

Entrepreneurial Gender Gap in New Zealand

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ABSTRACT. Globally the gender gap is decreasing and in New Zealand targeted policies and governmental encouragement for women appeared to have lowered barriers to women entering entrepreneurial businesses. However recent research carried out as part of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) project revealed an unexpected increasing entrepreneurial gender gap from 2001 to 2003. This paper analyses the findings from the GEM results to seek explanations for this unexpected result.

SOMMAIRE. À l'échelle mondiale, il y a une réduction des disparités entre les hommes et les femmes. En Nouvelle-Zélande, des politiques ciblées ainsi que le soutien de l'État envers les femmes semblent avoir réduit les obstacles pour les femmes qui se lancent en affaires. Par contre, une étude menée dans le cadre du projet Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) a révélé une augmentation imprévue de la disparité entre les hommes et les femmes pour la période s'échelonnant entre 2001 et 2003. Cet article analyse les résultats de cette étude afin d'expliquer ces résultats inattendus.

Introduction

Women make a significant contribution to the entrepreneurial advantage of nations and women-owned businesses are critical to economic prosperity. A higher level of participation by women in the economic arena is associated with higher standards of living (Reynolds, Bygrave and Autio, 2004). "Empowered women, women with economic and political clout strengthen a nation. When women win, everyone wins" (Alvarez, 2000: 13). Nonetheless, since the inception of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) project in 1999, data have shown that women's participation in entrepreneurship is only about two-thirds that of men (Minniti and Arenius, 2003).

In recent years in New Zealand government educational initiatives, such as the "Girls Can Do Anything" campaign, have targeted policies to increase start-up and entrepreneurial businesses. As women currently serve as role models in some powerful positions (prime minister, chief justice, governor general, former opposition leader, and minister of justice are some examples) we expected that the gap between male and female entrepreneurs (entrepreneurial gender gap) would be closing in New Zealand even faster than in other countries, particularly those in the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and North American countries. Specifically, we examine the three following propositions.

- *That as barriers for women entrepreneurs are being reduced, the entrepreneurial gender gap is closing in New Zealand.*
- *That family obligations hinder female entrepreneurial endeavours.*
- *That accessing finance is a barrier for small-scale businesses in which female entrepreneurs predominate.*

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship by nature and definition is a “complex and multi-faceted phenomenon” (Minniti and Arenius, 2003: 6). Bolton and Thompson (2000) define an entrepreneur as “a person who habitually creates and innovates to build something of recognized value around perceived opportunities” (p. 5). This is a wide definition, which incorporates both innovation and creation, and not only implies or requires the creation of financial capital, but also can include the creation of social capital and aesthetic capital (thus encompassing social entrepreneurs). Entrepreneurship may also be defined as meaning business start-ups (Gartner, 1988). There has been a growing interest in women entrepreneurs over the last two decades, with greater recognition of their contribution to economies through growth, employment, and innovation (Orhan, 2001; Minniti and Arenius, 2003; Gundry, Ben-Yoseph and Posig, 2002).

Many indicators show that the “economic gender gap” internationally is narrowing. The share of women in the labour force increased between 1980 and 1997 throughout the world except in sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and Eastern Europe (Weeks, 2000). Women in the USA are starting businesses at twice the rate of men (Delaney, 2003; Coleman, 2002). From 1987 to 1999 the number of women-owned businesses in the United States increased by 103% nationwide (Gundry et al., 2002). “Women’s entrepreneurship is growing in OECD member countries and around the world ... with start-up rates outpacing the national average in several OECD member and non-member countries” (Koreen, 2000: 23). In Brazil, Ireland, and Spain women are beginning new businesses at a faster rate than men, and are also expanding their share of business ownership. The OECD recognised the value to national economic growth of growing the female entrepreneurial sector, very often by identifying and removing barriers (Koreen, 2000). New Zealand data are consistent with the growth of women’s entrepreneurship, with the number of female employers and self-employed doubling over the last 30 years (Ministry for Economic Development, 2004).

The entrepreneurial gender gap is defined as the lower rate of female participation in entrepreneurship as compared with male participation rates. GEM studies since 1999 have recognised that while entrepreneurial women are involved in entrepreneurial endeavours, and so contribute significantly to the growth of the world economy, they are not as well represented as men.

This is also the case in New Zealand. GEM New Zealand 2001 indicated that New Zealand had the highest proportion of female entrepreneurs with women making up 43% of all entrepreneurs. In 2002, 37.7% of New Zealand’s entrepreneurs were female (about 5% of the female adult population). Earlier research indicates that New Zealand female entrepreneurs believe they have the necessary skills and motivation to start a new business, and that there is general social acceptance of women starting new businesses.

