

A Study on Financial Independence, Influencing Factors of Work–Life Choices Among Women Entrepreneurs in AP

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Abstract:

This qualitative study examines financial independence and the factors influencing work-life choices among women entrepreneurs in Andhra Pradesh, India. Based on in-depth interviews with a purposeful sample of 100 women business owners from micro-enterprises, retail, and service sectors, this research investigates how financial autonomy impacts decision-making in family life, business operations, and personal goals. It identifies themes such as social expectations, access to finance, family support, and time management strategies that shape women's work-life choices. Findings show that women entrepreneurs often pursue financial independence as their main motivation for engaging in business. They see economic self-reliance as a way to challenge traditional gender norms and gain autonomy over personal and family decisions. However, balancing work and family roles poses a significant challenge due to domestic responsibilities, childcare duties, and the need for flexible scheduling. Participants with strong family support and higher financial knowledge report better work-life strategies, including delegating tasks, setting boundaries, and planning strategically. In contrast, those with limited access to resources experience increased stress, role conflict, and limited business growth. In the context of Andhra Pradesh, government support mechanisms, such as self-help groups and entrepreneurial training programs, have helped achieve economic stability and gradual empowerment, though gaps in financial literacy and institutional support still exist. The thematic analysis highlights how financial independence interacts with social norms to influence women entrepreneurs' choices, revealing complex negotiations between professional ambitions and family expectations. This study adds to the growing literature on women's entrepreneurship and work-life balance in India by focusing on women's experiences, motivations, and challenges. It recommends targeted financial education, community support networks, and culturally aware policies to promote sustainable entrepreneurship that enhances both economic independence and personal well-being¹

Key Words: community, entrepreneurship, development, economic, growth, women

1. Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as a key driver of economic growth and gender equality around the world. It not only contributes to GDP growth but also improves social outcomes, community development, and broader inclusive progress. Research shows that when women participate equally in entrepreneurial activities, economies grow faster and become more resilient. Studies in India estimate that removing gender-based barriers could potentially double women's labour force participation and significantly boost overall welfare, highlighting the economic importance of women-led businesses beyond personal empowerment. Globally, women business owners are known for creating jobs, driving innovation, and building networks that benefit other women, which aligns with Sustainable Development Goals aimed at reducing inequality and promoting decent work and economic growth.

In India, female entrepreneurs increasingly seek financial independence as a central motivation. They aspire to achieve economic autonomy, influence household decisions, and challenge traditional gender roles that have historically limited women's control over resources and choices. Entrepreneurship provides women with a way to earn income that does not solely depend on family structures or male income sources. This transformation helps shift power dynamics within households and allows for greater agency in family and community decision-making. Empirical studies show that women engaged in business often see improvements in financial knowledge, income generation, and participation in economic decisions, especially when supported by microfinance, training, and collective networks such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs). These factors lead to meaningful changes in their economic situation and long-term empowerment.²

Despite these positive developments, women still face an unequal burden of domestic labor. This reality complicates their efforts to balance entrepreneurial goals with household obligations. Social norms in many areas of India continue to expect women to prioritize caregiving and household management, which leads to complex work-life negotiations that men entrepreneurs do not typically face. The dual responsibility often results in time poverty, role conflict, and emotional stress, which can negatively impact business success and personal well-being.

In Andhra Pradesh, the relationship between entrepreneurial ambitions, financial independence, and work-life balance is influenced by a distinct ecosystem of self-help groups, MSME activity, and institutional support. SHGs in the state have

organized many women into collective economic actions, improving their access to credit, markets, and financial services while fostering social networks that promote entrepreneurship and community engagement. Government-supported initiatives, such as significant credit allocations to SHGs and national exhibitions promoting women-made products, illustrate how institutional support can enhance women's financial independence and visibility in the economy. However, research specific to the state still indicates gaps in understanding how these economic advancements intersect with women's lived experiences of balancing business responsibilities with family expectations. This need highlights the necessity for deeper qualitative research into the work-life choices women make within their cultural contexts.

2. Literature Review

Financial independence is consistently seen as one of the most transformative results of women's entrepreneurship. Economic self-reliance boosts women's autonomy, strengthens their negotiating power within households, and increases their involvement in financial decision-making processes. When women earn their own income, they often experience higher self-confidence, greater mobility, and more control over savings, investments, and long-term financial planning. Thus, entrepreneurship becomes not just a way to earn a living but a path to economic empowerment.

