

# Entrepreneurial Efforts by Bangladeshi Immigrant Women in New Zealand: A Preliminary Analysis

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**Abstract** – *This exploratory research investigates the entrepreneurial orientation among migrant Bangladeshi women in New Zealand. There have been many studies of higher degrees of entrepreneurship among the migrant communities in the western world but this research studies the role and trends among the Bangladeshi migrant women using a mixed method of study. The descriptive statistics show unique trends among this group of women entrepreneurs. The women face various challenges but they also deal with these challenges in their unique ways. The striking trend that was established was that the limited expectations are limiting the growth of the businesses among these group of entrepreneurs in New Zealand. The findings of this research may be of interest among various policy makers both at the national and international levels. This may also be of interest for researchers who study women empowerment concepts around the world.*

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, empowerment, entrepreneurship, New Zealand, women

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## I. Introduction

New Zealand's economy holds a unique nature having a developed nation status, but it's highly dependent on the agricultural productions to maintain their sustainability in exports. New Zealand producers need to constantly demonstrate their entrepreneurial innovations to stay competitive in the market. A growing body of evidence suggests that an entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is critical for the survival and growth of companies as well as for the economic prosperity of nations (Morris, 1998). Entrepreneurship has become the main mechanism for transformation of the world's economies (Lee & Peterson, 2000). However, because of the divergence among culture, economic, political/legal, and social conditions, EO and hence entrepreneurship, emerges more readily in some nations than others.

There has been an immigrant influx into New Zealand over the last few decades and trends show that the immigrant population will continue to grow. As of 2016, the total population of New Zealand is 4,745,087 (Statistics NZ, 2016) This consists of a diverse population of European, Maori, Pacific Islanders, Asian, Latin American and African origin. Out of this population, a majority (23%) is currently European born immigrants but due to slower growth of this ethnic segment their proportion is projected to decrease in future. The ethnic projections show that New Zealand will have greater ethnic diversity in future.

Historically, contribution of the immigrant population to New Zealand entrepreneurship was high and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this group accounted for 89 per cent of the total entrepreneurs which was much higher than the immigrant representation in the New Zealand population which was 54 per cent in 1881. The immigrant representation towards entrepreneurship in the twentieth century reduced to 38.2 per cent but it was still higher than their representation in the general population (24 per cent in 1926). The largest group among these immigrants came from the United Kingdom (UK) in these centuries. The other origins represented in this group were Australian, Jewish, Chinese, Dutch, Lebanese, Danish and German (Hunter & Wilson, 2007).

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The current representation from the immigrants still needs to be investigated. But why, in general, do immigrants appear in such large numbers among the entrepreneurial class? A number of scholars offer suggestions as to why this might be the case. Godley & Cason (2005) argue that immigrants can be driven by a strong desire to restore family fortunes (if depleted in their own country) or perhaps turn to entrepreneurial activity in response to economic discrimination. Equally, the entrepreneurial immigrant may feel less constrained by cultural norms in their adopted country and find they are able to make use of valuable social networks from their home country in the entrepreneurial process (Hunter & Wilson 2003). In short, New Zealand's immigrant entrepreneurs, for a number of reasons, have figured and continue to figure highly in the story of New Zealand entrepreneurship. This study explores the phenomenon of immigrant entrepreneurship among Bangladeshi female immigrants of New Zealand with a view to identify entrepreneurial orientation among migrant Bangladeshi women in New Zealand as well as barriers that have an impact on immigrant entrepreneurship.

## **II. Literature Review**

Traditionally, New Zealand has been a popular destination for immigrants, many of whom displayed entrepreneurial characteristics in establishing themselves and their families in a new home. Presently those people wishing to apply to migrate permanently to New Zealand must enter through one of five residency criteria: skilled, entrepreneur, entrepreneur plus, investor and investor plus (New Zealand Now, 2010). Earlier these residency categories were divided into only three distinct parts; skilled/business, family sponsored, or international/humanitarian. Over the decade (1994-2003) more than half the number of immigrants arrived via the skilled/business criteria (Dunstan, Boyd & Crichton, 2004). The 2001 census identified that 20 per cent of all New Zealand residents were born overseas, an increase compared to the 1996 figure of 18 per cent, of which half lived in Auckland. The majority have lived in New Zealand for a number of years and came primarily from Europe, Pacific and China (Statistics New Zealand, 2001a). While little research has been carried out on entrepreneurship among recent immigrants, the importance of self-employment as a form of labour force participation was evident in statistical data from the 2001 New Zealand census. The level of entrepreneurship among these people is generally higher than native New Zealanders, although the type of ventures and entrepreneurial behaviours vary markedly between ethnic groups (North & Trlin, 2004).

