

**WORKING FOR YOURSELF IN CENTRAL ASIA: IS THE INFLUENCE OF  
GENDER ON THE ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERIENCE AND PSYCHE  
DIFFERENT HERE?**

Paul J Davis

Bang College of Business, KIMEP University, Kazakhstan

E-mail: [pdavis@kimep.kz](mailto:pdavis@kimep.kz)

Fatima Abdiyeva

ATF Bank, UniCredit Group, Kazakhstan

E-mail: [Abdiyeva\\_fatima@mail.ru](mailto:Abdiyeva_fatima@mail.ru)

***ABSTRACT***

*This paper is the result of an exploratory research project that examines the role of gender as a factor shaping the experiences and perceptions of small business owners in Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan. The findings of this study are discussed in relation to the findings of similar gender-based entrepreneurial research studies conducted in other countries. The research is based on a pilot study of thirty-two male and twenty-eight female small business owners. The respondents completed a self-administered questionnaire in the form of a survey instrument. The data revealed that there are several noticeable differences in the reported experiences and perceptions of male and female entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan compared with the experiences and perceptions of entrepreneurs elsewhere. However, there are also many similarities along gender lines between entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan and in other societies. As a first look at gender issues in entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan this study's limitations include sample size; geographical reach (only entrepreneurs in Almaty were surveyed) and the depth and breadth of data sought. Notwithstanding this, there is value in the findings of this study for young Kazakh citizens considering entrepreneurship as a vocation, for institutions that provide services to entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan and for government policy makers charged with developing the small business sector in the country.*

Keywords: Small Business, Entrepreneurship, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Gender Issues, Gender differences, Self-employed.

## INTRODUCTION

The investigation of the existence and prevalence of gender differences in entrepreneurship has received significant attention from researchers for a number of years. It is notable, therefore, that there remains much debate on the topic. The crux of this debate has two focal points. Firstly, whether there are, in fact, significantly observable differences between male and female entrepreneurs. Secondly, whether any observable gender differences can definitively be said to result as an inherent consequence of gender. The counter argument to the second point is that differences between men and women small business owners stem not from gender *per se* but from external factors that impact differently, and often unequally, on men and women. These factors are sometimes ignored and so the simplistic conclusion that men and women intrinsically make different choices as small business owners or are simply ‘different by nature’ is drawn. This paper will present the findings from a new study of Kazakhstani entrepreneurs and, in so doing, explore the two aforementioned points.

The majority of research concerned with gender differences in entrepreneurship has focused either on western countries or other English-speaking countries (Orhan and Scott, 2001). Relatively little research has explored these issues as they pertain to transitioning economies and, as far as can be ascertained, no other study exists of gender differences and entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. It is noted that those research studies that have found few gender differences among entrepreneurs have nearly all been conducted in industrialized countries (Orhan and Scott, 2001). This paper provides a first look at the experiences and perceptions of Kazakhstani entrepreneurs. Kazakhstan is a fast developing, new country which has positioned itself as a regional hub for commerce and banking. As such it presents itself as an interesting and increasingly important place for entrepreneurial research in particular and academic investigation generally.

## KAZAKHSTAN

This year marks the twenty-first anniversary of Kazakhstan’s independence. Prior to 1991 Kazakhstan was part of the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan is situated in Central Asia along with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. It shares a border with China to the East, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to the South, the Caspian Sea to the East and Russia to the north.

Since its inception, Kazakhstan has been led by President Nursultan Nazarbayev who has overseen the country’s rapid economic development and transformation from a Communistic centrally planned society to a tentative free market economy. The country has a population of approximately sixteen million but is about the size of Western Europe. Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is US\$7,440 (World Bank,

2011). Kazakhstan is a predominantly Muslim country operating a moderate, secular form of Islam similar to Turkey.

