Growth barriers of women-owned home-based businesses in Iran: an exploratory study
Meisam Modarresi, Zahra Arasti, Kambiz Talebi, Maghsoud Farasatkhah,

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify the growth barriers of women’s home-based businesses (HBBs) in Iran.

Design/methodology/approach – The qualitative approach was used by 22 in-depth interviews with Iranian female HBBs owners/managers.

Findings – Business growth barriers of women were categorized in a multi-level framework of individual barriers (micro), business-related barriers (medium) and environmental barriers (macro). The most important micro-level barrier is lack of skills and experience, while the financial barriers identified as the most business-related one and, finally, the problems of having work interactions with men is the most important environmental barrier women-owned HBBs mentioned.

Research limitations/implications – The results of this paper can help policy-makers better understand growth barriers for women-owned HBB and attenuate these barriers by developing purposeful supportive growth policies that are commensurate with the barriers. Also, HBB women owners themselves could better concentrate on removing barriers by deepening their understanding of their business growth barriers.

Originality/value – The paper contributes to the scarce knowledge about women-owned HBBs in Iran, a rapidly growing, developing country, which can provide better insights from a less explored context. Moreover, as there is only a limited understanding of HBB growth, especially in relation to women business owners, the paper results can prove helpful for researchers in the domain of female entrepreneurs.

Keywords Iran, Business growth, Growth barriers, Home-based business, Women’s business

Introduction

Encouragement and support of women entrepreneurs could help their effective participation in the economic development of their countries (Roomi and Parrot, 2008). Although women’s businesses have recently grown three times faster than men’s, most women’s businesses have remained small and underdeveloped. In fact, growth is a stage in business development that many women’s businesses do not experience (Morris et al., 2006). According to the 2012 women’s GEM[1] report, in all economies women exhibit more fear of failure and have a narrower growth perspective as compared with men, and of course, the effect of limitations and environmental conditions for men and women are different in all countries such that women face severe problems when they grow from one stage to the next (Kelley et al., 2012). In the 2015 GEM report, the environmental constraints on women have been mentioned, yet again, as the biggest challenge women face worldwide (Kelley et al., 2015). There are different points of view regarding less growth in women’s businesses. Some feminist theories
attribute gender differences in business growth to gender discriminations (Cliff, 1998) or deliberate choices of women (Brush et al., 2004). Some other researchers refer to the service-oriented nature of women’s businesses (Buttner, 1993).

On the other hand, the home-based business (HBB) is one of the most popular types of businesses among women, such that work at home is an important source of employment for women all around the world (Chen et al., 1999). Because while engaged in generating income from such activities, women can manage household affairs and take care of children, as well (Sinai, 1998). Women-owned HBBs are expanding in all sectors, mostly in a full-time and determined way, and providing both local and global societies with much added value (Wynarczyk and Graham, 2013); yet, they are faced with numerous problems and obstacles on their path toward growth. The women who own HBBs experience rather more problems compared to their male counterparts (Mason and Reuschke, 2015). As home businesses are considered one of the major ways to resolve the problem of unemployment among women (White, 1996; Mahmud, 2003), the owners of home businesses in Iran are also mostly women. However, only a very limited number of people are employed in women-owned HBBs and usually everything is handled by the owner of the business. This shows that women-owned HBBs lack the motivation or ability needed for business growth (Modarresi, 2013). Although studies have been conducted on women-owned HBBs growth obstacles, (Holmes et al., 1997; Breen, 2010; Breen and Karanasios, 2010), first, there is a need for much more research (Breen, 2010), and second, most of the studies related to women’s entrepreneurship (including women-owned home businesses) have been only conducted in the context of the Western countries and there is only limited research on Islamic societies in this respect (Roomi, 2013). Moreover, these limited studies (McElwee and Al-Ryami, 2003; Roomi and Parrot, 2008; Jamali, 2009; Mordi et al., 2010) have not taken the growth barriers in HBBs into consideration (in the context of Islamic countries). In light of the above-mentioned issues and the importance of focusing on understanding the barriers on the path of growth with respect to women’s entrepreneurship in special contexts, it becomes possible to strengthen positive policy measures and also minimize the entrepreneurial gender gap (De Bruin et al., 2007).

On the other hand, the handicraft industry plays an essential role in the economy of developing countries (Richard, 2007), such as Iran, by generating wealth for local communities as well as ensuring the continuation of local traditions from one generation to another (Graburn, 2006), through poverty reduction and sustainable development (Vencatchellum, 2006), rural development (Gough and Rigg, 2012) and protection of local cultures (Yang, 2006). Moreover, the economic participation and export markets of this industry is expanding in developing countries (Richard, 2007). For instance, the handicraft sector in India has created 6 million job opportunities (Garg and Dhingra, 2014) or Columbia has an annual revenue of $400mn from sales and production of handicrafts (Hnatow, 2009). In Iran, according to the head of Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), the handicraft sector comprises 70 per cent of HBBs, the majority of which are owned by women (CHTN, 2014). Iran is one of the three major countries in the world with the highest rate of handicraft production and the highest variety. But handicrafts only account for 1.3 per cent of the country’s export (MINIT, 2014). Therefore, this study aims at filling the gap and developing an insight about the growth obstacles of women’s HBBs within the handicraft industry in Iran as a Muslim country with its special socio-cultural contexts for women.

**Gender and business growth barriers**

Women’s businesses are one of the fastest growing entrepreneurial groups in the world that have significant contribution to GNP, jobs, innovations and societal welfare (Brush and Cooper, 2012). Despite the increase in women’s ownership and the number of female
entrepreneurs, women-owned businesses are smaller in size, sales growth and the number of employees compared to businesses owned by men (Morris et al., 2006). Moreover, a literature review of female entrepreneurs suggests that the majority of women are less likely to pursue various forms of entrepreneurial activities (e.g. launching a business, owning/managing a business, commercialization) than men (Jennings and Brush, 2013). This might be because women entrepreneurs face numerous problems compared to their male counterparts, when growing from one stage to the next (Kelley et al., 2012).

The theory of liberal feminism argued that gender discrimination has limited women’s abilities, creating barriers to their growth (Welter et al., 2014). For instance, difficulty in obtaining managerial experiences because of job discrimination (Greer and Greene, 2003) and unequal opportunities for men and women in the field of entrepreneurship (Cliff, 1998) are among the reasons that trigger the barriers to women’s business growth. However, social feminists argue that women’s aims and preferences may vary based on their social values; and these preferences restrict their perspectives for growth (Welter et al., 2014). For example, keeping a business small to avoid neglecting the family issues can be a preference for women (Brush et al., 2004). Gender limitations make women select small-sized service businesses which are mostly home-based with a low start-up capital and a very low growth potential, so that they can play their main gender role (Ehlers and Main, 1998).