The importance of understanding immigrant entrepreneurship is reflected in the rise in ethnic entrepreneurship in other parts of the world described in other studies such as the case in Amsterdam, as increasing numbers of foreign immigrants in urban and rural environments choose self-employment (Masurel, Nijkamp & Vindigni, 2004). On any given working day throughout New Zealand or other immigrant receiving countries, immigrants, their spouse/partners and their siblings are likely to be making decisions regarding the employment opportunities that are available to them. A major element of immigrants' social and economic integration is tied to the status attained through some form of employment which impacts their family viability, social acceptance and personal esteem. One approach to satisfying these needs is to engage in entrepreneurial activity, although it has already been inferred that different immigrant ethnic groups approach this prospect quite differently.

A major conclusion of the international literature is that immigrant entrepreneurial activity/self-employment is a promising springboard for immigrants' social integration and reinforces their economic position and social status (Hunter, 2007; Masurel et al., 2004). The proliferation of immigrant entrepreneurship has led researchers to conclude that over the last 100 years foreign born have been more likely to be self-employed than native born (Fernandez & Kim, 1998). Another example of the proliferation of immigrant entrepreneurship is offered by Rath and Kloosterman's (2003) finding that between 1986 and 2000, entrepreneurial activity amongst immigrants in the Netherlands increased threefold and they argued that this reflected similar patterns to that found in the USA and Britain. These entrepreneurial decisions are influenced by individual, cultural and societal factors, and can include immigrants aspiring to be self-employed i.e., opportunity entrepreneurs or those forced to engage in self-employment due to a lack of employment opportunities i.e., necessity entrepreneurs (Frederick, 2004). The behaviours behind entrepreneurial choices are often dynamic and complex; furthermore, they entail decisional and behavioural patterns that may be unique to specific ethnic groups.

The entrepreneurial behaviour of immigrant groups is of ongoing international interest to business bodies, financial institutions and politicians. News media organisations are regularly reporting on the activities of entrepreneurs. Much has been written (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2004; Timmons & Spinelli, 2004) about the significance of entrepreneurial behaviour in the economic and social development of nations. Existing international studies have identified both factors internal to immigrant groups (personal characteristics, family,

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cultural factors, values, etc) and factors external of immigrant groups (social-cultural, legal and political issues in the receiving country and homeland environments), as influencing the level of entrepreneurial behaviour (Masurel et al., 2004). Of particular interest to this study was the type and level of entrepreneurial behaviour among heterogeneous immigrant groups in establishing small to medium sized businesses (SMEs) in New Zealand.

Specific research in this country has been conducted on the influence immigrants have on their host country from both an economic and social perspective (Elliott & Gray, 2000; Fletcher, 1999). Internationally research has been undertaken on immigrant and ethnic minority business development (Baldoock & Smallbone, 2003), and the cultural/social influences on such activities (Kloosterman, Van der Leun & Rath, 1999). However, comparative studies of the influencing factors that facilitate entrepreneurial activity among different ethnic groups are limited internationally and consequentially, there is inadequate development of theory in this area. In this country, research has been undertaken with regard to the social and fiscal impact of immigrants on New Zealand society (Nana, Sanderson & Goodchild, 2003) and indigenous and ethnic entrepreneurs have been studied in isolation (North & Trlin, 2004). Much of this research, however, has focused on segregated analysis and has therefore disaggregated entrepreneurship and immigration. As a consequence, the understanding of the differing cultural values and backgrounds in the context of the New Zealand social and political environment and how they impact on entrepreneurial behaviour i.e., establishment of SMEs, among immigrants have not been effectively established through existing research.

### **Defining Immigrant Entrepreneurship**

The process by which immigrants involve themselves in New Zealand's economic wellbeing is a topic we know little about (Hunter, 2007). Differences in self-employment rates have been observed in many countries, thus making it difficult to aggregate ethnic immigrant groups (Hammarstedt, 2004). The Weberian approach argues that there is no consistency in entrepreneurial behaviour as it varies significantly depending on culturally influenced values and beliefs (Dana, 1995). Furthermore, there is a widely held view that ethnic business development is driven by both external social forces and internal ethnic solidarity (Li, 1993). Limited employment opportunities, high rates of unemployment, marriage, family, gender, length of time in a country and lack of higher education are all factors influencing the decision to be self-employed (Hammarstedt, 2004). These factors and the ensuing entrepreneurial behaviour vary significantly between different immigrant groups (Hammarstedt, 2004). For example, in New Zealand self-employment is low among Polynesians but high among those from Asian origin (Statistics New Zealand, 2001a)

