International Journal of Enhanced Research in Management & Computer Applications
ISSN: 2319-7471, Vol. 14 Issue 3, March, 2025

Successors of the Family Legacy: Biases Faced by Women in Family Businesses

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ABSTRACT

Family-owned businesses play a vital economic role while facing substantial obstacles that limit women from participating in future leadership transitions, especially across Asian regions. This study examines the succession processes for women in family businesses by concentrating on three key factors that impact leadership changes. This study, which used an online survey form to collect 119 responses, sought to evaluate gender dynamics in decision-making, leadership roles, and social expectations in family companies. The results show that the majority (68.9%) of senior male family members make financial decisions, while female engagement remains low (5.9%). Women display business management skills, yet 95.8% of poll respondents believe that societal attitudes continue to favor male heirs to family leadership jobs. A staggering 81% of survey respondents confirm that women in business leadership face greater challenges than men when developing their professional image. Women are increasingly being recognized for their corporate leadership potential and achievements as part of a progressive trend for more inclusive business succession procedures. This study adds to current discussions about entrepreneurship and gender by providing important insights on establishing gender-friendly business transition processes in family-owned businesses to help academics, policymakers, and business leaders.

Keywords: Women in Family Business, Gender Challenges, Leadership Barriers, Family-Owned Enterprises, Gender Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

Unlike their male counterparts, women's roles in the workforce, as entrepreneurs, as family leaders, or even as members of the working class are mostly underappreciated. According to an estimate by UN Women (the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women), if women’s unpaid work in various roles is assigned a monetary value, it would exceed up to 40 percent of GDP for many countries even at conservative estimates.

The global economy depends heavily on family businesses because they simultaneously create wealth and generate employment, which supports community social harmony. Family business succession stands as a highly intricate challenge that becomes more complicated because of gender issues. Traditional patriarchal succession practices persist in many Asian regions and fail to recognize how women may advance family enterprises (Mathew, 2016). This study examines the obstacles alongside beneficial conditions faced by women regarding leadership succession in family businesses through the evaluation of social/cultural and financial structures and organizational dynamics.

The absence of women in leadership positions in family-owned businesses has serious economic consequences. If women are not given authority or a role in decision-making processes in family businesses, their education and work experience do not contribute to development, resulting in a missed potential for GDP development. For example, in India, the GDP for FY 2024-25 is estimated to be around ₹ 324.11 lakh crore (Economic Survey, 2024). As stated by the International Monetary Fund, women in high-ranking leadership positions increase performance and innovation in businesses, which increases GDP development (IMF, 2020).

There is evidence that the family business succession scheme can increase GDP due to financially active women, whose talent is not fully exploited (World Economic Forum, 2021). In addition, some researchers suggest that a strong gender imbalance leads to poor decision-making and low financial performance that prevents economic growth (Smith, 2018). Therefore, involving women in the family business succession scheme goes beyond gender equality and solves a major economic issue.

The succession plan in family businesses has been traditionally male-dominated, but in recent years, many major trading families have taken important steps to ensure gender equality in leadership. One of the most notable examples is Reliance Group, where Mukesh Ambani has carefully divided the responsibilities among his three children. Akash Ambani helms Reliance Jio, Isha Ambani Heads leads Reliance Retail, and Anant Ambani oversees the energy business (Economic Times, 2023). This strategic allocation not only protects the future of Reliance Industries but also sets an example for gender-convened leadership in one of India's largest groups (The Hindu, 2022). The equal participation of both sons and daughters highlights a progressive change in the succession scheme (BBC News, 2023).

The Godrej Group has also set an important example in this regard. Nisa Godrej serves as the Executive Chairman of Consumer Products, a major division of the group, while her brother Piroja Godrej is the head of Godrej Properties (Hindustan Times, 2023). This division of leadership shows how modern family businesses are moving from traditional patriarchal norms to embrace gender equality (Deccan Herald, 2023). Nisa Godrej has played an important role in running innovation and stability in the company, proving that capacity and vision are more important than gender in leadership succession (Business Standard, 2017).