The institutional theory considers the restrictive boundaries which impose rules, policies, institutions and culture on entrepreneurship. This theory suggests that the growth or lack of growth in women’s entrepreneurship is influenced by the formal and informal institutions governing the society (Welter et al., 2014). For example, less legitimacy and credibility for women’s entrepreneurship bring about restrictions for women in the society (Baughn et al., 2006), or women’s businesses in male-dominated societies will be mostly confined to self-employment, employment in traditional fields (handicrafts), as well as low-growth and home-based jobs (Welter and Smallbone, 2010).

Regardless of the fact that which theories should be used as the basis for explaining women’s entrepreneurship, a better identification of women’s entrepreneurship requires a study of a complicated collection of the interaction of (related) factors at the macro, medium and micro levels. The importance of having an appropriate theoretical framework that considers all the three levels have been duly emphasized in key researches in this domain (Brush et al., 2009; De Bruin et al., 2007). De Bruin et al. (2007, p. 334) described such a framework in this way:

[…] an integrated framework must reflect the embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurship in the macro, meso, and micro environments. Moreover, the framework should also have a cultural context so that differences across countries and institutional settings can be analyzed.

Notwithstanding, little attention has been paid to this subject, and very few studies have taken these three levels into account when conducting research on women’s entrepreneurship (Jamali, 2009). Syed and Ozbilgin (2009) developed a suitable multi-level framework that bridges the divide between macro/national, meso/organizational and micro/individual levels of analyses. In their viewpoint, the macro level involves societal and structural conditions (laws, institutions, culture and political economy);the micro level includes factors like individual agency, motivation, identity and various forms of human capital that influence individual capabilities and opportunities and the meso level involves organizational processes that mediate employment opportunities according to individual abilities and contextual circumstances. This multi-level framework that was previously used by Jamali (2009) in the women’s entrepreneurship field is very useful for conducting a more comprehensive, realistic and context-specific framing of women’s entrepreneurship, especially women’s business barriers, because women suffer from multi-facet barriers...
including micro-, meso- and macro-level factors in any given specific context (Jamali, 2009). Sometimes, however, the categorization of these factors into different levels is somewhat difficult because of their interactions and overlaps. For instance, although an entrepreneurial woman has the responsibility to play a maternal part – a role at the micro level – this can be also viewed at the macro level, if the socio-cultural norms of a society consider the maternal part as a superior role for a woman (Brush et al., 2009). Table I illustrates studies conducted on growth barriers to women’s businesses.

In general and after reviewing the related literature, it can be said that access to capital and financial support is considered as the most important barrier to the growth of women’s businesses in most parts of the world (Coleman, 2007; Roomi et al., 2009). Compared to men, women encounter very tough procedures for obtaining capital (Derera et al., 2014), and once they try to access various kinds of entrepreneurial capital, they are placed in an unfair position because of cultural and socio-economic contexts where they work and also because of occupational experiences and personal concerns (Carter and Shaw, 2006). As a matter of fact, the characteristics of the two different genders, that is the owner (a woman) and the business (mostly male-dominated), cause discriminations in access to capital (Loscocco et al., 1991). Reviewing the literature proves that the barriers which are specific to women (which men may rarely face) are related to family issues as well as socio-cultural problems, including lack of social support or approval, both of which are heavily influenced by gender characteristics. Women have less work experience compared to men; therefore, it adversely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Barriers to women’s businesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hisrich and Brush (1986)</td>
<td>Lack of experience in financial planning, conflict between business and personal affairs, poor locations, lack of capital and professional skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still and Guerin (1991)</td>
<td>Lack of support and expert services, lack of finance, lack of business management skills such as marketing as well as the simultaneous management of both the house and the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loscocco and Robinson (1991)</td>
<td>Lack of access to governmental agreements and capital, lack of managerial and business skills and family obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush (1997)</td>
<td>Lack of being taken seriously; responsibilities toward their children; shortage of capital; lack of education or entrepreneurial trainings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McElwee and Al-Ryami (2003)</td>
<td>Lack of women’s business networks to exchange information and receive consultation on job-related subjects, bureaucracy and its expenses, lack of needed skills and difficulty in employing experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grundy and Ben-Yosef (2004)</td>
<td>Lack of access to the required capital, lack of business knowledge, cultural attitudes toward women’s understanding of their position in the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush and Gatewood (2008)</td>
<td>Lack of motivation and ambitions, commitments, accounting knowledge and insight, financial relations and social networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roomi and Parrot (2008)</td>
<td>Lack of access to capital, land, business location, information technology and training, inherent attitudes in a male-dominated society, support and encouragement by family members and lack of social capitals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roomi et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Lack of information needed for developing the business, lack of skillful workforce, inability to create networks, lack of training opportunities, the responsibility of taking care of babies and family requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamali (2009)</td>
<td>Creating balance between the business and family life, negative social attitudes and accessibility of capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mordi et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Family obligations; lack of access to capital and networks; lack of acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.M.A. et al. (2016)</td>
<td>Lack of social acceptance for women’s entrepreneurial ventures and women-owned businesses, inadequate credibility as a result of little training, insufficient experience and/or education for running a business and difficulty in accessing mostly male-dominated networks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. A summary of studies on growth barriers of women’s businesses
affects the (female) human capital needed for the growth of their business (Fairlie and Robb, 2009). Moreover, gender differences in social capital stemming from gender-dominated roles in a society have a direct effect on the decision to expand a business and, accordingly, on its survival and success (Elam and Brush, 2010).

