

Gendered Perspective, Family Business and Entrepreneurial Experiences: Exploring Differences in Entrepreneurial Addiction and Mental Health

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Abstract

Purpose: This study delves into the intersections of gender, family business, and entrepreneurial experiences to explore differences in entrepreneurial addiction and mental health.

Design/methodology/approach: Focusing on habitual entrepreneurs in Malaysia, the research employs a quantitative approach, examining variables such as obsessive thoughts, self-worth, withdrawal/engagement, tolerance, negative outcomes, neglect, and mental health.

Findings: Findings reveal high levels of addiction, particularly in obsessive thoughts and withdrawal/engagement, alongside generally positive mental health outcomes. No gender differences highlighted that there is no potential susceptibility of male entrepreneurs to work-related stress and burnout, contributing to higher rates of entrepreneurship addiction. Family economics involvement significantly influences self-worth and withdrawal/engagement, showcasing unique stressors in navigating familial roles within entrepreneurship. However, no significant differences emerged based on years of entrepreneurial experience.

Research limitations/implications: This study contributes to the enrichment of the topic of entrepreneurship addiction, specifically on differences by gender, family business and years of experience.

Practical implications: Entrepreneurs can recognize the level of entrepreneurship addiction for them to reduce their addiction and also their mental health.

Originality/value: The study contributes to the addiction realm in entrepreneurship, while emphasising the intricate interplay between individual characteristics and contextual factors in shaping mental well-being within entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Habitual entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial addiction, mental health, gender, family business, entrepreneurial experiences

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a significant driver of economic growth, innovation, and job creation. It plays a crucial role in fostering productivity improvements and ultimately leads to higher living standards (Balder, 2020; Mohammadali & Abdulkhaliq, 2019; Lee et al., 2006). Entrepreneurship is not only a source of economic development but also contributes to the continuous enhancement of export product quality and overall economic stability (Liu et al., 2023). Research has shown that entrepreneurship, particularly growth-oriented entrepreneurship, is essential for explaining economic growth, especially in developing economies (Ordeñana et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2005). Moreover, entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as a key mechanism for accelerating economic growth and welfare through job creation and innovation (Crudu, 2019).

While entrepreneurship has numerous positive impacts on economic growth, it is essential to acknowledge that entrepreneurial activity can also have negative consequences. For instance, the impact of entrepreneurial addiction on mental health, especially on life satisfaction and quality of life with work, has been the subject of several studies (Shepherd & Haynie, 2009). Forty-five business owners suffer from one or more mental illnesses, such as depression, bipolar disorder, drug usage, and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Thus, being an entrepreneur is stressful and negatively impacts mental and physical health.

Spivack and McKelvie (2021) identified six observable antecedents of behavioural addiction. The components include the obsessive, withdrawal-to-engagement cycle, self-worth, tolerance, neglect, and negative consequences. To further understand how entrepreneurs suffer from entrepreneurship addiction and to examine the effect of entrepreneurship addiction on mental health, the research objectives are to determine the differences in entrepreneurship addiction on mental health by gender, family, age, and years of experience in business. As compared to other previous studies on entrepreneurial addiction, these perspectives are still underexplored. The present study focuses on entrepreneurs with multiple start-ups categorised as habitual entrepreneurs.

Most research is focused on the positive effects of entrepreneurship. This shows scarce studies on the adverse effects of entrepreneurial addiction. Additionally, the lack of research on the adverse effects of entrepreneurial addiction raises questions. This study can contribute to overcoming entrepreneurial addiction by conducting in-depth studies to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon. Researchers can help entrepreneurial individuals overcome addiction and foster sustainable and fulfilling entrepreneurial journeys by shedding light on these issues and providing practical solutions. In addition, habitual entrepreneurs need support to learn self-control and set constructive goals. These include techniques for controlling their work habits, setting boundaries, setting successful task priorities, and achieving long-term work-life balance. Entrepreneurs can better manage their workload and reduce their risk of addiction by encouraging self-regulation and goal planning. Thus, this study investigates (1) the level of entrepreneurship addiction and mental health; (2) Differences between entrepreneurship addiction and mental health by gender; (3) the Difference between entrepreneurship addiction by family business; and (4) Differences in entrepreneurship addiction by years of experience.

