

## An Assessment of the Motivational factors and Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs in the Construction Industry in South Africa

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**Abstract:** The construction industry is noted to be male dominated. Despite the male dominance of the industry, women entrepreneurs have been observed to be establishing their presence and have survived over the years. This study intends to fill this gap by examining the factors motivating the women entrepreneurs to establish small businesses in the construction industry in South Africa. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on women entrepreneurs operating small businesses in the construction industry. The main aim of this study is to examine the factors that motivated the women entrepreneurs to establish small businesses in the construction industry and the characteristics that have made them survive in a male-dominated industry. The study adopted a qualitative research approach in which empirical evidence was collected through in-depth interviews from sixteen women entrepreneurs who operated in the construction industry. NVivo 12 software was used to conduct thematic analysis. The results revealed that women entrepreneurs are motivated by several factors to venture into the construction industry. These factors include the need to empower themselves and the community, the need to challenge patriarchy, the need for independence, the need for money, and wealth creation among others. The implication for practice was derived from the outcome of the analysed data which suggests that women would continue to survive in the construction industry as long as they have the right motivation.

**Keywords:** Construction; women entrepreneurs; motivations; motivational factors; characteristics; South Africa

**JEL Classifications:** M12; I31

### 1. Introduction

The participation of women entrepreneurs in the construction industry, a male-dominated space, has attracted significant academic interest. Literature is replete with evidence that the construction industry continues to be male-dominated (Fielden, Davidson, Gale & Davey, 2000; Menches & Abraham, 2007; Mathur-Helm, 2011; English & Hay, 2015). Of all the major industrial groups, the construction industry is the second-largest male-dominated industry in the world (Fielden et al. 2000; Menches & Abraham, 2007; Mathur-Helm, 2011; English & Hay, 2015). Apart from the fact that 84% of its workers are male, it also appears to exhibit the greatest degree of vertical segregation by gender (Fielden et al., 2000; English & Hay, 2015). However, extant literature indicates that the number of

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women entrepreneurs in the industry has been increasing over the years (Langowitz, Minniti & Arenius, 2005; Thiye, 2019). In South Africa, women own 48% of all the enterprises in the construction industry. What therefore needs to be explored are the factors that have motivated the women entrepreneurs to establish small businesses in such a male-dominated space and the characteristics that have made them survive in the industry. This is critical for the growth and sustainability of women in the sector, especially in a developing country that is highly patriarchal and is experiencing high levels of unemployment.

Previous studies have focused on the entrepreneurial motivations for both men and women in establishing various businesses (Kirkwood, 2009; Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012). Other research studies explored the motivations of women small business-owners (Meyer & Landsberg, 2015; Landsberg & Meyer, 2017; Solesvik, Iakovleva & Trifilova, 2019). Some researchers focussed on entrepreneurship in the construction industry (Buyle, Braet & Audenaert, 2013; Siddiqui Khahro & Akhund, 2017; Emmanuel, Tesha & Mwaitenda, 2020). For example, Emmanuel *et al.* (2020) studied the barriers and motives for venturing into the construction sector small business sector in Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania. The findings revealed that entrepreneurs are driven among others by financial freedom, success, and independence (Emmanuel *et al.*, 2020). A similar study by Siddiqui *et al.* (2017) studied the motives and barriers to entrepreneurship in the construction industry. However, these two studies (Siddiqui *et al.*, 2017; Emmanuel *et al.*, 2020) focused on the motives and barriers for entrepreneurship in general, without being gender specific.

Several studies have explored women entrepreneurship in the construction industry (Anuar, Abas & Hamzah, 2017; Manoharan, 2017; Haupt & Ndimande, 2019). Manoharan (2017), for example, carried out a study on the factors affecting the growth of women entrepreneurship in the construction industry in Malawi. Haupt and Ndimande (2019) investigated the reasons for the failure of women-owned construction firms in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The results indicated that lack of industry training, dominantly male networks, prejudice and stereotyping, and lack of opportunities were the primary reasons why women fail in the construction industry (Haupt & Ndimande, 2019).

Other studies investigated the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the construction industry (Smallwood & Agherdien, 2008; Anuar *et al.*, 2017). The results revealed that women face challenges such as inflexible working hours, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, patriarchy, gender stereotyping, lack of role models, and balancing work and family life, perception of women's ability, lack of support and support from family members, isolation from professional networks and lack of mentorship, male resentment against women, difficulty in adjusting to the industry.