Barriers to the growth of women’s home-based businesses
In a systematic review of the literature on HBBs, Anwar and Daniel (2014) suggested that most of the research in this domain address the gender-related topics, while only few studies have been conducted on the growth of HBBs (Vorley and Rodgers, 2012). Meanwhile, researchers have reached different results on the growth of women’s HBBs. Some studies have found these kinds of businesses weak and with very limited motivation and potential for growth (Loscocco and Smith-Hunter, 2004; Thompson et al., 2009). Yet, most studies conducted on women’s HBBs have proved that they are completely serious and are growing across all sectors (Breen, 2010; Breen and Karanasios, 2010; Wynarczyk and Graham, 2013; Clark and Douglas, 2014; Modarresi et al., 2016). The first group believes that women go for HBBs because they have no other alternatives. Therefore, as the house is used as a business location, the growth of their business has been limited; their activity is thoroughly made marginal, because less time is used for the business; its survival is even under question (Thompson et al., 2009), but Breen and Karanasios (2010) believe that managerial qualifications and access to capital and marketing skills make women-owned HBBs grow. Of course, there are significant gender differences at work in HBBs (Holmes et al., 1997). The barriers to the growth of HBBs are different to some extent for men and women. For example, a study in Australia (Breen, 2010) showed that the lack of capital was a common barrier for both genders, but women’s family commitments versus men’s risk-aversion characteristic have been two different barriers with regard to HBBs. A study by Mason and Reuschke (2015) on HBBs in Scotland showed that women who owned HBBs experience rather more problems compared to their male counterparts. According to their findings, disappearance of the boundaries between the family and the business, isolation, limited working space and difficulty in employing people are among the women’s HBBs problems. Moreover, based on the results of the study by Wynarczyk and Graham (2013), the obstacles to the growth of women’s HBBs are as follows: lack of skills in using and upgrading technology in the business, lack of technical skills and the related supports, lack of managerial skills – a business which leads to imbalance between life and business for some women and outsourcing are not cost-effective for a small-sized HBB – isolation and lack of interaction with co-workers and, as a result, lack of access to networking or local supporting groups for (using) consultation on business problems. The results of Newbery and Bosworth (2010) also showed that capital, role conflict between home and the business, access to social networks, size and characteristics of home plan, lack of skillful workers and employment-related rules are considered to be the barriers to the growth of women’s HBBs. Among other obstacles that prevent women’s HBBs from growing, one can mention the fact that most of such businesses fail to gain access to governmental supports; they confront hindrances in gaining access to information and trainings and other kinds of supports; and they are even uninformed of services provided by the governments to support small-sized businesses (Ali, 2011).

Women entrepreneurs in Iran
Women account for half of the population in Iran, but women’s participation rate in the Iranian labor market is just 12.4 per cent, resulting in total women’s unemployment rate of 19.8 per cent (Rayesi et al., 2014). Furthermore, according to the World Economic Forum (2015) report, among 145 countries surveyed, Iran is among the countries with a high gender gap in economy ranking: 141 in terms of women’s economic participation; 143 in terms of
sub-indices such as market participation; 106 in terms of leadership positions; and 108 in terms of professional careers (which particularly deserves consideration given the high rate of educated women in Iran). Compared to Western countries, the Iranian society, especially the Iranian women, suffer from some kind of a mismatch between economic and cultural changes and the outcomes of a modern world have not been properly aligned with deeper cultural and social contexts (Javaheeri and Ghozati, 2004). Indeed, there is a conflict arising from the Islamic teachings in Iran against the pressure from the secular world; this in turn results in Iranian women facing barriers to career advancement despite exploiting career and training opportunities provided through globalization and information technology (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007). Therefore, Iranian women view self-employment as a way of overcoming the structural barriers to entry to the public sector (Javadian and Addae, 2013) and occupational segregation (Arasti, 2006; Javadian and Addae, 2013) as well as a means of contributing to economic development (Arasti, 2006). As a result, women’s entrepreneurship does not seem to be enjoying an appropriate business environment in Iran, and despite increased entrepreneurial activities by women, the ratio of businesses run by women to businesses run by their male counterparts are 2 to 10. This is while the ratio is 50 to 50 in countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa and Thailand (Kelley et al., 2012). Of course, the status of entrepreneurship is not very favorable for men either. Based on a GEM (2014) report, Iran has the worst rank with regard to entrepreneurship as a career choice in resource-based economies. Also, Iranian female entrepreneurs are too cautious. One of the main reasons for this can be traced in the socio-cultural structures of Iran which are not encouraging at all for women’s entrepreneurial activities. There are numerous negative beliefs and values commonly shared in Iran with relation to women’s employment and entrepreneurship, especially in small towns. Arasti (2006, p. 109) studied some of these values in her study on a sample of well-educated women entrepreneurs: a woman’s employment is considered unacceptable if her family does not need her salary; a woman’s employment is not allowed, because a woman’s financial independence is interpreted as a decline in her husband’s power over her; house-keeping and child care are the most important responsibilities of a woman; the society simply cannot approve of the presence of women in certain jobs; it is unacceptable for a woman to work in an all-male working environment; the society simply cannot approve of the presence of women as a manager; the society does not believe in women’s managerial skills; and the social insecurity of women. It is noticeable that these beliefs are compounded by the families that reinforce excessive dependency of girls on their mothers, believe that girls and boys have different manners of finding autonomy, give boys more freedom in being away from home, and it is exacerbated in the context of education by regenerating gender inequalities such as gender segregation and depiction of male superiority in the contents of educational resources. This, in general, leads to the development of a poor gender identity among women which, in turn, affects the psychological and personal structures of women and their attitudes toward entrepreneurship (Javaheeri and Ghozati, 2004). But the results of Arasti’s (2006) show that despite all this and all the challenges that Iranian female entrepreneurs face, they have the necessary qualities and skills for being competent entrepreneurs at running their ventures like in other parts of the world. In fact, college education has attenuated the negative beliefs toward female entrepreneurs in the society (Arasti and Akbarijokar, 2008) and gave women entrepreneurs enough self-confidence to deal with these barriers (Arasti, 2006). Moreover, it is expected that with time more women find themselves in entrepreneurial positions than before in Iran (Javadian and Singh, 2012). As mentioned in the Forbes report, with an increase in the level of university education, Iranian women have progressively gained more presence
in the domains of business and have played a significant role in the development of startups (Guttman, 2015).

Many individual and environmental factors affect women’s business growth. Results of a qualitative study on a sample of Iranian experts on women’s entrepreneurship (Arasti et al., 2012) pointed out that growth orientation is a complex phenomenon which is affected by personal factors including goals (economic and non-economic), motives (push and pull factors), female identity (internal and external stakeholders), and individual characteristics (personality and demographic characteristics and personal attitudes and skills).

In the Iranian context, despite the recently growth of women’s in business, many women experience internal and external barriers to start a business. Some of internal problems of women in business are related to their less self-confidence, less achievement motivation, more fear of failure, weakness in entrepreneurial networks, and finally less knowledge and experience both in business and management. However, their external barriers are related to their access to financial and non-financial resources, social value about women’s abilities in management, lack of role model in the society, and finally diversity of their responsibilities which cause difficulty in work–family balance (Arasti and Bahmani, 2017).

As there is no study conducted on growth of women’s HBBs in the context of Iran, it is clearly essential to do more in-depth studies on this subject. The present research aims to fill this gap and, as indicated by Javadian and Singh (2012), contributes to the literature on the newly emerged subject of women’s entrepreneurship in Iran while keeping a demanding eye to the global theoretical participation because of the limited studies in this area. So the present paper is aimed at identifying growth barriers to women’s HBBs in Iran, a rapidly growing, developing country, which can provide more insights from a less-explored context and further add to its body of knowledge.