The Piramal Group, another large Indian business, has made sure that both men and women are involved in succession leadership roles. Nandini Piramal is responsible for the Pharmaceutical division, while Anand Piramal manages the Real Estate and Financial Services Segment By ensuring a uniform division of responsibilities, the Piramal family has demonstrated that modern businesses thrive when leadership is based on merit rather than gender (CNBC TV18, 2023). Another notable case where the succession plan is designed to include both male and female successors is the JSW group. Partha Jindal has led the leadership in JSW Sports and JSW Cement, while his sister, Tarini Jindal Handa, leads the JSW Experience Division, focused on luxury and lifestyle projects (CNBC TV18, 2023). This division of responsibilities reflects a comprehensive commitment to ensure that the leadership is based on expertise and interest rather than the old gender norms.

Traditionally, all the women's leadership in the men-dominated industry sheds light on a bold and progressive approach to the team succession scheme (NDTV benefits, 2023). His contribution has deployed Apollo Hospitals as a global leader in healthcare, proving that gender equality leads to business excellence. As more family-run businesses adopt this inclusive approach, the corporate landscapes will evolve from traditional gender prejudices and embrace the more progressive, merit-based leadership models.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Family businesses encounter a major obstacle when preferring male descendants over female candidates for leadership roles despite women possessing enough qualifications to take charge. Patriarchal family businesses continue holding the belief that leadership should follow males from generation to generation thus restricting women's advancement beyond their qualifications (Pyromalis et al., 2004; Abdulla & Albattat, 2023). Family and social norms both preserve discriminatory practices that prevent daughters from participating in succession choices despite their potential to lead (Mathew, 2016).

Transcending patriarchal norms and reaching family leadership positions becomes especially difficult for female aspirants who seek positions in family-run businesses. The research conducted by Wang et al. (2008) and Vita et al. (2023) demonstrated that family business organizations maintain gender biases, which prevent educated and skilled women from accessing leadership positions even though their qualifications have improved.

The Asian business environment creates hurdles for women because women encounter restricted networking opportunities alongside limited financial support and cultural expectations demanding them to maintain domestic duties first (Tambunan, 2009). Women encounter multiple barriers that prevent their participation in family business decision-making procedures, which consequently reduces their ability to shape strategic plans (Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2006).

Mathew & Kavitha (2010) explain that socio-cultural obstacles in family businesses have additional layers because of substandard women-specific technical education and the absence of sufficient mentoring systems. The practice of denying access to family businesses for potential successors remains rooted in previous socially rigid ideas regarding the traditional definitions of gender within these organizations. Family businesses increasingly understand the substantial worth that women contribute to their organizations despite years of embedded obstacles. Research demonstrates that female leaders strengthen innovation with better resilience and help companies build more inclusive corporate settings (Goyal & Parkash, 2011). Jyothi Textiles proves women can challenge traditional male dominance in their family business to become leaders through their success in India's textile industry according to Mathew (2016). This change is supported by socioeconomic processes such as economic liberalization, globalization, and advancements in education, as well as by women becoming more independent through enhanced employment opportunities (Dana, 2000).

The creation of emerging opportunities has shown limited acceleration because patriarchal traditions persist strongly in traditional family structures and industrial sectors. According to Dana (2000), the Indian entrepreneurial environment continues to evolve toward more women entrepreneurship because of the remaining structural hurdles. Additionally, purpose-driven solutions are necessary to boost the speed of change in developing environments where women can actively participate in business succession planning.

The study extends previous theoretical research about family business transitions particularly via Sharma et al. (1997), Habbershon et al. (2003), and Booyavi & Crawford (2023), which analyze how family dynamics shape business strategies within cultural contexts. This analysis targets an important research deficiency through a dedicated investigation of women's role in Asian family business succession. The research examines women's barriers to identifying effective policies that will enhance leadership transition inclusiveness.