A study by Sospeter (2016) on entrepreneurial motivational factors for women in the Tanzanian construction industry revealed that women are motivated by the need for achievement, need for independence, dissatisfaction at previous jobs, meeting the needs of the family and community to establish businesses in the construction industry. From the foregoing studies, it is clear that there is a dearth of studies on the factors that motivate women to establish small businesses in the construction industry in South Africa. There also a scarcity of research on the characteristics of women that have survived in male-dominated industries. The current study seeks to plug that gap by examining the factors motivating women entrepreneurs to establish small businesses in the construction industry and the characteristics that have made them survive in the sector. This study makes a unique contribution to the body of knowledge on women entrepreneurs operating small businesses in the construction industry in South Africa.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Factors Motivating Women to Establish Small Businesses

This section discusses the different motives for engaging in entrepreneurial activities. These factors are categorised into 'push' and 'pull' factors (Sospeter, 2016). Motivation is a driving force within individuals that causes them to engage in goal-directed behaviour to meet their expectations (Sospeter, 2016). In the context of entrepreneurship, motivation refers to the desire or tendency to organise, manipulate and master organisations, human beings or ideas as quickly and independently as possible, as well as an incentive to start own business (Solesvik *et al.*, 2019). Motives for starting businesses are different between men and women. Being an entrepreneur is a business strategy for a man, while for a woman it is a life strategy (Hasson, 2009; Nchimbi, 2003). The authors argue that men, therefore, establish businesses for economic reasons while women start businesses to address family and community needs. Thus, men and women have different entrepreneurial intentions (Solesvik, 2013; Solesvik *et al.*, 2019). It is also important to note that women entrepreneurs are heterogeneous. Therefore, they are motivated by different 'push' and 'pull' factors to establish businesses in the construction industry.

Pull factors are "associated with motives of choice" (Orhan & Scott, 2001 cited in Sospeter, 2016, p.2), and fascinate individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Pines *et al.*, 2010). The pull factors include the need for achievement, freedom, economic prosperity, technical education and experience, and to assist the community (Emmanuel *et al.*, 2020; Sospeter 2016). The push factors, on the other hand, compel an individual to establish a business out of necessity, and they include unemployment, job dissatisfaction, career frustration, the inspiration of friends, parents, and institutions, and the need for work/life balance (Nchimbi & Chijoriga, 2009; Sospeter, 2016). Previous study indicated that women entrepreneurs are motivated by pull factors than push factors (Meyer & Landsberg, 2015). A more detailed discussion of the factors motivating women entrepreneurs to establish businesses in the construction industry are presented below.

**Need for achievement:** This is the need for personal growth, fulfilling dreams, and achieving personal realisation through entrepreneurship (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012; Solesvik *et al.*, 2019). It has to do with the realisation of oneself which includes achieving a personal vision for the business and its various responsibilities; and to learn through some of the challenges of starting and operating a business (Akehurst, Simarro & Mas-Tur, 2012; Sospeter, Rwelamila, Nchimbi & Masoud, 2014; Uddin & Kanti, 2013). In countries where socio-cultural pressures oppress women from self-expression, females are motivated to establish businesses to realise their full potential (Solesvik *et al.*, 2019). Working in the construction industry allows women entrepreneurs to have a feeling of achievement (Zitzman, 2018). The need for achievement has its roots in the theory developed by McClelland in the 1960s, where the author stated that people with a high need for achievement prefer challenging work that provides an opportunity for advancement (Botha & Botha, 2017). Furthermore, the need to achieve is associated with self-discipline, schedule-keeping, accepting responsibility, and becoming success-oriented (Wärnich Carrel, Elbert & Hatfield, 2015).

**Balancing family and work-life:** The need for a balanced family and work-life account for more reasons why women venture into entrepreneurship to gain flexibility in providing for their family needs and running their businesses (Buthelezi, 2011). Empirical studies revealed that the ability of an individual to achieve work-life balance could help in the promotion of organisational efforts aimed at motivating, attracting, and retaining employees (Ganiyu, Derera, Atiku & Fields, 2020, Ganiyu, Fields

& Atiku, 2017). The finding of the study by Ganiyu *et al.* (2020) suggests that individual achievement of work-life balance could result in satisfaction with work and family life, which invariably enhances performance. However, not all business sectors afford women this opportunity as some of the businesses are more demanding than others, particularly in male-dominated industries.

**Need for Independence:** This refers to the ability to be in control of one's personal work life and time (Sospeter *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, it means autonomy in decision making and being capable of balancing one's personal life with work (Sospeter *et al.*, 2014; Solesvik *et al.*, 2019; Uddin & Kanti, 2013). Additionally, entrepreneurs also need financial autonomy (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012). The need for independence is a psychological trait that many researchers regard as a driver for an individual to engage in entrepreneurial behaviour (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012). Studies by Landsberg and Meyer (2017) and Solesvik *et al.* (2019) indicated that women entrepreneurs establish businesses for them to be independent.