**Research methodology**

**Research approach**

As indicated by Henry et al. (2015), entrepreneurship and gender-related research should approach qualitative methodologies such as biographies, case studies and discourse analyses more carefully; in this study, a qualitative research methodology has been used based on in-depth interviews, as we need to develop insight about people (women owning and managing HBBs in this study), attitudes, behaviors, value systems, concerns and motivations, culture and lifestyles (Richards, 2005).

**Sample and data collection**

In line with the definition of Roberts and Chrisman (1996), the participants of this study were women who had started and expanded a business from home and were still operating all or part of their business activities at home and used their home as the location of their business. To define an expanded business, Delmar and Wiklund (2008) indicated both financial measures (increase in sales) and non-financial measures (increase in number of employees), but Bamiatzi and Kirchmaier (2014) mentioned increase in sales as business expansion. To select our sample, a database of home-based women entrepreneurs operating in the handicraft industry was obtained from the handicraft syndicate in the province of Tehran. Then, by obtaining information from syndicate officials, phone interviews with women entrepreneurs and visiting women’s workshops in some cases, we carefully selected a list of 40 women’s HBBs with more than 3.5 years of experience and increased sales. But interestingly, some of them also had increase in the number of employees.

Data were gathered using semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the women from the list of women’s HBBs who accepted to participate in this research. They were asked to explain the barriers they suffered from in growing their businesses. While in a qualitative
study, it is not possible to predict the sample size from the beginning; interviews continued until the process of analysis and discovery reached the point of theoretical saturation. In total, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted.

The theoretical saturation of data greatly helps the internal validity of the qualitative research (Rao and Perry, 2003). Furthermore, based on Eisenhardt (1989), three techniques were used to increase the validity and reliability of the qualitative data. First, the response speculation technique was used to avoid the additional effect of the respondents when asking an open-ended question. Then, the interviewees were reassured that the data would be published confidentially and anonymously so as to increase the truthfulness of the statements. Ultimately, by pre-announcing the meeting topic, each interviewee had prior experience and knowledge about the goal of the study.

Table II shows a detailed description of the women who were interviewed in this research. Most of them were married, aged between 30 and 40 and 55 per cent of them had university education. A majority of them started their businesses from home in the past four years. A few of them (four participants) had established a workshop outside their home and performed only a part of their work at an external workshop. It should be noted that all of the respondents confirmed their sales growth but were reluctant to mention their turnover and other financial data. Job creation through these businesses was very low, and the businesses were usually operated by the owners. In this study, only 32 per cent of the HBBs had more than one employee.

Of the examined business ventures, 55 per cent use exhibitions as the only channels to offer their products. Only 18 per cent of them handled all business tasks including sales at home. This indicates the special cultural constraints, difficulty of commuting to private properties and problems at home. Moreover, only 27 per cent of them used the internet as a complementary measure for selling their products. This indicates the predominance of traditional methods of management and marketing in Iranian HBBs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal profile</th>
<th>No. (%)</th>
<th>Home-based business profile</th>
<th>No. (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>Age of the business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 30</td>
<td>4 (18)</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>14 (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>14 (64)</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>6 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 40</td>
<td>4 (18)</td>
<td>More than 8</td>
<td>2 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of employees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>10 (45)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15 (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>11 (50)</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>3 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>1 (5)</td>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>4 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td>Place of sale products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5 (23)</td>
<td>Only home</td>
<td>4 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15 (68)</td>
<td>Only exhibition</td>
<td>12 (55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2 (9)</td>
<td>Internet as a supplementary place besides home and exhibition</td>
<td>6 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td></td>
<td>Location of business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 2</td>
<td>15 (68)</td>
<td>Tehran</td>
<td>11 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7 (32)</td>
<td>Varamin</td>
<td>6 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 13 had children</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shahryar</td>
<td>3 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boumehen</td>
<td>2 (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Profile of entrepreneurs and home-based businesses
**Data analysis**

The systematic content analysis method was used for a detailed analysis of the data. Hence, the data were collected and analyzed concurrently, and each interview was compared to the previous interviews. The data analysis consisted of three stages of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) on 22 interviews. Open coding is generally the initial stage of qualitative data analysis. In the opening part of the analysis, the emphasis was placed on words, not on their meanings. The transcripts of all the interviews were read carefully and coded one by one. At axial coding, the researcher identified facts that illustrated or justified certain themes and made it possible to divide the data into themes and sub-themes. Normally, the identification of main themes and sub-themes takes place during the phase of selective coding. After open coding, the developed codes were reviewed by comparing the interviews. Then, the repeated categories were omitted, and the smaller categories were integrated into more general ones (axial coding). Finally, the theoretical framework by Syed and Ozbilgin (2009) was used to link the data with the theoretical explanation of the findings. As a result, the identified themes (i.e. barriers) which were individual in nature and stemmed from the individual’s situation were classified under the sub-category of “micro-individual barriers”. The barriers related naturally to the HBB were classified under the sub-category of “meso-organisational barriers”. And finally, the barriers which stemmed from the environment were classified under the sub-category of “macro/national barriers”.

**Research findings**

This section presents the results of the content analysis of the in-depth interviews on growth barriers to women-owned HBBs. After axial codification of the narrations, 13 barriers were identified, and with consideration of the multi-level framework by Syed and Ozbilgin (2009) and based on their nature, these barriers were classified into three categories: micro/individual, meso/organizational and macro/national barriers.

**Micro/individual barriers**

*Lack of skills and experience.* Most of the women in this study had, out of necessity, turned to entrepreneurship as a form of self-employment to earn an income; they lacked sufficient previous experience for doing business; and they had not undertaken any training course to obtain business skills. Almost half of them had not high educational levels, and when even educated, they had not graduated in management or business fields of study and they had not even been trained for business skills. They admitted that they lacked basic business skills, especially in marketing and advertisement fields, while marketing is deemed as a basic skill for the growth of a business. More than half (55 per cent) of women owning HBBs in this study admitted that they were embarrassed and suffered from lack of marketing knowledge and need for business marketing training. Mozhdeh, a 26-year-old married woman with no children and who had a 6-year-old business stated:

I did not know the market, and did not know either how to sell what I produced. The easiest way I knew was the internet, but it had its own problems, because I did not know how to advertise and how to introduce my website.

