



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT CONFERENCE 2023

1-3 MARCH 2023

BANGKOK, THAILAND

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Tomorrow People Organization

Dušana Vukasovića 73, Belgrade, Serbia

www.tomorrowpeople.org

Proceedings of international conference:

"WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT CONFERENCE 2023"

Editors: Tomorrow People Organization
Dušana Vukasovića 73
11070 Belgrade, Serbia

Secretary: Vladimir Ilić

Scientific committee: **Prof. Gerald Fry** - University of Minnesota, USA
Dr. Megumi Okugiri - University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo, Japan
Dr. Susan Crosbie - Amaad Private School, Oman
Laura R. Leaton - Anchored Elements Coaching and Training, LLC, USA
Dr. Khandicia Randolph - Regent University, USA
Sandy Lamb - Altitude Business Coaching, USA

Producer: Tomorrow People Organization

Publisher: Tomorrow People Organization

Quantity: 200 copies

Table Of Contents:

About the women's entrepreneurship promotion program in the Japanese local city; from a viewpoint of the legitimacy acquisition of women entrepreneurs	Prof. Dr Tomoyo Kazumi	School of Commerce/Senshu University, Japan	5
Craftivism: A Disruptive Force for Personal Change	Najla Turk	ConnEQt, Australia	25
Examining the Impact of Religion in Deciding Women's Leadership Positions in Nigeria	Nneka Chiedozie-Udeh	Robert Morris University, USA	37
How to Find Freedom in an Unfree World	Alexandra Dobrynina	Russia / China	45

Index Of Authors:

Chiedozi-Udeh, Nneka	37
Dobrynina, Alexandra	45
Kazumi, Prof. Dr Tomoyo	5
Turk, Najla	25

**About the women' s entrepreneurship promotion program in the
Japanese local city; from a viewpoint of the legitimacy
acquisition of women entrepreneurs**

**Prof. Tomoyo KAZUMI (Ph.D.)
School of Commerce/Senshu University**

t-kazumi@isc.senshu-u.ac.jp

1 Introduction

In Japan, a large gender gap still exists in entrepreneurial activities. There are fewer women entrepreneurs and women business owners than men. With the government's "promotion of women's participation and advancement" policy and reforms in work styles, in addition to the spread of remote work and telework as a response to COVID-19, the percentage of women in management positions in companies and organizations has increased. More women have been appointed to the boards of directors of large companies. Simultaneously, a wide variety of businesses that utilize information technology (IT) are being created, and there are some examples of women starting their own businesses in related fields.

In central areas such as Tokyo and Osaka, it is no longer unusual for women to start their own businesses by opening restaurants or specialty stores on the Internet. However, in regional cities, the number of "women entrepreneurs" is still small. In addition, the people in charge at commercial and industrial organizations and in local governments who provide support for women who want to start businesses in fields in which many men have traditionally started businesses, such as construction and manufacturing, lack an understanding of what women think about business and the management issues that women with family responsibilities face. This lack of understanding results in a mismatch between support programs and the actual needs of women entrepreneurs. In other words, although there are women who aspire to start their own businesses, women's entrepreneurship has not gained legitimacy when viewed against the standard of men's entrepreneurship, and therefore, it remains largely unrecognized and is not adequately supported.

Accordingly, this study analyzes a successful case study of women's entrepreneurship support in a regional city. Through the analysis, the study determines how the mismatch between the help offered by entrepreneurship support programs and women's actual needs for entrepreneurship support was resolved from the perspective of acquiring legitimacy.

2 Facts about women's entrepreneurship in Japan

The second Abe Cabinet set the "promotion of women's participation and advancement" as a policy goal, and the SDGs¹ also include "(5) Realization of gender equality." However, according to the "Gender Gap Index 2022" published by the World Economic Forum, Japan ranks only 116th out of 146 countries, which is the lowest level among developed countries and lower than China, South Korea, and the ASEAN

¹ An international goal stated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by a unanimous vote from all member states at a previous UN summit in September 2015. It comprises 17 goals and 169 targets.

countries. The Gender Gap Index comprises four areas: “Economy,” “Education,” “Health,” and “Politics,” and Japan ranks particularly low in terms of “Economy” and “Politics.” In the “Economy” area, the low percentage of women in executive and managerial positions in companies is a concern. However, the percentage of women business owners and entrepreneurs is also low. Increasing the number of women who start their businesses would contribute to improving the gender gap in Japan.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2021/2022 Women's Entrepreneurship Report² (Elam, Amanda B., *et al.*, 2022), the average Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity Index (TEA)³ across the 47 countries included in the aggregate was 10.4% for women compared with 13.6% for men. The country with the highest female TEA was the Dominican Republic at 43.7%, and the country with the lowest was Poland at 1.6%. At 4.0%, Japan was the third lowest country after Poland and Norway (1.7%) (Figure 1).

In terms of TEA by gender, Norway and the United Arab Emirates had the largest gender differences, with a TEA of 1 for men compared with only 0.4 for women. Japan was next at 0.5, and women's TEA was only half that of men. Conversely, the least difference was observed in the Dominican Republic, Kazakhstan, and Morocco, all of which had a male TEA of 1 and a female TEA of 1.1, higher than the male entrepreneurial rate. The global average was 0.7 for women compared with 1 for men.

The annual “Survey of New Business Startups” conducted by the Japan Finance Corporation (JFC) Research Institute indicated that a gradual increase in the percentage of women has been the long-term trend. However, there have been some fluctuations, as depicted in Figure 2. Even so, it only finally exceeded 25% in 2022.

The 2021 Survey on Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Attitudes is conducted annually since FY 2013 by the aforementioned JFC Research Institute. This is an online survey of persons (aged 18–69 years) registered with an Internet research firm and is split into a simple survey (presurvey) to determine whether they are eligible for the main survey and the comprehensive main one. This is a survey of a wider range of entrepreneurs than the “Survey of New Business Startups.” According to the report, women constituted 26.4% of the entrepreneurs who started a business in the last five years (2017–2021) (preliminary survey) and constituted 40.6% of “part-time entrepreneurs” (preliminary survey) who devoted less than 35 hours per week to their businesses. Clearly, a relatively larger number of women are starting their businesses while balancing household chores, childcare, and nursing care or as a side business.

The fields of business in which people start their enterprises differ between men and women. Women are more likely than men to start a business in the “lifestyle-related

² The report analyzes women's entrepreneurial activity using data from GEM 2021/2022.

³ Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity: as a percentage of the population aged 18–64 years who had just started a business.

services,” “restaurants,” “retail trade,” “medical care and welfare,” or “education” sectors. Men are more likely than women to work in “construction,” “transportation,” “academic research, professional, and technical services,” and “information and communication” (Figure 3).

3 Challenges in providing support for women’s entrepreneurship

The Japanese national and local governments are engaged in gathering information and developing measures to promote women’s entrepreneurship. According to the “Survey of Women Entrepreneurs, etc.” conducted in 2015 by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (commissioned by EY Advisory) targeting prefectural, municipal, and other governmental organizations and companies that support women’s entrepreneurship, the top responses to a question regarding recent female entrepreneurs and those wishing to start a business were “Social interest in women starting businesses has increased (47.4%)” and “The number of women who want to start a business has increased (42.9%).”

Furthermore, some of the challenges faced when starting a business are unique to women. According to the aforementioned survey, the most common challenges specific to women starting a business were “Balancing work with housework, childcare, and/or nursing care” (71.4%), “Lack of management knowledge and know-how” (53.2%), “Lack of role models” (38.3%), “Financing for opening a business” (37.0%), and “Lack of expertise and know-how required for the business” (32.5%).

Thus, although women are increasingly interested in entrepreneurship, various problems will arise if entrepreneurship support measures are planned and implemented without considering the distinctive characteristics and difficulties of women entrepreneurs, which differ from those of men. Specifically, for example, “business start-up seminars” are often held on weekends or weekday evenings for the convenience of those working in companies (men), but these are times when it is difficult for women to participate. Women can usually only participate while the children are at school or before dinner is to be prepared. In addition, if childcare services are not provided, they must either have someone take care of their children or pay a high fee to hire a babysitter, which is a significant hurdle. Social gatherings among seminar participants are often organized as a form of peer support, but these are also often held on weekday evenings with food and drink, making it difficult for women with family responsibilities to attend.

The content of “business start-up seminars” requires participants to prepare a detailed business plan since the objective is to eventually receive a loan from a financial institution to start a business. However, for women, many of whom want to start a small business at home, such a detailed plan is not necessary since they do not plan to obtain financing. We have heard that many women who initially attend the

seminars quit halfway through because the content is too difficult or they are concerned about the gap between the type of business they have in mind and the required business plan.

In addition, women who actually consulted with support organizations or applied for loans at financial institutions said that they were often disappointed because their business ideas were not understood by male counselors or loan officers (Table 1). This is a real challenge faced by women entrepreneurs because their businesses can be different from those of male entrepreneurs. One factor that discourages women from starting their businesses is low self-efficacy. A single remark by a person in charge who does not understand women's entrepreneurship may cause women to lose confidence, thereby further deterring them from realizing their entrepreneurial potential.

Especially in regional areas, as opposed to central areas, women are rarely assigned to be in charge of consultation services at Chambers of Commerce and Industry or public support organizations related to business and trade. Those in charge who have no experience in housework, childcare, or nursing care and who have only provided support to male entrepreneurs cannot understand the business perspectives and support needs of female entrepreneurs.

4 A case study of women's entrepreneurship support in a regional city - Toyota City, Aichi Prefecture

This section describes the process by which the regional city of Toyota City, Aichi Prefecture, overcame challenges in women's entrepreneurship and developed effective support measures.

4.1 Overview of Toyota City

Toyota City, Aichi Prefecture, has a population of approximately 417,000 and is located about an hour by train from Nagoya or Toyohashi. The headquarters of Japan's largest automaker, Toyota Motor Corporation, is located here. According to the Basic Economic Census conducted in 2014, there were 13,981 business establishments with 253,165 employees located in Toyota City. By industry, the manufacturing sector constituted 11.2% of the total number of establishments and 43.9% of the total number of employees. Thus, it is very much a city of automobiles and manufacturing.

Many women who work in the manufacturing industry are employed in factories, and once they get married and have children, it becomes difficult for them to work night shifts and often leave their jobs. Accordingly, there is a strong sense of gender role division of labor in the region, with men working outside the home and women taking care of housework and childcare. Toyota City has a higher percentage of married women engaged in housework (full-time housewives) than the nation as a whole (Figure 4). When their children grow up and want to work, there are not many suitable

job opportunities in the area because of the large number of manufacturing companies. In addition, women who relocate to Toyota City because of their spouses' job transfers face limited opportunities to demonstrate their high potential.

4.2 Background and outline of the “Women Can Start a Business in Toyota” Project⁴

Playing a central role in supporting women's entrepreneurship in Toyota City is Rie Oniki, CEO of Eight Co., Ltd. Ms. Oniki moved to Toyota City as a result of her spouse's job transfer and established Eight Co., Ltd. in 2015. In Nara City, where she lived before moving to Toyota City, Ms. Oniki partnered with freelance mothers to run a business that took on tasks from other companies and further developed it into a business that supported entrepreneurship. Eight also offers a “Moms Making their Debut in Entrepreneurship School” course as an independent project. Ms. Oniki teaches entrepreneurship courses in Toyota City and in other cities, towns, and villages in Aichi Prefecture.

When Eight Co., Ltd. was given the opportunity to plan and teach an entrepreneurship course sponsored by the Toyota Chamber of Commerce and Industry starting in FY2015, they devised the title and content of the course in response to concerns that previous entrepreneurship courses had appeared to be intimidating for women. Their flyers were also printed in soft colors and were written in a handwritten style. The title of the course was “Turn your ‘newfound interest’ into a job! A series of courses for mothers to start their own businesses” (Figure 5).

In Toyota City, several entrepreneurship courses for women were held by different organizers: an entrepreneurship school organized by Eight, another by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and another by the Toyota City Manufacturing Industry Promotion Division, as well as a series of mini entrepreneurship courses for women organized by the Toyota Gender Equality Center. From the perspective of women interested in entrepreneurship, there was some confusion as to which courses they should take, and inquiries to Eight Co., Ltd., which served as the instructor for several courses, increased. Accordingly, Eight Co., Ltd., acting as the secretariat of the project, started the “Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project” in 2016, a collaborative project among four organizations, including the previously mentioned three organizations and Toyota Shinkin Bank (regional bank).