Kazakhstan emerged from the Soviet Union in a far better position than its neighbors. The country enjoys significant natural resources, especially large oil reserves, and bountiful productive farmland. What Kazakhstan did not inherit was a culture of entrepreneurship. Only in the dying days of the Soviet Union were laws passed to legalize private enterprise. The legacy Kazakhstan inherited from seven decades of Soviet governance was a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy, a central planning mindset and under-developed infrastructure (Tovstiga *et al.*, 2004). In light of this, Kazakhstan's progress towards a small business-friendly culture in just twenty years is surely remarkable.

According to Teal *et al.*, (2011) there are 140,000 small businesses in Kazakhstan today and that this figure doubled during the period 2005-10. The authors also note that 90 per cent of businesses in the country are family owned while 50-60 per cent of small businesses constitute some type of trading entity. It is also significant to note that the southern city of Almaty is the center of small business in the country (Teal *et al.*, 2011) because Almaty is where the research presented in this paper was conducted.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many researchers have concluded that there are no significant differences between the choices and characteristics displayed by male and female entrepreneurs. Tillmar (2007) argues that this is the conclusion that can be drawn from most studies and that it is contrary to expectations. As examples; Yu (2011) points out that male and female entrepreneurs are more similar than they are different in terms of their personal attributes. Similarly, Tan (2008) studied Chinese entrepreneurs and also concluded that self-employed men and women share similar character traits such as aggressiveness while in a Polish study, Zapalska (1997) found no discernable differences in character traits between male and female small business owners. Buttner (2001) found a number of common, shared characteristics among male and female entrepreneurs including need for achievement; innovativeness and independence.

Similar conclusions have been drawn by researchers looking at a range of other aspects of the role played by gender in entrepreneurial activity. For example; Maxfield *et al.*, (2010) found that women and men have the same propensity for risk taking and that women's motivations for taking risks in business are the same as for men. Further, the authors found little evidence for a particularly female decision making process. In a UK study it was discovered that there was no significant

difference between male and female entrepreneurs in raising the finance for a new business venture (Irwin and Scott, 2010). However, only 26 per cent of respondents in the study were women and the authors do not reveal whether the women had difficulty acquiring external financing. It could be that the 72 per cent of women in the study who commenced their business using their personal savings did so because they could not secure other finance. Certainly, the evidence from many studies is that women do find it more difficult than men to raise capital to start a business (World Bank, 2011; Weeks, 2009; Singh and Belwal, 2008; Brindley, 2005; de Bruin and Flint-Hartle, 2005; Hisrich and Fulop, 1994).

Tan (2008) found that the business start-up experience is the same for men and women and that women have no specific difficulties in starting a business in comparison with men. While this may be the case in China, it will be discussed in the following paragraphs that there is very substantial evidence to suggest that women do indeed face particular difficulties in acquiring debt capital to commence a business venture. Tan (2008) also concluded that men and women network the same and that there are no differences in the effectiveness of their networks. Again, much evidence as will be presented from many other countries specifically highlights networking as a major gender difference in entrepreneurial experiences. In a different Chinese study of gender and entrepreneurship, Yu (2011) found no significant difference in education level between men and women in business. Again, China appears to differ from the vast proportion of the research which indicates that women entrepreneurs tend to be better educated than their male counterparts (Weeks, 2009; McClelland *et al.*, 2005; Cowling and Taylor, 2001; Hisrich and Ozturk, 1999; Zapalska, 1997;).

The greater part of the research, however, represents that there are numerous and significant gender differences among entrepreneurs. Some studies present these differences as evidence that men and women behave, choose, act or decide differently along gender lines. Others argue that gender differences are the consequence of discrimination and inequality that limits the opportunities women entrepreneurs can exploit. The distinction is significant because it fundamentally characterizes two very different approaches to the study of gender in entrepreneurship. The first position postulates that natural gender differences between men and women influence their choices and perceptions as small business owners. The second view is that environmental circumstances and prejudices that adversely affect women in societies pre-determine the experiences of women as entrepreneurs by limiting the options open to them. Loscocco and Bird (2012) describe this phenomenon as gendered structural constraints and give the example of the woman's role in global society as primary care provider for children. This discrimination, according to Malach-Pines *et al.*, (2010), is important in the study of entrepreneurship because it explains *how* gender makes a difference rather than *whether* it makes a difference (my italics).