This study enhances knowledge about gender and entrepreneurship specifically regarding women's experiences within family enterprise succession.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Women employed in family businesses provided primary data for this study via a survey questionnaire. Google Forms was used to create a survey which was then shared online via WhatsApp groups and emails. A variety of questions were included in the survey to learn more about the difficulties women encounter in family businesses including work-life balance gender discrimination and leadership issues. The study employed open-ended together with closed-ended questions to gather comprehensive information. To better understand the difficulties and experiences of the participants open-ended responses were examined in the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. The research analysis incorporated pie charts together with trend analysis and the chi-square test as tools to both display and conduct a thorough analysis of the results.

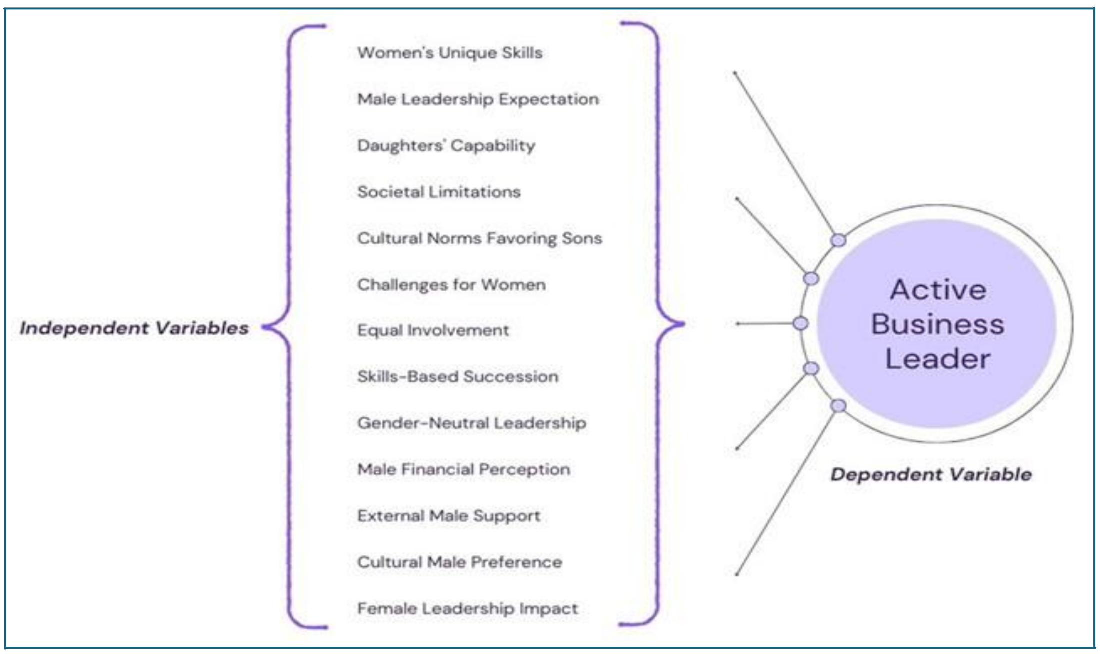
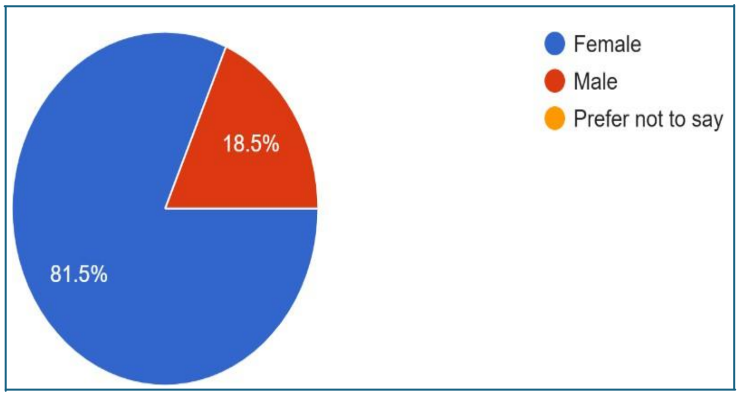