The slogan “Women Can Start a Business in Toyota” conveys the message that in Toyota City, where men have mainly started businesses in the manufacturing industry,

⁴ This case study is based on information about the “Women Can Start a Business in Toyota” project posted on the website of eight-tv.jp. This report is based on the reports for each year, an interview with Rie Oniki, CEO of Eight Co., Ltd. (held on March 15, 2022), and those who were in attendance at the “Women Can Start a Business in Toyota” business contest held on December 11, 2022, and a later e-mail fact-checking session with Ms. Oniki.

women can pursue their entrepreneurial ventures based on their ideas and experiences. In other words, it gives legitimacy to women's entrepreneurship. With the acquisition of social legitimacy, women entrepreneurs are better able to attract management resources, reduce challenges arising from inexperience, and achieve better business outcomes (Kibler *et al.*, 2014; Shepherd *et al.*, 2007).

Launched in 2016, the "Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project" has as its mandate the goal of "helping to meet the unique challenges of women's entrepreneurship" (Eight, 2016). Specifically, many women have gaps in their careers due to life events; time management can easily become a challenge due to home responsibilities, children, and family-oriented lives. Furthermore, many businesses started by women are small and provide personalized, accessible services. Moreover, the project's role is recognized as one of unifying and coordinating the support provided by each organization, creating a system that enables women to grow incrementally and building a support system that will allow them to develop as a business and create employment in the future.

The duration of the 2016 course was from July 6, 2016, to the end of March 2017. The course program was divided into three levels: "those considering starting a business but not sure how to proceed" (Entrepreneurial Level), "those who just started a business" (Entrepreneurial Beginner Level), and "those who already started a business and wished to expand the scope of the challenges they faced" (Entrepreneurial Growth Level).

The course began with a "Project Orientation," and the first three lectures (one for each topic) were designed to help participants learn about themselves and consider entrepreneurship and other ways of working. These courses were intended for those at the "considering starting a business but are not sure how to proceed" level. The Center for Gender Equality was in charge of the course.

The next four courses were concerned with the practical application of opening a stall at an event to flesh out the details of one's own business. First, as a "Practical Challenge for Opening an Event Store," participants would learn what to sell, the basics of marketing, teamwork for preparation, and preparation for opening a store. The course comprised five sessions, including an actual event stall.

In between the above lectures, a lecture on "Improving the ability to open a stall at an event" was held, which included a lecture on "Developing the ability to send out information via social media" and a lecture on "How to attract people to your stall." By opening a stall at an event, participants could gain an understanding of customer reactions and needs, information that would be helpful in planning the actual operations, sales, and profits of their new business. After the event, there was a "Women's Entrepreneurship Exchange" where participants discussed their thoughts on their entrepreneurship with each other to "identify their present and future and take another step forward."

Participants could acquire a concrete image of entrepreneurship by opening an event stall and could consult with experts on the next steps at the “Free Consultation for Women’s Entrepreneurship,” held seven times in total. This course mainly targeted the “Entrepreneurial Beginner Level” and the “Entrepreneurial Growth Level.” The Toyota Chamber of Commerce and Industry was in charge of the program.

This was followed by a course on finance and related topics (one session) and then by sales practice at a rental store (about 2 months × 2 sessions), which was then followed by a course on creating personalized plans for starting a business. Rental stores were operated by several persons, selling and providing services to customers for approximately two months. Since rent costs would be incurred, specific figures were confirmed regarding sales, production costs, and various expenses, making it easier to prepare a business plan including an income and expense plan and a financial plan. Moreover, participants were able to check the time taken to manufacture, sell, and service products and learn about advertising and customer service, which was well received. Four people opened stalls in the first half of the year, with 513 visitors and overall sales of 514,640 yen. In the second half, 6 people opened stalls, bringing the total number of visitors to 616 and the total sales to 1,056,674 yen.

After accumulating experience in practical application, the students would proceed to the “Entrepreneurial Plan Creation Course,” a five-session syllabus. With a sustainable business in mind, the participants discussed financial planning and marketing methods and prepared materials to present their entrepreneurial plan in front of a group of guests. The final session involved a public presentation, with slides created in PowerPoint displayed. In each work session, strengths were discussed and confidence was built. In this course, the participants were required to try out their business as an idea, get a concrete image of the business, and then proceed to the preparation of a business plan. The curriculum was well thought out. The Toyota Chamber of Commerce and Industry was in charge of this program.

At the end of the course, a “project debriefing and exchange event” was held to share information with relevant organizations and allow female entrepreneurs who participated in the course to interact with each other and with the organizations that implemented the course (Figure 6).

All courses included childcare (for a fee).

4.3 Innovative content and results

Accordingly, 26 seminars were held during the 2016 project, with 260 participants. Participants were characterized as housewives or part-time workers in their 30s or 40s or those who already started their businesses. The majority constituted those with an “aim to start their own business” (51%), but 39% of attendees were those with an “aim to work in some form, including the option of starting a business.”

Regarding the method of notification that best reached women who wanted to start

their own businesses, “introduction from Eight” was the most common method at 31%, followed by “introduction from a friend or acquaintance” at 20%. The problem was that information about entrepreneurship courses and events for women held by local governments was not easily communicated to the target audience. In the case of Toyota City, compared with the distribution of information in the city’s PR magazine, the distribution of information to the women’s community by word of mouth, e-mail, etc., reached the highest number of potential entrepreneurial women.

Furthermore, satisfaction among course participants was high. From the feedback throughout the course, before joining the project, participants were concerned that they did not know what to do first and wondered if they would be able to start a business doing what they were interested in. The determining factors in signing up for the project were that “it was OK to be in a state of confusion and not have a concrete plan” and that the course was designed for women, had accessible fees, and offered childcare. After all, few women have a concrete plan for starting a business from scratch, so the need to start supporting entrepreneurship from the stage of “I want to start something, but I don’t know what to do” becomes apparent.

As for what was good about attending the course, respondents stated, “I thought I would have to give up my children and my own life by working, but my thinking has changed,” and “I had time to reevaluate myself.” Clearly, for women, entrepreneurship is not just about creating a business to make money but is really perceived as a means of “self-actualization.”

Furthermore, when asked about the changes they experienced after taking the course, the unanimous responses were “I gained confidence,” “I was able to take a step forward,” and “My motivation increased.” Many participants have taken concrete steps toward starting their businesses, and it can be concluded that the series of courses has not only empowered women but also promoted entrepreneurship.

4.4 Subsequent developments

The “Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project” was launched in 2016 and entered its seventh year in 2022. The course content is reviewed from year to year. In FY 2017, 17 courses were offered with 203 participants, but sales practices in rental stores were omitted. In FY 2018, 16 courses were offered with 207 participants, and event stalls were omitted. Instead, a course on “Selling Handmade Works via Apps” and a “Crowdfunding Course” were added.

The course content significantly changed in FY 2019 and FY 2020, with FY 2019 focusing on the “Skill and Mind Up Seminar for Women Entrepreneurs” and FY 2020 focusing on matching new start-up companies with existing companies and providing long-term accompaniment support, in part due to the spread of COVID-19.

From FY 2021, the first half of the program, “Knowing Yourself” and “Thinking about a Work Style that Suits You,” were to be conducted by the Gender Equality Center and

through Eight's own lectures. This was followed by "Entrepreneurial Consultation" and the "Entrepreneurial Plan Creation Lecture" as well as the "Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project Business Contest." Over the years since the project's inception, know-how on how to support women's entrepreneurship has been shared among the multiple organizations involved in its operation, and roles have been divided among them based on their respective areas of expertise. Unfortunately, however, no recent events have been held that would allow stalls to be opened, and no practical courses have been included.

Project content in FY 2022 was similar to that in FY 2021. The author attended the business contest held on December 11, 2022. The eight finalists, in addition to two students, were women in professional occupations such as nurses and counselors. Each proposed a business that would solve a social issue that they personally experience on a day-to-day basis. The grand prize went to musubun Inc., which aims to alleviate the shortage of welfare personnel and realize a symbiotic society through a welfare experience matching website that connects students with welfare workplaces. The company's representative, Ms Moe Suzumura, took a leave of absence from her university to run this enterprise.

During the contest, a person from the Toyota Chamber of Commerce and Industry mentioned that the chamber's consultation service had received over 150 consultations between April and November, 60% of which were from women and that the number of consultations from women is further increasing. A member of the Toyota Chamber of Commerce and Industry commented, "We encourage those who have concerns about where to start to take advantage of our services, as we will be happy to speak with you about anything you need." At the end of the contest, Mayor Toshihiko Ota of Toyota City addressed the audience, saying, "We started this project in 2016, and more than 800 women have already participated in it. It's wonderful to see women doing so well. Although it is an idea that has just come to my mind, I would like to create a virtual space where products developed by women entrepreneurs can be showcased and sold and where entrepreneurs can interact with each other," she said. This suggests that women's entrepreneurship is gaining recognition and legitimacy in Toyota City, which is known for its manufacturing industry.

5 "Women Can Start Their Own Businesses in Toyota Project" success factors and effectiveness

This project in Toyota City, where there are more full-time housewives than in other areas of Japan and where women working outside the home or realizing what they want to do through entrepreneurship during child-rearing years is not widely appreciated, is a good example of how to raise awareness and understanding of women's entrepreneurship, thereby increasing its legitimacy.

Women who are forced to interrupt their careers due to childbirth and those who may have previously stayed at home may want to do something, but this does not immediately translate into entrepreneurship. This process requires self-reflection, finding a balance with family life, and turning your interest into a job. While not all women are in the same situation, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of these women and provide support for entrepreneurship, even for those who do not have a concrete entrepreneurial plan. In addition, even those who at first have only a vague interest in entrepreneurship have perspectives and experiences that men do not have, such as childcare and involvement with the local community, and have the potential to create diverse businesses that meet social needs.

Even in Toyota City, those in charge of entrepreneurship support at city hall, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and credit unions did not initially expect the women who participated in the project to start diverse, sustainable businesses. However, as a result of participating in the management project organized by Ms. Oniki of Eight, who herself has experience starting a business while raising children, the women who participated in the course gained confidence, materialized their entrepreneurial plans, and actually started their own businesses, which undoubtedly changed their own perception of women's entrepreneurship. The business contest for women entrepreneurs resulted in the launch of innovative businesses that had not previously existed in Toyota City, and the legitimacy of women's entrepreneurship was enhanced when many city hall staff, Chamber of Commerce and Industry staff, and citizens became aware of these new business perspectives. In this way, the legitimacy of women's entrepreneurship has been recognized by the city's chamber of commerce and financial institutions, and this will benefit the success and growth of these businesses by enabling them to receive various types of support, work with existing companies, and in some cases, obtain financing.

By ensuring that women's entrepreneurship, as it exists, is properly recognized, valued, and legitimized, previously "invisible" women entrepreneurs will be considered and will be more likely to receive appropriate public support. As a result, women will be empowered, and women's entrepreneurship will be promoted.

6 Conclusion

This paper indicated that in regional areas, where the gender gap is larger than in central areas, the issue is that women's entrepreneurship has not yet acquired sufficient legitimacy. It analyzed the process of providing appropriate support for women's entrepreneurship, especially in the support provided by public institutions, through which women's entrepreneurship gains more legitimacy. In the current climate of insufficient access to entrepreneurial opportunities for women and insufficient understanding of the needs of women for entrepreneurial support, the study has been

able to state the importance of gaining legitimacy for women's entrepreneurship in the regions concerned as a measure to promote support for women's entrepreneurship.

Women entrepreneurs are diverse, ranging from those who start high-tech start-ups to those who start social businesses. Many of these community-based women entrepreneurs do not have a clear business plan at first glance, and it is often unclear whether they will be able to generate enough revenue to sustain their businesses. Public agencies usually consult with male entrepreneurs, which leads them to assume that it is normal for male entrepreneurs, the breadwinners of the family, to run businesses. If one looks at women's entrepreneurship from that perspective, it may not seem very much like a business but more like a volunteer hobby.