Indeed, the very premise that gender itself can be reliably cited as an explanation for how and why men and women entrepreneurs come to be different business people is

questionable. Tillmar (2007) criticizes the literature which concludes that the training needs of male and female entrepreneurs are essentially the same. She goes on to say that training needs do differ along gender lines but the reasons stem from exclusion, disadvantage and the nature of the business being operated rather than simply being gender based. Tillmar goes on to say that women entrepreneurs are not a homogenous group; rather they are diverse in every aspect. This further highlights the simplification of explaining gender differences without a broader context.

The tendency of some writers to characterize learned skills as inherent traits and then divide them into masculine and feminine sub-sets has also been challenged. Bruni *et al.*, (2004) give the example of ‘innovation’ as something that can be attained and developed as one such capability often treated as an intrinsic trait. The authors argue that this practice has served to emasculate entrepreneurship and sideline women with traits not perceived as valuable to entrepreneurship so that they become second class entrepreneurs who must try to adopt masculine traits if they wish to be successful entrepreneurs. Zapalska (1997) provides an example of this mode of thinking by claiming that most characteristics associated with successful entrepreneurship are masculine including: competitiveness; proactivity; independence; decisiveness and self-confidence). Zapalska goes on to say that unless women adopt these masculine characteristics they will be less successful in business.

Brush *et al.*, (2009) argue that women experience distinct and specific life events which influence many of the experiences they have as they become entrepreneurs. They give the example of child rearing and domestic work which necessarily influences a woman’s priorities and the time she has to devote to self-employment. This in turn dictates what kind of businesses a woman is able to operate. For example; with child rearing and domestic duties a business that requires a lot of travel (such as some sales work or consulting) is far more difficult to pursue. Therefore, studies which simply state that women seem to choose a narrow band of often home-based industries when starting a business fail to identify the source of these ‘choices’. In many instances, it is more a case of lack of choice. Malach-Pines *et al.*, (2010) make a similar point in relation to women’s ability to even start a business. They say that subjective, perceptual variables significantly influence a woman’s ability to be an entrepreneur. One example of this could be attracting investors needed to launch a new business.

This paper will now turn to the entrepreneurial gender differences different studies have highlighted.

The literature seems in agreement that men constitute a much bigger proportion of the entrepreneurs in most societies than women. A longitudinal study of Norwegian entrepreneurship during the 1990s, for example, found that one quarter of all self employed people in the country are women and that this rate is consistent with Europe as a whole (Spilling and Berg, 2000). That said, it is interesting to note that the rate at

which female entrepreneurship is growing is faster than that for men in many places (Hisrich and Ozturk, 1999; Lee, 1999; Jamali, 2009). In Singapore, for example, in the past twenty years women entrepreneurship has grown by 80.3 per cent compared with 65.6 per cent for men (Lee, 1999). Entrepreneurship is also growing rapidly among women migrants and women who are members of ethnic minorities as evidenced by the case of Latino women in the United States (Robles and Cordero-Guzman, 2007).

Another point on which there is a lot of consensus is that women entrepreneurs are more educated than their male counterparts (Yu, 2011; Cowling and Taylor, 2001; Hisrich and Ozturk, 1999; Zapalska, 1997). These papers note that women business owners tend to have more business degrees than men and tertiary qualifications in general. Women owned businesses are also generally smaller than those run by men in most societies (Alam, *et al.*, 2011; Yu, 2011; Roomi, *et al.*, 2009; Ndemo and Maina, 2007; Orhan 2001). There is a greater number of microbusinesses operated by women and a greater number of women sole traders. For example; a study of six sub-Saharan African countries found that two-thirds of the women-owned businesses were micro enterprises (Ndemo and Maina, 2007). Similarly, Al-Alak and Al-Haddad (2010) discovered that 66 per cent of the women-owned businesses they studied had nine or less employees. Indeed; seventy-five per cent of those businesses were home-based.