Fig.: Research Methodology: Dependent and Independent Variables of the Study

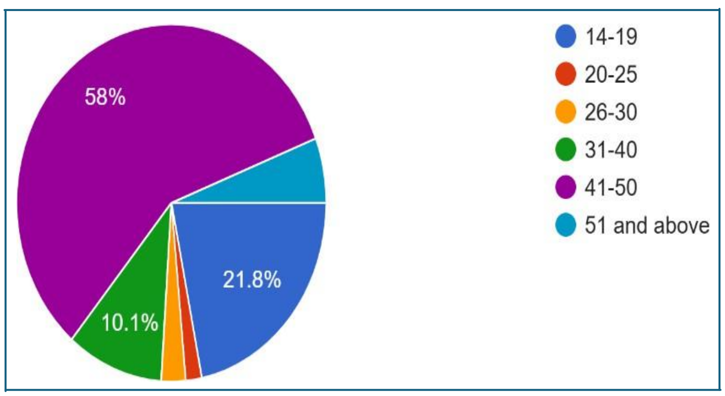
RESEARCH RESULTS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Demographic Profiles

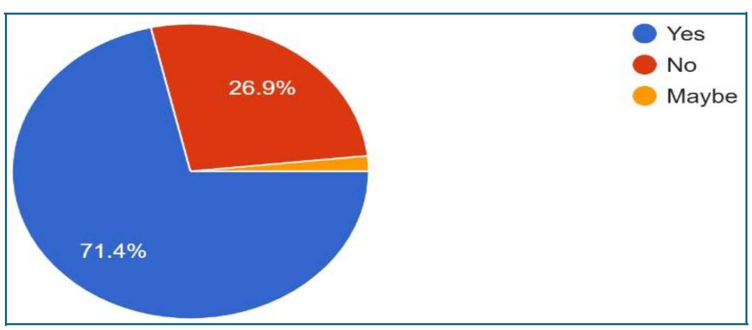
A sample of 119 family business operators participated in the survey across various industries throughout the Delhi NCR region. The demographic data collected from the respondents includes age, years of experience in the family business, position held, industry type, and the number of family members involved in the business. This section summarizes the demographic information of responding participants. A total of 119 owners from various industries located across different geographical regions completed the survey. The age number of family members working in the business position held industry type and years of experience in the family business are among the demographic information gathered from the respondents. An overview of the demographic profiles of the respondents can be found below. Out of the 109 respondents who took the survey, 86 (approximately 78.9%) identified as female, and 23 (nearly 21.1%) identified as male. The male responses offer a comparative viewpoint on gender dynamics within family businesses while the substantial majority of female participants reflect the primary focus on comprehending the difficulties faced by women in these businesses.



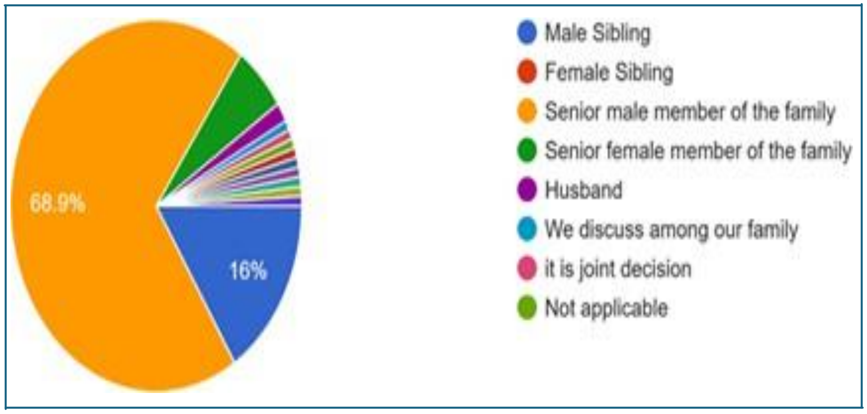
The survey includes participants from various age groups with sixty percent being from the 41–50 range indicating these individuals belong to either the mid-career stage or have senior positions in family businesses. About 20% of the participants belong to the age group of 14–19 indicating that they started their family business experience at an early stage.