Even now, many people in charge of consultation services are men, and many of them may not understand the issues and solutions related to childbirth, childcare, and nursing care, which they have never experienced. Unfortunately, the majority of contact persons at public support organizations are still men in regional areas. We encourage such male counselors to visit social events, etc., attended by a large number of women entrepreneurs. The author once observed a "Mama Fest," an event where mompreneurs opened their stalls, and saw a male visitor who was very surprised to see the enthusiasm of the stall holders and the women who listened intently to the stories of senior mompreneurs. By diving in as a minority among a large number of women entrepreneurs, one can see things that have not been seen before.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate the significance of providing support for women's entrepreneurship. Women who have participated in the "Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project" have not only become more motivated to start their businesses but have also gained confidence in themselves and have also started to take positive steps forward. Women's empowerment can be achieved simultaneously by supporting women's entrepreneurship. If women living in a community are empowered, the community will be revitalized. It is our hope that support for entrepreneurship will be provided in a way that is more friendly to women to revitalize every region of Japan.

List of Citations and References

- Elam, Amanda B., et al. (2022) "Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2021/22 Women's Entrepreneurship Report: From Crisis to Opportunity", London: GEM.
- Kibler, Ewald, Teemu Kautonen, and Matthias Fink (2014) "Regional Social Legitimacy of Entrepreneurship: Implications for Entrepreneurial Intention and Start-up Behavior", *Regional Studies*, 48(6), 995–1015.
- Nishimura, Junko and Hyunji Kwon (2016) "Divergence in Women's Employment in Korea and Japan: What Shapes the Different Patterns around Childbirth?", *Development and Society*, 45(3), 467–502.

Shepherd, D., Jeffery S. McMullen and P. Devereaux Jennings, (2007), "The formation of opportunity beliefs: overcoming ignorance and reducing doubt", *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 1(1-2), 75–95.

EY Advisory Ltd (2016) "Report on the FY 2015 Industrial Economy Research Commissioned Project (Survey of Women Entrepreneurs and Other Entrepreneurs)," March.

Shikazumi, Michiyo (2017), "Women's Entrepreneurship and Required Support Measures: Focusing on 'Mama Entrepreneurship'," Shoko Research Institute, Shoko Finance, April 2017, 5–26.

Shikazumi, Michiyo and Norifumi Kawai (2018), "Women's entrepreneurship support measures and women entrepreneurs' self-efficacy: from Japanese data," *Entrepreneurial Research Forum*, 15, 109–134.

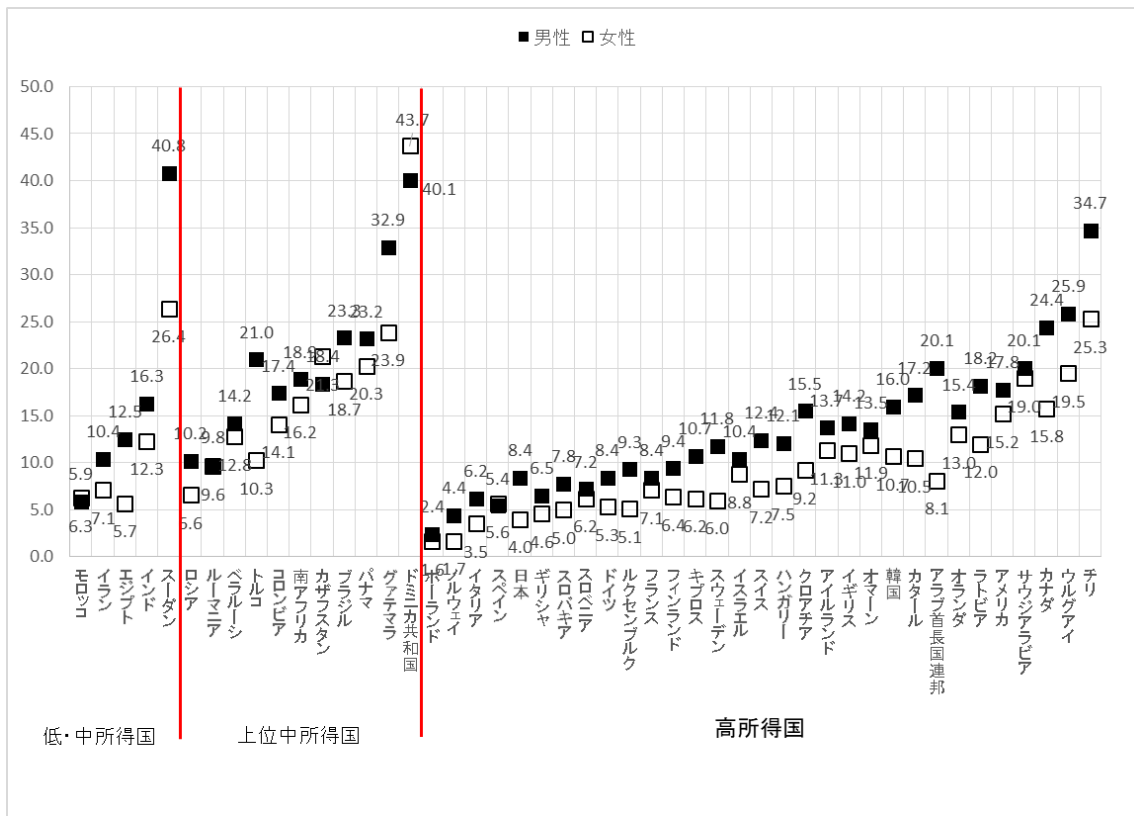
Eight Co., Ltd. (2016) "Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project 2016 Report"

Eight Co., Ltd. (2017) "Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project 2017 Report"

Eight Co., Ltd. (2018) "Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project 2018 Report"

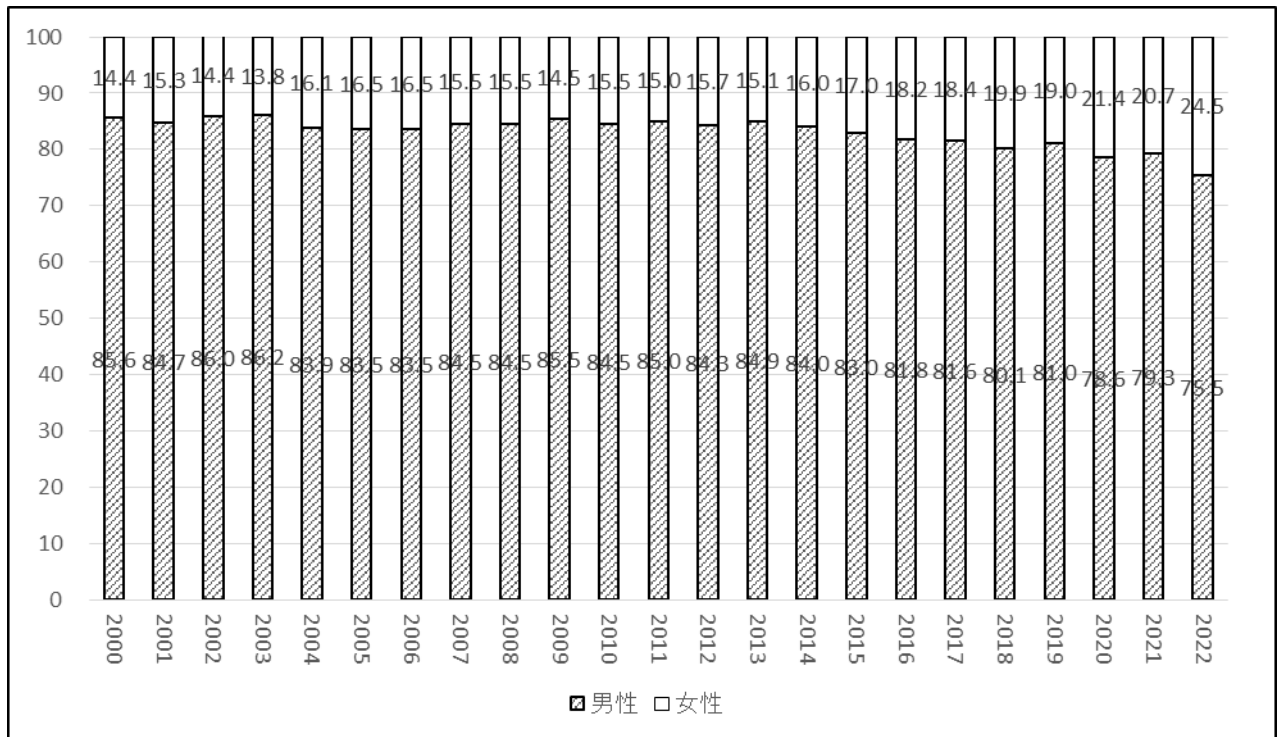
Japan Finance Corporation Research Institute (2023), "2022 White Paper on New Business Startups," Saeki Communications

Japan Finance Corporation Research Institute (2022) "FY2021 Survey on Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Attitudes—Summary of Questionnaire Results," January 26, 2022.



Source: GEM2021/2022 Women's Entrepreneurship Report Figure 2, adapted from the Japanese

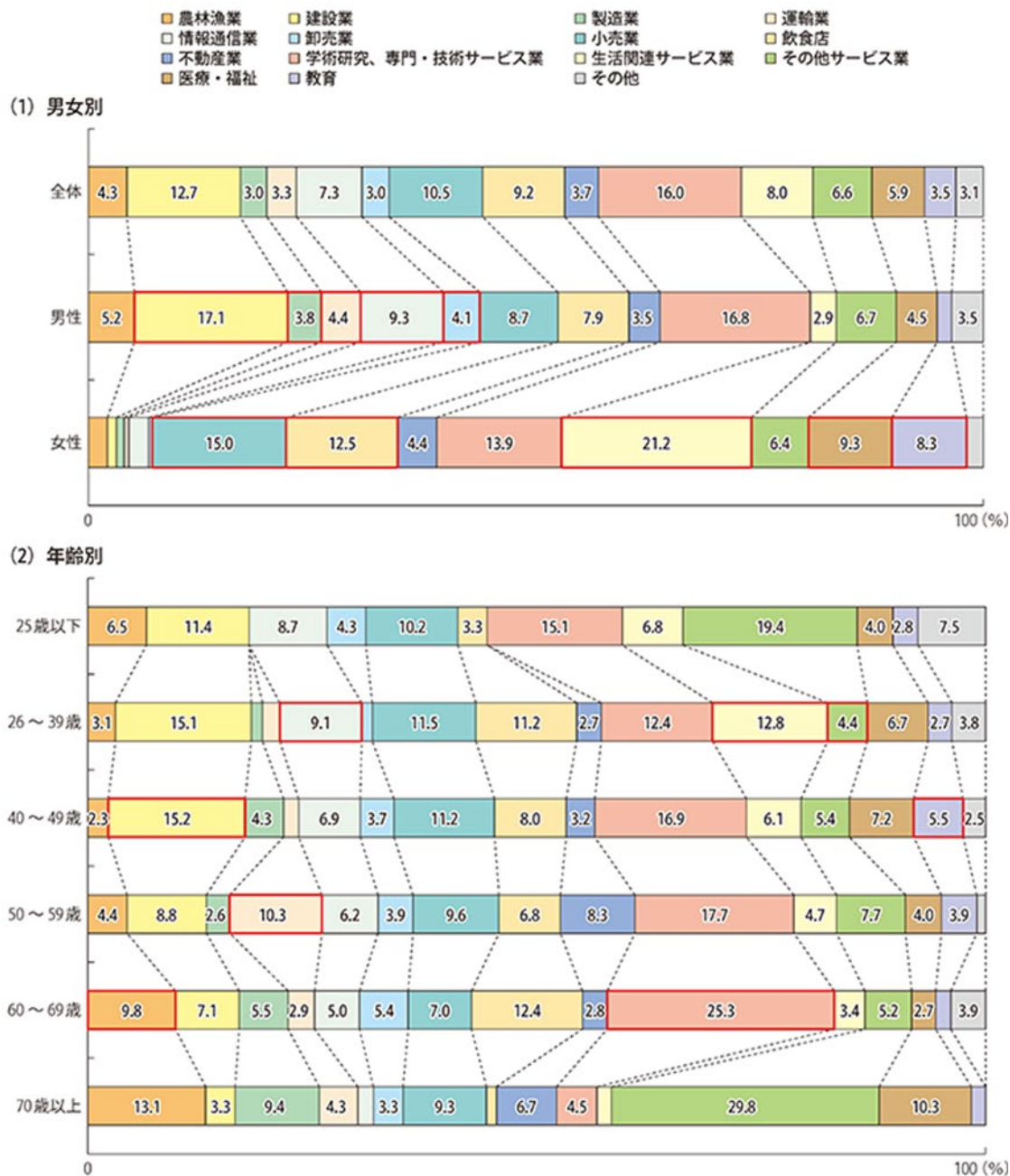
Figure 1: Gender Differences in TEA by Country



Source: Japan Finance Corporation Research Institute (2023), “2022 White Paper on New Business Startups,” Saeki Communications.