Financing is another area of entrepreneurial activity which has revealed a difference between the experiences of men and women. Women find it more difficult than men to secure external financing and, as a consequence, start businesses with less capital (Davidson, *et al.*, 2010; Tambunan, 2009; Brindley, 2005). Still and Walker (2006) found that in an Australian study 67 per cent of women started their business with personal savings while only 24 per cent used bank financing. One in five women in the study reported difficulty attracting financing to start their business. The problem appears to be pervasive; Gatewood *et al.*, (2008) found that even well educated, experienced and proven women entrepreneurs have difficulty securing bank financing for their businesses. Indeed, the proliferation of micro-financing in developing and emerging economies is largely a result of the reluctance of traditional banks to lend to aspiring entrepreneurs without collateral; the majority being women. The significance of the role played by micro-finance lenders in nurturing the growth of small business is explained well in Kuzilwa's (2005) paper on the Tanzania experience.

Researchers have focused much attention on what drives men and women to become entrepreneurs. People become entrepreneurs, it seems, as a consequence of push and pull factors. Push describes those circumstances which force or compel people into entrepreneurship. For example; lack of alternatives; losing one's job; financial survival. Pull factors are the opposite; these are circumstances which attract or entice people to entrepreneurship. Examples of pull factors are; exploiting a gap in the market; having something to do to fill spare time; satisfying a need to use one's skills

or talents. Most studies postulate that women are generally pushed into entrepreneurship while men are generally pulled towards entrepreneurship (Malach-Pines, *et al.*, 2010; Nagarajan *et al.*, 2009; Still and Walker, 2006; Zapalska, 1997). One reason for this is that female entrepreneurship is much higher in countries where income per capita is low and unemployment high and so financial necessity is commonly advanced as a reason why many women become self-employed (Malach-Pines *et al.*, 2010). Conversely, male entrepreneurship is higher in western countries where social security payments not only prevent people from slipping into abject poverty but provide, albeit undesirable, an alternative to self-employment.

Male business owners have also been said to possess disproportionately more social capital than female business owners. Moreover, women leverage what social capital they do have less effectively, or perhaps less assertively, than men (Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2009; Bird and Sapp, 2004). This phenomenon whereby women accumulate and leverage social capital to a lesser extent than do men is not restricted to women who are small business owners but has also been documented in the corporate sphere. Northouse (2010), for example, has argued that women executives have much smaller and less influential networks than their male counterparts and that women's networks tend to be very considerably dominated by friends and family where men's networks are much broader and far-reaching. The result is that male executives have access to and can create for themselves more and greater opportunities for self-advancement through their networks. Similar conclusions have been drawn of the small business networks of men and women entrepreneurs (Loscocco *et al.*, 2009).

Social capital such as experience, social networks and affiliations are important because they influence the range and nature of businesses that individuals can operate and they create opportunities for individuals. Jamali (2009) cites this as a reason why so many women are concentrated in small, low-growth, service and sales businesses although Brindley (2005) suggests women are better at self-screening than men and so start businesses which they are most confident will be satisfying and successful. Irrespective, those with higher levels of social capital discover more business creation and growth opportunities (Gonzalez-Alvarez and Solis-Rodriguez, 2011) and therefore social capital helps explain some of the disparities observable between male and female entrepreneurs.

Social capital is not the only factor researchers have identified as a barrier to female entrepreneurship and a differentiator between male and female small business owners. Women in many societies, unlike men, struggle against overt and covert discrimination; sexual stereotyping; legally and socially embedded prejudices and diminished rights (Tan, 2008; Ndemo and Maina, 2007). The combination of all barriers appears to conspire to largely limit women to just a few entrepreneurial paths and this seems to be true in both wealthy, western industrialized nations and poorer, less developed nations in Africa and Asia. Female owned businesses are very significantly concentrated in personal services; administration; retail; non-scalable

and non-durable manufacturing; sales and small scale labor-intensive agriculture (Dzisi, 2008; Lituchy and Reavley, 2004; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Hisrich and Ozturk, 1999) while male owned businesses are spread more equally across a broader range of industries.