Accepting that the reasons why immigrant entrepreneurs go into business are dynamic and multidimensional, Kloosterman et al. (1999) contended that the rate of participation in entrepreneurship of a particular group of immigrants depends on the intricate interplay between socio-economic characteristics of the group in question and the opportunity structure. They suggested that immigrant entrepreneurs can only be understood effectively by taking into account a concept of mixed embeddedness which encompasses both their embeddedness in social networks (their own formal and informal activities), and their embeddedness in the socio-economic and politico-institutional environment of the country of settlement. Hunter (2007) suggested that in establishing themselves i.e., embedding themselves, immigrants do not suffer from a host nation's preconditioning and appear free of society's shackles, thus acting more creatively and with genuine innovation.

In the light of the significance of immigrant entrepreneurship and the complexities surrounding this topic, it is necessary to establish a clear standpoint on what constitutes immigrant entrepreneurship as a definitional position on basic concepts is fundamental to a sound research structure. Kupferberg (2004, p. 73) affirmed the need for such a position in stating "knowing who the entrepreneur is, is far irrelevant from the point of view of a biographical approach, indeed, it must be the starting point for any meaningful analysis of entrepreneurial phenomena".

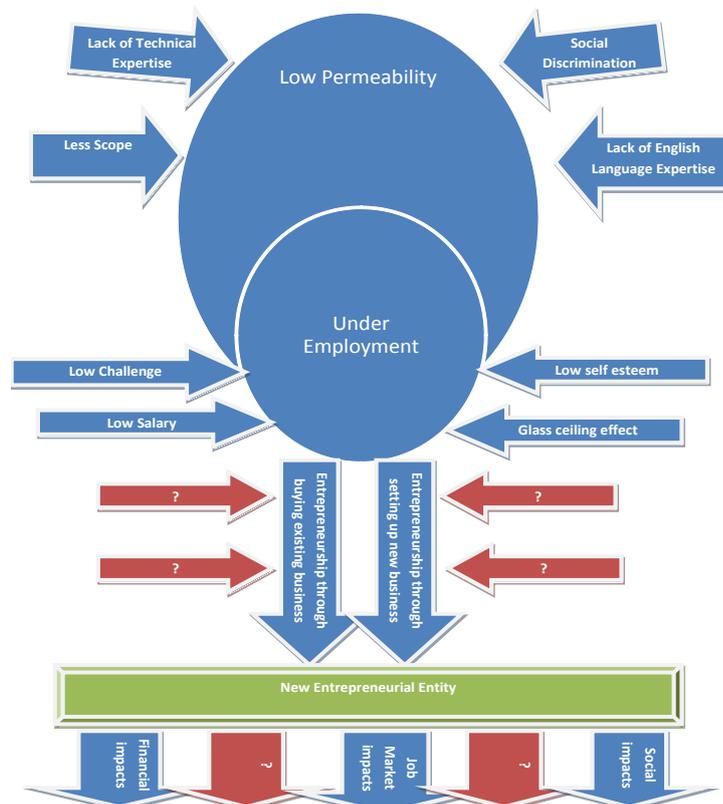
With respect to immigrant entrepreneurial participation, this study refers to the broad range of business activities undertaken by immigrants of differing ethnic backgrounds and their immediate offspring in establishing themselves in their host country. To begin to understand the phenomenon, this study defines immigrant entrepreneurship as 'workplace settings created by immigrants or by their immediate offspring (who have a specific ethnic identity) for themselves and others, within their receiving country. This study also defines the immigrant entrepreneur as 'an immigrant person who engages in entrepreneurship'.

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### Bangladeshi Immigrants in New Zealand

Although Bangladeshi immigrants are comparatively a small group among the total population of immigrants in New Zealand this research identified this group to be a viable source of information as the researchers have close relations with this community and this will enable closer contacts and deeper analysis for an exploratory study to test the validity of a conceptual model. Historically, migration has been a common livelihood strategy of Bangladeshi people. Migration to industrialised countries, particularly in the west has been connected to the colonial past in many researches (Carey and Shukur, 1985). Bangladesh as a country has demonstrated growth in the average annual GDP over the last three decades from 2.4% in the 1980s to 6% in 2010 (CIA, 2010). Nonetheless, Bangladesh remains one of the least developed countries of the world. 25 million people which is 19 per cent of the total population, live in extreme poverty and the incidence of this is greatest among women (Siddiqui, 2003). He further describes that Bangladesh is one of the two unique countries of the world where life expectancy of women is lower than that of men. Given the size of its population, the ratio of population to arable land, the overall level of economic development and the increased number of women looking for avenues to earn livelihood, there are ample reasons as to why the various forms of migration, that is forced or voluntary, internal or international, might occur in Bangladesh. Major destinations for these long term migrants included Australia, UK, USA, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, New Zealand, Belgium, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain and Japan. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), 2000 and Siddique (2001) revealed some gender specific factors uniquely affecting the migration of women. It is also relevant to note that in particular, reference to migration of women in New Zealand majority of the immigrants came in as spouses to the main applicants and thus did not go through the stringent process of screening of their qualifications and skills under the skilled migrant category of migration for New Zealand. Studies have identified that many of this migrants faced considerable barriers in settling down in this country due to lack in their specific skills, in particular lack of English language communication skills and technical knowledge (Cameron, & Massey, 2000; Khan & Hoque 2004; Khan, 2004; New Zealand Now, 2010).