Literature Review***Behavioural Addiction***

Entrepreneurial addiction is a phenomenon often associated with habitual entrepreneurs, individuals who are continuously engaged in starting or owning multiple businesses. These habitual entrepreneurs exhibit distinct behaviors, motivations, strategic planning, and levels of success compared to other types of entrepreneurs (Lechner et al., 2016). Research has shown that habitual entrepreneurs are driven by factors such as entrepreneurial motivation, ability, willingness to act, and the entrepreneurial environment, all of which positively influence their choice of entrepreneurial behavior (Yang, 2022). Despite potential failures, habitual entrepreneurs display a strong inclination to repeatedly start new ventures, showcasing their resilience and persistence in the entrepreneurial landscape (Kurczewska & Mackiewicz, 2023). Studies have delved into the psychological aspects of entrepreneurial behavior, highlighting the role of achievement motivation in driving entrepreneurial actions (Collins et al., 2004). Entrepreneurial motivation, a key factor in entrepreneurial endeavors, is closely linked to effort exertion, competitiveness, and self-efficacy, all of which contribute to the success of entrepreneurial ventures (Liñeiro, 2024). Moreover, the fear of failure, often viewed negatively, can serve as a motivating factor for entrepreneurs, propelling them towards success (Murnieks et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurial behavior is also influenced by various perceptual variables such as alertness to opportunities, fear of failure, and confidence in one's skills (Arenius & Minniti, 2005). Additionally, the pursuit of wealth maximization is identified as a significant driving force behind entrepreneurship, indicating that financial goals play a crucial role in entrepreneurial endeavors (Su et al., 2020). Furthermore, the courage to take risks emerges as a dominant characteristic among entrepreneurs, showcasing their willingness to step into the unknown and embrace uncertainty (Astuti et al., 2019). Thus, habitual entrepreneurs exhibit a unique set of characteristics and motivations that drive their entrepreneurial behavior. Factors such as entrepreneurial motivation, achievement orientation, risk-taking propensity, and the pursuit of wealth contribute to the success and persistence of habitual entrepreneurs in the dynamic world of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial Addiction

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Hypothesis Development

Gender and Entrepreneurial Addiction

The influence of gender on entrepreneurial addiction is a multifaceted issue that encompasses various factors such as gender stereotypes, personality traits, workaholism, and self-objectification (Lechner et al., 2016). Research has highlighted the significance of considering gender when examining the impact of personal motivational factors on entrepreneurial behavior to gain a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship (Yang, 2022). While some studies suggest that males demonstrate a higher inclination towards entrepreneurship compared to females (Kurczewska & Mackiewicz, 2023), contradictory findings indicate that there may not be a significant difference in the relationship between gender and entrepreneurial intention (Collins et al., 2004). This discrepancy underscores the need for further investigation to fully grasp the role of gender in entrepreneurial addiction.

Moreover, the correlation between gender and entrepreneurial addiction is influenced by additional characteristics such as sensation-seeking, workaholism, and self-objectification (Liñeiro, 2024). Workaholism, in particular, has been associated with potential adverse consequences for women entrepreneurs due to the conflict between their internal drive to work and societal gender role expectations (Murnieks et al., 2019). Additionally, disparities between genders have been observed in terms of self-objectification, feelings of sadness, and addictive behaviors like excessive Facebook use, indicating that gender plays a role in shaping addictive tendencies (Arenius & Minniti, 2005).

Overall, the relationship between gender and entrepreneurial addiction is complex and intertwined with societal expectations, individual characteristics, and motivational factors. Understanding how gender stereotypes, workaholism, and self-perception influence entrepreneurial behavior is crucial for gaining insights into the dynamics of entrepreneurial addiction and paving the way for more inclusive and diverse entrepreneurial ecosystems.