In India, the pursuit of financial independence has gained significant momentum in the past decade. National surveys and media reports show that more women prefer entrepreneurial careers for better financial control and professional identity. This change reflects broader social and economic transformations, such as improved access to education, digital platforms, and microfinance networks. Women entrepreneurs are increasingly using e-commerce, home-based production, and service-oriented businesses to create income streams that offer flexibility and promote economic stability.³

Moreover, women's financial independence also brings intergenerational benefits. Studies indicate that women who have control over their income generally invest more in their children's education, healthcare, and overall household well-being, amplifying the positive impact of entrepreneurship. Participation in SHGs and micro-enterprise collectives has further improved women's access to credit and financial knowledge, aiding their ability to manage profits and reinvest in business growth. Despite these advancements, obstacles such as limited collateral, restricted access to formal credit, and social constraints continue to limit the financial independence women can achieve. While entrepreneurship fosters independence, its effects are influenced by institutional and social factors.

Work-Life Balance in Female-Led Ventures

Work-life balance in women's entrepreneurship is a complex and multi-faceted issue that goes beyond simply dividing time between work and family. It involves ongoing negotiation between professional goals, caregiving duties, and personal well-being. Research on Indian women entrepreneurs identifies factors such as effective time management, spousal and family support, educational background, and demographic characteristics as significant elements affecting their perceived work-life balance.

Unlike traditional jobs, entrepreneurship provides flexibility in scheduling; however, this flexibility can unintentionally increase work demands. Women entrepreneurs often find themselves working without clear boundaries, resulting in longer hours and blurred lines between home and business—especially for home-based businesses. As a result, role conflict frequently occurs when business obligations collide with childcare, eldercare, and household management tasks.

Family support plays an essential role in shaping work-life balance outcomes. Women with supportive partners and extended family networks report higher satisfaction and lower stress, as they can share or delegate domestic responsibilities. On the other hand, women without such support may suffer emotional strain and burnout. Societal expectations regarding gender roles also affect how women see and prioritize work-life balance. In many Indian households, women continue to hold the main responsibility for unpaid domestic work, even while contributing significantly to household income.

It's important to note that work-life balance is not a one-size-fits-all concept; it is subjective and varies by context. Some women entrepreneurs perceive the blending of work and family positively, enabling them to remain economically active while fulfilling family obligations. For others, the overlap creates tension and affects personal well-being. Therefore, understanding work-life balance requires a nuanced, qualitative exploration of individual experiences rather than relying solely on quantitative measures.

Context of Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh provides a unique setting for studying women's entrepreneurship due to its strong network of self-help groups, government-supported micro-enterprises, and a growing MSME ecosystem. The state has long been recognized for its SHG movement, which has gathered millions of rural women into savings and loan groups, improving financial inclusion and entrepreneurial participation.

Government-sponsored programs, such as national exhibitions like the SARAS Mela and startup incubation centers, have greatly improved visibility and market access for women-led businesses. These platforms give women entrepreneurs the chance to showcase their products, connect with buyers, and access training resources. Additionally, substantial credit programs for SHGs in Andhra Pradesh have increased women's access to funding, thereby boosting economic activity and financial independence.⁴

However, while institutional mechanisms support entrepreneurial growth, research specifically focused on Andhra Pradesh has limited insight into how financial independence affects work-life choices. Differences between rural and urban areas, along with varying educational levels and cultural norms, create distinct experiences for women entrepreneurs. For instance, rural entrepreneurs may struggle with mobility and infrastructure issues, while urban entrepreneurs may face market competition and higher operational costs.

Andhra Pradesh presents a rich social and economic environment to study how financial independence, family expectations, and institutional support shape women's entrepreneurial experiences. A qualitative study in this region can provide insights into how women balance their economic goals with personal and family responsibilities. This contributes valuable knowledge to the broader conversation about gender and entrepreneurship in India.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs in Andhra Pradesh in relation to financial independence and work-life choices. Phenomenology is useful when the goal is to understand how people make sense of their experiences within specific cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Instead of measuring variables, this approach allows for a deep exploration of participants' feelings, motivations, and coping strategies.⁵

The focus is on how women entrepreneurs view financial independence and how it shapes their decisions in both professional and personal life. Given the cultural complexities surrounding gender roles in India, a qualitative design enables a detailed look at how women navigate their responsibilities regarding business management, family care, and personal goals.

Data were gathered through in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 100 women entrepreneurs from urban and rural areas of Andhra Pradesh. The sectors included artisan production, retail trade, service enterprises, and home-based businesses. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were conducted in Telugu and English, based on participant preference. Open-ended questions allowed participants to share their experiences freely, resulting in rich narratives.