*Low physical ability.* Insufficient physical ability for doing certain jobs, tiredness, muscular weakness and job-related physical damage have been mentioned by some women (28 per cent) as problems in doing more work and accepting more orders; two of them were of course women with physical disabilities. The subject can be related to the specific nature of handiworks which imposes pressures mainly on the arms or other limbs; women’s HBBs in other areas might not require more power and muscular body. Among other cases related to
low physical ability mentioned by these women, we can refer to the difficulty of lifting heavy objects, moving and carrying weighty loads and the exhaustion caused by doing physical jobs. Delaram, a 23-year-old single woman who had been in her business since she was 18, explained:

This job needs a little masculine strength; that's why my hands are full of blisters all the time. If I went on doing the job, the blisters of my hands would pop up. I had to wait for them to get well, so that I could resume my job, later. [...] Sometimes, my patience would grow thin because of the heavy pressure on my arms and neck.

Family responsibilities. Similar to many other societies, women shoulder family burdens in Iran, and men seldom take part in activities like cooking or looking after the children to help women. Female entrepreneurs in this study are not an exception. Some of these women considered numerous house-keeping duties as hindrances in the way to their business growth. In addition to creating job-induced stress and anxiety, these numerous roles and duties can limit the time needed to spend for running the business. It is clear in the statements made by the Masoumeh, a 41-year-old mother of two children with a 7-year-old business:

[...] in addition to doing my business, I am also performing my husband’s administrative jobs, I do the cooking at home, I have to deal with the kids and check their progress at school every now and then. I have to work even on weekends from 8 a.m. till late at night in order to make up for my last week’s overdue jobs [...] all my work is done in a hurry. I face lack of time for doing my house work.

Family members’ disapproval. Although most of the women in this study talked about their family’s support in expanding their businesses, only few of them (three individuals) expressed that their families (spouse, children) were openly against the growth of their businesses for different reasons, the most important of which was concerns about the women’s physical health and men’s strict cultural considerations toward women in Iranian families. For instance, Nikia, a 31-year-old single woman with a master’s degree, who was a university teacher, stated:

[...] I have problems in running a workshop. My family wants the workshop to be in a nearby location, a familiar and safe place like the center of the city. But now you could hardly find workshops which are not far away or in the outskirts. That is why my father opposes running a workshop out of the city.

Apparently, it is of great importance to ensure women’s psychological and social security in Iranian families; the limitations caused by the male members of the family in ensuring such security are considered as barriers to the growth of women’s businesses, especially among single women. Zahra, a 42-year-old woman with two children and a 7-year-old business, narrated the problem as follows:

My husband is strictly disapproves of it. He says it is better to quit your job today than tomorrow. He says women should not be financially independent. If they are, they will become rude. He says a woman has the responsibility of taking care of her husband and children in the best manner, not working outside [...] my kids are not happy about me working. They, too, tell me to stop working, because they are concerned about my physical health.

The statements made by this interviewee are true about the women whose husbands believe in a negative stereotype; these husbands say that “a working woman and her financial independence will reduce the man’s authority”. It is also true about the women whose family members are worried about their health.
Meso/organizational barriers

Business financing. The biggest barrier that most of the interviewed women in this study (96 per cent) faced in terms of business growth was related to lack of capital and difficulty in financing the growth of their business. They believed that government’s financial support for HBBs was too little to pave the way for business growth. The maximum amount of loan for the HBBs was too small and could not help the business growth, on the one hand, and there were many strict procedures for receiving these very small amounts of loan, on the other hand. Banks usually avoid giving loans intended for HBBs for the fear that the borrower would not be able to pay it back, or by requesting heavy collateral, the banks dissuade the applicants because they cannot find sponsors or prepare securities or collateral. Some of the interviewed women stated that they had come across problems both in supplying raw materials and also in employing workers, because of the lack of capital, while some others failed to run an out-of-the-city workshop, because they could not generate the capital for renting or buying a suitable place. Leila, a 38-year-old divorced woman with one child and a 12-year-old business, pointed to this barrier as follows:

If I had the required capital, my business would develop so much. When there are more orders, you need more hands; and the more money and sponsors you have, the bigger can be your business. We can now accept and finish 4 orders out of 10, because firstly I cannot afford the money for the raw materials, and secondly, I do not have enough capital to employ more workers […] I myself kept on requesting for a loan several times, my father did so as, well, but all in vain. I requested a loan so that it could serve as an initial investment to promote my business, but the bank told me that there was no budget. Once I found someone to recommend me to the bank, but I was told there was a need for two civil servants as my bondsmen. I could not find any one, so I was not granted the loan.

Disturbance and restriction of working hours. Using the house space for business activities usually causes disturbances for the people around. The female entrepreneurs in this study believed that noise, disorderliness and commuting of customers are among the causes that trigger the protest of family members and sometimes the neighbors. Delaram says:

[…] There are so much noise, disorderliness and dirtiness in this business; for example, when I break a tile, small pieces of the broken tile would scatter all over the place, say, on the T.V. set and under the sofa, and I cannot stop it. For example, once my mum was walking about the room, when suddenly a shard of glass cut her foot; she then began screaming and complained what a business it was! […] The noises would sometimes disturb the neighbors, so I had to work in the morning till noon, I was forced to stop working in the afternoon and in the evening.

Female entrepreneurs are compelled to set a time limit for doing their business to minimize the troubles and to respect both the family members and the neighbors. However, the restriction and reduction of working hours are regarded as barriers to doing more activities and, in turn, the business growth.

Lack of concentration and repeated work interruptions. The interviewed women believed that there was no complete concentration when doing business in the house. Some of the interviewees mentioned guest’s visits as the major cause of work interruptions. Nasim, a 31-year-old married woman with one child who had a 4-year-old business, stated:

It has happened many a time that I have brought my working tools in the hall of the house when an unexpected guest has come to my house forcing me to pack all the tools. After the guest is gone, I do not have any concentration to resume the job […] when we have an uninvited guest, everybody would say, “Come on! Put everything away!” But that’s easier said than done, because you have to collect the tools one by one; I have suffered a lot for that.

The nature of HBBs and, in fact, doing the business affairs and handling the mother-dependent kids as well as the children’s needs can impose repeated pauses and
interruptions, which take their toll on the concentration needed for the job. For instance, Zohreh, 40-year-old mother with two children and a 4-year-old business, stated:

Sometimes, it happens that I cannot resume my work for at least two hours, when my small son begins screaming, because I thoroughly lose my concentration, and because it is a thinking-based and energy-consuming job. For example, you have to think at the same time about two million colors, and single out the color to make your design. Therefore, you need a very calm environment.

The above-cited cases may reduce the quality and the quantity of their business and have a negative impact on more business activities and growth.