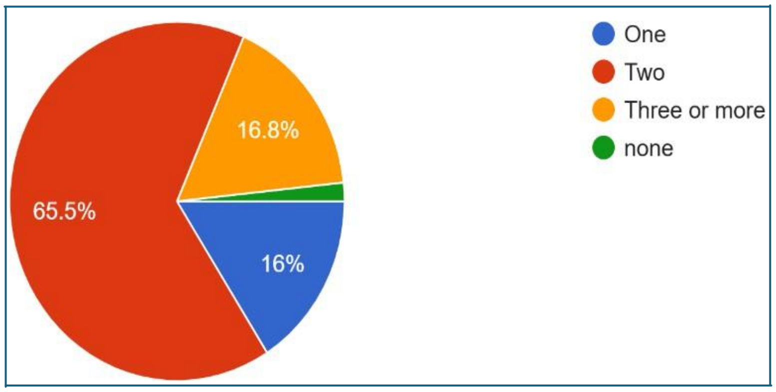
Survey results indicated that corporate ownership by family members was verified among 70% of respondents verifying the focus of the survey on business inheritance. Roughly twenty percent of those participating stated their families did not own businesses although ten percent remained uncertain about the matter.



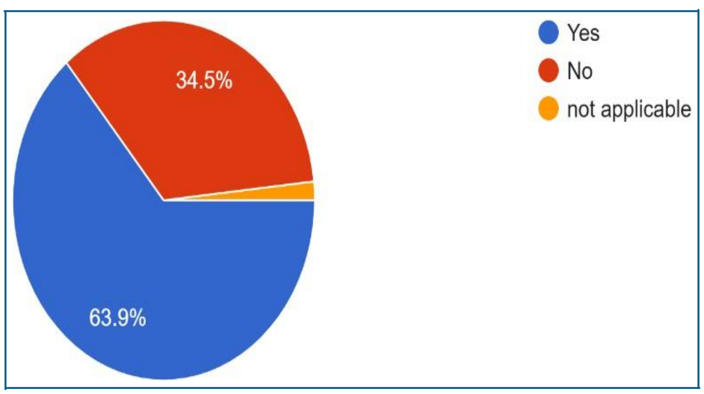
More than 70% of those surveyed said that senior male family members primarily run the family business and make important financial decisions. A male-dominated decision-making structure was highlighted by the fact that male siblings made up a sizable portion. Family business norms based on patriarchy led to minimal female participation with mother roles only appearing occasionally alongside female partner decisions.



A typical family size was indicated by the majority of respondents (about 65%) who said they had two children. The percentage of individuals with three or more children along with those without children or having one child accounted for 20% of the study group. This family structure distribution shows contemporary trends since small family sizes form the major proportion.



In keeping with balanced gender representation, the majority of respondents (about 65%) stated that they had both male and female children in their households. Approximately 30% of respondents said otherwise and some answers were flagged as not applicable. Family business organizations exhibit diverse perspectives about gender roles because of this demographic pattern.



Survey Results

An evaluation of 119 participant responses about decision authority, societal norms and gender-based biases in succession decisions determined the gender-based dynamics within family enterprise leadership. The study provides fresh insights into historical traditions and modern perspectives about female leadership in family enterprise management.

