offer loans, women face collateral requirements they cannot meet, such as property ownership or guarantors (Ajonbadi et al., 2024). Documentation hurdles, lack of identity verification, and absence of business registration further block their entry into structured finance systems (Huq et al., 2022). This forces many to depend on male relatives for transactions or rely on informal

borrowing, often at exploitative interest rates (Desai, 2021). Without formal credit, scaling or diversifying a business becomes nearly impossible. Moreover, this financial exclusion perpetuates dependency, undermining the very empowerment that entrepreneurship is meant to foster (Sadiq et al., 2024). Structural reforms must address these limitations to unlock women's full economic potential in rural communities.

Patriarchal Control

Patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's autonomy in both subtle and overt ways. Many women must seek male permission, from husbands, fathers, or brothers, before starting a business, purchasing materials, or interacting with customers (Jaim, 2022). In extended families, in-laws often act as gatekeepers, monitoring women's activities and discouraging initiatives perceived as "too independent" (Huq & Arenius, 2024). Elder women, especially mothers-in-law, may criticise home-based work that draws attention or challenges traditional domestic roles (Mashapure et al., 2022). This social control is rooted in concerns over family honour (izzat) and public exposure, which are deeply ingrained in rural culture (Althalathini et al., 2022). Even if a woman is successful, visibility in the market or public praise can provoke backlash from conservative family members (Wu et al., 2019). These barriers are particularly hard to negotiate because they are emotionally tied to relationships and reputation. As a result, many women practice self-censorship, limiting their ambitions to avoid familial conflict. This internalised control stifles innovation and slowed the pace of true empowerment (Guney-Frahm, 2018).

Double Workload and Physical Strain

Women entrepreneurs in rural areas experience a double burden of responsibilities, juggling unpaid domestic duties with the demands of home-based work (Kamberidou, 2020). Despite earning income, they are still expected to fulfil traditional roles, cooking, cleaning, childcare, and elder care, without support or reduction in workload (Ameen et al., 2023). This constant balancing act leads to chronic fatigue, stress, and health issues, especially when rest and recreation are culturally deprioritized for women (Osunmuyiwa & Ahlborg, 2022). Unlike men, who typically separate work from home, women operate in overlapping spaces, making it difficult to mentally disengage or recover. The "unpaid-paid" exhaustion they face often goes unrecognised because their entrepreneurial efforts are informal and undervalued (Naz & Bogenhold, 2016). Over time, this physical and emotional strain can lead to burnout, limiting their ability to expand or sustain their businesses. Additionally, the lack of supportive infrastructure, such as shared childcare or flexible domestic arrangements, means women must constantly sacrifice personal well-being to maintain both household and economic contributions (Rashid & Ratten, 2020).

Market Access Limitations

Limited market access is a persistent challenge for home-based women entrepreneurs in rural area. Most of them rely on neighbourhood customers or known contacts, which significantly restricts their sales volume and profitability (Beta et al., 2022). Without transportation or safe mobility options, expanding to nearby markets or towns becomes impractical. Cultural norms further discourage women from promoting their services outside the home (Naz & Bogenhold, 2016). In addition, many lack digital literacy, they are unfamiliar with online marketing, mobile payments, or e-commerce platforms that could dramatically increase their reach (Guney-Frahm, 2018). As a result,

their businesses remain stagnant and hyper-local. Some women depend on male relatives to deliver goods or advertise through word-of-mouth, which limits independence. The absence of exposure to new customers, technologies, and platforms prevents these women from scaling their ventures. Without targeted training and infrastructural support, their potential remains untapped, reinforcing the cycle of informal, under-resourced entrepreneurship (Eisalo et al., 2024). Bridging this access gap is crucial for realising inclusive rural development.

Unintended Consequences: Negative Feedback of Empowerment

Household Tensions

While empowerment through home-based entrepreneurship often improves household livelihoods, it can also trigger internal family tensions. As women begin to assert more autonomy, making decisions, handling finances, or gaining social recognition, some men feel their traditional role is threatened (Huq & Arenius, 2024; Wolf & Frese, 2018). This may result in emotional distancing, verbal conflicts, or even covert resistance. Disputes often arise over control of the money earned, especially when women want to save or invest independently (Jaim, 2022). Time becomes another point of friction, with men or elders complaining that entrepreneurial duties interfere with domestic responsibilities (Naz & Bogenhold, 2016). Visibility in the community, whether from customer interaction or public praise, can also lead to accusations of neglecting home duties or seeking unnecessary attention (Bagheri et al., 2023). These tensions reveal the deep discomfort many families feel with shifting gender dynamics. In such cases, empowerment becomes a source of strain rather than harmony, showing that without parallel changes in household attitudes, economic agency alone is not enough (Hazarika & Goswami, 2016).