Lack of sufficient space. Insufficient space is a major problem for most of the interviewed women (64 per cent) in developing their businesses. Expressing discontent with the lack of a separate working space and/or a limited work space, the women believed that they were beset by the lack of space. They had to take measures to arrange for an outside space to develop their business which was not always possible because of high rental fees. Shabnam, a 32-year-old married woman with a 5-year work experience, stated:

We lack sufficient workspace, and our space inside the house is too small and I cannot accept many orders as a result [...] (When I was young) there were too many members in our family and we had only two rooms. Can you imagine that I had occupied one fourth of the home space? If we had just one separate room or even a very small store, it would be great.

No place to sell the products. Having no place to offer products is another problem which half of the women complained about. They believe that they might be able to overlook or tolerate the problem of space insufficiency for production, yet they face a more serious problem in offering their products. It was hard for the customers to come to the house because the family members would oppose or the neighbors might object and/or the customers themselves did not like it. Therefore, most of the HBBs had problem selling their products. As they lacked sufficient space to store and keep their products, they had to deal with middle-men, and accordingly, they had to sell their products at a very low price. These are the brokers who mainly get the lion’s share. Masoumeh said:

Since there is no place for me to sell my product, I am forced to offer it to middle-men; the problem is that they want to gain much of the profit. For example, they sell the product they buy from me at a double price. I don’t make a profit proportionate to the efforts I expend (for the production), but the broker is gaining a double profit.

The interviewed women believed that there was not a permanent fair to sell their products to encourage them to increase their production. They claim that the existing fairs are first held temporarily, and second, the booths are rented at very high fees. Mozdeh points to this problem:

There has to be a place where we can easily offer our products. As a producer, I have to know that if I produce at home for 20 days, there is a place to sell them [...]. All producers suffer from the same problem; they produce, but they have no place to offer (their products). The places (booths) they offer are too expensive. How much profit do I gain to pay millions of Rials for a booth?

Macro/national barriers
The problems of having work interactions with men. A considerable number of the interviewed women (73 per cent) were dissatisfied with the masculine working environment in Iran. They believed that the negative stereotypes about working women, particularly those working with men, had led men to treat them unequally, misuse their femininity and defraud them. Nikta explained:
When I go shopping, just because I am a woman, some shopkeepers shortchange or overcharge me, because they believe women know nothing about business.

Another problem with female entrepreneurs was that they were not trusted completely. Some men avoid transacting with businesswomen. Nasim stated:

When I take my works to show them to the shopkeepers, they reject them. They, sometimes, reject them without asking the price. But, when I have my husband or my father takes my works to the shops, they buy it because [they] think it is much better to work with men.

This distrust in women is visible even in the public sector. The interviewed women complained about public inequalities toward women and the lack of equal opportunities compared to men. Homaa, a 38-year-old mother of two children who wrote and painted besides her engagement in the handicrafts, said:

Early in my career, when I approached an organization to do the marketing for my works, nobody much cared for me. They did not hear me because I was a woman […] They do not give major projects to women […] Since most organizational decision-makers are men, there is discrimination against women.

For example, if an exhibition is going to be held, most exhibition stands are given to men.

In all the above cases, businesswomen are in unequal conditions compared to businessmen which have a significant negative effect on the growth of their business.

Negative attitude of the society toward home-based businesses. Some of the interviewees consider negative mentality as a barrier. Samaneh, a 35-year-old married woman with one child who has an 8-year-old business, explains this problem:

The mentality [towards home business] is negative. Maybe because they [the society] believe that works accomplished at home have poor quality or, as the case maybe, they fear that the home address might change and no one could be held responsible.

Or Somayyeh, a 25-year-old single woman who has a 4-year-old business, explains:

No one takes home-based businesses seriously. Those who work at home are given no credits and are viewed as cheap workers.

Lack of support services. Some of the interviewed women believed that the lack of access to an individual or a center to guide them with respect to business or provide them with consulting services was the most important barrier to improving their businesses. Mozhdeh stated:

I had no experience and there was no one to guide me […] There’s no place to answer my questions. So, I should learn by trial and error which takes a long time to give you the know-how.

However, only four women complained about the above issue and the rest of the respondents did not consider it as a serious barrier to business growth.

Legal barriers. Legal barriers and complicated procedures were among the barriers experienced by some women studied here. The regulations related to insurance and complicated procedures of acquiring some permission were among the barriers mentioned by some women. Fatemeh, a 35-year-old divorced woman with one child, who has also worked in a charity organization and had been an employment supervisor, said:

You work at home, in the hope of getting an old-age pension after 20 years. But, unfortunately they easily cut your pension. We even have great difficulty in employing people because we can’t solve the issue of insurance.

This category of the barriers to HBBs is not very serious as only three women believed rules and regulations are serious barriers to business growth.
Discussion
The present study identified the growth barriers to women-owned HBBs in Iran as a developing Islamic country with its unique cultural limitations and gender inequality for women. Many studies have been done in the field of women entrepreneurship, even in the context of the Middle East and Islamic countries (Roomi and Harrison, 2008; Jamali, 2009; Roomi, 2013), and the barriers to women’s entrepreneurship have been particularly investigated (Roomi and Parrot, 2008; Jamali, 2009). However, their results cannot be generalized to Iranian female entrepreneurs because of major cultural differences between Iran and Arab countries, especially with regard to gender issues, aside from the remarkable progress that Iranian female entrepreneurs have made in comparison with their Arab counterparts (Javadian and Addae, 2013). Given the effect of context on opportunities and threats and their role in entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011), the current research aimed at investigating the issue in Iran.

On the other hand, despite the increasing role of HBBs in improving entrepreneurial activities and economic and social advantages (Breen and Karanasios, 2010), this area suffers from a dearth of academic literature and its importance is not widely recognized (Vorley and Rodgers, 2012). Therefore, the present research focuses on the aspect of growth barriers (Breen, 2010) to women-owned HBBs to push the boundaries of the related literature.

In addition, while women entrepreneurs and women-owned businesses are affected by a set of complicated factors at different levels of analysis, most of the research in this area does not follow a multi-level framework that includes all factors at the micro, middle and macro levels of analysis (Jamali, 2009). Therefore, this research uses the framework proposed by Syed and Ozbilgin (2009) to investigate the factors at the micro, meso and macro levels of analysis.

