

## **WOMEN AS THE PILLAR OF FAMILY BUSINESS: BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES**

**Ziyan Farhan Naufal<sup>1</sup>, Selvyana Yasmin Fadillah<sup>2</sup>, Nazwa Aliyya Pasha<sup>3</sup>, Nizza Nadya Rachmani<sup>4</sup>**  
<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Entrepreneurship Study Program, Indonesian University of Education, Tasikmalaya, Jalan Dadaha no. 18  
Email: [ziyan@upi.edu](mailto:ziyan@upi.edu); [selvyanaysmin99@upi.edu](mailto:selvyanaysmin99@upi.edu); [nazwaaliyyap@upi.edu](mailto:nazwaaliyyap@upi.edu); [nadyarachmani@upi.edu](mailto:nadyarachmani@upi.edu)

### **ABSTRACT**

This research is designed to closely examine how women are key figures in family companies while also handling their home and work duties in Tasikmalaya City. Given the cultural background that often sees women in conventional roles, this study aims to uncover the ways they adjust to continue running their businesses while still caring for their families. The research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to look at the real-life situations of the women involved. Fifteen female family business owners were specifically chosen because they actively participate in managing their businesses. Information was gathered through detailed talks and watching them in action, and then examined using thematic analysis that included simplifying the data, showing it, and making conclusions. The results show three main ideas: family backing, methods for handling time, and gender stereotypes that still affect what women are expected to do. Support from husbands and adaptable work schedules were key in helping women find a balance between their home and work lives. This research highlights that women's ability to keep family businesses going depends not just on their own skills, but also on having a helpful community and family setting that allows them to balance home and work in a lasting way.

**Keywords:** women; family business; domestic role; professional role; qualitative study

### **INTRODUCTION**

Women play a crucial and often underestimated role in sustaining family businesses over the long term. In many developing countries, including Indonesia, family businesses are not only economic institutions but also social and cultural systems that rely heavily on the contributions of women. Women are frequently positioned at the center of daily operations, financial management, customer relations, and internal coordination within the family. Despite this, their contributions are often seen as an extension of their domestic responsibilities rather than as professional or strategic work. This dual expectation creates a complex dynamic where women must constantly negotiate between their roles at home and in the marketplace.

In Indonesia, women commonly carry what is known as a "double burden." They are expected to manage household responsibilities such as childcare, cooking, and maintaining family harmony, while simultaneously contributing to income generation. This condition aligns with work-family conflict theory proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), which explains that role pressures from work and family domains can be mutually incompatible. When time, energy, and emotional resources are limited, fulfilling one role often makes it more difficult to fulfill the other. For women in family businesses, this conflict is even more complicated because the boundaries between home and work are often blurred. The business may operate from the home, involve relatives, and require emotional labor beyond formal job descriptions.

From an economic and feminist perspective, Folbre (2009) argues that women's economic participation can be understood as both a survival strategy and a subtle form of resistance against unequal economic structures. In family businesses, women's involvement is not merely about helping the family; it can also represent an assertion of agency and autonomy within a system that traditionally privileges male authority. In many Indonesian communities, including Tasikmalaya, patriarchal norms still shape expectations about leadership and decision-making. Men are often considered the formal heads of households, yet in practice, women frequently manage day-to-day business activities and ensure continuity across generations.

In Tasikmalaya, a region known for its strong family-based enterprises in sectors such as handicrafts, trade, and small-scale manufacturing, women play a dominant operational role. Many of these businesses are supported by extended family members, creating networks of shared labor and responsibility. However, academic research on how women experience and manage the intersection of domestic and entrepreneurial roles in this specific cultural context remains limited. Previous studies, such as Rahmawati (2020) and Putri (2023), highlight the importance of family support systems in strengthening women's entrepreneurial performance. Emotional encouragement, shared childcare responsibilities, and flexible task distribution within the family have been identified as key success factors.

Nevertheless, those studies tend to emphasize economic performance indicators and structural support, without deeply examining the emotional struggles, identity negotiations, and social pressures that women face. In a cultural environment where leadership is traditionally associated with men, women entrepreneurs may experience internal conflict, social judgment, or reduced recognition of their authority. They may also feel pressure to maintain

idealized images of being both a “good mother” and a “successful entrepreneur,” which can lead to stress, guilt, or emotional exhaustion.

Therefore, this study seeks to move beyond purely financial or managerial perspectives. It aims to explore the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of women’s experiences in managing family businesses. By focusing on women entrepreneurs in Tasikmalaya, this research intends to understand how they interpret their dual roles, how they cope with role conflicts, what kinds of support systems are most meaningful, and how cultural norms influence their sense of identity and sustainability as business owners. Ultimately, the study hopes to provide a more holistic understanding of women’s contributions to family business continuity, not only as economic actors but also as social agents navigating complex layers of expectation and responsibility.