New Zealand does not score well, however, in providing appropriate social service support to female entrepreneurs when they continue to work after they had started a family (Frederick et al., 2002). GEM New Zealand 2002 research signalled the need for further investigation of the influences on the entrepreneurial involvement of women.

Women entrepreneurs around the world face common challenges and barriers. The Second OECD Conference of Women Entrepreneurs in Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), held in 2000, identified four areas needing attention to enhance the growth of women’s entrepreneurship: Firstly, the cultivation of a positive entrepreneurial image; secondly, encouraging entrepreneurship through education, mentoring and networks;

thirdly, the gathering and analysis of a range of statistical information across a range of sectors; and fourthly, the improvement of financing for women—including educating women on the range of financial instruments, networks and institutions (OECD, 2000).

In a similar vein, the National Foundation for Women Business Owners (USA) identified a number of needs for female entrepreneurs (Weeks, 2000) including information needs, technical expertise, and access to industry and marketing networks.

Access to capital is a common barrier, mainly because women are more likely to have smaller businesses than men (Coleman, 2002). According to Coleman and Carsky (1996), the dominant sources of funding for women historically have been personal savings, credit cards, home equity loans, and family loans. This was confirmed by Haynes and Haynes (1999) who analysed data over the 1987–93 period and found that female-owned businesses, especially at start-up, were more likely to borrow from family and friends. A 1998 study revealed that “women entrepreneurs of colour” were less likely to have bank credit and that African-American and Native American women were more likely to have been rejected when applying for loans while starting their businesses (Gundry, Ben-Yoseph and Posig, 2002).

Interestingly, little previous research mentions family obligations as a barrier or a constraint for women. The demographics of Weeks’ (2000) study indicate that at least 75% of the women in each country studied are over 35 years old. Minniti and Arenius (2003) highlight the fact that females comprise 30% of entrepreneurs in the Western world, but 40% of all employees. Factors that may account for this may be a combination of social and economic responsibilities. When Letowski (2000) analysed the results of US and UK researchers, he found that many of the women entrepreneurs interviewed stressed the differences in women’s goals (balancing family life/working life). Letowski also noted a shift in the sectors in which French women entrepreneurs are involved. Although women were strongly represented in the services and trade areas, there had been a radical change in the position of young women who are now strongly represented in personal services (health, recreational, cultural and sporting activities), business services (legal profession, training agencies, consultants) and less in retail and the hotel-café-restaurants sectors” (Letowski, 2000: 148).

Methodology

We use the GEM data set which assesses female entrepreneurial activity in 41 countries for the period 2001–03 and allows us to examine female entrepreneurship in the context of core entrepreneurial drivers such as finance, technology, education and training, culture and economic climate. We analyse the relationship between these drivers and levels of female participation in entrepreneurship within New Zealand and in different countries. From the GEM data we also quantify the levels of total female entrepreneurial activity and produce a comparative ranking of men versus women and of women in various countries.

Data Collection

Adult Population Survey

Within New Zealand, data were collected in two ways. Firstly, DigiPoll Limited, a reputable market research company, was contracted to carry out a randomised telephone Adult Population Survey which entailed approximately 2,000 interviews per year with adults aged 18 to 64 from 2001–03 to assess how many people were trying to start new firms.

Table 1. Gender breakdown for the GEM Adult Population Survey (2001 –03)

Year	Male #	Female #	Male %	Female %	Total
2001	923	1,025	47.4	52.6	1,948
2001	874	1,126	43.7	56.3	2,000
2003	774	1,235	38.5	61.5	2,009

As can be seen from Table 1, the proportion of male to female respondees was not even, so these statistics were normalised globally to ensure global statistical consistency (GEM, 2002).

To measure entrepreneurial participation, respondents had to answer *yes* to one or more of three filter questions:

- *Were they presently trying to start a business alone or with others?*
- *Were they presently attempting to start a new business with their employer? or*
- *Were they an owner of a business that had paid wages for less than four years?*

Such a series of questions is consistent with Gartner's (1988) view of entrepreneurs as those who start new organisations, and the GEM research protocol was at this time focussed on (and thereby limited to) start-ups. Gender-analysed TEA activity was compared over the years 2001–03 (the years the GEM research has been carried out in New Zealand) to identify any trends, and also to make a comparison with other countries. These responses were used to determine Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA).