Figure 2: Gender distribution of respondents to the survey on new business openings

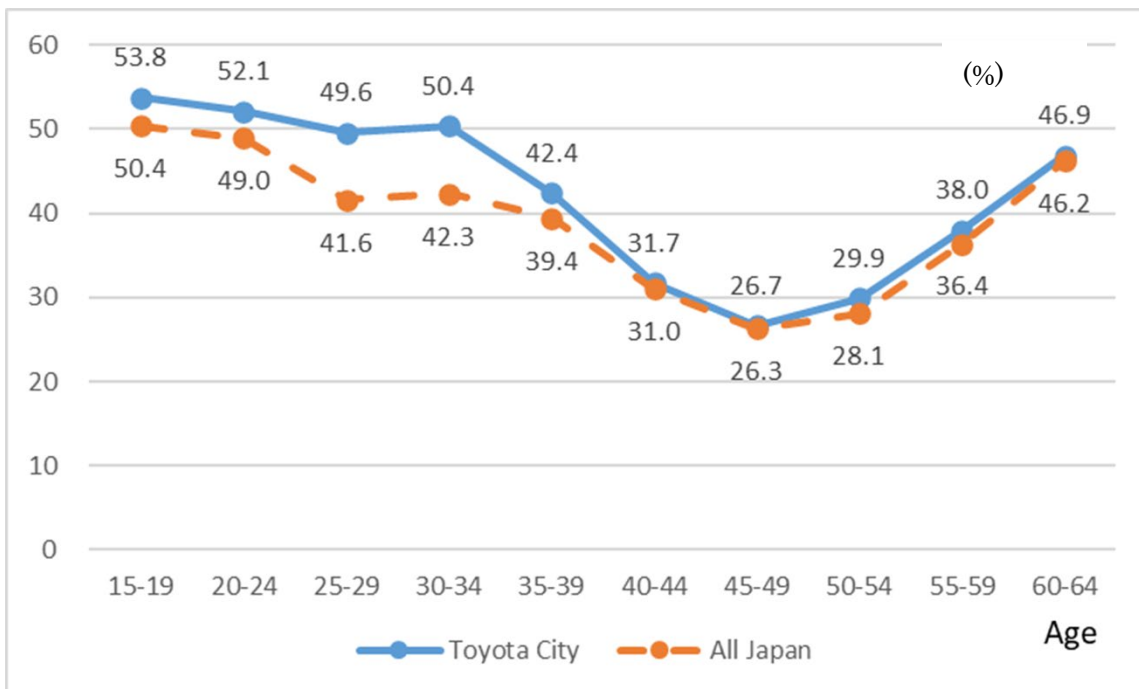
第2-2-9図 男女別及び年齢別に見た、起業家の起業分野（2017年）



資料：総務省「平成29年就業構造基本調査」再編加工
 (注)1. ここでいう「起業家」とは、過去1年間に職を変えた又は新たに職についた者のうち、現在は「会社等の役員」又は「自営業主」と回答し、かつ「自分で事業を起こした」と回答した者をいう。なお、副業としての起業家は含まれていない。
 2. 起業分野とは、「起業家」が就業している産業分野をいう。

Source: Small and Medium Enterprise Agency (2019), “2019 White Paper on Small and Medium Enterprises”

Figure 3: Entrepreneurial fields by gender



Source: 2010 Census

Figure 4: Percentage of married women engaged in housework in Toyota City

Figure 5: Flyer design for “Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project”





**とよたで
女性の起業
できます。
PROJECT**

豊田市 3 機関合同企画プロジェクト

<p>豊田市役所 【とよた男女共同参画センター】 【ものづくり産業振興課】</p>	<p>豊田 商工会議所</p>	<p>豊田 信用金庫</p>
--	------------------------	-----------------------

市民の「働く」を応援する豊田市の3機関が主催。女性起業のエキスパート『株式会社 eight』と連携し様々な講座やイベントを企画しています。

結婚・妊娠・出産・子育て・介護…
様々なライフイベントへの柔軟な対応が求められる「女性の働きかた」。女性が人生を通して「働く」をもっと楽しむために、自分のスタイルで仕事をつくる「起業」を支援する女性が、ここ豊田でも増えています。プロジェクトではそんな女性たちのために様々な人や社会との繋がり、場、スツッパップの場を提供していきます。

起業なんてまだまだ…という方向に向けた導入講座から実際に起業を始めている方向けの実践講座まで段階に応じた学びの場をご用意いたしました。



2016 年度スケジュール

July. 7 Start!

プロジェクトオリエンテーション
7/6日(水) 10:30~12:00

なりたい未来と自身も考える「働く」にやむを得ず 3つのごと。講座
7/20(水) 10:00~12:00
(主催) とよた男女共同参画センター

仕事をプライベートも大満! 「ワークライフフレンド」講座
8月24日(水) 10:00~12:00
(主催) とよた男女共同参画センター

1derland 株式会社 代表取締役 / イベント出店 実践チャレンジ講座
全5回連続講座
9月9日(金)・9月23日(金)
10月7日(金)・10月14日(金)
(主催) 豊田商工会議所

無料相談講座でのスツッパップ / 女性起業無料相談会
9/26(月)・10/31(月)・11/20(月)
12/26(月)・1/30(月)・2/27(月)
3/27(月) 8時45分~11時5分
(主催) 豊田商工会議所

October. 10
女性起業交流会

1derland 株式会社 代表取締役 / イベント出店 実践チャレンジ講座
全5回連続講座
9月9日(金)・9月23日(金)
10月7日(金)・10月14日(金)
(主催) 豊田商工会議所

November. 11
稼働のシェアアプリも体験「レンタル店舗」販売実践
秋組スタート予定
(主催) 豊田商工会議所

December. 12
起業に「ここからスタート!」
「わたしの起業プラン作成」講座
全5回連続講座
(主催) ものづくり産業振興課

January. 2017
プロジェクト報告会&交流イベント
IDOBATA SUMMIT - 丹戸耀サミット -

February. 2

3 March.

各講座の開催場所

とよた男女共同参画センター
豊田市小坂本町 1-25
産業文化センター 2F

主催

<p>とよた男女共同参画センター ものづくり産業振興課 0565-31-7780</p>	<p>豊田市役所 豊田商工会議所 豊田信用金庫 0565-34-6643 0565-32-4593 0565-36-1227</p>	<p>中小企業相談所 経営支援部</p>
--	--	------------------------

わたしたちは、はたらく女性の活躍を応援します!

■ お申込・お問い合わせ
株式会社 eight ~マツコックアップル~
MAIL event@eight8.jp
TEL 0565 41-8871 FAX 0565 41-8872



各講座の詳細は、株式会社 eight ホームページにて随時公開していきます。 <http://www.8eight8.jp/>

Fig. 6 “Women Can Start a Business in Toyota Project”

When I went to a public institution to discuss a loan for a new business, I told the consultant about my business and was met with what I thought was a curt, "Why did you come here?" I was shocked that they did not understand my business, and at the same time, I lost confidence, thinking that it would be difficult for me to get a loan.

Since I was planning to open a paper art class, which I started as my own hobby, I didn't think that a public institution would be willing to offer me advice in the first place.

I had never gone to a public institution to prepare or discuss entrepreneurship, especially since I started doing it as a hobby and teaching friends when they asked me to do so, and I started receiving payment for materials +/- fees. I thought such a place was where people with more respectable businesses would go for advice.

I studied at the "Entrepreneurship School" of an organization that supports women's entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship school was well organized, and the center's counselors were helpful and efficient. However, when I opened a stall in the business center, I felt disheartened and depressed when I was told that "this is not a business" or a photo album "is not worth 500 yen."

I had been teaching knitting classes for many years, and in 2012, I came up with the idea of "universal crochet hooks." The following year I went to the city's industrial support organization to ask about patent applications. The consultant talked about technicalities that I did not understand, and I thought it would be difficult. I continued to consult with various patent attorney associations and universities, but my ideas were rarely understood, and I lost confidence in my approach. The support organization recommended that I attend a "start-up school," but the content was too difficult, and I wondered if I was not suited for entrepreneurship.

When I first started my business, I attended a seminar by a tax accountant sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, but I found it to be unhelpful because much of the content was not appropriate for me as a solo entrepreneur. Since then, I have stopped attending public institution seminars, thinking that they may not be appropriate or suitable for the size of my business.

I went to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to discuss an application for a start-up subsidy, but the business support staff did not understand the start-up subsidy system at all. Since I did not trust these institutions, I decided it was better to do the preparations on my own. I was angry that they responded so inappropriately to my frantic preparations to start my

own business, and I felt uneasy because we were not on the same page. Later, when I went to a public financial institution to discuss financing, I was disappointed when they told me that the lunch menu would be too expensive and did not ask me why I had set the prices at this level. I was also told that it was a “pipe dream” and that I would “never be able to do something like this.” I felt depressed and thought I was being self-indulgent.

Source: Michiyo Shikazumi and Norifumi Kawai 2018

Table 1: Women entrepreneurs' experiences when consulting with support organizations, etc.

Craftivism: A Disruptive Force for Personal Change

Najla Turk, ConnEQt
Riverwood, 2210, Sydney Australia
najla@conneqt.com.au

ABSTRACT

In this vignette, a bi-cultural care partner expresses feelings of hopelessness and helplessness after her partner was diagnosed with younger onset dementia. Invited to be involved in a workshop titled *Stitch it for Dementia*, dementia care partners were offered an opportunity to amplify their voices and experiences of dementia care using art and craft materials. Given the level of care and support from the group, it was evident the workshop was more than an activity.

Acceptance and a safe space to share anecdotes allowed for newfound insights in areas which led to different ways at looking at difficult situations and new ways of being in relationship. The care givers' lived dementia experience, combined with unconditional care and support, allowed for a two-phase critical reflection practice. This ignited a pivotal moment of awakening. A deeper level of self-awareness (introspection) as well as a critical assessment of assumptions and relationships.

To metaphorically represent her journey from adversity to enhanced engagement, choice, and freedom, the care giver creates a compelling piece of artwork, the diamond. The diamond and its descriptors of colour, cut, clarity and carat highlight the introspection phase, and looking outward, highlights changed perspectives. Both phases work as complementary opposites like Ying and Yang.

As a result, the care giver transformed, affirming the importance of learning how to change perspectives to create social change. Today the author works ardently to bridge the bi-cultural divide, strengthen relationships and inspire social change by simply helping people introspect and challenge their perspective.

KEYWORDS:

Cultural stigma
Cultural obligation
Vulnerability
Personal growth
Relational leadership
Introspection
Dementia
Human connectedness

INTRODUCTION

I look into my husband's eyes and see blankness. An emptiness in his spirit. Or was that my mirror reflection?

I was being challenged like never before. How does one respond to memory loss? Stay silent, become angry, loop negative thoughts or kick and scream in denial? I was unable to cope with the feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and insecurities. I had 'lost' a team player, my partner. Sharing my husband's sentiments, we were both in denial and could not come to terms with the diagnosis of Younger Onset Dementia (YOD).

As a multicultural Muslim woman living in Sydney's Western suburbs, I had taken strides in building my career. Even though I am a fiercely independent woman, nothing could have prepared me for the role of care giver. This paper shares how 'craftivism,' the merging of art-and-craft, with the word 'activism', the act of bringing about social change, became a catalyst for personal transformation.

BACKGROUND

My name is Najla Turk and I have a bi-cultural women, with a long-standing history as an educator, coach and speaker. Equipped with qualifications, lived experience, stakeholder engagement and published articles, including the book, *The Art of Diversity*, my journey to date has helped me become a strong subject matter expert, as a fearless, independent woman.

My lived experience of cultural diversity comes from my Middle Eastern heritage. After my parents immigrated to Australia, dad worked long hours in trade and my mother, a homemaker, attended to the immediate needs of the family. Looking back on my upbringing, both parents modelled social values, respectful behaviour and the Middle Eastern culture. They set the foundations of my identity, yet I aspired for more.