Table-1 Survey Results

Statement		Strongly Disagree	Disagre e	Neutral	Agree	Strongl y Agree	
Women bring unique skills and perspectives that enhance family business success.	N	1	1	**16**	**60**	**41**	**1.**
	%	0.80%	0.80%	**13.40%**	**50.40 %**	**34.50%**	
Male family members are traditionally expected to lead family businesses over females.	N	2	7	**14**	**61**	**35**	**2.**
	%	1.70%	5.90%	**11.80%**	**51.30 %**	**29.40%**	
Daughters are as capable as sons in family business management.	N	1	1	**3**	**29**	**85**	**3.**
	%	0.80%	0.80%	**2.50%**	**24.40 %**	**71.40%**	
Societal expectations often limit women's involvement in family business.	N	0	9	**16**	**63**	**31**	**4.**
	%	0%	7.60%	**13.40%**	**52.90 %**	**26.10%**	
Cultural norms lead parents to prioritize sons over daughters as successors.	N	1	13	**20**	**61**	**24**	**5.**
	%	0.80%	10.90%	**16.80%**	**51.30 %**	**20.20%**	
Women face greater scrutiny and challenges in earning respect as leaders in family businesses.	N	1	10	**11**	**63**	**34**	**6.**
	%	0.80%	8.40%	**9.20%**	**52.90 %**	**28.60%**	
Male and female members are equally involved in business discussions and decisions.	N	4	**40**	**32**	**31**	12	7.
	%	3.40%	**33.60%**	**26.90%**	**26.10 %**	10.10%	
Successors should be chosen based on skills and dedication, not gender.	N	1	1	**9**	**40**	**68**	**8.**
	%	0.80%	0.80%	**7.60%**	**33.60 %**	**57.10%**	
Children, regardless of gender, can demonstrate the capability to lead the family business.	N	0	1	**3**	**55**	**60**	**9.**
	%	0%	0.80%	**2.50%**	**46.20 %**	**50.40%**	
Males are often perceived as better suited to handle financial risks and	N	5	**21**	18	**55**	**20**	**10.**
	%	4.20%	**17.60%**	15.10%	**46.20 %**	**16.80%**	

International Journal of Enhanced Research in Management & Computer Applications
ISSN: 2319-7471, Vol. 14 Issue 3, March, 2025

complexities in the family business.							
Male family members receive more external support (e.g., from clients, and banks) than female members.	N	2	**25**	**28**	**49**	15	11.
	%	1.70%	**21.00%**	**23.50%**	**41.20 %**	12.60%	
Cultural norms and traditions favor males over females as business successors.	N	1	6	**10**	**77**	**25**	**12.**
	%	0.80%	5.00%	**8.40%**	**64.70 %**	**21.00%**	
Female leadership in family businesses challenges traditional societal roles.	N	0	10	**13**	**76**	**20**	**13.**
	%	0%	8.40%	**10.90%**	**63.90 %**	**16.80%**	

Table 1 Results compiled by authors; top 3 responses are marked bold.

Women bring special skills and perspectives that increase the likelihood of success in business according to the majority of respondents (84. 9%) who agree or strongly agree. Overall society recognizes women's potential contributions to decision-making even though their actual powers remain restricted. The conventional expectation that male family members should run businesses is acknowledged by more than 80% of respondents, with 51.3% agreeing and 29.4% strongly agreeing. Nonetheless, 95.8% agree or strongly agree that daughters are just as capable as sons in running a business exposing a conflict between cultural expectations and individual convictions.

According to survey findings, most respondents (over 79%) indicated women face social restrictions when participating in family businesses. A widespread 71.5% of respondents showed agreement that cultural traditions prefer males over females when selecting heirs demonstrating that prejudice against females continues throughout leadership roles and inheritance practices. More than 81% of those surveyed, concur that women encounter more scrutiny and difficulties in gaining respect as executives in the business world. This implies that women's active involvement in business management is discouraged by a systemic barrier.

Only 36.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that male and female family members participate in business discussions equally while 60.5% disagreed or remained neutral. Women remain less involved with strategic decision-making processes based on this comparison. However, 90.7% of respondents strongly agree that skills and commitment, not gender, should be used to select successors. The forward-thinking viewpoint presents potential changes to the future succession process despite present male-dominant leadership patterns. Men are better equipped to manage financial risks according to 46.2% who agree and 16.8% who strongly agree with this statement but 21.8% disagree. Although these results show enduring prejudices against financial literacy, they also imply that some respondents acknowledge the ability of women to handle finances well. Male family members according to more than half (53.8%) receive more outside assistance than female family members including from clients and financial institutions. Women in executive roles may face challenges due to gender-specific corporate relationships within organizations.