At the micro (individual) level, the results of this study show that lack of business management skills, particularly in marketing, is the most important barrier. It is noted that while a previous study by Wynarczyk and Graham (2013) showed that lack of required skills in IT, technology and business management are among the major barriers to women-owned HBBs, lack of marketing skill was emphasized by the women in this study. One of the reasons for this phenomenon concerns the stereotype that the business world is masculine in Iran and other similar settings which contributes to the difference in the educational pursuits of women in comparison to men with women less inclined toward acquiring business skills. Moreover, the acquisition of business skills requires the presence and participation of women in the fieldwork. In Iran and other Muslim countries, however, not all women are easily able to take part in masculine work environments and benefit from a practical work experience.

Most HBB workers are prone to physical problems and face obesity and bone diseases. Moreover, some women who run HBBs suffer from poor eyesight, backache and other diseases (Tipple, 2006). The present research found low physical capability and its ensuing diseases as a barrier to the growth of women-owned businesses. It is also worth noting that these problems are more common in the handicraft industry settings, as they are more likely to involve the use of hands and greater effort.

Study results show that household duties and responsibilities are among the barriers to the growth of women-owned HBBs in Iran. Managing a business at home does not mean leaving the motherhood responsibilities and household tasks (Al-dajani and Marlow, 2010) and particularly taking care of the children at home and the resulting limitations (Mason et al., 2011) increase the challenges that women face when running HBBs (Lynn and Earles, 2006). This problem is more serious in Iran and other Muslim countries, because according to the Islamic principles, the main responsibility of women
is doing housework and caring for children and certainly not doing business or making profit. These religious principles are widely accepted in Islamic societies and the women who work outside home are not even allowed the smallest negligence with respect to matters related to caring for children.

The disagreement, or at least the lack of support, of family members is a barrier which is not reported in research conducted for Western countries. However, in countries with Islamic cultures, family disagreement is considered as a barrier to the development of women-owned businesses (Roomi and Parrot, 2008; Itani et al., 2011). This shows the importance of contextual differences with respect to women businesses. Interestingly, in the case of Iran, this is not serious because, despite the results of the above-mentioned research, most of the interviewed women in this study were supported by their husbands or family members. This attests to the social-cultural growth of the Iranian families which can be attributed to the increase in the rate of higher education pursuits among women as well as increased successful models of female business owners in Iran. It is worth mentioning that family’s opposition to businesswomen in Islamic countries has its roots, mainly in traditional beliefs or misinterpretation of religious principles like freedom to go out of the house, meeting new men (Roomi, 2013), male female separation in work environments (Itani et al., 2011) and the concerns of parents about the future of their single daughters (Mordi et al., 2010).

At the meso (organizational) level, according to study results, business financing is found to be the major problem faced by women-owned HBBs in Iran. Although the difficulties related to raising capital in various contexts usually have their roots in gender discrimination (Losocco et al., 1991), it is considered a structural problem in Iran. For instance, most banks flinch from granting loans to home businesses. This, interestingly, afflicts men and women equally. Or in other cases, while some HBBs require a large budget to buy equipment and launch the business, the loans allocated to HBBs are small (Modarresi, 2013). In fact, in Iran, although there are policies that provide financial support for female entrepreneurs, particularly women who own home businesses, in practice, they seldom can obtain loans because of difficult conditions and slow procedures that are in place; hence, the raising of finance and capital is difficult and requires extra effort (Modarresi et al., 2016a).

Some HBB owners are bothered by business-home conflicts and are forced to draw clear boundaries for their HBBs (Gray and Owen, 1986). Inconvenience for other family members and, in some cases, for the neighbors, as the result of noise pollution, was considered a barrier. This naturally imposes constraints on the working hours at home. In Iran, unlike some developed countries, such as the USA, there is no zoning rule that forbids HBBs operation in some special urban zone. Therefore, all urban areas and even larger apartment buildings can be HBB activities which naturally yet unwittingly create disturbance for neighbors.

Lack of focus and work interruption are among the barriers identified in this research. This issue is interwoven in the nature of HBBs, because most HBBs view their job as part of their daily activities. Therefore, they do not draw a line between their daily activities and their works (Rosnafisah and Shariff, 2012). Inconveniences usually caused by family members, friends and neighbors, because they are not viewed as workforce (Gringeri, 1994).

According to study results, another significant barrier to the growth of women-owned HBBs is not having enough space for running the business. The space used by HBB owners is usually more than the space specified for other members of the family (Tipple, 2005) and most home businesses, while facing limited space, occupy a part of the living
area (Sinai, 2002). It seems that lack of work space is a problem independent of the context which arises from the nature of the home business.

According to research findings, not having enough space for selling products is among the major barriers to women-owned HBBs in Iran. This is because, as a result of cultural limitations or space-related problems, only few women sell their products at home and most of them rely on exhibitions and local bazaars for selling their goods. For instance, some women mentioned the difficulty of receiving men as customers at home which is somehow specific to the social-cultural context of Iran or to Islamic countries as indicated by Roomi (2013). This problem for HBBs is not found directly in research related to other contexts. This could be investigated as a barrier to the growth of women-owned HBBs.

At the macro (national) level, according to the findings of research, the difficulty of working interaction with men as the result of widespread negative mentalities toward women, not taking them seriously and the dominant gender discriminations are the most important barriers to the growth of women-owned home businesses. This shows the importance of the negative role played by this barrier in the context of Iran. However, this has been noted in Western (Brush, 1997) and Islamic countries (Mordi et al., 2010; Jamali, 2009). In fact, in most societies, women suffer from some type of sexual discrimination (Cliff, 1998) which is stronger in societies with Islamic cultures that promote particular religious values (Roomi and Harrison, 2008). Negative beliefs and mentalities in Iran (Arasti, 2006) are stronger to the extent that the world of business in Iran is masculine in a way that men even dare to abuse and deceive a woman just because she is a woman.

The present study found that the negative mentality of the society and customers toward HBBs is a barrier to the growth of these businesses. In fact, an individual who is engaged in a HBB is low-credited and is not taken seriously as someone who works outside home (Christensen, 1988). Moreover, these businesses face difficulties with regard to legitimacy in the eyes of their customers and investors (Mirchandani, 1999). Home businesses in Iran are unfortunately viewed as efforts that are made out of desperation by their owners. As a result, in spite of being unemployed, young university graduates are not inclined to enter this sphere. This unhealthy culture topped by the government’s lack of resolve to foster a context for home businesses has tarnished the legitimacy of these businesses for both the owners and customers.

Our results show that lack of support services such as consultation and guidance is a barrier affecting the growth of our sample population. The results of the study differs from other related research and contexts in that lack of access to information, guidance and consultation in most contexts is the result of gender issues limiting women and weakness in networking (McElwee and Al-Ryami, 2003). Meanwhile, in the context of Iran, first, women entrepreneurs receive more emotional support from their networks than other supports (Arasti and Akbarijokar, 2008) and, second, providing business guidance and consultation is fundamentally weak in the context of Iran which is something irrelevant to gender. It is worthy of mentioning that there is no Iranian center to provide home business-related information and guidance. Unfortunately, HBBs receive a minimal financial support from the government to launch their businesses and other services, such as advice and guidance, are not provided to home businesses. In fact, HBBs are left to themselves after being launched (Modarresi, 2013).