**Wealth creation:** This is the realization of the importance of having financial earnings which can be achieved through various means such as, thinking outside the box, background check on existing ideas, beating competitors, building personal relationships with prospective customers, among other things (Cohoon, Wadhwa, & Mitchell, 2010; Stephan, Hart, Mickiewicz, & Drews, 2015). Wealth creation is the key to women's empowerment globally.

**Status and recognition:** This relates to aspects concerning an entrepreneur's social status such as the need to gain personal respect and recognition among family and friends, which extends to the broader community (Akehurst *et al.*, 2012). This is in line with the esteem needs in Maslow's theory of motivation where an individual seeks to be unique with self-respect and to enjoy esteem from other individuals (Botha and Botha, 2017; Haque *et al.*, 2014).

**Family roles:** Some businesses are family-owned so the motivation stems from the need or desire to continue or take over the family business, and/or to follow the example of role models in the family (Stephan *et al.*, 2015; Williams, 2018). Williams (2018) notes that if the family is into construction, women are encouraged to join the construction industry as entrepreneurs. A study conducted by Cohoon *et al.* (2010) indicated that encouragement from role models was important for women to start businesses.

**Dissatisfaction:** Dissatisfaction with previous work is also classified as a motivation for starting a business. Previous jobs not being challenging enough, lack of growth potential, and less pay, among others can lead one to establish a small business (Akehurst *et al.*, 2012). A study by Sospeter (2016) in Tanzania revealed that women entrepreneurs had to quit their jobs due to anger and frustration and started their businesses in the same industry. In South Africa, some women have established businesses in the construction industry having realised that being an employee is intensely frustrating (Thipe, 2019)

**Social and community motivations:** Some studies suggest that some entrepreneurs are motivated to establish their businesses in order to give back to the community where they reside through job creation or philanthropy (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012; Eva, 2014; Stephan *et al.*, 2015:16; Thipe, 2019). Therefore, they desire to contribute to the welfare of the community. This also includes social responsibilities (Jayawarna *et al.*, 2011). Some women entrepreneurs have established businesses in the construction industry to create employment for the community and assist previously disadvantaged individuals to acquire experience and skills (Thipe, 2019). According to Solesvik *et al.* (2019:12), "female entrepreneurs consider their personnel as a "family" rather than formal employees"

as they care for their comfort and security. Lincoln (2011) observes that women contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities. Such developments positively affect the lives of women and communities (Adesua-Lincoln, 2011).

**Job security:** The individuals have expectations and needs which change over time. If these expectations are not met at the required periods, it begins to affect their job performance (Şenol, 2011). Hence, the need for organisations to interfere in the affairs of employees to change their attitude according to set targets. Having job security is an important external motivational factor for individuals who want to remain in their jobs, and lack of job security in an establishment may allow one to quit his/her job for another or start own business (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012; Şenol, 2011). Employees with job security bring out their best at their workplaces leading to the realisation of organisational goals.

**Education:** Education, particularly, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) has also motivated women entrepreneurs to establish businesses in the construction industry (Lestch, 2019; Vatal, 2015). Technical education produces entrepreneurs who can survive, thrive, and contribute to local and national economic development (Haupt & Ndimande, 2019). Universities encourage women to consider construction as a career (Williams, 2018). Such encouragement shapes their propensity to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

**Professional associations and organisations:** These have strongly campaigned to promote women in science, technology, and engineering. The associations also support women in the construction industry through developing their skills and techniques and addressing any obstacles and the challenges they face (Vatal, 2015; Williams, 2018; Zitzman, 2018). Such kind of support has motivated women to establish businesses in the construction industry. Associations also create networks and role models that encourage women to join the construction industry (Williams, 2018). According to Sospeter *et al.* (2014), the window of opportunity and a strong association of women in construction has motivated more women to enter the construction industry.

## 2.2. Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs

Even though literature does not say much about the personal characteristics of women operating small businesses in the construction industry, a few can be identified, which also relate to the personal characteristic of entrepreneurs in general. They are discussed below:

Entrepreneurs have many unique and individual traits that are identical. Entrepreneurs are *optimists*, in that they have a positive outlook regardless of disappointment, setbacks, and past shortcomings (Haupt & Ndimande, 2019). When the business goes well the entrepreneur is further stimulated to do more which gives credence for more accomplishments (Chyi-Iyi & Paul, 2009). *Self-confidence* is another feature of most entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs can work on themselves to gain confidence, which is the ability to overcome challenges in executing business opportunities. Anuar *et al.* (2017) claim that women entrepreneurs in the construction industry are self-confident to cope with the nature of work. Furthermore, entrepreneurs are *visionaries*. They picture the best possible options in establishing and running their businesses daily and as the day passes, it becomes clearer where the business is heading (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). Anuar *et al.* (2017) note that most women entrepreneurs in the construction industry can plan carefully with ample research before making a decision. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs can establish and maintain an infrastructure of support that provides diverse