The phenomenological approach emphasizes reflexivity, where the researcher is mindful of biases and ensures that participants' voices are central to the analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Field notes captured contextual observations, non-verbal cues, and environmental factors during the interviews.⁶

Sampling Strategy

The study used purposive sampling, a non-probability technique often used in qualitative research to select participants who have relevant experience and insight into the research topic (Patton, 2015). The goal was not statistical generalization but depth and diversity of views.

The sample of 100 women entrepreneurs was chosen based on these criteria:

- Ownership or co-ownership of a business for at least two years
- Active involvement in daily business operations
- Representation from both rural and urban districts of Andhra Pradesh
- Inclusion of married, unmarried, widowed, and single-parent participants
- Variation in age groups (21–60 years)

- Diversity in educational backgrounds

Participants were distributed across sectors as shown in the first graph above. Retail businesses made up the largest group (30%), followed by artisan enterprises (25%), home-based ventures (25%), and service enterprises (20%). This variety ensured representation of different operational scales, financial structures, and family dynamics.

The sample also included women involved with Self-Help Groups (SHGs), microfinance institutions, and independent businesses, allowing comparison between supported and self-funded ventures.⁷

Data Collection Procedure

An interview guide was created to cover key topics:

1. Motivation for entrepreneurship
2. Perceptions of financial independence
3. Household decision-making roles
4. Time allocation and daily routines
5. Family and institutional support
6. Challenges in balancing work and personal life

All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed word-for-word. Ethical considerations were strictly upheld, including informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and anonymizing participant identities.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying and reporting patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed six steps:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Initial coding
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Transcripts were manually coded and verified to increase reliability. Codes were grouped into broader categories reflecting patterns across interviews.

The second graph above shows major themes and their frequency in participant narratives. The most prominent theme was Financial Autonomy, followed by Time Management, Family Support, Role Conflict, and Institutional Support.⁸

Key Thematic Interpretations:

- **Financial Autonomy (85%):** Most participants linked entrepreneurship to dignity, self-respect, and greater decision-making power.
- **Time Management (78%):** Structured routines and multitasking were essential survival strategies.
- **Family Support (70%):** Spousal and extended family involvement greatly impacted work-life balance.
- **Role Conflict (65%):** Many women experienced stress from balancing professional and home responsibilities.
- **Institutional Support (60%):** Access to SHGs and government programs positively influenced financial stability.

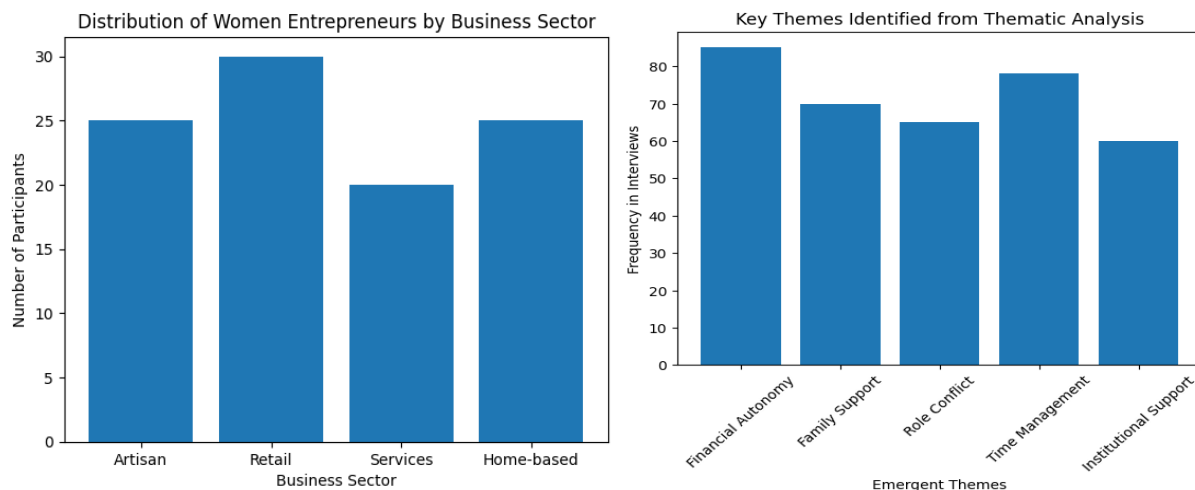
Thematic analysis revealed patterns beyond individual stories, highlighting broader influences such as cultural norms, financial literacy, and access to credit.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the research, the study incorporated:

- Triangulation (cross-checking responses among participants)
- Member checking (participants reviewing summarized interpretations)
- Documentation of the audit trail
- Peer debriefing

These strategies align with qualitative validity standards set by Lincoln and Guba (1985).