Some studies have highlighted differences between the motivations of male and female entrepreneurs. Brindley (2005) found that women nominated autonomy as a business motivator more than men while Farr-Wharton and Brunetto (2009) found women are less motivated by business growth than men and more motivated by long-term survival. Similarly, Zapalska (1997) found that women were far more motivated by long-term wealth accumulation than quick financial gains than were men. A study of French entrepreneurs (Orhan, 2001) also discovered some notable differences among the motivators driving male and female entrepreneurs. Women placed less emphasis on social status; power and prestige than men and much more emphasis on economic development and creating jobs than did the male respondents.

Finally, gender differences have been observed in the way male and female entrepreneurs manage and lead their businesses. Women have been found to adopt a more participative and collaborative leadership style than men with maintenance of cooperative relationships more important to women than men. Yu (2011) discovered that women entrepreneurs are far more likely than men to make important business decisions in consultation with their managers. Orhan (2001) expresses this as a preference for creating harmony with others by nurturing positive relationships with employees. In the same vein, Farr-Wharton and Brunetto (2009) state that women adopt a relational approach to leading their businesses through building trust and encouraging involvement. An Israeli study (Dafna, 2008) found that women were people-oriented in their leadership style while men were more goal-oriented. In a United States study male entrepreneurs were found to use a mild form of 'command and control' to achieve business objectives while women preferred to use employee involvement (Nixdorff and Rosch, 2010).

This can broadly be summarized as the difference between transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Indeed, Tibus (2010) found a relationship between a woman owning a business and an increase in transformational leadership behaviors. Buttner (2001) found that women tended to be more transformational than men in their leadership because they often have better developed interpersonal skills.

## **THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND FINDINGS**

A self-administered survey was completed by sixty small business owners who expressed interest in participating in the research; 32 men and 28 women. The survey was designed in English and translated into Russian. The objective of the survey was

twofold: to elicit information on some of the dominant gender themes in entrepreneurship study for the purpose of comparison with earlier research and to explore possible gender differences in entrepreneurship specific to Kazakhstan. According to Hisrich and Drnovsek (2002) there are four dominant lenses through which to examine entrepreneurship: individual; process; organizational and environmental. This research project was designed to incorporate the individual aspect with the environmental. The individual aspect allows for comparison between this study and a large portion of the earlier research while the environmental aspect facilitates the exploration of entrepreneurship relevant to the development of Kazakhstan.

The survey had four sections. The first section sought basic demographic information on the small businesses. The second section of the survey was designed to identify the most significant challenges faced by Kazakhstani entrepreneurs in operating and growing their businesses. Section three of the survey asked survey respondents to identify whether conditions had changed over the past ten years to make business easier to conduct in Kazakhstan. The fourth section of the survey asked entrepreneurs to nominate how important different business motivators were to them.

The first section revealed a number of differences between male and female entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan. Men were almost twice as likely to own construction firms as women while 39 per cent of the women owned businesses providing personal services. It was found that no male respondents owned personal services businesses. The percentage of men and women that owned a retailing business was almost exactly the same. In relation to business size, all of the women owned businesses had 30 employees or less while only half of the men owned businesses had 30 employees or less. 60.7 per cent of the women owned businesses were microbusinesses with ten employees or less. 40.6 per cent of the men owned businesses were microbusinesses. In terms of longevity, 57.1 per cent of the women owned business had existed for two years or less while only 31.2 per cent of men had been in business for less than two years. 7.1 per cent of women had had their business for eleven years or more while 37.5 per cent of men had owned their business for at least eleven years.

Generally, the findings suggest that women in Kazakhstan find operating and growing a small business more of a challenge than men. For example; 92.8 per cent of female respondents reported getting bank finance to grow their business as a challenge while only 62.5 per cent of men found it a challenge. 64.2 per cent of women respondents said licensing and paperwork were a business challenge compared with 43.7 per cent of men. Government bureaucracy was considered one of the biggest business challenges by 92.8 per cent of women and 75 per cent of men. Managing the laws governing hiring and firing employees was similarly more a challenge for women than men (28.5 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively).