perspectives leading to better decision-making (Anuar *et al.*, 2017). Entrepreneurs are also *risk-takers* (Solesvik *et al.*, 2019). Studies suggest that if many people seize opportunities amid risks, they may be successful businessmen and women. It is not that entrepreneurs are not afraid to fail but the eagerness to succeed outweighs that of fear of failure (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). Studies reveal that most entrepreneurs are aged between 35 and 45 years and agree with extant literature, which indicates that most entrepreneurs are young and *energetic* (Sarri & Trihopoulou, 2005; Nieman & Nieuwenhuizen, 2009; Barringer & Ireland, 2010; Xavier *et al.* 2012). Being energetic is important for entrepreneurs as it influences investors' decisions to invest in their new venture (Barringer & Ireland, 2010). Investors are comfortable in investing in a business owned and run by an energetic entrepreneur. Another significant trait of an entrepreneur is *creativity*. Creative thinking is the construction of new products and ideas and has the potential to be useful to consumers. A creative entrepreneur places a business in a better competitive position than its rivals (Fillis & Rentschler, 2010). Entrepreneurs are, *promoters, tenacious, strong characters, networkers, persuasive, tolerant to ambiguity, achievement motivated, and have strong work ethics* among others (Barringer & Ireland, 2010; Eva, 2014). In the construction industry, women should be self-motivated, assertive, and skilled in the ability to learn independently as well as collaboratively with a team (Eva, 2014). Eva (2014) further notes that women entrepreneurs in the construction industry, amid all the challenges, should be able to generate enthusiasm and excitement, which must be communicated to employees, and other people around them. The basic characteristics of entrepreneurs highlighted above are critical for achieving entrepreneurial success.

### 3. Research Methodology

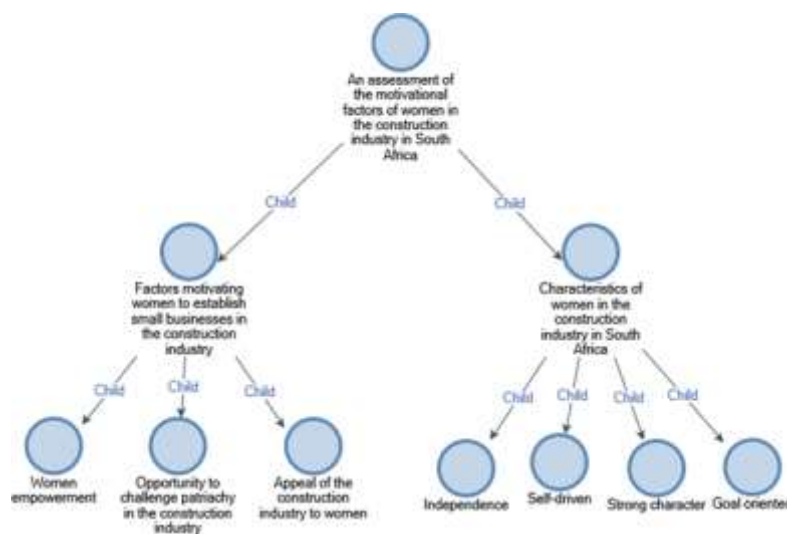
Given that there is a dearth of studies on the factors motivating women to establish businesses in the construction industry, an exploratory research design adopting a qualitative approach was employed in this study. An exploratory research design is adopted in a study to get detailed information on a subject where inadequate information is available (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001; Sakeran & Bongie, 2016). A judgement sampling technique was used to select 16 women entrepreneurs in the construction industry who participated in this study. A judgement sampling technique is used in a study of this nature so that a researcher can use own judgement to select participants who are in the best position to respond to the research questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In-depth interview using a semi-structured questionnaire was valuable to collect data from the survey participants. In-depth interviews were used for collecting data because gender issues are complex and require an ordered approach to bring out salient or burning issues that women entrepreneurs are facing in the construction industry (Hamilton, 2013). The in-depth interviews were recorded and lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The data was collected during the festive season when the prospective respondents were busy completing all outstanding contracts and preparing for the annual shut down. A thematic approach was adopted in the analysis of qualitative data. NVivo 12 software was adopted to conduct thematic analysis. The data analysis procedure followed 5 stages: transcribing the precise word expressions of the recorded interviews into MS Word document; condensing the text to reduce the number of words while retaining its meaning; Uploading of the transcribed data into the NVivo software; coding the data according to the objectives; and categorizing the data into common themes (Dyili, Ganiyu, Mahlobelana, Singh & Naicker, 2018; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). The respondents were coded from 1 to 16 for ease of reference. The data analysis is presented in the section below.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

This study is guided by two main objectives as follows:

- 1) To establish the factors motivating women to establish small businesses in the construction industry.
- 2) To establish the characteristics of women entrepreneurs in the construction industry.