Figure 1- Conceptual Model for Immigrant Women Entrepreneurship in New Zealand (Source: Parvin and Khan, 2011)



Parvin and Khan (2011) summarised the potential barriers in their presentation and identified four barriers to entrepreneurial activities by these women in New Zealand in Figure 1. These are lack of technical expertise, lack of English language skills, social discrimination and limitation of scopes. They also proposed that this segment of migrants did not have sufficient scope to be employed in the workforce due to low self-esteem, not having enough incentives due to lower wages compared to the male counterpart and also various challenges such as juggling with family commitments in a new country that they fail to find time to explore their scope of employment. They also proposed that there might be further factors that are contributing towards low employment in this group which needs to be further investigated.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (2013) provides us with a more recent picture of the settlement outcome of the partners of New Zealand residents who are predominantly women. The settlement outcome of this sample differs from the sample in Parvin and Khan (2011) and demonstrates a higher degree of employment in the sample compared to that study. It also establishes better English language skills and previous work experiences prior to residence visa approval as major factors towards high employability among this group. And it also establishes the contentedness of the 91 per cent migrant spouses in having 'settled down' in this country and being comfortable with their current work status (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2013 p. 14).

This raises the following questions for this study:

1. Is the entrepreneurial trait unique among the Bangladeshi immigrant women in New Zealand?
2. If an entrepreneurial orientation is present among this segment of the migrant women, what are the specific traits that contribute towards these women having an entrepreneurial orientation?

### **III. Methodology**

In order to investigate the above research questions, a two staged study was designed to better understand the entrepreneurial orientation among the Bangladeshi immigrant women living in Auckland. The data collection for analyses was done using a mixed method of a primary survey and in depth interviews.

Self administered questionnaire, was used to collect rudimentary traits among these women to identify their entrepreneurial orientation and their tendency to become entrepreneurs. A stratified random sampling method was adopted for this survey in Auckland, with the source country being Bangladesh and only among women. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents to capture only Bangladeshi women who were interested to do any form of business activities in New Zealand. The responses were keyed in using SPSS at the end of the survey and statistical analyses were carried out to identify traits of entrepreneurial orientation among women from this sample.

At the first stage, a survey a total of 100 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 47 usable responses were accepted. The survey had a 47% response rate. This response rate is in line with the other similar studies conducted in the same area (Cameron & Massey, 2000; Kupferberg, 2004).

In the second stage, based on the survey, seven respondents who demonstrated strong entrepreneurial traits were identified and in depth interviews were carried out with semi-structured questionnaires. The responses were audio taped and three coders were used to tally the responses using a code book for analysis. This ensured that the responses recorded in this analysis remained unbiased. Also separate groups of individuals were used as the interviewers and the coders to ensure an unbiased analysis.

### **IV. Findings**

In terms of demographic profile, the sample represented an age group of early to middle aged women who were experienced enough in life to manage their own business. A large majority (51%) of the respondents were below 35 years old depicting the young migrants who had followed their spouses to New Zealand, while 26 per cent of them were in the 36-45 years age group. A majority (53%) of these entrepreneurs had a minimum of Bachelor's degree qualification. So, sufficient academic training was present among this group. The household income of this group was average in comparison to the countries wages, indicating that there are economic incentives driving the entrepreneurship among this group of individuals. A majority (51%) of these respondents came from household's earning an income of NZD 35000 - 45,000 per annum.

To capture the Bangladeshi women's entrepreneurial orientation, a few questions were asked on their experience, their expectations, their challenges and the assistance they get. Notably, 70 per cent of the respondents did not have any previous business experience and it was a fresh move for them to start up a career

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in business. The next question was designed to capture the trend of experience in running a business in New Zealand. Out of the 47 respondents who have been involved in business in New Zealand, only two (4%) had registered their businesses in New Zealand. This questions the respondents' awareness of legal structures and possibilities for expansion of their ventures, and becoming successful entrepreneurs through sustainable businesses out of their ventures that they have started.