I became a leading authority on the topic of diversity and inclusion and a member of the Global Leadership Academy and other forums. As well, I was nominated as a Global Life Skills Ambassador, and am a recipient of various awards. If I was successful in life why, as the primary care giver, would my husband's diagnosis of YOD cripple me? I struggled to understand how there could be a positive outcome to a disease the medical profession declares as terminal.

The reality of living with dementia is that it is not just a health-care issue, it is a socio-cultural issue. In the early days Riad ardently ignored all the early dementia signs. "I'm just stressed, that's why I can't find my wallet." Little by little, further symptoms such as anxiety, reflex delay, diminished communication, misidentification and cognitive decline settled in.

THE CARE GIVING ROLE

When caring for loved ones, the surge of negative emotions can impair judgment and highlight weaknesses and vulnerability. Unless impacted by the disease no-one can possibly imagine the strain and stress associated with the dementia care giving role. How many dementia care givers are out there if an overwhelming fifty (50) million people worldwide have dementia, with a new diagnosis every three seconds.

Dementia is immeasurably more than memory loss. Dementia affects thinking, language, mood changes, behaviour and an inability to perform everyday activities.

When Riad was forced into early and unplanned retirement, I questioned why my world flipped upside down. I, too, lost my independence and life of autonomy. Don't I have the Right to exercise free will? The days and months ahead would be dark and daunting.

In the role. I felt robbed psychologically, emotionally and physically. How can Riad realistically receive quality support and attention when I was depleted of mind, body and soul. I felt frustrated due to the so many uncertainties lurking in my life. I 'unplugged because I was far too busy. Unintentionally, I disconnected and disengaged. I was living my life's purpose and did not have the headspace or time to understand how to engage with a loved one's decline in cognitive abilities. Nor did I want to face a tsunami of mixed emotions.

Feeling socially isolated, unsupported and disengaged is common for many care givers, however my load was heavier. I was in the thick of disability stigma, cultural expectations and carer burnout. I had no other way out from my personal circumstance. I could only blame my poor state-of-affairs to culture. In simple terms, culture is the way of life within each community. It is learned behaviour and is evidenced by way we think, feel and believe.

Who does not love culture? Culture is embedded in every society and the benefits are many. For instance, it is a collective community with shared values, tradition, customs and religious doctrine. Food, music and dance is a big part of most cultures as well as the sense of belonging it gives each individual. For instance, when family, friends and community are connected, they come together to support and celebrate with one another. Such as the arrival of a new baby or death of a loved one.

On the flip side, there are aspects of culture I do not love. They include

- Cultural stigma
- Cultural obligation
- Cultural-social needs
- Selflessness

These obstacles would move me backwards from where I was headed, and as a result I distanced myself from Riad. It was like culture had a strong hold on me and I was forced to 'pull back.' I was aware I had been moving backwards and away from Riad, resulting in disengagement and disconnection. It weighed heavily on my shoulders as my husband was non-verbal and experiencing further cognitive decline.

Cultural Stigma

The main challenge I experienced as a carer giver was cultural stigma. Sadly, cultures have different ways of making sense of disability. There is no denying there is stigma around dementia and other disabilities. As a consequence, I feared judgment. For this reason, I chose not to disclose Riad's state of health to family and friends. "Why?" you ask. Not only did I hope to avoid 'thoughtless' questions, in my experience many cultural communities are unwilling to accept, engage or support those with a disability or their carer. When there is no support or not enough support, the care partner is left to carry the burden.

Cultural Obligation

The second challenge that inhibited my ability to provide quality care was cultural obligation. Women from collective societies are traditionally conditioned to serve their families and, more often than not, serve the patriarch. So, when Riad was diagnosed I did not object. I acted according to cultural expectation and obligation. Soon enough I realized I was enlisted to a full-time caring responsibility involuntarily. As Riad's condition worsened, I began to lose my sense of self and purpose. Particularly when forced to leave the job I loved. The carer role consumed my valuable time and energy. I was unable to reconcile inner conflict and our relationship suffered.

Post covid, I was house bound working from home, and struggled to accept and cope with the 'additional' responsibilities. The Western marriage oath taunted me. "For better, for worse - for richer, for poorer - sickness and in health - till death we do us part." My future looked bleak.

Cultural-Social Needs

A major concern as a care giver was whether our religious, cultural, linguistic and social needs could be met by providers. Ensuring these needs were met added further pressures. As a Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) care partner, I yearned for disability service providers, health services and government agencies to better understand how to be culturally responsive. Unfortunately, not everyone has the same deep level of understanding of different cultures as I. Cultural responsiveness is always at the forefront of my mind however others assume that what, and how, we value and do things is universal.

The fact that service providers focus on 'person-centred' care was something else. "Who was going to support me as the dementia progressed?" I felt disempowered. Who cares for the carer? Traditionally people from CALD background do not request assistance. I was not any different. Behind the mask of bravery, I was voiceless, helpless and pretended to be managing as the dementia progressed and Riad became non-verbal.

How can anyone communicate and engage non-verbally? How was I going to meet his needs, wants, desires and goals? I was now forced into an advocacy role to ensure he was getting 'quality' disability services. Few front-line workers were trained and upskilled on the complexities of culture, language or literacy barriers.

Selflessness

Lastly, my role as a carer had overtaken me at the cost of who I was as a person. I had no problem linking leadership to ethics, virtues and morality. I was driven to engage and serve others and build a sense of community. However, I served all people ahead of my personal objectives. After having read Shel Silverstein's poignant and classical children's story, the *Giving Tree* the penny dropped. Like other women, I would constantly self-sacrifice (Silverstein, 1999). The tree generously gave her apples, branches and trunk so the boy could benefit. One gives, the other takes! Ahh haa! A defining light-bulb moment.

I analogue my life of generosity and selflessness to the giving tree. Convinced both traits are noble I question the difference in a leadership role. Generosity is about giving and sharing, yet to be selfless is to self-sacrifice. How many women trail blazers do you know are relentless in the time and effort they put into work?

Research has shown that people who care about others and neglect themselves are more likely to suffer mental health issues. The act of self-sacrifice is a risk factor for carer burnout. I learnt the hard way. Giving unconditionally is unsustainable and in the long term does not serve anyone. Every day was a physical, emotional and psychological struggle which explained why I was disengaging and quietly wanting to quit.

CRAFTIVISM

In 2022 an opportunity presented itself. The Consumer and Community Involvement and Knowledge Translation Strategic Platform of SPHERE received support, from Black Dog Institute and the UTS Centre for Carers Research, to conduct a qualitative research study. The study involved providing a platform to amplify the lived experiences, share stories and knowledge of dementia care givers as a “craftivism” project.

Writer, Betsy Greer, explains that ‘craftivism’ is a blend of words. *Craft* – as in art and craft and the word *Activism*. Craftivism projects involve some form of engaged creativity to advance social causes. Voicing opinions through creativity, a form of activism, makes your voice stronger and your passion for equity and equality more noticeable.



Photo 1: Project materials – needles, thread and fabric

Titled, “*Stitch it for Dementia*” the craftivism project involved a series of workshops whereby we, the participants, all leaders in our own right, used everyday materials such as needles, thread and fabric to represent our journey living and engaging with loved ones with dementia (Photo 1).

The care givers, all different ages, genders, backgrounds and cultures, shared how they struggled with isolation, loss for the person, and lack of support in the dementia care journey. Everyone was pleased for the opportunity to finally be heard and seen.

Why do we assume high profile women - leaders, executives or visionaries - have the resources to handle any situation?

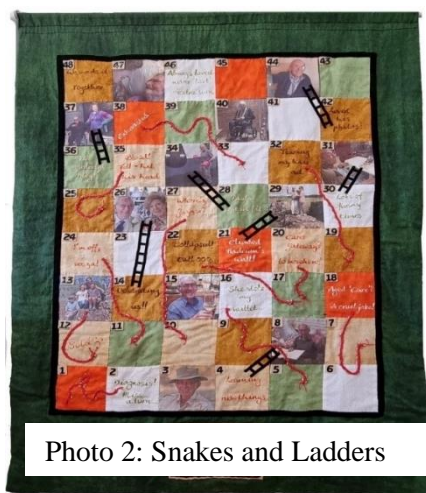


Photo 2: Snakes and Ladders

Gaynor Macdonald was a larger-than-life character. As a co-founder of Dementia Reframed, senior lecturer and consultant anthropologist, Gaynor was a high-profile visionary leader with influence, strength and experience. Even so, she had her fair share of dementia challenges (Watfern, et.al., 2023). Gaynor stitched a ‘snakes and ladders’ game representing the ups and downs of dementia (Photo 2). Gaynor offered valuable insight, highlighting profound gaps in service provision in the six-year journey caring for Charlie, her late husband.

Who would have thought an academic, speaker and published author, would be needing help. Gaynor hoped her artwork would be able to express her pain, grief, hopes and exhaustion.

One other carer, Penny, spoke of her anguish and the “loss of self.” Then there was Sarah. At the start of the craftivism project Sarah’s creative mind blanked, until she spoke about the arch of red roses Bob built for her at the entrance of the house. Her artistic replica of the red roses, in stitching, is just as memorable as her poem. It deeply touched everyone (Photo 3). A stanza of her poem reads,



Photo 3: Arch of red roses

“Dear husband, trust me to do my best
To get you through this dreaded mess
Our lives can never be the same
With Lewy Bodies in your brain”

Similar to Gaynor, I had a successful career yet paradoxically, I struggled to see success in my personal life.

I recall the first virtual workshop. I logged in late, after attending to Riad’s needs. I was far from composed, I sobbed profusely. Was I releasing buildup of frustration and overwhelm? Or did I intuitively know I would be received by warm and caring supporters? Neither! I came to understand the group served the purpose of a learning community.

THE JOURNEY

Learning communities, somewhat like any communal culture, provides a space to tell stories, disseminate information, ask questions, actively listen, show understanding and share inner thoughts. The facilitator is never the teacher. What a blessing to have Chloe and Michelle, both skillful facilitators, create the safe space for non-judgmental sharing and communal learning. From this point the process of making, crafting, sharing and guiding became ‘organic.’

With so much sharing and openness amongst the stitchers, the ‘craftivism’ sessions became invigorating and inspiring. I felt accepted, valued and appreciated as a member of a collective camaraderie. I was amongst a group of people who created and held a safe space for learning, sharing and passing down of dementia knowledge and wisdom. This so resonated with me. Culture is the ancient way of being. Like indigenous cultures, every person is an individual within the wider community.

The strength of any community is that everyone learns, shares and support one another. From generation-to-generation communities focus on human connectedness. I loved that I was in a community of like-minded people, all influencers, who were able to advocate for quality dementia care and positive engagement, through the art of craft and stitching. I was understood, accepted and embraced wholesomely.

With all the best intention at heart, Lynne, one other participant interjects, “that's where I am in that space if that help's anyone else.” I raise one brow. My journey was unlike no other. The participants may think they understand my challenges; however, they cannot truly know. Living with dementia as a bi-cultural woman in the West is no easy feat. How do I best explain the depth of the complexities I face using a needle and thread?

PHASE 1: INTROSPECTION

Forever grateful for the guidance and support of the facilitators and other carers, conversing, stitching, and peer encouragement, created the space to look at how I could reclaim my identity as a liberated, bi-cultural Western woman. How can I best express my journey of inner conflict and why I was thinking and behaving the way I did? I sincerely hoped the craftivism project would be the disruptive force that brought harmony into my world and would magnify my passion for equality, equity and inclusion.

By chance I read a quote that propelled me into deep thought.

“It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life.
Where you stumble, there lies your treasure.”

Joseph Campbell

By going down into the abyss you find your treasure? Eureka, I found the treasure. My artwork. a diamond, would represent my journey of introspection and personal growth (Photo 4). It was time to represent my journey into cloth.

Why diamonds? Over centuries and across all eras and cultures, diamonds are unique and symbolic of many things. The metaphor of a diamond best describes the value of every woman. “Diamond” comes from the Greek term “adamas,” which means “unconquerable”. Diamonds are the toughest substance in existence and can only be cut with another diamond. I believe every woman is uniquely precious. Metaphorically, as valuable diamonds, we have the potential to illuminate the world in which we live.

The practice of introspection was not easy. I was forced to meet myself deep in the abyss and ask culturally related ‘what, where, how and why’ questions. It took courage to deep dive and push well beyond my comfort zone. I had to be honest with self and be open to accept the multitude of raw emotions such as fear, vulnerability and anger. Only then was I able to face the reality of disengagement and mental health.