Expert Interviews

GEM explored nine dimensions of entrepreneurship labelled the "Entrepreneurship Framework Conditions (EFCs)." These dimensions covered financial support, government policies, government programmes, education and training, research and development transfer, commercial and professional infrastructure, market openness/barriers to entry, access to physical infrastructure and cultural and social norms. In New Zealand, in 2003 twenty women "experts" who were either directly involved in entrepreneurial activities or in infrastructural entrepreneurial roles and who identified the factors that help and hinder entrepreneurial activity were interviewed. They were specifically asked to identify three key barriers to entrepreneurial activity, three factors that contribute to entrepreneurial activity, and three strategies which could be undertaken to increase entrepreneurial activity. They were also asked whether there were any particular aspects affecting women's participation in entrepreneurship. Their responses were thematically analysed using Nudist software.

Expert Questionnaire

The interviewees also answered a questionnaire that consisted of five-point scale items including questions on the EFCs listed above. These were factual statements about the situation in New Zealand, which were compared with GEM experts' opinions from around the world. These included views on social services available to women after they had started a family, the social acceptability of starting a business, whether women are encouraged to start a business, whether there are opportunities to do so and whether women have the same level of skills and knowledge as men to start a business.

Results

Adult Population Survey

GEM data for 2003 show that the New Zealand Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA)

Table 2. New Zealand Total Entrepreneurial Activity by gender, 2001 –03, percentage

Year	Male	Female	Proportion of Females Amongst All Entrepreneurs
2001	17.77 %	13.56%	43.3%
2002	17.45%	10.55%	37.7%
2003	17.19%	9.99%	36.8%

rates by gender are 17.19% for males and 9.96% for females (See Table 2). However, if we compare this to the rates for 2001 and 2002 (Figure 1) it is apparent that while the entrepreneurial gender gap was closing in other countries, it was widening in New Zealand since the female TEA rate declined by more than the 3% margin of error.

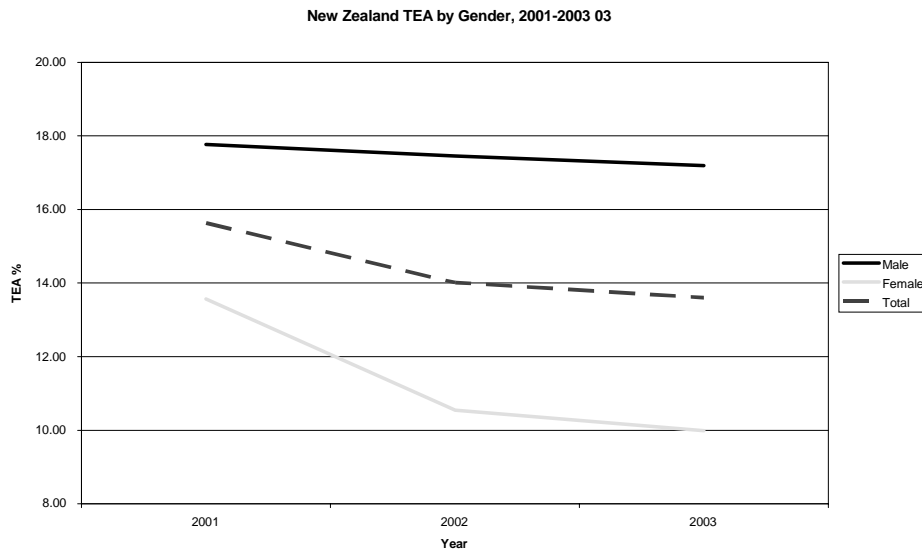


Figure 1. New Zealand TEA by gender, 2001–03.

An examination of the year-by-year TEA differences by gender *and* age reveals other interesting patterns.

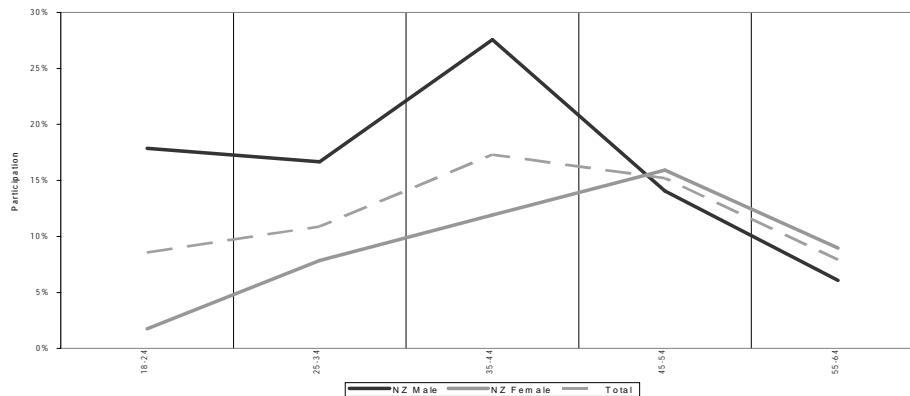


Figure 2. TEA by age and gender, 2003.