Emotional and Identity Overload

Empowerment often brings psychological rewards, but it can also result in emotional burden and identity confusion. Women in rural area frequently struggle with guilt for not fully meeting family expectations, even while contributing economically (Kamberidou, 2020). The constant balancing act between business tasks and caregiving responsibilities leads to feelings of isolation, fatigue, and self-doubt (Ameen et al., 2023). Many lack emotional support systems and suffer in silence, fearing criticism from both family and society. As they take on multiple roles, mother, wife, entrepreneur, the weight of high expectations without adequate support can result in burnout. Some women experience identity conflict, unsure of whether they are truly empowered or simply overworked (Osunmuyiwa & Ahlborg, 2022). Their informal status means there are no workplace rights, peer groups, or stress outlets. Without safe spaces for emotional expression or role negotiation, empowerment can feel hollow. In such cases, the psychological toll overshadows the economic benefits, reminding us that true empowerment requires mental well-being, not just income (Rashid & Ratten, 2020).

Moral Policing and Reputation Risk

In conservative rural contexts like rural area, women's visibility in economic roles often invites moral scrutiny and social policing. Success in business can lead to unwanted gossip, with neighbours or relatives questioning a woman's motives or morality. Comments like "she's getting too bold" or "she's trying to act like a man" reflect a deep-rooted discomfort with female autonomy (Mashapure et al., 2022). Public interaction

with male customers or increased mobility, even if within business contexts, may be misinterpreted as immodest behaviour (Althalathini et al., 2022). This honour-based backlash not only damages a woman's reputation but can also lead to family disputes or pressure to stop working. In extreme cases, women are accused of chasing fame or money at the cost of dignity (Guney-Frahm, 2018). The fear of being labelled "too independent" deters many from expanding their enterprises. This policing reinforces patriarchal control and discourages other women from following in their footsteps, effectively undermining the wider social impact of female-led entrepreneurship (Wu et al., 2019).

Economic Exploitation

Despite contributing significantly to household income, many home-based women entrepreneurs are subjected to economic exploitation. Their labour is often undervalued or underpaid, especially when selling to middlemen or within informal networks where pricing power is minimal (Desai, 2021). Because they operate outside the formal economy, they lack access to legal contracts, enforceable agreements, or consumer protections. In some cases, customers delay payments, exploit trust-based relationships, or negotiate unfair prices, knowing the woman cannot legally contest (Naz & Bogenhold, 2016). Additionally, without business registration or licenses, women cannot access fair trade platforms, government subsidies, or small business protections (Ajonbadi et al., 2024). The informal nature of their work also means they are excluded from pension schemes, health insurance, or maternity benefits. Over time, this economic precarity erodes confidence and limits scalability. What appears to be empowerment on the surface may conceal a deeper cycle of exploitation, where women work hard but remain trapped in low-reward, high-risk environments with limited long-term gains (Beta et al., 2022).

Theoretical Foundation

The Socio-Economic Development Theory and Empowerment Theory are built on several assumptions defining their perceptions of home-based business among rural.

These theories presuppose those exercising economic activities at the household level results in income security and improved quality of life among families (Muhammad et al., 2021; Verma & Mourya, 2024). These frameworks centre and promote localised informal micro-enterprise thinking that posits that people can attain independence financially without having to give up family responsibilities and other conventional obligations to society (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013; Huq et al., 2022). Besides, they indicate that entrepreneurship is a sustainable prospect for subordinate people (women in particular) who rarely find employment in developed countries (Ahmad, 2016; Moral et al., 2024). Both theories rely on the belief that the welfare of an entire nation can be enhanced if all its people start practices that render economical practices as well as lifting themselves from the pool of dependents so that every head of a household produces food for the family as well as take care of other needs as well as bonding the community economically (Habeeb et al., 2021; Sadiq et al., 2024). With these assumptions in mind, motivation for home-based entrepreneurship in rural area can be regarded as a simple function of the desire for more employment opportunities that allow for flexibility in how they can be pursued in parallel with a family's responsibilities (Senapati & Ojha, 2019). This flexibility supports the theory that people will be attracted to entrepreneurial activities, which do not encroach into conventional tasks. For women, for instance, this kind of entrepreneurship empowers them to gain income-generating activities within the

cultural norms set to them; hence, it empowers the principles of these theories (Kantor, 2003; Eisalo et al., 2024).

Others include limited resources, restricted market opportunities, as well as time constraints by family obligations regarding these theoretical frameworks. The Socio-Economic Development Theory admits that, for such, hurdles are well understood in the informal and home-based economic activity scenarios. However, removing these barriers does not only provide economic sustainability but also capacity (Verma, 2023). Empowerment Theory argues that this resilience (born from navigating challenges) enhances individuals' self-worth and agency, reinforcing the assumption that empowerment is an ongoing process driven by overcoming hardships (Dadheech & Sharma, 2023). For home-based entrepreneurs, especially in rural settings, each challenge overcome becomes a step toward personal and financial empowerment, contributing to a stronger sense of control and fulfilment (Muhammad & Ximei, 2022). Community well-being is central to both theories, which suggest that individual empowerment and income security contribute positively to the community's collective health. The increase in household income from home-based entrepreneurship has resulted in more expenditures on nutrition, education, and housing, and the subsequent raising of community standards. Empowerment Theory assumes that gains by individuals are not only confined to the household but rather propagate into strengthening the community and building social capital (Atta & Shah, 2020). This means that the benefits accruing to one household will have a ripple effect on an entire rural community in rural area. In this way, the theories demonstrate how one's economic empowerment leads to the stability and well-being of that community, thus promoting a spiral of economic resilience and social cohesion.