## **METHOD**

This research employed a qualitative approach grounded in a phenomenological perspective, which aims to understand how individuals interpret, construct, and give meaning to their lived experiences. Phenomenology was selected because the focus of this study was not limited to observable actions or measurable outcomes, but rather to the subjective meanings that women attach to their dual roles as family business leaders and homemakers. In line with Willig (2008), phenomenological inquiry emphasizes the exploration of lived experience as perceived by the participants themselves. This approach allows the researcher to enter the participants’ lifeworlds and to understand how they experience role conflict, responsibility, identity, and resilience from their own perspectives. Instead of testing hypotheses or quantifying variables, the study sought to uncover the essence of experience through narrative depth and reflective interpretation.

The participants consisted of 15 women entrepreneurs in Tasikmalaya City who owned and actively managed family businesses. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to ensure that participants possessed characteristics directly aligned with the research objectives. Inclusion criteria required participants to have managed their family businesses for a minimum of two years and to simultaneously carry domestic responsibilities within their households. The two-year minimum was established to ensure sufficient experiential depth, allowing participants to reflect not only on initial adaptation but also on sustained role negotiation over time. This deliberate sampling strategy enhanced the richness of the data by focusing on individuals who had directly navigated the intersection between entrepreneurship and domestic life.

Data collection was conducted primarily through semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes per participant. Interviews were carried out in locations selected by the participants, most commonly their homes or business premises, to create a familiar and comfortable setting that would encourage openness and authenticity. The semi-structured format provided both structure and flexibility: guiding questions ensured coverage of central themes such as role balance, family support, and social expectations, while open-ended prompts allowed participants to elaborate freely on experiences they considered meaningful. This format was particularly suitable for phenomenological research because it supported narrative depth while preserving conversational flow.

In addition to interviews, non-participant observation was conducted to contextualize participants’ narratives within their everyday environments. The researcher observed daily routines, interactions with family members and employees, and the physical organization of work and domestic spaces. These observations enabled a more holistic understanding of how roles overlapped in practice, not only in discourse. Field notes were documented systematically to capture situational details, non-verbal cues, and contextual dynamics that might not have emerged explicitly during interviews. The integration of observational data strengthened interpretative depth by situating verbal accounts within lived contexts.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis process guided by Creswell’s (2014) framework, which includes stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Initially, interview transcripts and field notes were transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to facilitate immersion in the data. Significant statements were identified and coded, focusing on expressions that reflected perceptions of responsibility, conflict, adaptation, support, and identity. These initial codes were then clustered into broader thematic categories that represented shared patterns across participants. The analytic process was iterative and reflexive; themes were continuously reviewed, refined, and compared to ensure internal coherence and conceptual clarity. Through repeated engagement with the data, core thematic structures gradually emerged, representing the essential features of the participants’ lived experiences.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation was employed by cross-verifying information from interviews with observational findings and field documentation. Consistency between narrative accounts and observed practices strengthened interpretive validity. Additionally, the principle of data saturation guided the determination of sample size. After the fifteenth interview, no substantially new themes emerged, indicating that thematic redundancy had been reached. At this point, further data collection was deemed unlikely to generate additional conceptual insight.

Through this systematic and reflective methodological process, the study was able to construct a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how women in Tasikmalaya experience and interpret their dual

roles. The phenomenological design enabled the research to move beyond surface descriptions and to reveal the deeper emotional, relational, and cultural dimensions that shape women's leadership within family businesses.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the interview data and field observations, three central themes emerged that illustrate the significant role of women in sustaining family businesses. These themes do not only reflect practical strategies, but also reveal deeper social and emotional dynamics that shape women's experiences as entrepreneurs and caregivers.

The first theme is family support as a foundational resource. Participants consistently emphasized that their ability to sustain and grow their businesses was closely linked to the support they received from husbands, children, and extended family members. This support was multidimensional. It included practical assistance, such as helping with production, managing customers, or taking over household responsibilities when needed. More importantly, it also involved emotional reinforcement, encouragement, and shared commitment to the business. One participant stated, "If my husband didn't help me, I couldn't split my time between cooking and running the business." This statement reflects how domestic cooperation directly influences entrepreneurial continuity. These findings align with Setiawan and Lestari (2022), who identify family support as a critical form of social capital for women entrepreneurs. In this context, family is not merely a background structure, but an active partner in economic survival and growth.

The second theme concerns time management as an adaptive strategy. Participants described various mechanisms they developed to navigate their dual roles. These included flexible working hours, delegating tasks to trusted family members, prioritizing urgent responsibilities, and utilizing late-night hours to complete administrative or planning tasks. Such strategies illustrate an ongoing negotiation between work and domestic spheres. These findings resonate with Clark's (2000) work-family border theory, which emphasizes the importance of managing boundaries between professional and personal domains to achieve balance. However, the participants' narratives reveal that balance is not solely a technical matter of scheduling. Several women expressed emotional strain when faced with competing priorities, particularly when business demands conflicted with family obligations. This suggests that work-life balance involves emotional regulation, internal negotiation, and the management of social expectations, not just efficient time allocation.