To achieve the formulated objectives, the qualitative data collected was analysed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was conducted using the NVivo software as depicted in Figure 1 below. The NVivo output in Figure 1 illustrate the main themes that emerged from the two formulated objectives. The word “*child*” as used in Figure 1 is an NVivo generated label that showcases the link between themes and sub-themes (Ayandibu, Ngobese, Ganiyu & Kaseeram, 2019; Dyili et al., 2018).



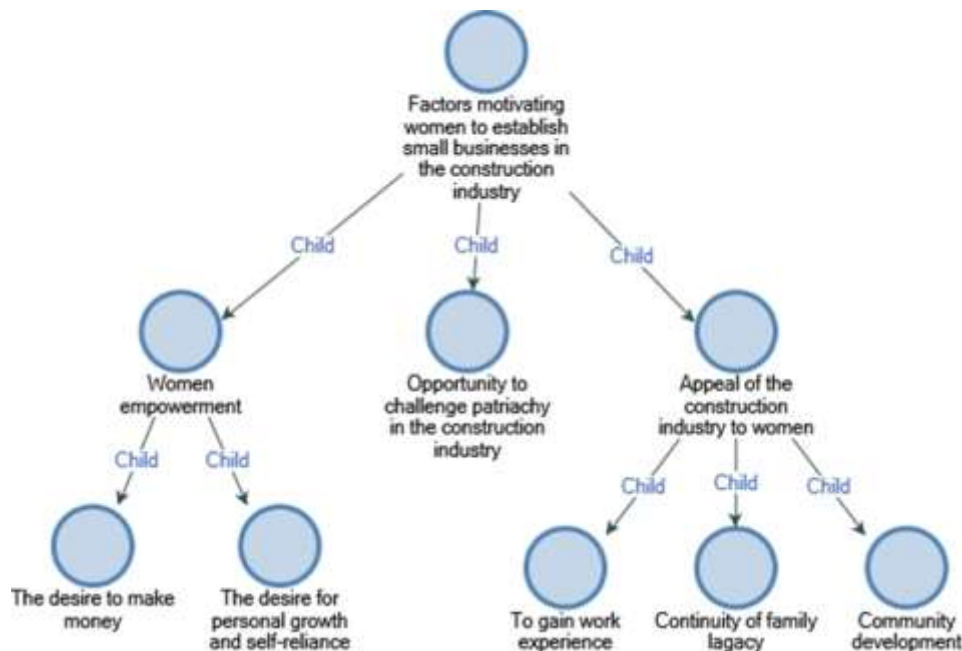
**Figure 1. Assessment of the Motivational Factors of Women in the Construction Industry**

*Source: Emerged from data analysis*

The themes from each of the objectives illustrated in Figure 1 are explained in detail in the subsequent sections below.

##### 4.1. Factors Motivating Women to Establish Small Businesses in the Construction Industry

Objective one of this study was to identify the factors that motivate women entrepreneurs to establish small businesses in the construction industry in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The women were asked to establish the factors, which motivated them to establish their small businesses in the construction industry which is considered a male-dominated industry. The three main themes that emerged from the data are that small businesses empower women, offer women an opportunity to challenge patriarchy, and that the construction industry is appealing to women. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the objective one is showcased in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Factors Motivating Women to Establish Small Businesses in the Construction Industry**

*Source: Emerged from data analysis*

#### 4.2. Small Businesses Empower Women

Regarding the motivation of women entrepreneurs to start up small businesses in the construction industry, which they knew was male-dominated and not very welcoming, the analysis of empirical evidence revealed that the desire for women empowerment emerged as a very strong motivation. The women entered the industry to empower themselves as well as other women. Some women specifically stated their desire to empower themselves and other women as a motivating factor, such as Respondent 9, who said:

*“I started my small business to empower other women. I worked for some time in the construction industry, so I know the difficulty women encounter in getting jobs in areas such as the construction industry and most importantly because they are mostly not educated enough”.*

The quote indicates that social and community motivations have encouraged women entrepreneurs to establish businesses in the construction industry. This is confirmed by extant literature. For example, Thipe (2019) noted that some businesses are started to create employment for the community and assist previously disadvantaged individuals to acquire experience and skills.

#### 4.3. The Desire to Make Money

For other women, however, what they considered as empowerment was expressed in certain specific terms. The desire to make money was one expression of empowerment as a motivation. A considerable number of women started a business in the industry to make money because they saw the prospects for earning a lot of income from the industry. This was clearly articulated by Respondent 14:

*“...To make money and be financially responsible for my wellbeing...”.*

In this quote, the respondent highlighted the issue of financial stability, which reflects the need for financial independence. Literature is replete with evidence that individuals start a business to create



wealth. Stephan *et al.* (2015) claim that entrepreneurs establish businesses because of their desire for financial gains. For women, earning an income is a means of gaining economic empowerment which enables her to look after the family.