The business challenges which were experienced by men and women almost equally were: raising the capital to start a business (64.2 per cent of women and 56.2 per cent of men) and administering labor law that governs employee working conditions (35.7 per cent of women and 37.5 per cent of men). The only business challenge which men experienced significantly more than women was meeting the expectations of customers (35.7 per cent of women; 62.5 per cent of men).

Section three of the survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with nine statements about whether it had become easier to do business in Kazakhstan over the past ten years. The women were noticeably more positive than men about the improved business environment. On all nine statements at least half the women respondents agreed that the business environment in Kazakhstan had improved in recent years. Not one of the nine statements had half of the male respondents agreeing that the business environment had improved.

The improvements felt by the most number of women entrepreneurs were: less bureaucracy connected with starting and running a small business (78.5 per cent); easier to hire and fire employees (64.2 per cent); bank finance has become easier to obtain (64.2 per cent). The improvements men recognized in the greatest numbers were: social development (37.5 per cent); Infrastructure and public transportation improvements (37.5 per cent) and easier to hire and fire employees (37.5 per cent). There was a very significant difference of opinion between men and women on two statements. While 78.5 per cent of women respondents said there was less bureaucracy associated with doing business today in Kazakhstan compared with several years ago, only 31.2 per cent of male respondents shared this view. On whether economic developments had made it easier to run a business, 64.2 per cent of women said it had while only 18.7 per cent of male respondents concurred.

The final section of the survey asked entrepreneurs how important ten different motivators were to them in terms of being a small business owner. Respondents could nominate 'very important'; 'quite important'; 'not very important' or 'not important at all' for each potential motivator. On some motivators, men's and women's responses were similar. For example; 64.2 per cent of women and 59.3 per cent of men said that the desire to be their own boss was a very important motivator. Another motivator that both men and women rated as very important to a similar degree was doing work that they are passionate about (78.5 per cent for women and 71.8 per cent of men). Both men and women also said in similar numbers that increasing their earning potential was an important motivator for entrepreneurship (women 71.4 per cent and men 65.6 per cent).

Some significant differences were observed between male and female motivations for self-employment. Men were found to be more community minded in that they said contributing to the country's economic development (65.6 per cent of men and 28.5 per cent of women); to make a difference to others (50 per cent of men and 21.4 per

cent of women) and to be a more visible part of my community (28.1 per cent of men and 21.4 per cent of women) were very important motivators. Men were also far more motivated than women by the opportunity for risk taking and self-challenge; 56.2 per cent of men and 21.4 per cent of women said this was very important to them. Men, much more than women, also said that having full responsibility and accountability for their life (90.6 per cent of men and 35.7 per cent of women) and to better use their full set of skills and talents (78.1 per cent of men and 42.8 per cent of women) were very important motivators.

## **DISCUSSION**

The research found a number of significant differences between the experiences, perceptions and motivations of entrepreneurs along gender lines. Women were far more concentrated in services and far less represented in traditionally male-dominated fields such as construction. Women were also found to operate smaller businesses than men in terms of number of employees. This is all consistent with earlier studies which have observed similar trends. The research also revealed that women owned businesses were considerably younger than men owned businesses. This is something which other studies seem not to have investigated and it provides an opportunity for future researchers to explore further.

The study also discovered that women tend to find it more challenging than men across a range of indicators to operate and grow their businesses. Consistent with earlier research, women in Kazakhstan find it more challenging to secure finance to grow their business than do men. Government bureaucracy posed a particular challenge for both men and women and, despite government reforms, seems to reflect the social and political legacy Kazakhstan inherited from decades within the Soviet Union. While significant differences do exist between male and female entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan regarding the business challenges they face, the research identified that on several issues there is little difference between entrepreneurs according to gender. Only on dealing with customers did men indicate a greater challenge than women. The literature review suggested that women tend to have a far more progressive, inclusive and people-centered approach to running their businesses than men. Women have also been found to be more transformational in working with employees which could influence how employees interact with customers on a daily basis. This could, in part, explain why women business owners in the survey appear more at ease meeting their customers' needs than their male counterparts.