(Web Sources)

4. Discussions & Findings

4.1 Motivation for Financial Independence

Almost all participants highlighted financial independence as the main reason for starting and continuing their entrepreneurial ventures. However, financial independence was not just about making money; it involved aspects like autonomy, dignity, and changes in identity. Many respondents said that earning their own income allowed them to contribute significantly to household expenses, their children's education, healthcare, and savings. This contribution boosted their self-esteem and changed how they saw their status within the family.

Several participants mentioned a change from being “dependents” to becoming “contributors” or “co-decision-makers” in financial matters. This change greatly affected household dynamics, especially in budgeting, investment decisions, and long-term financial planning. Women who previously depended solely on their partner’s income noted that entrepreneurship provided them with a sense of security and negotiating power. For widowed and single participants, entrepreneurship became not just a source of empowerment but also a way to survive and ensure financial stability.

Moreover, financial independence was linked to psychological empowerment. Participants often used terms like “self-respect,” “confidence,” and “freedom” when talking about their income. Being able to make independent purchases or reinvest profits without needing permission represented autonomy. These findings highlight how entrepreneurship can act as a path for social mobility and identity transformation, especially in patriarchal environments.

At the same time, participants viewed financial independence as a gradual process rather than something that happened overnight. Many entrepreneurs started with small operations and modest earnings, but over time, their profits built up savings, helped them create assets, and improved their living standards. Thus, financial independence appeared as both a motivational driver and a developing outcome of engaging in entrepreneurship.

4.2 Socio-Cultural Influences

Despite their economic involvement, participants consistently mentioned that deeply rooted socio-cultural norms still influenced their work-life decisions. Traditional gender roles positioned women as primary caregivers and managers of the household, even if they were also earning income. Because of this, their entrepreneurial efforts were often designed around domestic responsibilities rather than the other way around.

Many women arranged their business tasks after finishing household chores or during school hours. For home-based entrepreneurs, the merging of home and work spaces blurred boundaries and increased multitasking demands. Several participants noted that cultural expectations limited their ability to expand businesses, attend networking events, or travel for procurement and marketing.

Role conflict was a common theme, especially during busy business seasons or family occasions. Women felt guilty when prioritizing business over family and frustrated when domestic duties interrupted their work. These issues highlight the ongoing impact of patriarchal norms that define caregiving as primarily a woman’s responsibility.

Interestingly, some younger participants observed gradual changes in societal attitudes, particularly in urban settings, where dual-income households are becoming more common. However, rural participants reported stronger traditional expectations and more scrutiny from extended family. Overall, socio-cultural influences acted as both limitations and shaping forces, affecting the pace, scale, and strategic choices of women-led businesses.

4.3 Family Support and Networks

Family support proved to be a crucial factor in both entrepreneurial success and perceived work-life balance. Women with supportive partners reported shared domestic duties, emotional encouragement, and sometimes direct involvement in their businesses. These collaborations reduced stress and increased flexibility in managing competing roles.

Extended family networks, especially parents and in-laws, also played an important role. Grandparents helping with childcare or relatives assisting with household management allowed women to dedicate more focused time to their businesses. In contrast, participants lacking such support often felt more exhausted and saw slower business growth due to time constraints.

Peer networks and women's groups, including Self-Help Groups, provided additional layers of support. Beyond financial help, these networks offered mentorship, information sharing, and emotional encouragement. Participants frequently mentioned that connecting with other women entrepreneurs helped combat feelings of isolation and inspired motivation.

The findings suggest that family and social networks act as enabling systems that influence the relationship between financial independence and work-life balance. Where support systems were strong, women showed greater business confidence and better time management. Where support was weak, women relied heavily on personal resilience and self-discipline to maintain both areas.

4.4 Institutional Access and Training

Support from institutions, such as government-funded entrepreneurship programs, microfinance options, incubation centers, and skill development workshops, significantly shaped participants' confidence and operational abilities. Women who attended formal training reported improved knowledge in areas like financial management, digital marketing, customer relations, and inventory control.

Access to institutional training improved strategic thinking and long-term planning. Participants who received mentorship or support from incubation programs had clearer business goals, diversification strategies, and better record-keeping methods. These skills contributed not only to profits but also to more predictable work schedules, indirectly aiding work-life balance.