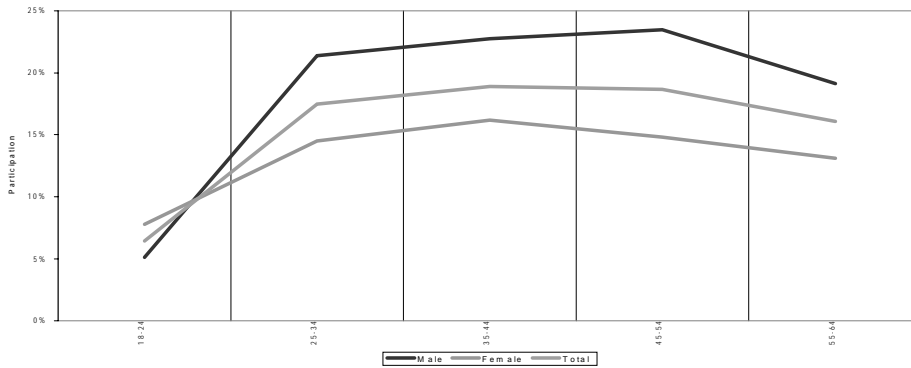


Figure 3. TEA by age and gender, 2002.

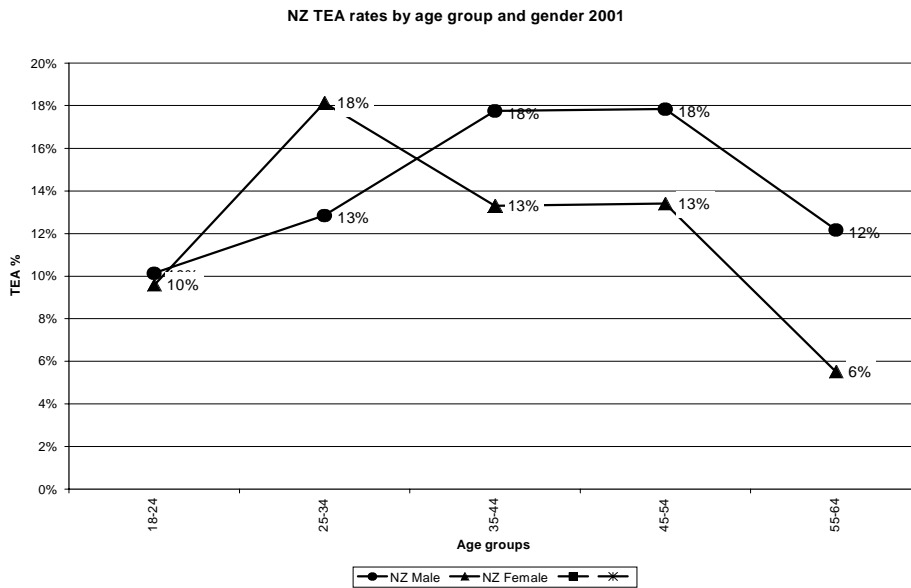


Figure 4. TEA by age and gender, 2001.

Strikingly apparent in 2001 and 2002 is the steep entry curve of younger women aged 18–34 into entrepreneurship; however this has all but disappeared in 2003. In 2001 however there was a dramatic fall in the number of female entrepreneurs in the 35–44 age bracket, but this decline was much less pronounced in the years 2002 and 2003.

Comparing New Zealand’s performance with other GEM countries, at 9.96%, New Zealand females are seventh ranked in total female entrepreneurial activity (see Figure 5). (The vertical bars represent the 95% confidence intervals, sometimes referred to as the margin of error). Where the vertical bars overlap those countries would be considered statistically similar.

New Zealand women are ranked above North American and OECD countries. There is no significant statistical difference between New Zealand’s rate and those of Iceland,