#### 4.4. Desire for Personal Growth and Self-Reliance

The desire for personal growth and independence also emerged as a strong motivation for establishing small businesses. The construction industry was perceived as an avenue that could enhance women's personal growth and allow them to become self-dependent, self-sufficient, and free from the challenges that come with relying on others for their needs as well as being employed by others. Thus, according to Respondent 1,

*"I am developing myself in the specific field since I do not have any knowledge in the field of construction. I enrolled for part-time courses and I attend programmes organized by the industry"*.

Respondent 4 expressed it this way,

*"I started my own business to be my boss. The idea of having a domineering male boss became less appealing"*.

The respondents indicate that women entrepreneurs establish businesses in the construction industry intending to be independent. Solesvik *et al* (2019) posited that individuals start businesses to control their personal life and time. This means autonomy in decision-making. Women entrepreneurs found it frustrating and less appealing to be an employee in the construction industry.

#### 4.5. Small Businesses Offer an Opportunity to Challenge Patriarchy

Patriarchy is the social system in which men almost exclusively hold and control power in most spheres of life (Sultana, 2011). The pervasiveness of patriarchy is seen in the exclusion of women in social, political, and economic life (Derera, 2015). The construction industry is a male-dominated space in which the exclusion of women is maintained through certain gender stereotypes and beliefs (Aneke, Derera, & Bomani, 2017). This includes the perception of women as a weak gender and lacking the strength required for working in the industry (Aneke *et al.*, 2017). Challenging such perceptions and the entire patriarchal structure emerged in this study as a key motivation for women who established small businesses in the construction industry. The idea that participating in the industry would in itself challenge and subvert the belief that the industry is meant only for men was prevalent in the study. Some of the participants saw their pursuit of business in the industry as motivated by the need to challenge such beliefs and stereotypes about women, which excludes or push them to the peripheries of the industry. One such participant highlighted that:

*"I decided to start my business in the male-dominated industry because I wanted to defeat stereotypes in the industry... it is not men alone that can succeed in the industry, women also can have a successful career in the construction industry"* (Respondent 9).

Owning a small business in the industry is perceived as an opportunity to challenge male-dominance in the industry from within and to promote equal opportunities for people of all genders. They want to show that one's performance in the construction industry has nothing to do with one's gender but the required skills and knowledge. Their observation in the industry is that women have been treated as

inferiors for no better reason than their gender. Thus, Respondent 5 said,

*“I chose the construction industry because I want to develop my community in terms of infrastructure, and also because women are being discriminated against... I want to prove men wrong that women can also do a man’s job”*

Thus, for women entrepreneurs in the construction industry, challenging the status quo would eventually lead to the transformation of the industry. Indeed, while women noted that they wanted to transform the industry in terms of gender relations and equity, the change they wish to bring about is not limited to that. They seek to bring about change in the industry as a whole and starting small businesses within the industry will accord them the opportunity to do so. The findings imply that, if women entrepreneurs can confront the status-quo in the construction industry by breaking down the barriers to gain easy entry and run a successful business, this could help to bring the change that is led by women. The number of women in the construction industry will increase and eventually the image of the industry will be transformed. Consequently, economies would benefit from their talent and contribution to economic development.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2004), entrepreneurial activities that women are involved in are expanding all over the world in the formal sector and will play an even greater role in the informal sector. Women have made contributions from different backgrounds to their environment in the spirit of entrepreneurship. Construction is one industry that has been left out (Aneke *et al.*, 2017). Their contribution extends from the economic sphere to include the wider process of social transformation. According to Adesua-Lincoln (2011), women’s productive activity particularly in the construction industry empower them economically and enables them to contribute more to the overall development as women. The author argues that whether they are involved in small and medium scale activities in the formal or informal sector, women entrepreneurial activities are not only a means for economic survival but also have a positive social repercussion for women in general (Adesua-Lincoln, 2011).

#### **4.6. The Construction Industry is Also Appealing to Women**

The dominance of men in the construction industry and the ease with which it passes as an environment fit only for men could also create the impression that the industry is not appealing to women. Any such suggestion or impression is challenged by the findings of this study. The research data revealed different levels of interest in the industry among women from merely being interested and having a desire to explore the industry to have a ‘love’ or ‘passion’ for it. According to Respondent 16, *“The love and passion I have for the construction industry was my motivation since growing up. I have always loved to do a boy’s job, so I grew up with that mentality”*.

This shows that women also find the industry appealing despite the gendered barriers to entry surrounding it. This has motivated them to establish small businesses within the industry and to seek to grow and develop themselves in and through it.