Figure 1: Foundations of Community Prosperity

The figure 1 illustrates the foundations of community prosperity through interconnected elements. Homeownership ensures asset security via land and housing stability. Socio-economic characteristics such as education, income, and credit access shape household dynamics. Motivations driven by financial needs and cultural norms influence work-life balance. Family well-being improves through better education, healthcare, and nutrition. Community well-being grows via social cohesion and local economic participation. Finally, business success and growth depend on income generation and access to markets, reinforcing overall rural resilience and development.

Discussion

This study offers multiple contributions to theory, empirical literature, research methodology, and grassroots practice, particularly in the context of rural South Asia. Theoretically, the study enriches Empowerment Theory by empirically demonstrating how economic participation from within the domestic sphere can lead to layered forms of empowerment. For many female respondents, empowerment was not just financial but also psychological expressed through increased self-confidence and decision-making autonomy. While much of the literature on women's entrepreneurship focuses on urban centres or donor-led projects, this research captures organic, self-initiated entrepreneurial activity. Moreover, it reveals overlooked motivational factors such as family compatibility and peer imitation, which are critical for understanding why entrepreneurship emerges in traditional settings.

It shows how home-based skills, often dismissed as "women's work" or informal, hold real economic value when linked with basic entrepreneurship. These insights challenge the urban bias in Pakistani development literature and call for a more localized understanding of rural economies. Practically, the study equips policymakers, NGOs, and community development actors with firsthand data that can inform program design. By identifying specific constraints such as lack of packaging knowledge, absence of market access, and gendered workload imbalance, the study offers a blueprint for targeted interventions. The identification of successful micro-strategies, such as household-based collaborations and reliance on existing tools, also provides scalable models for replication.

Directions for Future Research

Building on the current study, future research can adopt a broader lens to strengthen academic and policy understanding of rural entrepreneurship in Pakistan. First, there is a critical need for gender-expanded studies that intentionally sample a higher number of women. Such research can provide deeper insights into household power relations, resistance to female mobility, and hidden forms of agency. Secondly, a mixed-methods approach would enhance analytical depth. Surveys capturing changes in income levels, health access, schooling rates, or decision-making autonomy could validate qualitative findings and offer measurable impact indicators. Future studies should also consider longitudinal designs, particularly to observe how home-based enterprises adapt to external disruptions such as inflation, climate variability, or post-pandemic recovery trajectories. Capturing entrepreneurship as an evolving practice would provide a richer temporal perspective. Sector-specific deep dives are also warranted. Dedicated studies on herbal services, dairy processing, digital freelancing, or recycled crafts could illuminate micro-industries that were only briefly touched upon here. Lastly, comparative regional analysis across multiple districts or provinces would allow for structural, cultural, and institutional variations. Understanding why entrepreneurship thrives in one locality and not another can inform targeted policy and development interventions at a sub-national level.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how home-based entrepreneurship contributes to family and community well-being in rural areas of Pakistan. In many cases, businesses were initiated with negligible capital and traditional skills, sometimes through imitation or necessity. For women particularly, the compatibility of home-based work with

caregiving duties emerged as a vital enabler. However, the study also documented significant constraints: financial limitations, absence of formal training, gendered social norms, and restricted access to external markets. Despite these challenges, the outcomes were transformative. At the theoretical level, the study reinforces the idea that micro-level entrepreneurship functions as a vehicle for empowerment, not only economically but also socially and psychologically. It supports the principles of Empowerment Theory and Socio-Economic Development Theory by illustrating how income generation can reconfigure roles and agency within the household and community—without challenging dominant cultural norms. In terms of broader societal significance, the research shows that informal home-based enterprises fill critical employment gaps, particularly for women and low-skilled individuals. These businesses support children's schooling, reduce dependency on loans, and create alternative pathways for social mobility. The ability to participate economically without leaving the home represents a culturally consonant solution for conservative rural regions. This research makes a strong case for recognizing home-based work as legitimate economic activity. It challenges policymakers, NGOs, and development practitioners to move beyond urban-centric models and to support village-level innovation through financing, training, and infrastructure. The resilience and creativity observed among rural area entrepreneurs deserve formal acknowledgment and institutional support. Ultimately, the study offers a grounded, humanized understanding of how informal enterprise reshapes rural life. It invites us to reimagine the "entrepreneur" not as an urban elite or risk-tolerant capitalist, but as a rural actor, often female, who navigates structural constraints with innovation, persistence, and care. It is in these quiet acts of agency that real development unfolds.

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