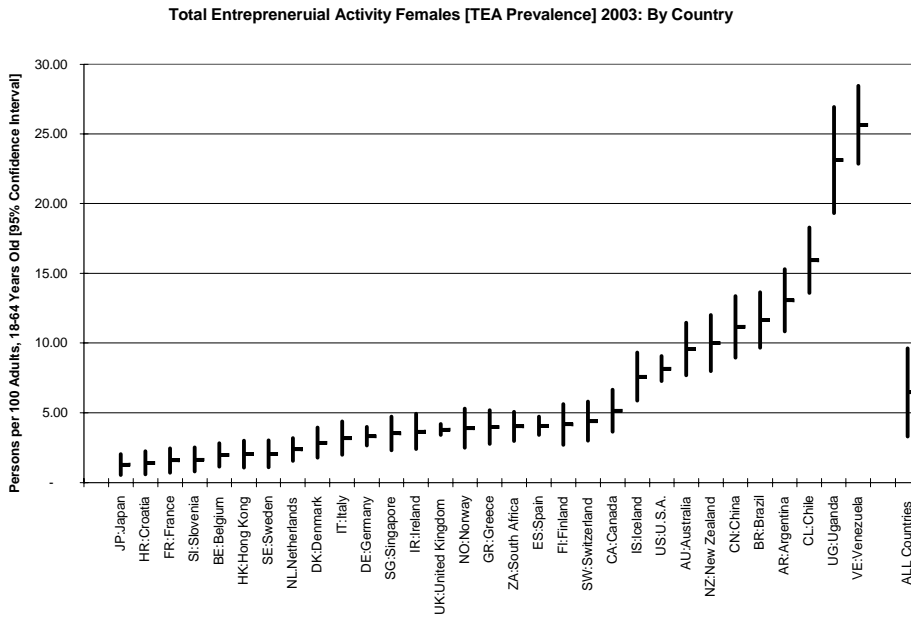


Figure 5. Total Entrepreneurial Activity Females (TEA Prevalence) 2003: by country.

USA, Australia, China, Brazil and Argentina. However, women in Chile, Venezuela, and Uganda score statistically higher than New Zealand women’s entrepreneurial rate. Uganda and Venezuela we consider may be characterised as “churning” economies, which occur when a country is in a considerable state of unrest politically and economically with resulting variances in economic activities. Thus these countries may have exceptional results.

The TEA rates of gender activity are compared across countries in Figure 6. It can be noted that China, South Africa, Italy and France have nearly equal gender representation, but except for China, score low in entrepreneurialism.

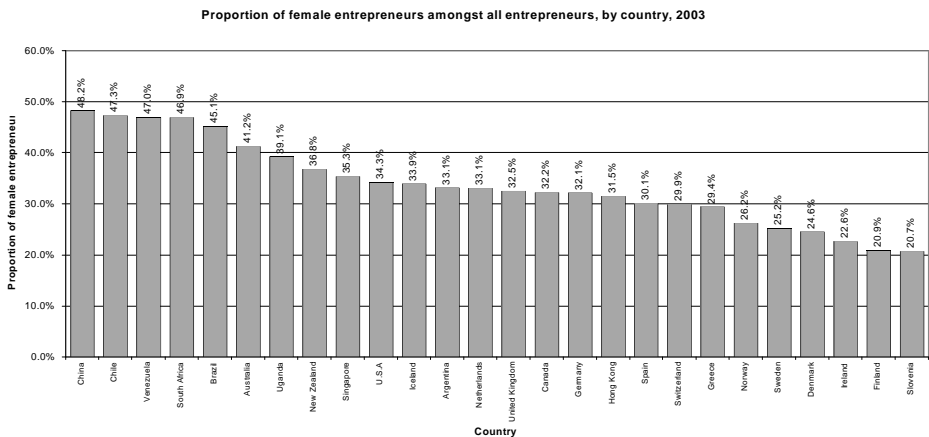


Figure 6. Total Entrepreneurial Activity by gender and country.

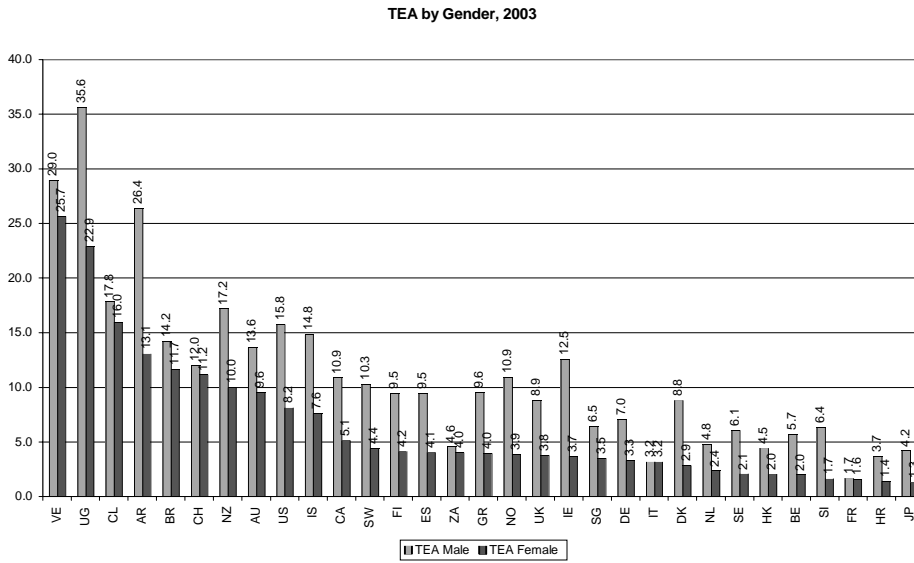


Figure 7. Proportion of Female Entrepreneurs amongst all Entrepreneurs, by country 2003.