Based on the survey results, female entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan are significantly more positive about the improved business climate in recent years. On average, barely a third of male respondents felt the conditions for small business in Kazakhstan had improved over the past decade. For women the figure was at least half on all

statements. Irrefutably Kazakhstan has become a better place to be self-employed as evidenced by the dramatic growth in small businesses in the past six years and the significant government reforms which have been implemented to help small businesses (World Bank; 2011; World Bank, 2010). It seems that other studies on entrepreneurship have not sought to discover whether small business owners perceive any improvement in operating conditions over time. This would be an interesting research question that could identify whether entrepreneurs in other societies see benefits from relevant reforms their governments have introduced.

In relation to motivation, male and female entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan are both motivated to a similar degree by the aspirations of making money, being independent, controlling their own destiny and doing work they are passionate about. This is consistent with other studies conducted elsewhere. In light of earlier research, an interesting finding of this study was that male entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan appear to be more community minded than female entrepreneurs and this contradicts the findings of other studies which have found women are more motivated by a sense of community. On all three questions directed at identifying the altruistic tendencies of entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan, male respondents reported being more socially connected than women. This is the most significant finding to emerge from this study in terms of contradicting all other entrepreneurship studies on this issue. The male respondents were also found to be more motivated by risk taking and personal control than were the female respondents which is a finding consistent with earlier studies.

In summary and to return to a key topic in entrepreneurial study situated at the beginning of this paper, it is too simplistic to state that the gender differences observed through the study can be explained merely in terms of sex. As the literature review revealed, stocks of social capital, societal prejudice and discrimination are some factors which influence the entrepreneurial experiences and opportunities of women. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of published research on Kazakhstan generally and on gender issues specifically and so there is insufficient evidence on which to interpret the gender differences among entrepreneurs observed in this study. However, one might reasonably surmise that Kazakhstan, like all other countries discussed earlier, would have an environment which in some ways makes entrepreneurship more difficult to successfully pursue for women than men. It is certainly the case that the data collected are suggestive of this. This noted; it would require further investigation to understand the broader societal, economic, political and historical context of Kazakhstani small business within which the research findings must be situated and interpreted.

## CONCLUSION

Kazakhstan is a new country and entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is in its infancy. The country inherited a culture and psychology not conducive to entrepreneurial activities. Despite this, the number of small businesses has grown dramatically in recent years and the Kazakhstani Government has initiated a far-reaching reform agenda to build the small business sector. To date, there have been few academic studies of small business in Kazakhstan and this is the first that has focused on gender differences among Kazakhstani entrepreneurs.

This study found that there are a number of gender differences among Kazakhstani entrepreneurs that have also been observed in studies conducted in other societies. Further, male and female entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan are similar in some aspects of their experiences, opinions and motivations to their international peers as documented in the findings of earlier studies. This study, however, also contradicts some of the conclusions of earlier studies. The most notable illustration is that male entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan were found to be more motivated by the importance of community or the greater good than were women; this is the first study to reach such a conclusion. In addition this research project has investigated new areas of entrepreneurship for gender differences such as business longevity and how business conditions have changed over time.

It is the author's contention that the gender differences observed in the research cannot be understood without a full appreciation of the context in which males and females are socialized in Kazakhstan and the nature of prevailing societal norms. Kazakhstan's history as part of the Soviet Union and the influence of communism on men and women would be an interesting and integral part of understanding the context of entrepreneurship in present day Kazakhstan.

Finally, the findings of this study and conclusions on which they are based should be considered with caution and are reported here with a caveat. The study drew on a small sample of business owners and was elementary in design; it was a preliminary and very general first look at gender in entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan. This exploratory pilot study was designed specifically as a platform for further research; to give others a reference point from which to design and conduct their own, more comprehensive research. There is certainly opportunity and need for further research on entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian nations too. A great deal more is waiting to be learned about the issues introduced in this study and there are many more related topics in need of further investigation too.

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