Basically, these Bangladeshi women did not migrate to New Zealand on their own but a large majority (87%) of the them had come to New Zealand to join their spouse. So, they did not have any formal plan to start a business when they had arrived but consequently the opportunities or some other factors might have driven almost half of the respondents to start up a business. This reason remained a key query for the study. On further quizzing them on the reasons to start their own business, it was interesting to note that the main driving force was financial security through profit maximization (47%) and self-empowerment (47%). Their responses to the question confirms the business philosophy of these entrepreneurs. A majority (79%) of the respondents had started their business in order to secure their financial security, where the profit maximisation philosophy is the natural drive for these entrepreneurs.

The research further investigated the type of business that these migrant women were involved in. A majority (47%) were involved in beauty parlour business. It is noticeable that the entrepreneurs chose businesses that correspond to their homemaking skills rather than any major production activities. Other businesses included the food industry followed by tailoring.

It was interesting to note that majority (94%) of the respondents claimed that they are able to transfer the philosophy which they believe in the business they were doing. Although, majority of them (66%) received minimum help from various agencies they appeared to be under the impression that they were doing quite well with their businesses. This may be indicative that whether they have low or minimum expectations in terms of how they define success in business. It was interesting to note that a majority (58%) of them felt that they were successful in their business endeavours.

A majority (87%) of the respondents had some sort of business connection with their homeland showing that they were still yet to sever the cultural ties with their homeland. Finally, a majority of the respondents have reported that their spouse had minimal involvement in running their businesses (77%). This might have been due to the work culture and local influence of business practices where male domination is actively discouraged in the New Zealand society.

The study carried out in depth interviews with seven of the respondents of the survey sample. These respondents were business owners having a reputation of being successful in the community. They were running their businesses for more than three years in a row at the time of survey.

A majority of the women interviewed (three out of four) had no prior plans to enter into an entrepreneurial venture. One of them specifically mentioned that,

*".... I never dreamt of becoming a business person as my family does not like women in business".*

Bangladesh is a country where social taboo discourages women to take up business ventures on their own (Kabeer, 2001). This point of view seemed to have been carried over by the Bangladeshi women who have migrated to New Zealand and thus the lower incidences of entrepreneurship, although there is a high rate of unemployment in this group of migrants. The few who have overcome the barrier are quite aware of this social taboo and picture themselves as the misfits within their community rather than feeling proud of their achievements.

Out of the seven interviewees only three had gone through the process of registering their venture as a company and thus giving a formal structure to their business. A majority of these entrepreneurs are still maintaining an informal structure and running their businesses from home. They have to juggle business and their family commitments which is quite evident in their expressions such as,

*"My family comes first, after all the reason I am doing this business is to help out my family." or*

*".... I stopped running my venture of selling imported cultural clothes because it was becoming too much for me after I had my first child".*

They also seem to prefer to run their business from home and are not interested in expansion as they are aware of the fact that the expansion will require them to commit extra time which they will not be able to afford.

All the respondents in these interviews had major motivations to increase their financial freedom. More specifically, their aim was to make their family's financial condition sustainable. This confirms the results of the quantitative survey,

*"I started the business to meet the increasing financial commitments of our family...."* or  
*"Since I started working with my business both my husband and myself have managed to invest in our new home".*

The businesses run by this group of women tend to have a flavour of their own identity i.e., their womanhood. They felt that choosing an industry that was close to their heart will be more comfortable to them

*"I love working with my business as I am good at doing what is required."* or *"I chose this business because I did not have to go out too much to run the business and it gives me freedom to spend time with my family".*

## V. Discussion and Recommendation

In conclusion, it was noted that these Bangladeshi women migrants carried out businesses. The research had very practical findings that reflects the origin of this group of women coming from a predominantly male dominated country. The women have migrated to a new country as a part of their family and faced the major barriers to assimilation with the new society. They struggled to fit in to the new culture and society due to many barriers such as language, lack of technical skills, etc. All these challenges have led to an Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) which is not too rare among the migrant communities in the western world. What is unique about the EO among this group is the limitation of hopes and expectations. They demonstrated limited expectation to grow and as a result many of the businesses are not even registered.

The lack of government support has been reported but this also limits the scope of including this promising businesses within the tax framework. The government should assist these businesses so that not only they benefit from the tax but also the entire community benefits from the profits of these businesses.

Future research should look into the different migrant communities' performance in this society or a comparative analysis of the same group in different countries.

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