The third theme highlights the persistence of gendered social norms and stereotypes. Many participants reported that societal expectations continue to frame women primarily as homemakers, leading to skepticism about their leadership capabilities. Some experienced subtle doubt from community members or business partners regarding their authority and decision-making competence. Despite this, most participants demonstrated strong self-confidence and viewed such biases as motivation rather than limitation. They perceived their business achievements as evidence that women are capable economic actors. This finding supports the perspective of economic feminism articulated by Folbre (2009), which argues that women's labor should not be viewed as supplementary but as a fundamental contributor to economic systems. In this sense, the participants were not only sustaining family businesses but also challenging traditional gender hierarchies through their everyday practices.

Overall, these findings suggest that women's roles in family businesses extend beyond operational support. They function as strategic managers, emotional stabilizers, and agents of subtle social transformation. Their contribution lies not only in maintaining business continuity but also in reshaping cultural assumptions about gender, authority, and economic value. In other words, they are running businesses while quietly renegotiating the rules of the game. And they do it while still making dinner. Which, frankly, says more about structural inequality than about "natural multitasking."

## **CONCLUSION**

This research demonstrates that women who lead family businesses in Tasikmalaya occupy a central and indispensable position in sustaining both household economic stability and family cohesion. Their role cannot be reduced to supportive or secondary labor. Instead, their involvement represents a structural pillar that upholds the continuity of the business while simultaneously preserving the functional stability of the household. In many cases, women act as operational managers, financial decision-makers, and emotional anchors within the family enterprise. The findings clearly indicate that their contribution is multidimensional, encompassing economic productivity, relational coordination, and emotional regulation.

The ability of these women to sustain dual responsibilities does not emerge automatically; it is the result of deliberate adaptation and continuous negotiation. Strong family support systems, flexible time management strategies, and personal resilience function as interconnected mechanisms that enable women to navigate overlapping expectations. Rather than treating work and domestic life as strictly separate domains, participants often described integrating the two in ways that allowed them to maintain presence in both spheres. This integration, however, requires constant adjustment, prioritization, and emotional discipline. The women demonstrated strategic thinking in allocating time, delegating tasks, and redefining responsibilities within the family structure.

The results further emphasize that social support, particularly from spouses and children, serves as a critical stabilizing force. Practical assistance, such as sharing domestic tasks or helping in business operations, reduces physical strain. More importantly, emotional encouragement and recognition reinforce women's confidence and sense of legitimacy as business leaders. In several narratives, participants described how verbal affirmation, shared decision-making, and mutual understanding within the household strengthened their motivation to continue facing entrepreneurial challenges. Family support, therefore, functions not merely as instrumental help but as an emotional infrastructure that sustains long-term engagement and reduces the psychological burden associated with dual roles.

At the broader societal level, the findings reveal persistent structural challenges. Cultural norms that position women primarily as domestic caretakers continue to shape public perceptions of authority and leadership. Although many participants reported growing self-confidence and business success, they also acknowledged encountering subtle doubts or lowered expectations from community members. This suggests that while individual adaptation is strong, systemic transformation remains gradual. Consequently, fostering a more inclusive social environment becomes essential. Recognition of women's dual roles must move beyond symbolic acknowledgment toward structural validation within economic, social, and policy frameworks.

In terms of policy implications, empowerment programs targeting women entrepreneurs should extend beyond financial capital or technical skill development. While access to funding and training remains important, psychosocial empowerment is equally crucial. Programs should incorporate components that strengthen leadership identity, negotiation competence, stress management skills, and peer support networks. Community-level awareness initiatives are also necessary to challenge persistent gender stereotypes and normalize women's economic authority. A holistic approach that integrates economic, psychological, and social dimensions will better reflect the complexity of women's lived experiences.

This study is not without limitations. The relatively small sample size and the focus on a single geographic location limit the generalizability of the findings. The cultural specificity of Tasikmalaya may influence patterns of support, norms, and expectations in ways that differ from other regions. Future research is recommended to expand the geographical scope and include comparative analysis across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Additionally, further investigation into the psychological dimensions of role negotiation, identity construction, and emotional labor would deepen understanding of how women sustain resilience over time.

Overall, this research confirms that women in family businesses are not merely economic contributors but active agents of continuity and gradual social transformation. Through their everyday practices, they renegotiate traditional gender expectations, redefine leadership within domestic spaces, and model alternative forms of economic participation. Their leadership reflects not only managerial competence but also adaptive strength within evolving social systems. In sustaining their businesses, they simultaneously sustain families and, in subtle yet meaningful ways, reshape the cultural narrative of gender and work.

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