The journey of self-awareness, mindfulness and transformation was a two-phase process; phase one, introspection, prelude to phase two, personal transformation.

Phase one looks at the diamond structure as a four-step evolutionary process of introspection. Each of the four steps a characteristic coinciding, coincidentally, with the descriptor of diamonds; color, cut, clarity and carat.

Here we cover the 4C's; Colour – Cut – Clarity and Carat, working from the surface of the diamond down to its apex.

The first 'C' stands for Colour:

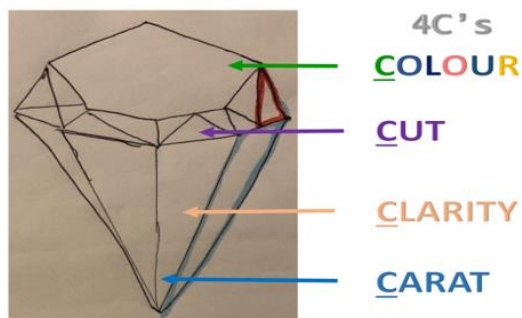


Photo 4: Diamond structure

The biggest challenge facing women internationally today is the 'glass ceiling.' A popular metaphor for the 'invisible barrier' preventing modern women and minorities from promotion to higher ranks in the workplace. Peering through the lens as a professional woman from CALD background, I have been fortunate and have not experienced the 'glass ceiling.'

Within the craftivism community, there were no invisible' barriers. I only ever experienced unconditional acceptance. It didn't matter that I wore the hijab, a head veil. What mattered was that I was accepted, respected and valued as an individual, and also as part of a collective.

By putting aside some time for daily self-reflection, I was able to pay more attention to what makes me so diverse, and what I stood for. By recognizing and accepting my own differences, I was better able to appreciate the diversity of others. No person is flawed. Regardless of hair or skin colour, physical features or appearance, sexual orientation, or disability, it is important to embrace colorful personalities. To achieve high quality engagement, it is important to embrace the whole of self and others, to overcome judgment, self-doubt and low confidence.

The second 'C' stands for Cut:

The second step of phase one is looking at the cultural aspects that conflicted with my career aspirations and resulted in disengagement. These included cultural stigma, cultural obligation and unmet cultural needs, and the fact that I was burning the candle at both ends.

Why should I be a victim of social stigma and cultural pressures or be looked upon in a negative fashion? I began to set personal boundaries and dismiss the demands behind cultural expectations that did not serve us.

To better weather the journey ahead as a care giver, I chose to 'metaphorically' cut through cultural negativity weighing me down. I needed a different approach to overcome negative situations. Like the sun shining down through the branches, the cut of diamond allows the light to penetrate through.

The third 'C' stands for Clarity:

Where you stumble there lies your treasure! The more time I invested in self-exploration and self-awareness, the more clarity I obtained. The journey thus far highlighted inner conflict and emotional turmoil from the onset; social, cultural, religious and family values vs working values. Do we consider whether women in leadership and executive roles have additional caring duties and responsibilities? The likely answer is, no. As a consequence, women inadvertently work harder and burnout quicker, without getting the appropriate support they need.

I was convinced the best way forward was to ask for culturally appropriate help. Why attach shame to asking? Many Westerners are only too happy to support and share information, when questions are asked appropriately and in a timely manner. I learnt many lessons from asking

dementia experts and people with lived experience. The most important lesson was about the importance of self-care. If I was to regain sanity, I had to let go, step aside, and trust the process. By doing so, I was able to reclaim my time, energy and mental state in keeping up with Riad's progressive cognitive decline. As well, how refreshing to allow others to co-care.

Lastly, the fourth 'C' – Carat

Diamonds are formed when carbon is subjected to extreme heat and pressure. Using the diamond as an analogy I had gone through extreme times to glimpse the value deep within. I exercise soft skills in all areas of life as they best serve me in demonstrating relational leadership. For instance, I do not shy away from showing care, patience, tolerance and sensitivity. Gaynor (2019) stressed, "the quality of our lives depends on the quality of the relationships."

As a prelude to phase two, the journey through the 4C's led to personal transformation. Even so, the journey is meaningless if one's inner calling is suppressed and not magnified.

PHASE 2: CHANGED PERSPECTIVE

Phase two has been the most rewarding of the journey thus far and I wish to highlight a significant shift. Similar to a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly, I learnt to change my perspective and relationship. Where I once spent a great amount of time in the 'cocoon', performing introspection and pushing boundaries beyond my "comfort zone," I then voluntarily plunge forward into discomfort. I am pleasantly surprised to find my light radiating inner calmness and peace. Figuratively speaking, there was a death of the old identity and rebirth of the new.

To recap, I was dealt with more than my fair share of challenges, obstacles and hardship not only because I was a woman. I was a bi-cultural woman, working the 9-9pm treadmill, and burdened by cultural obligation and responsibilities.

A quote and great take away from the craftivism project is that "at the end of hardship comes happiness." Brown (2012) further supports this quote when stating,

"When we dare to drop the armor that protects us from feeling vulnerable, we open ourselves to the experiences that bring purpose and meaning to our lives." (p9)

The constant fear of "what will people say?" consumed my thoughts. I was living in fear of judgment and criticism if I expressed vulnerability, weakness or made poor decisions. Where was the emotional support from family and friends for the both of us? Here I was managing cultural 'pull-back,' a force that later proved to be beneficial for inner harmony and building quality relationships. This could explain why I resented culture. I did not know how to merge cultural values with Western values to satisfy both personal and professional aspirations, not just professional.

The challenge of dementia care is whether carers are prepared to the person's cultural, religious, emotional and psychological needs, and respond rather than react. When things do not go to plan, are you able to hold your loved ones steadily in 'relationship'. Holding the number one man in my life, in kindness and connection, and learning new ways of engaging, has been extremely beneficial in all areas of life and for all stakeholders (Photo 5).

Prior to the care giving role, I was on a clear path. I had a vision, I knew my purpose, and I was on a mission. So, what changed? The process of 'craftivism,' making and stitching, was the disruptive

force. It was the catalyst for change. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, said 'change is the only constant in life'. Like a strong current downstream, it is futile to resist change. My life was being morphed. For better or worse, I was on an evolutionary journey of self-awareness. Evolving from inside-out.



Photo 5: Growth areas

To improve the quality of our relationship and effectively engage, I was given the opportunity to learn how to change. When another being is reliant on you for care, it needs a new way of being in relationship. "The upside to a crisis is guidance from a different compass" (Turk, 2021). An outcome of the 'craftivism' project is that I found ease after hardship.

Thankfully I was part of a small community that understood and embraced my individuality and aspirations for social change and quality dementia care. As a diamond in the 'tough,' I was nurtured and supported to learn, grow and create. I learnt to unconditionally accept all parts of self, reframe past, negative experiences and approach challenges differently.

To move beyond the mounting cultural obstacles, it was necessary to push for change. Identifiable attitudinal shifts occurred as I journeyed within. Every new experience, learning and change in my values, attitude and behaviour has brought light and joy to our lives. Just as there is noticeable light in how a diamond shines in sunlight, so too, Riad and I, acknowledge we are shining like a ray of light. Our needs, wants and priorities are being met.

TRANSFORMATION: PERSONAL GROWTH

The journey of introspection was necessary and liberating, resulting in deeper authenticity and personal transformation.

I had fallen victim to carer burnout, as I was facing overwhelming pressure, feelings of helplessness and resentment towards my husband, which negatively impacted my health, well-being and life's purpose. It wasn't so much the diagnosis, as it was the care giving role. I was comfortable with my identity as an Australian woman; however, it was the cultural components of my heritage that held me back from being independence, 'freedom' and inner peace. I feared disability stigma as the word 'dementia' was taboo. I was not able to have my cultural expectations met, nor was I reciprocating my partner's needs, wants and desires. More importantly I wanted to preserve the Rights and dignity of a loving man, a 'hu-man'.

My dementia care journey ignited a return to work with a newly acquired passion. I now play an activist role and work to ignite a social response to dementia care. It is time to dispel disability stigma, empower care givers and breakdown cultural barriers to pave the way for positive relationships and change in behaviour. Below is a list of what I hope to achieve as an activist.

I aim to

- support others to be more visible and vocal
- promote syncing of mind, body, heart and soul ie polish the diamond
- encourage people to see the good in self and the good in others
- model best practice relational leadership and encourage introspection
- bridge the cultural divide such as cultural stigma and expectations
- ignite confidence, courage and assist 'suppressed' individual
- unapologetically own vulnerability, sensitivity and fear - why hide?
- empower individuals to shed insecurities and ask
- develop capabilities and life skills for influencers
- demystify change and guide people to better control their life

As well, I now ritually invest time to curb self-sacrificing habits and perform mind-body-heart-soul activities to avoid future health risks. As a positive outcome, Riad has displayed less aggression, frustration and maintained cognitive abilities. I, on the other hand, am more attuned to my inner self and everything I do, I do with intention. We are both much happier, calmer and more energized.

The knowledge, wisdom and learnings that have come out of the craftivism project has been monumental. First and foremost, I was able to push past my comfort zone, push for change and achieve work-life balance, by shifting down a gear. Secondly, I am able to approach the blend of personal and professional sphere with a different lens. Thirdly, I am able to use my lived experiences with dementia and culture, to inspire social change that helps promote equality, equity and inclusion.

Where I once dealt with cultural challenges with disappointment, conflict or self-doubt, I now approach difficult situations responsively. More importantly, I hold people in connection, ensuring I accommodate their individual needs, wants and desires, as well as my own. All the decisions I make are not only thoughtful but heartfelt. I also consider the mutual interest of all parties - myself included. I have become a strong advocate for quality care, well-being, quality engagement and am a bridge for cultural divides.

More importantly, I have learnt to be present, trust the process and surrender control. I have further developed my soft skills and as a change agent, I am able to advocate on behalf of others to achieve fairness and justice.

Moving forward, I invite you to join me to inspire others to explore diamonds in the tough.

Let's ConnEQt, shine and lead with brilliance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Acknowledgement to the late Dr Gaynor Macdonald, Social Anthropologist, Researcher and Honorary Senior Lecturer at Sydney University, Dr Chloe Watfern, Research Associate, CCI and KT Strategic Platform and Michelle Elliott, Educator and Artist-in-residence with a translational health research centre in Sydney, Australia. John Milham, Suicide Prevention Consultant, Kay Healey, Director, Life Lived Ceremonies and Sarah Wallace, Author of *Beyond Closed Doors* and Wafaa Allam, Sylvia Liu, Director at Culture Fusion.

FUNDING: This research received no external funding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Author declares no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1] Brown, B., (2012, Nov 15). *The power of vulnerability: Teachings on authenticity, connection and courage*, Sounds True
- [2] Macdonald, G. (2019). In Gaynor Macdonald and Jane Mears (Eds.), "*Dementia as a social experiment: why 'person-centred' care is not enough*", Routledge
- [3] Silverstein, S., (1999) *The Giving Tree*, Harpercollins
- [4] Turk, N., (2021, Oct) *Busy Warrior*, Leading Issues Journal, ISSN 1445-8721
- [5] Watfern, C., Macdonald, G., Elliot, M., Stone, L., Gilmore, I., Wallace, S., Tecons, M., Turk, N., Bingham, P., Mears, J., Dadich, A., Doran, B., Boydell, K., (2023) *Craftivism as inquiry: Holding life's threads*, submitted to The Qualitative Report [under review]

Examining the Impact of Religion in Deciding Women's Leadership Positions in Nigeria

Nneka Chiedozie-Udeh

Robert Morris University

6001 University Boulevard, Moon Township PA 15108, USA

nxcst175@mail.rmu.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7221-525X>

ABSTRACT

Leadership is viewed as a crucial component for any civilization to realize its vision. However, its practices in many communities have been masculinized. In Nigeria, where there is no significant difference in the population of women and men, lesser women occupy leadership position in different sectors of its society. Although, research on women in leadership particularly in management is abundant, there is paucity of literature about the role religion plays in determining the positions occupied by women and its impact on their decision making methods. Therefore, this study examined women's view on how religion in Nigeria treat women in leadership positions. In practical terms, this paper provided several examples that demonstrate the leadership abilities of women, giving them more confidence to strive for prominent leadership roles in their communities. Finally, highlighting these skills, can abate the perception that women are inferior to their male counterparts in the religious sphere and encourage active participation of women in leadership positions.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, religion, women, Nigeria,

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a key element in achieving the vision of any society. Ridgeway (2003) described leadership essentially as a group rather than an individual experience. It is a result of the broader processes through which social hierarchies of status, influence, and power emerge among people with the aim of achieving a common goal or task. Supporting Ridgeway's view, Northouse (2019) explained that the process denotes a transactional occurrence between the leader and the followers, rather than the traits that a leader possesses. As a result, when leadership is interpreted in this way, it implies that anyone can be a part of it. Hence, egalitarianism encourages citizens' (men and women) participation in the leadership and management of public affairs without any discrimination (Woodburn, 1982). However, in many societies, leadership has been gendered with its practice tacitly drawn on hegemonic male images defining what it means to be a leader and act in a leadership role (Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008).