Finally, based on our results, the legal barriers constrain some women-owned HBBs but are not considered an important challenge to women-owned home businesses. In Iran, it seems that as most HBBs are invisible and not supported seriously by the government, they do not face the related rules and legal issues of conducting business.
Conclusion

Policy implications

The results of this study have significant policy implications for policy-makers in the areas of business, in general, and HBBs, in particular, and also for the field of women entrepreneurship in Iran and some similar Islamic countries. Although, in Iran, the support programs for HBBs formally started in 2010 under the umbrella of HBB organization and support, it suffers from numerous problems in application (Modarresi et al., 2016a).

According to this research, business financing is the most important barrier to HBB’s growth which is confirmed by most women. This shows the role of financial support in the growth of women-owned home businesses. It is worth noting that other similar efforts such as micro-financing and creating various financial institutions for financing women entrepreneurs both in UAE (Tlaiss, 2015) and in KSA (Welsh et al., 2014) have had positive effects. First, governments have to implement a micro-financing plan and obligate the banks to grant easy loans to applicants. Second, debt-ceiling for HBBs have to be raised to increase the possibility of the growth of home businesses.

Also, improving the culture in the areas related to entrepreneurial activities by women and removing the negative mentalities widespread in societies by the governments, albeit time-consuming and cumbersome, could pave the way to more cooperation by women in entrepreneurial activities such as government projects, getting attention from the mass media through introducing and acknowledging them. Through developing legal instruments, governments could minimize the possibility of abuse and fraud toward women engaged in financial areas and prevent men from mistreating entrepreneur women just because they are women. By adopting an approach to establish the legitimacy and acceptability of entrepreneurial activities conducted by women, UAE provided many incentives which resulted in the largest number of women entrepreneurs in the Middle East (Tlaiss, 2015).

The results reveal that lack of a specific place at home is the third most important barrier to conducting a home business. In this respect, policy-makers need to provide a place to women who are not capable of running a business at home which could be possible through founding an industrial zone specified to women with appropriate facilities and a woman-friendly atmosphere. With this support plan, other issues related to home businesses, that is, work interruption or inconveniences caused by the family members or neighbors, would be solved.

An important barrier to women-owned HBBs is the lack of a place to provide their products such that almost half of women producers could sell their products just in exhibitions. Without exhibitions, not only they cannot improve their businesses, but they are also forced to limit their economic activities. Given the fact that the exhibitions held in Iran are seasonal and some booths are expensive, the government could solve the issue through holding permanent exhibitions or bazaars for women which are affordable for all HBBs owners to facilitate selling their products and, hence, their growth.

Policy-makers need to remove the negative mentality toward HBBs through specific plans and programs. In this regard, developing educational programs, introducing and promoting HBBs opportunities and successful HBBs through popular media, like television channels, could play a crucial role. In fact, policy-makers have to change HBBs into a public discourse which is welcomed, both by customers and the educated unemployed population. This is yet to be done despite high unemployment rates, particularly among the educated female population.

Governments have to establish professional business centers for women owning HBBs to provide advice and consultation and train them with the skills required for managing...
businesses and handling the possible problems. As an example, the Saudi government has provided some advisory and technical assistance for women entrepreneurs (Welsh et al., 2014).

Governments also have to minimize the barriers to HBB development, that is, restrictive rules, and to remove the paperwork and bureaucracies related to HBB insurance and acquiring the required permissions.

Below, some suggestions will be given with regard to women-owned home businesses. Women HBB owners might not be able to overcome major barriers. Given the nature of HBBs and problems like lack of space, business barriers at middle levels could not be controlled by women business owners. However, these factors are out of their hands but could be controlled and minimized to some extent. They can participate in the business management training courses held by some organizations to improve their skills in business management. Engagement in HBBs should not stop them from doing their routine tasks. Sports are required to be put in the schedule to improve their physical strength. As for the restrictive nature of household responsibilities and, in some cases, disapproval from family members, HBB women owners are recommended to manage their time and develop more flexible schedules. In addition, smart and emotional management of home tasks through improving the sense of belonging and control over household tasks could minimize the possible conflicts between business and family tasks (Clark, 2002).

Limitations and suggestions for further research
The results of the study have implications for scholars and researchers in this field. Below the limitations of the study and some suggestions for further research are provided. The first limitation of the research is the result of conflicts in the definitions for HBBs provided in various studies and different perspectives toward theories related to HBBs (Mason et al., 2011; Tietze et al., 2009), which troubles the characteristics of home businesses. As a result, the identification of these kinds of businesses and their characteristics becomes complicated. For example, there is no clear line between home activities with limited growth, home workshops developed and workshops which have their origins in home businesses.

The second limitation to the study was the invisible nature of HBBs, because most of them try avoiding government agencies to bypass restrictive regulations (Dwelly et al., 2005). These businesses in Iran work informally (Modarresi, 2013). Therefore, the researchers did not have appropriate access to informal HBBs engaged in handicraft in Iran and the sample, inevitably, included only the registered businesses which were monitored by the Handicraft Union in Tehran, Iran. As barriers for business development might differ in formal and informal sectors, the research may not reflect the barriers to women-owned HBBs in informal sectors.

The third limitation of the study concerns the study being narrowed to a specific area (handicrafts) among numerous women-owned home businesses because barriers to business development could be influenced by the nature of a sector (Buttner, 1993). For example, although lack of space, low physical capability or not having a location to supply products might not be barriers to the growth of women-owned home businesses, they might subject the handicraft sector to problems.

Given the results and limitations of the present study, the following suggestions are proposed for further research: conducting cross-cultural research in the different contexts seems essential to better understand and explain the women’s businesses (home-based or otherwise) and, hence, create a basis for the expansion of an intercultural and generalizable theory. Examining growth barriers to women’s businesses in different sectors (e.g. services,
IT, food industries, etc.) and comparing the results could be helpful in expanding the existing theories. Comparison of growth barriers in women-owned and men-owned businesses is also a subject which leads to a better understanding of business growth-related differences in men and women. Furthermore, quantitative studies that assess the effect and correlation of each barrier identified in this study on business growth are also suggested.

Note
1. Global entrepreneurship monitor.

References


Further reading


Corresponding author
Zahra Arasti can be contacted at: arasti@ut.ac.ir

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