The entrepreneurial gender gap in Figure 7 is the proportion of female entrepreneurs amongst all entrepreneurs. By this measure, New Zealand is in the broad second rank of countries. The countries with the smallest gap are France and China. Clearly, Slovenia, Ireland and Japan have a long way to go to achieve parity.

As can be seen in Figure 8, there is something special about New Zealand indigenous Māori female entrepreneurs. Māori females have a significantly higher TEA (13.04%) than non Māori females (8.86%). Māori females are also five times more likely to be opportunity entrepreneurs than Māori males.

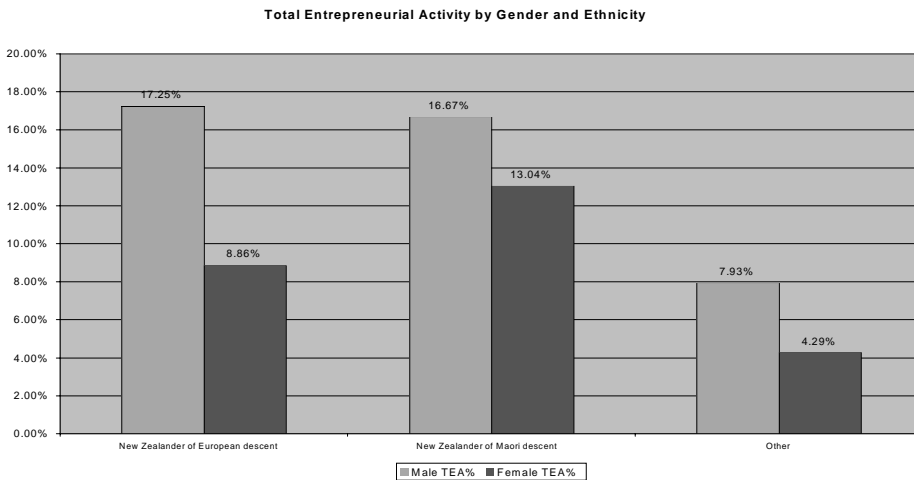


Figure 8. Total Entrepreneurial Activity by gender and ethnicity.

Table 3. Expert Views on Female Entrepreneurship

Expert Views on Female Entrepreneurship, 2003											
	In my country, there are sufficient social services available so that women can continue to work even after they start a family.		In my country, starting a new business is a socially acceptable career option for women		In my country, women are encouraged to become self-employed or start a new business		In my country, women get exposed to as many good opportunities as men to start a new business		In my country, women have the same level of knowledge and skills as men to start a new business.		Support for Women in Entrepreneurship Index: Average of five questions
FI	4.30	HK	4.51	TH	4.00	TH	4.40	TH	4.40	TH	4.18
NO	4.27	NO	4.46	US	4.00	HK	4.14	FI	4.35	FI	4.05
IS	4.03	US	4.41	FI	3.76	NL	3.80	HK	4.28	HK	4.03
CH	3.93	CA	4.32	NO	3.73	FI	3.78	IS	4.25	IS	3.92
DK	3.87	TH	4.32	HK	3.50	CH	3.63	DK	4.20	NO	3.91
SE	3.87	IS	4.21	UG	3.46	IS	3.61	SI	4.16	US	3.88
HK	3.86	FI	4.16	CA	3.44	DK	3.60	HR	4.11	CA	3.74
SG	3.81	SE	4.00	CH	3.43	SI	3.58	VE	4.08	DK	3.71
CA	3.80	NZ	4.00	ZA	3.43	US	3.46	CL	4.06	CH	3.62
TH	3.74	AU	3.86	IS	3.42	CA	3.38	AU	4.06	SE	3.49
BE	3.63	BR	3.82	SE	3.29	NO	3.36	US	4.05	NZ	3.47
AU	3.42	CH	3.77	DK	3.17	SG	3.33	BE	3.95	AU	3.47
US	3.41	BE	3.68	NZ	3.11	NZ	3.22	NZ	3.94	SG	3.40
NL	3.33	VE	3.67	DE	2.92	VE	3.22	SG	3.94	SI	3.36
NZ	3.17	DK	3.66	AU	2.91	AU	3.21	BR	3.92	NL	3.32
SI	3.06	IE	3.65	ES	2.89	DE	3.02	CA	3.88	VE	3.23
CL	3.00	SG	3.50	IE	2.88	BR	3.00	IT	3.83	BE	3.23
ZA	2.92	SI	3.47	BR	2.79	IE	2.96	SW	3.83	IE	3.20
IE	2.83	NL	3.47	SI	2.72	ES	2.96	AR	3.81	BR	3.18
GR	2.69	UG	3.42	UK	2.72	FR	2.94	FR	3.79	ZA	3.15
FR	2.67	ZA	3.41	VE	2.71	AR	2.94	IE	3.72	FR	3.04
VE	2.67	UK	3.39	IT	2.65	ZA	2.86	NO	3.65	UG	3.03
UG	2.66	FR	3.33	FR	2.65	SE	2.82	NL	3.60	UK	2.99
UK	2.65	AR	3.28	SG	2.55	BE	2.82	UK	3.57	CL	2.97
SW	2.50	CL	3.25	GR	2.53	UK	2.79	SE	3.44	IT	2.91
BR	2.46	IT	3.22	SW	2.53	UG	2.78	GR	3.41	GR	2.88
HR	2.40	GR	3.06	NL	2.47	HR	2.75	ES	3.36	ES	2.87
DE	2.32	ES	3.05	CL	2.44	IT	2.72	DE	3.31	AR	2.87
IT	2.28	SW	3.03	AR	2.44	GR	2.71	CH	3.23	DE	2.87
ES	2.16	DE	2.83	HR	2.28	SW	2.67	ZA	3.13	SW	2.85
AR	2.06	HR	2.75	BE	2.18	CL	2.25	UG	2.64	HR	2.78
AV	3.15	AV	3.64	AV	3.00	AV	3.18	AV	3.81	AV	3.34