Access to credit through Self-Help Groups and microfinance organizations reduced reliance on informal lenders and family support. This financial independence strengthened women's control over business decisions and made reinvestment easier. However, some participants faced bureaucratic delays and paperwork challenges when trying to access formal institutional programs.

Overall, institutional access acted as a catalyst for the professional growth of women-led businesses. When financial skills and management abilities improved, participants felt more in control of their business growth and personal time. Thus, training and incubation programs indirectly supported work-life balance by increasing efficiency and decreasing uncertainty.

4.5 Time Management and Boundary Setting

Effective time management emerged as a vital strategy among participants. Women entrepreneurs described highly structured daily routines that often began early in the morning to manage domestic responsibilities before focusing on business tasks. Many relied on detailed scheduling, task prioritization, and delegation to maintain balance.

Boundary-setting practices varied based on the type of business. Retail shop owners followed set hours, but home-based entrepreneurs often dealt with frequent interruptions. In response, some participants created designated areas in their homes exclusively for work, effectively separating their professional and personal lives.

Outsourcing household tasks, when financially possible, was another approach. Hiring help or relying on community childcare services allowed women to set aside uninterrupted time for their businesses. However, such arrangements were more common among urban participants with higher income levels.

Technology also aided boundary management. Utilizing digital payment systems, online marketing platforms, and messaging apps allowed women to interact with customers more efficiently, reducing unnecessary travel and time use. Yet, constant digital connectivity sometimes stretched working hours, revealing technology's mixed impact on work-life management.

Ultimately, time management and boundary setting were not fixed practices but ongoing processes needing continuous adjustment. Participants stressed that balance was rarely perfect; instead, it was a constant negotiation shaped by business cycles, family events, and personal health. The findings suggest that sustainable entrepreneurship among women relies significantly on flexible time-use strategies along with supportive family and institutional systems.

5. Conclusion

The qualitative evidence from this study strongly suggests that financial independence is closely connected to women entrepreneurs' work-life choices. Financial autonomy is not just an economic factor; it acts as a transformative force that reshapes personal identity, household dynamics, and long-term planning. For many participants, earning their own income boosted their confidence, strengthened their voice in family decisions, and enhanced their perceived social worth within their households and communities. However, how much financial independence improves work-life balance is largely influenced by structural and contextual factors.

Structural influences, such as family dynamics, established social norms, and differing access to financial and institutional resources, played a significant role in how effectively women balanced business with personal and domestic commitments. Women in supportive family environments, where husbands and extended relatives shared responsibilities, reported more flexibility and better mental health. Conversely, those facing strict gender roles often dealt with role overload, time shortages, and emotional stress, even when achieving financial success. These findings highlight that financial empowerment cannot stand alone; it requires parallel changes in social attitudes and distribution of domestic roles.

Access to resources, especially affordable credit, skill development programs, and entrepreneurial networks, further influenced women's ability to manage both business growth and personal wellbeing. Women with better financial literacy and institutional support showed improved planning, resource allocation, and stress management. In contrast, limited access to formal credit or training restricted business growth and intensified work-life conflicts.

Therefore, it is crucial to promote financial literacy programs, accessible low-interest credit options, inclusive incubation programs, and policies sensitive to gender issues to support sustainable entrepreneurial paths for women in Andhra Pradesh. Policy interventions must not only create economic opportunities but also tackle socio-cultural barriers that affect women's time management and decision-making power. A comprehensive approach that combines financial empowerment with social support systems can create an environment where women entrepreneurs thrive economically while keeping their personal wellbeing and family harmony intact.

6. Recommendations

- Financial Literacy Programs: Tailored training to improve budgeting, investment, and loan navigation.
- Family-Centric Support: Counseling and community groups to promote shared domestic responsibilities.
- Flexible Business Networks: Local mentoring circles to share strategies on time management and independence.
- Digital Empowerment Initiatives: Targeted training programs to improve digital literacy, including the use of online marketing platforms, digital payment systems, e-commerce tools, and social media branding. Strengthening digital skills can help women entrepreneurs reach more customers, improve operational efficiency, and lower the time needed for physical transactions.
- Accessible Childcare and Community Support Services: Creation of affordable childcare centers and community-based caregiving support, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Reliable childcare can greatly reduce work-family conflict and allow women to spend uninterrupted time on business development and skill building.
- Gender-Sensitive Credit and Policy Frameworks: Development of simplified loan processes, lower collateral requirements, and women-focused credit programs through banks and microfinance institutions. Policies that include mentorship, financial advisory services, and complaint resolution can further boost women's confidence in using formal financial systems.

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