H1: There is a difference between entrepreneurship addiction and mental health by gender

Family Business and Entrepreneurial Addiction

Family enterprises play a significant role in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations and behaviors, with various models and factors influencing the entrepreneurial tendencies within family businesses (Lechner et al., 2016). The impact of family businesses on entrepreneurial inclination can be understood through frameworks such as the parental role model and family support model, which highlight the importance of familial influences on entrepreneurial behavior (Yang, 2022). Research has explored the effects of perceived parental reward, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and family business engagement on entrepreneurial intention, underscoring the interplay of these factors in shaping individuals' intent to pursue entrepreneurship (Kurczewska & Mackiewicz, 2023).

Family members involved in family enterprises often demonstrate a heightened level of commitment, attributed to the strong social connections within the family and the prevalent entrepreneurial mindset characteristic of such businesses (Collins et al., 2004). This underscores the unique dynamics of family enterprises in fostering entrepreneurial attitudes

and actions, emphasizing the role of familial support and influence in entrepreneurial endeavors (Liñeiro, 2024).

Moreover, studies have delved into the impact of family support on entrepreneurial journeys, highlighting its pivotal role in decision-making processes, resilience building, and long-term success within family-owned businesses (Murnieks et al., 2019). The presence of supportive family environments can significantly enhance individuals' entrepreneurial intentions and provide a conducive setting for entrepreneurial development (Arenius & Minniti, 2005).

In conclusion, the influence of family enterprises on entrepreneurial aspirations is multifaceted, encompassing models such as the parental role model and family support model, as well as factors like perceived rewards, self-efficacy, and family engagement. Understanding the intricate interplay between family dynamics and entrepreneurial tendencies is crucial for comprehending the mechanisms through which family businesses shape entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors.

H2: There is a difference between entrepreneurship addiction and mental health in family business

Years of Entrepreneurial Experience and Entrepreneurial Addiction

Entrepreneurial addiction, characterized by an intense urge to engage in multiple business ventures, is influenced by a myriad of factors that shape individuals' propensity towards serial entrepreneurship (Lechner et al., 2016). Research indicates that specific traits, such as a strong inclination for novel experiences and an exceptional dedication to work, significantly impact the likelihood of individuals becoming serial entrepreneurs (Yang, 2022). These characteristics contribute to the development of a behavioral addiction to entrepreneurship, driving individuals to repeatedly participate in entrepreneurial activities (Kurczewska & Mackiewicz, 2023).

Moreover, the nature and duration of entrepreneurial experience, encompassing functional, industry-specific, and management expertise, play a crucial role in determining the performance and long-term growth of businesses (Collins et al., 2004). Elements such as serial entrepreneurship, experiential learning, and self-selection are fundamental components of entrepreneurial experience, with factors like the total years of experience, involvement in launching new ventures, and industry-specific expertise serving as key indicators (Liñeiro, 2024). Previous exposure, particularly through entrepreneurial competitions, has been identified as a significant factor in elucidating entrepreneurial self-efficacy and ambition, further influencing entrepreneurial intentions (Murnieks et al., 2019).

The interplay between entrepreneurial experience, personal characteristics, and environmental factors underscores the complexity of entrepreneurial addiction and its implications for entrepreneurial success and persistence. Understanding how various facets of experience, such as industry-specific knowledge and self-efficacy, interact with individual traits to drive entrepreneurial intentions is essential for comprehensively grasping the dynamics of entrepreneurial behavior and addiction.

H3: There is a difference between entrepreneurship addiction and mental health by years of entrepreneurial experience

Method

Quantitative research design was used in this study, using questionnaire survey which comprised of eight (8) sections; (1) Section one: Demographic information, (2) Section two: Obsessive thoughts, (3) Section three: Self-worth, and (4) Section four: Withdrawal/engagement, (5) Section five: Tolerance, (6) Section six: Neglect, (7) Section seven: Negative outcomes, and (8) Section eight: Mental health. The questionnaire items were adapted from Spivack, A. J., & McKelvie, A. (2021). The respondents consist of habitual entrepreneurs residing in Malaysia, who are entrepreneurs who have more than one business.