Expert Questionnaire

In the overall Support for Women in Entrepreneurship Index New Zealand lies in eleventh place with Australia, or just about average globally. New Zealand ranks comparatively low in the sufficiency of social services which enable women to work even after they start a family. The other measures are only marginally higher.

Evidence from Interviews

The interviews revealed recurring themes. The interview data supported the view that women's entrepreneurship is valuable to the New Zealand economy, yet repeatedly men-

tioned the entrepreneurial gap between male and female entrepreneurs. There were three recurring themes.

Gender Barriers

Interviewees agreed that women have the capabilities to be as entrepreneurial as men. This is supported by the Adult Population Survey, which revealed that a high percentage of women consider themselves to have the skills and abilities to be an entrepreneur. However, barriers to entry into entrepreneurial activity were commented upon by our interviewees.

Several respondents commented that there are no barriers to women as such becoming entrepreneurs. In other words, the barriers to participation by women are not related to abilities or discriminatory practices. However, the fact that women generally have primary responsibility for child rearing was considered to have an impact on women's participation. When asked to comment on barriers limiting women, one interviewee responded: "For a younger woman it would be all the same conditions as for the young man ... but often women will have a family." This, coupled with the data showing New Zealand to have low support for women after childbearing, is suggested to be a reason why the gender gap continues to exist.

Our interviewees confirm that barriers for female entrepreneurs by virtue of their being female have all but disappeared over one generation, and this again supports the literature on women's participation rates in business over the last 30 years or so. One successful entrepreneur commented, "In the course of my career I've seen it (the climate of acceptance for women) change so much ... In one whole generation there's definitely a huge difference in the barriers in that a lot of the barriers have reduced."

Access to Equity and Finance

An issue consistently raised by the interviewees was women's access to finance, although there were differing perspectives. The ability to access finance and the cost of finance were noted as factors. In line with the literature reviewed earlier the interviews indicated that many women starting businesses receive either capital from their families or financed themselves. For example, "I was a second income earner for the family household so we were fortunate enough to be in the situation we didn't need that second income." When the banks refused her, another said, "I was pretty typical of most women starting a small business who'll just use their own savings or some funding from their family."

Family Obligations

This issue often surfaced as women tried to balance their aspirations, financial needs and family obligations. In the words of one interviewee, "the demands of family life limit us ... women will always sacrifice everything for their children." One successful entrepreneur said, "without a doubt I think women do find themselves more torn once they get into having children and that balancing work and growing a business is a huge thing to take on." However the financial challenges faced by entrepreneurs starting a business included childcare: "I got into this venture when I had a family—support mechanisms for childcare [such as] getting a tax deduction for childcare would be really significant."

Discussion

Although New Zealand has a high level of female entrepreneurship, over the three years the entrepreneurial gender gap has inexplicably been increasing for New Zealand

women. While this gap may be reducing in other countries (Italy's gender parity is interesting), this is not the case in New Zealand. Over the last three years more women in their forties may be starting entrepreneurial enterprises, but future surveys will need to confirm if this is a trend.