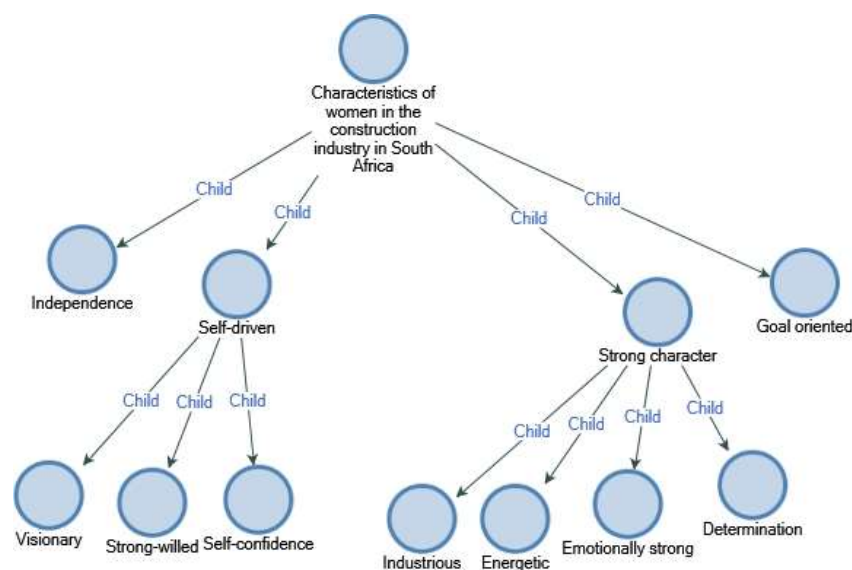
In addition to the various motivating factors discussed above, several other important motivations were highlighted by women entrepreneurs in the construction industry. Although these did not feature as strongly as the ones discussed above, they are worth mentioning. Some women entered the industry in search of work experience, others merely inherited and/or were managing and continuing the legacy of family businesses, and still, others saw it as an opportunity to contribute to the development of their

communities. It is also interesting to note that the data showed that a few women saw the absence of women in the construction industry as an opportunity rather than a challenge. This category of respondents who stated that the construction industry is also appealing to women saw the situation of male dominance in the construction industry to mean an absence of competition in the sector between the different genders, i.e. men and women. Thus, for such respondents, this situation translates into opportunities for women. Respondent 3, for instance, said: *“I realised that there is limited competition between men and women in the construction industry ... men believed that women will not be interested in such a masculine industry”*.

While this is an interesting point of view, it does not seem to be consistent with that of the industry not for women and the deliberate effort to keep women out of the industry through the perpetuation of certain stereotypes. However, given the motivation of women entrepreneurs to challenge such stereotypes and transform the industry, it could be regarded as an opportunity for women to realise their dreams. This implies that against the backdrop of the industry, women still find the construction industry appealing and want to make a mark in the industry. This could assist other women in seeing beyond just the image of the industry, but also what they stand to achieve by being part of the industry.

#### 4.7. Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs in the Construction Industry

The second objective of the study was to investigate the characteristics of women entrepreneurs that have made them survive in the construction industry, irrespective of the many challenges they face. For this objective, the participants were asked questions designed to find out whether they believed that women in the construction industry are different from women in other industries, and in what ways. The study went further to find out what, in their opinion could define a construction industry woman in terms of characteristics. In terms of the specific characteristics that make women in the industry to be unique and different from others. Figure 3 highlights the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study participants responses.



**Figure 3. Characteristics of Women in the Construction Industry**

*Source: Emerged from data analysis*

As illustrated in Figure 3, most of the participants believed that women in the construction industry are

unique and different from women in other industries. For example, for Respondent 6 noted that:

*“Yes, women in the construction industry are different from other women in other sectors because the construction industry is known for its male dominance... so for any woman to succeed in the construction industry she must be tough and work extra hard”.*

The statement shows that women entrepreneurs are unique, tough, and hardworking. The result is consistent with Barringer and Ireland (2014) who posit that women entrepreneurs have strong characters, highly motivated, tenacious, and strong work ethics.

The women also believed that in the construction environment, the male dominance and other peculiar challenges of the industry meant that not every woman would be attracted to it or survive in the industry. For example, this would include those wishing to balance family and work life. Respondent 1 claimed that:

*“The ability to balance both family and work is a difficult situation when working in an industry such as construction... More so, having to work on-site for long hours, and if the project is far from home, you will always be on the move”.*

The respondent implies that women entrepreneurs in the construction industry should have skills in balancing work and family life, be able to endure long hours of works, and be prepared to travel all the time. One of the reasons why women engage themselves in entrepreneurship is that they want to gain flexibility in providing for their family needs and operating a business (Buthelezi, 2011). One of the key characteristics of entrepreneurs is that they must be energetic (Sarri & Trihopoulou, 2004) such that they can work long hours in the construction industry and be able to travel.