Despite the proposition that encouraged all gender to ascend leadership positions, statistics have shown that in Nigeria, women's representation in places of authority remains abysmal. Although, the nation's population estimated at 49.2% women and 50.8 % men respectively indicated no significant difference in gender sizes, the leadership positions across various sectors indicated poor figures for women. The principal positions at the National assembly showed seven women and 72 men in 2019, while in the national judicial positions, women represented 28.86% of leaders in 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics,

2021). Nevertheless, no woman has ever been appointed the secretary to the government of the federation. At the local government levels, the figures showed 94.09% male and just 5.91% females chairperson (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Then, why is there the case of lesser women than men in leadership positions? Some factors, such as religion, culture, education, and politics, have been observed to play significant roles. Klingorová (2015) argued that the interpretation of religious texts as well as the sociocultural structures of religious organizations influence women's position in society. For instance, women are not allowed to climb to certain levels of religious hierarchy in numerous Christian churches due to their interpretation of Biblical tenets about leadership (Vandima, 2020). Whereas some Islamic scholars affirmed Muslim leadership and followership behavior as being based upon God's word as written in the Qur'an (Mohamad & Raji, 2021). In contrast, Chuku (2009) disclosed a different situation in African religion setting, which considered women to be equal with men and treated them with respect. Priestesses were as potent as priests, performing rituals to gods on their people's, behalf, and wielding authority in the community.

There exists an abundance of study on women in leadership, especially in management and secular businesses. However, there is a knowledge gap on the role that religion plays in defining the positions women occupy and how it impacts their decision-making processes. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to examine the impact of prevailing religions on women's leadership positions and how they lead in Nigeria.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was spurred by the quest to understand the effect of religion on Nigerian women's leadership position and their qualities. Qualitative method was used to achieve this research with the following questions:

1. How has the dogma of the main religions in Nigeria affected the possibilities of women occupying leadership positions in the country?
2. What is the perception of women on the ways religious beliefs has affected leadership styles in Nigeria?

Data collection included telephone interviews with six women in leadership positions of the three main religion (Traditional, Christianity and Islam) in Nigeria. A purposeful sampling method was used to access two participants from each religion community. So, the researcher approached previously known members in the three communities who helped identify participants for the research. Specifically, participants from the Christian groups were selected from one orthodox church (Catholic) and one Pentecostal (Assemblies of God) church. Participants from the traditional religion were identified through Google search for women Traditional religion worshipers in Nigeria since the religion is the least prominent among others.

Interview protocols was prepared prior to field data collection using the research questions to guide the processes and serve as reminder for information to collect during questioning (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Semi-structured, open-ended questions was developed for the interview. Following the suggestion of Lichtman (2013), a general set of questions was used for all participants but varied depending on situations (Fontana & Frey,

2005). Also, informed consents were acquired from participants to ensure their rights, confidentiality, and protection from potential risks (Smith, 2005).

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Religious Beliefs About Gender Equality in Leadership

In response to the question about how the dogma of the main religions in Nigeria affected the possibilities of women occupying leadership positions, it was observed that religion is multifaceted and encompasses a wide range of ideas, practices (Hemming & Madge, 2012). Many religious traditions directly and indirectly communicate messages about gender specific hierarchy to their followers. In the book "Women and Gender," Ahmed (1992) extensively discussed the place of women in Islam. The author contended that the explicit addressing of women and men in the Qur'an implied spiritual equality, in contrast to the fundamental assumptions of women's limited role in some Islamic civilizations. Some proponents of Islam have construed the Holy Qur'an, which is the primary source of Islamic law, to put women as absolute subordinates of men inside the family and in society.

Doing a review of female leadership in Islam to get the perception women on the ways its beliefs has affected their leadership styles in Nigeria, it was observed that women Muslims were not open to sharing their experiences. Several efforts to get the participants speak to the researcher got a constant reference to the Qur'an. Therefore, the finding of this study is confined to the scriptural treatment of female leadership according to the Quran and Sunnah.

Consequently, Shehabuddin (2000) noted that two Quranic verses are frequently misinterpreted to acknowledge men's supremacy over women: First, chapter four of the Qur'an, An-Nisa 4:34 ("the women"), stated that: "Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with. And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them first if they persist, do not share their beds, but if they persist, then discipline them gently. But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them." (Qur'an, An-Nisa 4:34).

Hence, several explanations of Q. 4:34 have highlighted the position of women in places of authority among Islamic believers. Ali (2003) revealed that interpreters from various perspectives have raised a key question about this verse to probe whether men are in control of women. Some traditional explanation of this section emphasized female obedience and male authority, while modern interpretations underscore female autonomy. Second, Qur'an Al-Baqara 2: 228 indicated that "women have rights similar to those of men equitably, although men have a degree of responsibility above them." As a result, some proponents take the words to suggest that God made women to be perpetually dependent on men (Shehabuddin, 2000).

Although Muslansir (2007) and Hasan (2016), on the other hand, contested this in their retold case of the Queen of Sheba as a revered leader in the Qur'an. Also, some Islamic scholars have argued that in terms of leadership roles, Muslim women typically believe that their primary responsibility is to help community members rather than to focus too much on themselves to increase the group's capabilities (Mohamad & Raji, 2021).

Closely related to Islamic misinterpretation of the Qur'an is the perception about Biblical injunctions regarding women in leadership roles. Some discriminating practices against women in church leadership have been hinged on the out-of-context understanding of the Bible in certain Christian denomination. For example, Carbajal (2018), claimed that a misreading of the text from the New International Version (2021, Gen. 2:18) – "The Lord God said, 'It is not healthy for the man to be alone.' I will create him a suitable assistant," to

denote a higher role for men and a subordinate position for women has contributed to increasing marginalization of women as spiritual leaders.

In that instance, the participants from the Christian religion think that the religion has impeded and is still impeding women in leadership. According to one of the participants, the Christian culture has already played a huge role in relegating women, and now modern religion is not helpful. "Women are still seen as and termed the weak vessel because there are various doctrines that backs this up." Women leadership in Nigeria will only get better when we start tackling the limiting aspects of Religion. Therefore, complicated biblical understandings have affected women's progression to leadership positions in churches. Though, Talabi-Adeniran (2021) argued that, while women primarily played the roles of mothers and wives in the Old Testament, there were a few women in the same Bible who were outstanding leaders. Women like Deborah, Esther, Huldah, Miriam, and a few others were judges, prophetesses, and even warriors that led the Israelites to victory and salvation.

Unlike the other religions, the context of African Traditional religion sees women in leadership positions as prescribed by the prevailing culture in that domain. Accordingly, culture consists of customs, traditions, beliefs, behavior, clothes, language, works of art and craft, and an attitude toward life, among other things. (Familusi, 2012). Idumwonyi (2018) argued that cultural beliefs and social constructs have detrimental effects on gender relations in imagined rather than real ways. In the case of African Traditional religion, it is somewhat different than other religious practices in treating women as leaders. Religion is intertwined with culture, which has been described as a way of life (Ezenagu, 2017). Within the tradition, Chuku (2009) observed that women and men are bestowed equal responsibilities to serve as diviners. Priestesses were as authoritative as priests, performing rites to the gods on their people's behalf and wielding influence in society. However, Makama (2013) recognized that a discriminatory system based on traditional characteristics impedes women's ability to advance to positions that can contribute substantially to community development.

To sum up this discussion, Cassese & Holman (2016) posited that, by most measurements, women are more religious than males, but devout women do not participate in politics at high rates even though religion provides its followers with a variety of civic skills that motivate them to participate in politics. Reasons for this could be attributed to the researchers' contention that gender socialization toward cultural expectations of boys and girls is integrated into accepted norms and practices in society, corporate offices, and religious settings (Jaiyeola & Aladegbola, 2020).

3.2 The Impact of Religion on Women's Leadership Styles

Different religious beliefs impact gender and leadership, which might influence the leadership style of women in power. In Nigeria, there are three dominant religious practices: Christianity, Islam, and Tradition. Among the religious worshipers are men and women, however, each has their own notion of women's leadership, thus contributing to the style of the few women in power. In the view of Otinche and Nnabuenyi (2015), one of the methods of allocating leadership responsibilities to males and females in Nigeria is through religious standards of Tradition, Christianity, and Islam.

The Christian religion in Nigeria is a prevailing force that dominates both men's and women's lives in the country (Okoli & Okwuosa, 2020). From the origin of Christianity in Nigeria, many individuals have accepted the faith and its teachings, thereby transforming most of the cultural values of the society. The authors explained that even though women make up majority of churchgoers, in several instances they are rarely permitted to rise to the top levels of Church administration or serve on higher decision-making bodies. They are instead sidelined.

Because of the relegation, Christian women have devised a different style of leadership, which is synonymous with the explanation of Hogg (2001)—people with influence over positions, activities, and the destiny of group members. In this type of leadership, influence becomes the key to achieving collective processes and followers are willing to collaborate with the leader. So, through women's organizations, mission societies, and wives of the ministers they have fitted into the function of educators and facilitators in religious arena (Talabi-Adeniran, 2021). Some of these women also lead other establishments, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporate entities affiliated to their husband's ministry. Upholding this view, Idumwonyi (2018) observed that women spend most of their time and energy developing groups or settings that allow them to air their views in and outside of the religious community.

Similarly, in Islam, which is the dominant religion in northern Nigeria, women play supporting roles in leadership as well. Jason (2020) explained that some reforms in Islam has targeted women in leadership roles. For instance, the Nasrul-Lahi-il Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) has made leadership roles available to women. NASFAT's female representatives serve on the National Executive Council and make strategic decisions on planning, policy, and investment at the highest level of the organization. Also, NASFAT's women's wing has been effective in elevating Muslim women's religious status and gathering them together for learning objectives such as vocational training, Arabic courses, and tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis) workshops.

In the case of African Traditional religion, it is somewhat different than other religious practices in treating women as leaders. Idumwonyi & Eduviere (2021) argued that, like Abrahamic religion's command, culture has promoted subservience in the way women approach leadership in African religion. Though women carry out religious activities such as divination, native doctors, and priests, they do so to a lesser extent than men. Further to this, Olatunji (2013) opined that in the same way that some Christians and Muslims misinterpret the Bible and Qur'an to favor men more than women, some African Traditionalists have twisted the custom to suit their interests and blamed the same on culture. This demonstrates that traditional religion is not biased against women in terms of governance.

4. CONCLUSION

There have been several arguments that women are major stakeholders in the development of every society, including Nigeria. It is also evident in the religious setting, especially in Christianity, that women are more religious and are doing great in the ministry when used by the same God. However, they are relegated to subordinate positions in terms of leadership. This paper examined how the main religions in Nigeria view women in leadership positions. It considers the influence that these beliefs have on the leadership styles of women. Also, various factors that prevent women from occupying key positions thereby limiting their leadership roles to supportive roles were considered.

The study revealed that because of various factors that discriminate against women, their leadership roles are more of an influence and support than being in principal leadership positions. While Christianity and Islam gave women largely supporting roles in leadership, traditional worshippers were not opposed to women taking the lead, though men have tried to push women back and blame it on tradition. In practical terms, this paper provides several examples that demonstrate the leadership abilities of women, giving them more confidence to strive for prominent leadership roles in their communities.

Consequently, religious tenets may not have placed women in an unequal position with men in leadership, but the nature of power, interpretations, beliefs, and culture have been used to politicize women's status in ways that benefit males at the expense of women.