As there is greater participation by women in self-employment and business, the question remains why the gender gap is not closing as expected. Perhaps future GEM surveys will show the gap to be closing. It is possible that the higher female response rate to the DigiPoll Survey may have distorted the results which persisted despite the efforts to normalise the results. The three-year survey time period may not be long enough to clearly establish a pattern, and the results could in fact be a statistical anomaly or variance. Yet the fact remains that female entrepreneurial participation is at about two-thirds that of men, which is high by international standards. Therefore the reasons for this existing gap need to be researched.

The lack of social services for women who continue to work after having a family, as evidenced in the qualitative interviews, may be a factor that deserves attention. Family obligations distract females from developing the potential of their businesses. Tax rebates for child or elder care may help offset these costs. For women without tertiary education the workshops and courses appear to be very helpful to motivate and guide would-be entrepreneurs. However it seems likely that unless attention is paid to developing greater support for women with young children the entrepreneurial gender gap will resist narrowing.

The interview evidence shows that the barriers for women entrepreneurs are largely financial. The main cause seems to be the small scale of these businesses, which are relatively unattractive to capital investors, and that the businesses are not in the more popular areas of computer technology or biotech, which do attract funding. Women find growth funding difficult to access. Issues of the attractiveness of the business, lack of access to the appropriate networks, the ability to use the appropriate language with investors, and a credibility factor were some of the difficulties given by the women interviewed. It could be helpful to address the issue of growth capital from two perspectives. On one hand the applicants for funds may need to be better prepared in their applications to meet the needs of the investors; on the other hand investors themselves could be made aware of possible unconscious biases that are operating.

It is possible that recent low levels of unemployment (less than 4% according to Statistics New Zealand, 2003) may mean that currently there is not the same need for necessity entrepreneurs who, motivated by a financial need in their personal circumstances such as redundancy, or lack of employment opportunities, have started a business as opposed to opportunity entrepreneurs, who seek enterprise opportunities and take advantage of them (Frederick and Carswell, 2001).

This is supported by the TEA rates of Māori male/female entrepreneurs. Historically indigenous Māori unemployment rates are higher in New Zealand than that of non-Māori, thus making entrepreneurial activity a necessity. The lower rates of unemployment will impact on Māori later than non-Māori, which may explain the smaller gap between male and female Māori entrepreneurs. There may also be an explanation in literacy rates, which are lower in Māori than in non-Māori. Reynolds et al. (2004) note a positive correlation globally between illiteracy rates and entrepreneurship, suggesting that entrepreneurial activity is higher in countries where the population cannot read and write.

The 2003 GEM global report also notes that where there are more opportunities for

women for participation in the labour force, entrepreneurial activity is reduced (Reynolds, Bygrave and Autio, 2004). Females, the authors note, tend to enter the labour market through necessity entrepreneurship, but this is less likely if they are already engaged in the workforce.

Most interviewees acknowledged the dual role many women have when trying to balance the needs of growing children with growing a business. In the future the demands and obligations of aging parents may also fall on such women. Women's abilities and energies are often used to balance their work and family needs, and there may be little left for their business. However, even small businesses create employment and wealth for their communities.

Conclusions

Accessing finance is a major barrier for small-scale businesses in which female entrepreneurs predominate. Reference to this barrier occurred in nearly all the interviewees' comments. The situation is compounded for younger women who have large tertiary loans to repay, and is a real constraint to starting up and expanding businesses.

There was insufficient evidence from the Digipoll survey to support the proposition that younger women were becoming more entrepreneurial. Many interviewees indicated that women had no different barriers from the men, but would then acknowledge that children did have an effect. The raising of children while working or running a business inevitably requires extended family support or a similar supportive network for the school holidays and when children are sick. Women entrepreneurs in their twenties and early thirties are likely to face this challenge.

The most prominent group for which this research has implications would be those who set policy regarding support for new business ventures and social policy on issues like parental leave and childcare. If, despite large societal changes in one generation of women, the entrepreneurial gender gap remains, then efforts must be made at the governmental level to first fully understand the barriers that limit women's participation in entrepreneurial activity, and secondly to reduce these barriers and allow women to participate at the same rate as men. Different age, regional and ethnic groups are likely to have different entrepreneurial patterns. Further research in these areas would help target funding and support programmes more productively.

For women, entrepreneurship is a journey towards equality (Reynolds et al., 2004). The entrepreneurial gender gap between male and female participation rates in entrepreneurship is apparently closing internationally, but not in New Zealand. The fact that the gap remains at all should be a matter of concern for the nation and its policy makers. As New Zealand females have the necessary skills to be entrepreneurs, and a higher TEA rate than OECD and North American countries, explanations for the gap are necessary. There is no doubt that if the rate of entrepreneurial activity in females could be raised to equal that of men, the New Zealand economy would benefit considerably.

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