Findings

With the specific aim of gathering an acceptable response rate, 150 potential respondents (habitual entrepreneurs) were approached online to participate in the study. 52 questionnaires failed to be delivered to the respondents due to incorrect email addresses and contact numbers. This left a total of 98 valid respondents. Finally, a total of 98 completed questionnaires were gathered for this study. None of the questionnaires were discarded because the respondents had answered all the questions before they could submit the completed questionnaires online. Therefore, the response rate was 65.3 per cent, but the usable questionnaire was 28.6 per cent. This is because the rest of the respondents did not fit the inclusion criteria, which is more than one business.

Demographic Profile

Table 1 shows the respondent's demographic profile. The majority of respondents were male, aged 20-29 years old, and 50-59 years old. Most of them are also Malay, married, and do not have a family business.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

| Demographic Profile | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 14 | 58.3 |
| Male | 10 | 41.7 |
| Age | | |
| 20-29 years old | 7 | 29.2 |
| 30-39 years old | 4 | 16.7 |
| 40-49 years old | 4 | 16.7 |
| 50-59 years old | 7 | 29.2 |
| >60 years old | 2 | 8.3 |
| Ethnic | | |
| Malay | 24 | 100 |
| Chinese | 0 | 0 |
| Indian | 0 | 0 |
| Others | 0 | 0 |
| Family business | | |
| Yes | 10 | 41.7 |
| No | 14 | 58.3 |
| Marital status | | |
| Single | 6 | 25.0 |
| Married | 18 | 75.0 |

Level of Entrepreneurial Addiction and Mental Health

24 respondents showed high addiction in entrepreneurship, except for negative outcomes, which have moderate addiction ($M=2.69$, $SD=0.853$) and neglect ($M=2.73$, $SD=1.11$). However, all respondents show high mental health ($M=3.95$, $SD=0.987$).

Table 2: Level of Entrepreneurial Addiction and Mental Health

| Variables | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-----------------------|------|----------------|
| Obsessive thought | 3.69 | .87 |
| Self-worth | 3.29 | .91 |
| Withdrawal/Engagement | 3.49 | .86 |
| Tolerance | 3.49 | .86 |
| Negative Outcomes | 2.69 | .85 |
| Neglect | 2.74 | 1.11 |
| Mental Health | 3.95 | .99 |

Differences in Entrepreneurial Addiction and Mental Health by Gender

Findings indicated that there were no significant differences in the scores for males and females. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kurczewska and Mackiewicz (2023). Males demonstrate a higher inclination towards entrepreneurship compared to females. Understanding these gender-specific dynamics is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems.

Table 3: Differences in Entrepreneurial Addiction and Mental Health by Gender

| | Female (mean) | Male (mean) | T-Value |
|-----------------------|---------------|-------------|---------|
| Obsessive thoughts | 3.89 | 3.40 | 1.39 |
| Self-Worth | 3.44 | 3.06 | 1.02 |
| Withdrawal/Engagement | 3.68 | 0.98 | 1.30 |
| Tolerance | 3.68 | 0.98 | 1.30 |
| Negative Outcomes | 2.73 | 2.63 | 0.26 |
| Neglect | 2.72 | 2.76 | -0.07 |
| Mental Health | 4.16 | 3.66 | 1.25 |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Differences in Entrepreneurial Addiction and Mental Health by Family Businesses

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare variable scores for those whose parents are entrepreneurs and those whose parents are not entrepreneurs. There were significant differences in self-worth in the scores for parents who are entrepreneurs ($M=2.68$, $SD=0.65$), and parents who are not entrepreneurs [$M=3.71$, $SD=0.83$; $t(24)=-3.419$, $p=0.003$]. The magnitude of the differences in the means was large (eta squared 0.3).