The participants highlighted several qualities such as independent, goal-oriented, strong-willed, energetic, hardworking, emotionally strong, industrious, diverse, ambitious, and visionary. The participants did not only describe themselves as possessing these qualities, but they also prescribed these qualities for women who are interested in working and surviving in the industry. According to Respondent 4: *“Women working or running small businesses in the construction industry are hard workers and independent... They work tirelessly to get the job done since most men believe that the industry is not for women, so women in the construction industry make conscious efforts to prove them wrong”.*

Among all these qualities, independence was the most widely mentioned. It appears that by ‘independent’ participant meant self-reliance, and the consequent freedom to run one’s life and make decisions suitable for one rather than being submissive or subjugated to someone else because one is reliant on them. The women felt that being independent as part of their personality qualified them to fit for the industry. Owning a business within the industry further enhanced that independence and their integrity, as argued by Respondent 8:

*“I am independent in carrying out my duties... Men will not look down on women once they know women possess such quality as being independent since they always feel women are not fit for the construction industry”.*

Ranking next to independence is being motivated or driven. The respondents also believed that being motivated in the sense of being enthusiastic and driven is a key attribute of women in the construction industry. This is captured in the words of Respondent10:

*“...motivation for me is key...It drives me to want to even do more”.*

Other highly mentioned attributes include being confident, goal-oriented, and strong-willed. Barringer and Ireland (2014) noted that self-motivation is critical for entrepreneurial success. Sospeter (2016) suggests that women entrepreneurs must have persistence and determination to realise their entrepreneurial goals.

It was observed that in defining who a ‘construction industry woman’ is, the women entrepreneurs mentioned qualities that they thought they possessed. This could imply that the women perceive themselves as the ideal construction industry women, or as possessing the ideal qualities that women in the construction industry should possess. This is probably grounded in the fact that they probably attribute their successes and/or survival in the industry to these qualities. What this means is that a certain discourse, idea or stereotype exists, at least among these women, about what kind of woman is suited to the industry. The consequence of this is potentially the same as the consequence of the discourses and stereotypes that sustains male dominance in the industry. Thus, just as the dominant belief that the construction industry is for a particular gender, i.e. men to be precise, excludes women who are perceived to be weak, is similar to the belief that the industry is for specific kinds of women (independent, strong-willed, and so on) could exclude other women who are considered not to have those qualities.

It should be noted, however, that a very small percentage of participants (2 out of 16 women) believed that there is no difference between the women in the construction industry and other women in other industries. Some believed that women are generally tough, and they become stronger and develop some of the stated qualities as a result of the influence of the industry on them after they have joined. An excerpt from Respondent 13 showed that,

*“Women in the construction industry are not really different... The construction industry has its own culture and that makes women in the construction industry strong and enduring”*

Women in construction are determined and they believe in themselves, and the vision they have for their businesses makes them persevere amidst the challenges they face in the industry (Verwey, 2006). This could imply that, for women entrepreneurs to successfully operate businesses in the industry, they must possess some characteristics of an “ideal” woman with attributes including, but not limited to, being confident, eager to work, and having strong willpower. This also means that even among women, there is a form of discrimination regarding who is considered suitable for entering the construction industry. Some women who do not possess the required qualities may be declared unfit for the construction industry and thereby excluded.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The main aim of this study was to examine the factors that motivate women entrepreneurs to establish businesses in the construction industry. The research results indicated the women entrepreneurs are motivated by several factors such as the need to empower themselves and the community, the need to challenge the patriarchy, and that the industry is appealing to them. Furthermore, the need for independence, and creating wealth or making money are among the factors that motivated women to start small businesses in the construction industry. The characteristics of women entrepreneurs that have made them survive in the industry include independence, self-driven, and high energy levels, strong-willed, goal-oriented, self-confident, among others. Therefore, the researchers recommend that potential entrepreneurs in the industry require these characteristics to achieve entrepreneurial success.

## 6. Future Research Directions

Future research could focus on how women entrepreneurs in the construction industry are fighting to address gender imbalances in male-dominated spaces such as the construction industry and the mining sector. Other areas of future research include investigating the experiences of women in other male-dominated spaces such as engineering, and mining. The study implies that organizations and development agencies that aim to promote females the “girl child” should base their motivation or inspiration from the experiences of women in male-dominated spaces. The limitations of the study are that it was a qualitative study, which used a small sample to gather the experiences of women in the construction industry. This means that the results of the study cannot be generalized to all women in the entire industry. However, the results laid a foundation for future studies on the discourse. Despite the mentioned limitations, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on women entrepreneurs operating small businesses in the construction industry.

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