Therefore, it is the submission of this paper that women should no longer be viewed primarily in a negative light but must be accorded the same respect and position as their male counterparts. Extolling their skills, can lessen the perception that women are inferior to men in the religious sphere and endorse active participation of women in leadership positions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: I would like to express a deep gratitude to my lecturers in Robert Morris University for their guidance, encouragement, and useful critiques throughout my learning process of becoming a researcher. I would also like to thank Dr Oni and Dr Uluocha for their advice and assistance in keeping my progress on schedule as a Doctoral student.

Finally, I wish to thank my children and loyal friends for their support and encouragement throughout my PhD journey.

FUNDING: This research received no external funding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The author declares no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. Yale University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1g2495f.6>
- [2] Ali, K. (2003 February, 11). Muslim sexual ethics: Understanding a difficult verse, Qur'an 4:34
- [3] Carbajal, J. (2018). Patriarchal culture's influence on women's leadership ascendancy. *The Journal of Faith, Education, and Community*, 2(1), 1. <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/jfec/vol2/iss1/1>
- [4] Cassese, E. C., Holman, M. R. (2016). Religious beliefs, gender consciousness, and women's political participation. *Sex Roles*, 75, 514–527 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0635-9>
- [5] Chuku, G. (2009). Igbo women and political participation in Nigeria, 1800s-2005. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 42(1), 81-103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40282431>
- [6] Coleman, M., & Fitzgerald, T. (2008). Gender and leadership development. In Lumby, J., Crow, G. & Pashiardis, P. (Eds.), *International handbook on the preparation and development of school leaders*. Routledge
- [7] Ezenagu, N. (2017). Leadership styles in the management of Igbo cultural heritage in pre-European era. *African Journals Online (AJOL)*, 13, 22-45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/og.v13i1.2>
- [8] Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2005). The interview: From neutral to political involvement. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 695-727). Sage Publications.

- [9] Familusi, O. O. (2012). African culture and the status of women: The Yoruba example. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 5(1), 299-313.
- [10] Hansan, A. (2016). The Queen of Sheba: Would rethinking the Qur'anic story support female leadership in Islam? *AnALize: Revista de Studii Feminist*, (21), 90-96
<https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=498092>
- [11] Hemming, P. J., & Madge, N. (2012). Researching children, youth, and religion: Identity, complexity, and agency. *Childhood*, 19(1), 38-51.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568211402860>
- [12] Hogg, M. A (2001). A social identity theory of leadership. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5(3), 184–200. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0503_1
- [13] Idumwonyi, I. M. (2018). *An ethnographic study of gender dynamics in Benin religion and a Pentecostal congregation in Benin City, Nigeria*. [Doctoral dissertation, Rice University]. <https://hdl.handle.net/1911/105726>.
- [14] Idumwonyi I. M., & Eduviere O. O. (2021). Women and African Traditional Religion. In: Yacob-Haliso, O., & Falola, T. (Eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of African women's studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham (pp. 2169-2186).
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_23
- [15] Jaiyeola, E. O. & Aladegbola, I (2020). Patriarchy and colonization: The "Brooder House" for gender inequality in Nigeria. *Journal of Research on Women and Gender*, 10, 3-22.
- [16] Jason, M. (2020). Crossing borders: The case of NASFAT or 'Pentecostal Islam' in Southwest Nigeria. *Nigeria. Soc Anthropol*, 28, 418-433. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12769>
- [17] Klingorová, K., & Havlíček, T. (2015). Religion and gender inequality: The status of women in the societies of world religions. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 23(2).
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279526649_Religion_and_gender_inequality_The_status_of_women_in_the_societies_of_world_religions
- [18] Makama, G. A. (2013). Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria: The way forward. *European Scientific Journal*, (9)7, 1857-7881.
- [19] Mohamad, S. B., & Raji, F. (2021). The impact of religion and culture on leadership styles of women policymakers in the education industry. *Journal of Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy*, 7(1), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.11113/jostip.v7n1.64>
- [20] Muslansir, M. (2007). The Queen of Sheba's conversation: A problem examined in Q. 21:24. *Journal of Quranic Studies* 9(2), 43-56.
https://www.academia.edu/7575301/The_Queen_of_Shebas_Conversion_in_Quran_27_4_4_A_Problem_Examined
- [21] National Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *Statistical report of women and men in Nigeria*.
<https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary?page=33&offset=320>

- [22] National Bureau of Statistics (2021). *2020 Statistical report of women and men in Nigeria*
- [23] New International Version. (2021). Biblica Online.
<https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/genesis/2/>
- [24] Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- [25] Okoli, A. B., & Okwuosa, L. (2020). The role of Christianity in gender issues and development in Nigeria. *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 76(4), e1-e8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6007>
- [26] Olatunji, C. P (2013). An argument for gender equality in Africa. *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2176>
- [27] Otinche, S. I. & Nnabuenyi, U. M. (2015). Culture and the right of the rural woman in Nigeria: An overview. *International Journal of Basic, Applied and Innovative Research*, 4(2), 30-43.
- [28] Ridgeway, C. (2003). Status characteristics and leadership. In Knippenberg, D., & Hogg, M. A. (Eds.), *Leadership and power: Identity processes in groups and organizations* (pp. 73-84) SAGE.
- [29] Shehabuddin, S. (n.d.) *Female leadership in Islam*. Islamic Research Foundation International, Inc.
https://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_401_450/female_leadership_in_islam.htm
- [30] Smith, L.T. (2005). The interview: On rocky ground: Researching the native of uncertainty. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 85-107). Sage Publications
- [31] Talabi-Adeniran, F. (2021). Women leadership and integrity in the 21st century Nigeria *African Journal Online*, 4(2), 251-266.
<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/njcs/article/view/220875>
- [32] The Qur'an (Khattab, M, Trans.). (2022). Quran.com. <https://quran.com/4>
- [33] Vandima, T. M. (2020). Gender inequality among Nigerian students. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI)*, 7(1), 173.
- [34] Woodburn, J. (1982). Egalitarian Societies. *Man*, 17(3), 431- 451.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2801707>

How to Find Freedom in an Unfree World

Alexandra Dobrynina
la_perla@126.com

Abstract:

The pandemic simply highlighted and demonstrated our complete emotional reliance on the outside world, as we sought illusory safety. We often live in tension and wait for something to happen. Emotional dependency holds a person hostage to his own emotions and drains his strength, energy, and life. Emotional involvement confuses our brains and increases the effect of helplessness, and anger. We feel guilty. And as a result, we shift responsibility for our lives rather than generating daily self-sufficiency through acceptance, curiosity, and action.

Any fear is the fear of uncertainty, and the frame of limitations and illusions is broad here. Is there anything that can help us to accept the uncertainty and find the right way to befriend this fear?

During Alexandra's research on her fear of communication, she found and conducted a list of helpful tips that helped her not only befriend with fear but also broadened her hobbies to include being an anchor in the media centre and a public speaker. Those new skills were familiar, but not obvious. And not only helped her to overcome her current fear but became a powerful tool for future situations that could happen.

To live free and happily, you must sacrifice boredom.
It is not always an easy sacrifice.
Richard Bach.

My name is Alexandra. I am a certified ICF coach, mediator, and inspirational speaker. Simply put, as a life and business coach I offer the opportunity for anyone, who wants to break free from his limitations, go beyond his consciousness, explore the corners of the subconscious, and achieve a state of balance, harmony, calmness, and confidence that leads to success. As a mediator, I help people who do not understand each other to common ground and shared interests in order to resolve their conflicts in a win-win-win situation. And as a speaker, I share with you interesting and useful information about the fundamental factors of human relations: fears, anxiety, uncertainty, personal and professional growth, and transformations that occur during coaching sessions at every stage of the process. And right now, I will share with you the knowledge and skills that have made my life better.

Today I would like to speak about «How to Find Freedom in an Unfree world». We all went through the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of us were concerned, others panicked, and others still saw no reason to be concerned. Moreover, during times of global upheaval, people behave differently. Stress, depressive disorders, mysophobia, anxiety, insomnia, emotional instability, post-traumatic syndrome, fear of death, and other factors disrupted our lives during the outbreak. But why do we usually focus on the negative aspects of such situations rather than accepting that we can't change things and figuring out how to live in these uncertain times? Why do we concentrate on the end rather than the beginning? Why do we hope and wait for help instead of cultivating **resilience, optimism, and the desire to be**? Simply put, how can we find freedom in an unfree world?

To be honest, the pandemic simply highlighted and demonstrated our complete emotional **reliance** on the outside world, as we sought illusory safety. Living in an unhealthy relationship and attempting to keep the family illusionary leads to uncertainty. It can have a wide range of negative consequences, ranging from psychologically unstable children to personal burnout. Everyday home-work-home does not guarantee stability in the future. Imposing your unrealized dreams on your children does not guarantee their happiness. Moreover, it does not guarantee their gratitude during your old age. "Do like everyone else" will not save you from disappointment and anxiety if your results differ from those of others. We often live in tension and wait for something to happen. Emotional dependency holds a person hostage to his own emotions and drains his strength, energy, and life. Emotional involvement confuses our brains and increases the effect of helplessness, and anger. We feel guilty. And as a result, we shift responsibility for our lives rather than generating daily self-sufficiency through **acceptance, curiosity, and action**.

Any fear is the fear of uncertainty; fear of communication is no exception. And the frame of the unknown is broad here, encompassing everything from what people will think of me to how I should interact with them. And no one knows what lies beyond the confines of a tense, compressed, hidden-in-a-lump person. Take note that we are now discussing limitations and illusions. But eventually, I accepted my harsh reality and allowed fear to enter my life.

So, when I accepted my fear of communication as a component of my fear of the unknown, I noticed how the tense feeling transformed into the released energy. How did I accept it? "Yes, I am scared and afraid," I told myself loudly. It took several days for this acceptance to take root in me, and then the question arose: what can I do with this fear?

So, we can already construct a chain of new skill development that begins with awareness of the state, progresses to acceptance, and finally to curiosity. What do you think the next step should be?

Research or exploration of the inner self. Because all the answers to any questions reside deep inside of us. And this adventure appears to be both frightening and appealing. Only half of the journey has been completed, and the emphasis has shifted from fear to research and finding an answer to the question.

During my research on communication apprehension, I was transported back to my childhood, when I was not afraid to be visible, talk, meet new people, and communicate. So, what happened throughout my entire life? Exploring myself, I discovered various sources that contributed to this fear. As a coach, I can say that these sources also intersected with my clients. They are as follows: Fear of Failing, Fear of Evaluation, Fear of Making Mistakes, Fear of Imperfection, Fear of Looking Stupid, Fear of Feeling Embarrassed, and a variety of other emotions. Familiar? Everything mentioned above is a result of our reaction to the unfair world around us. Realizing this, I wanted **to find, feel, and cultivate inner freedom** that is not dependent on external factors.

The next step in cultivating inner freedom was to find a communication coach who would support all my positive changes and achievements as they appeared on my life path. I began to feel liberated, and my curiosity grew like never before. Thus, simply communicating has become insufficient for me, and I have broadened my hobbies to include being an anchor in the media centre and a public speaker, and I continue to work on my inner freedom, not out of fear, but out of personal stability. Optimism, curiosity, and a strong desire to follow my chosen path all greatly helped me.

The chain of new skills cultivation can be continued. We settled on **curiosity** to test my abilities. Then came the action, which was an exploration or research of the inner self to fulfil the desire to be. **To be** means to be both "inside and outside oneself". That is, the internal is transmitted without distortion and with incredible gentleness, care, and warmth to the external world. And you are free to separate yourself from both people and circumstances because nothing can destroy the perfect ecosystem of the true self.

Let me summarize the chain of new skills that could help me find freedom in an unfree world. So, the first step was to recognize the fear, then accept it; then focus on the question, "What can I do in this situation?"; then use curiosity to get into self-exploration; the next step is to find the sources and work on them; and finally, focus on communication-related activities and enjoy the growth and desire to be. Do you agree? I do too. And, yes, I had the option of continuing to live with this fear, circling in a vicious circle, growing the internal experiences to the point of disaster, or recognizing and accepting it, shifting the focus of attention, and broadening horizons. Second-order thinking was my choice.

"In the truest sense, **freedom cannot be bestowed; it must be achieved.**" - Elbert Hubbard (June 19, 1856 – May 7, 1915)

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT CONFERENCE 2023
1-3 MARCH 2023
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

ISBN 978-86-87043-86-2