Table 4: Differences in Entrepreneurial Addiction and Mental Health by Family Businesses

| | Yes, my parents are entrepreneurs | No, my parents are not entrepreneurs | T-Value |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|
| Obsessive Thoughts | 3.33 | 3.95 | -1.80 |
| Self-Worth | 2.68 | 3.71 | -3.29** |
| Withdrawal/Engagement | 2.98 | 3.86 | -2.84** |
| Tolerance | 2.98 | 3.86 | -2.84** |
| Negative Outcomes | 2.68 | 2.69 | -0.02 |
| Neglect | 2.79 | 2.70 | -0.17 |
| Mental Health | 3.76 | 4.09 | -0.81 |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

There were significant differences in withdrawal/engagement in the scores for parents who are entrepreneurs ($M=2.98$, $SD=0.67$), and parents who are not entrepreneurs [$M=3.86$, $SD=0.80$]; $t(24) = -2.926$, $p=0.01$. The magnitude of the differences in the means was large (eta squared 0.3). There were significant differences in tolerance in the scores for parents who are

entrepreneurs ($M=2.98$, $SD=0.67$), and parents who are not entrepreneurs [$M=3.86$, $SD=0.80$]; $t(24)=-2.926$, $p=0.01$. The magnitude of the differences in the means was large (eta squared 0.3). This result aligned with Collins et al (2004), who found that family businesses present a unique context where entrepreneurship and familial roles intertwine. Recent studies have begun to explore the impact of family dynamics on mental health outcomes, particularly in the realm of entrepreneurship addiction. Research suggests that family pressures and expectations can amplify the risk of burnout and addiction among family business entrepreneurs. An in-depth comprehension is required to safeguard the welfare of entrepreneurs due to the merging of their work and personal obligations in such environments.

Differences in entrepreneurial addiction and mental health by years of entrepreneurial experience

A one-way between-group analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine whether there were significant differences in the variables based on the number of years of entrepreneurial experience. There were no statistically significant differences, at a significance level of $p < 0.05$, seen in any of the variables related to years of entrepreneurial experience.

Table 5: Differences in a variable by years of entrepreneurial experience

| | 1-10 years | 11-20 years | 21-30 years | F value |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|---------|
| Neglect | 2.59 | 3.29 | 2.38 | 1.02 |
| Obsessive thoughts | 3.67 | 3.79 | 3.58 | 0.06 |
| Self-worth | 3.12 | 3.73 | 3.20 | 1.00 |
| Withdrawal/Engagement | 3.40 | 3.96 | 3.00 | 1.53 |
| Tolerance | 3.40 | 3.96 | 3.00 | 1.53 |
| Negative Outcomes | 2.70 | 2.92 | 2.17 | 0.76 |
| Mental Health | 4.10 | 3.40 | 4.29 | 1.31 |

The present study suggests that prolonged exposure to the high-pressure environment of entrepreneurship can exacerbate mental health challenges, leading to increased rates of entrepreneurship addiction. This finding might be due to the lack of numbers of entrepreneurs who have more than 30 years of experience.

Conclusion

This study provides a theoretical framework which is supported by gender roles and societal expectations, as suggested by social role theory, which play a pivotal role in shaping how male and female entrepreneurs navigate stress and its subsequent challenges. Concurrently, longevity within the entrepreneurial realm can escalate stressors, potentially leading to heightened susceptibility to addiction. Theories on resilience and burnout emphasize that while experience might equip entrepreneurs with coping mechanisms, prolonged exposure could deplete these resources.

Moreover, the dual roles inherent in family businesses introduce unique stressors, especially with the pressures of upholding or surpassing familial legacies. Collectively, these theoretical insights highlight the intricate interplay between individual characteristics and contextual factors in influencing mental well-being in the realm of entrepreneurship addiction. This study contributes to the enrichment of the topic of entrepreneurship addiction specifically on differences by gender, family business and years of experience. This study offers some practical implications for entrepreneurs. They can recognize the level of entrepreneurship addiction for they to reduce their addiction and also improve their mental health. The limitation of this study is the population. The result of this study might not provide a full representation of entrepreneurship addiction. Future research for this study is to examine the relationship

between entrepreneurship addiction on mental health, and to increase the sample size. Future work could also recognize addiction levels for a healthier work-life balance among habitual entrepreneurs.

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