Significantly 85.7% of respondents agree that cultural norms support male successors which strengthens institutional barriers that prevent women from holding leadership positions in family businesses. Most people (80.7%) concur that traditional roles are challenged by female leadership in family businesses. Most respondents agree female leaders bring transformative changes to organizations despite traditional cultural preferences for male executives. There are 18.5% male and 81.5% female respondents in the study sample. 71.4% of participants are from families that own businesses, and a sizable portion (58%) are between the ages of 41 and 50 years. A varied demographic background is also provided for examining gender biases in corporate leadership with 65.5% of families having two children and 63.9% having both male and female children.

According to the findings, gender roles in family business leadership are complicated. There is strong support for gender equality in leadership capabilities even though traditional norms still favor male decision-making and succession. Society and structure continue to restrict women's potential, yet emerging views indicate the rise of inclusive family business management practices in the future.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Model Fitting

The good fit evaluation of logistic regression models relies heavily on the statistical data found in the Model Fitting Information table. The statistical indicators of assessment begin with -2 Log Likelihood values and Chi-Square statistics and degrees of freedom (df) and significance (Sig.) values to show if the final model brings a better fit than the intercept-only model.

Table-2 Model Fit

Model Fitting Information				
Model	Model Fitting Criteria	Likelihood Ratio Tests		
	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	103.409			
Final	3.673	99.736	60	.001

The Intercept Only model functions as a basic model with 103.409 -2 Log Likelihood because it contains no predictor variables. The addition of predictor variables within the Final Model resulted in a reduction of the -2 Log Likelihood value to 3.673 which indicates enhanced model performance and superior explanation of the dependent variable variation.

The Chi-Square value of 99.736 and degrees of freedom of 60 with high significance reaches .001 in this assessment, shows that the model is statistically significant at p 0.05.

Pseudo R-Square Statistics

Similar to linear regression logistic regressions pseudo-R-squared values roughly represent the proportion of variance that the model can account for. Unlike R-Square, these numbers provide information about model fit and explanatory power, but they cannot be directly interpreted. The Cox and Snell Nagelkerke and McFadden R-Square values are the most often reported pseudo-R-Square measures.

Table-3 Pseudo R-Square test

Pseudo R-Square	
Cox and Snell	0.567
Nagelkerke	0.936
McFadden	0.899

The Cox & Snell R-Square value of 0.567 reflects the proportion of variation explained by the model, but it has a limitation in that it cannot reach a maximum value of 1. In contrast, Nagelkerke R-Square, with a value of 0. 936, is an adjusted version of Cox & Snell's measure and is scaled to range from 0 to 1. This value suggests an exceptionally strong model fit, implying that nearly all the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the predictors. McFadden R-Square, at 0.899, is based on the log-likelihood ratio and is frequently used in logistic regression. McFadden’s R-Square values typically range from 0.2 to 0.4 for a good model fit, and a value of 0.899 suggests an almost perfect fit.

In conclusion, while the Pseudo R-squared values suggest that the model explains nearly all the variability in the dependent variable, raising its explanatory power to an exceptional level, the high values point to potential overfitting. This warrants further investigation to ensure the model’s generalizability to new, unseen data.

Likelihood Ratio Tests

The Likelihood Ratio Test (LRT) serves to assess the contribution of individual predictors to the overall model by comparing the fit of the final model with a reduced model, which omits the predictor of interest. The test statistic follows a Chi-Square distribution, where higher Chi-Square values indicate a greater impact from the predictor on the model. The significance of the predictor's effect is determined by the p-value, where a low p-value suggests statistical significance.

Table 4 Likelihood Ratio Tests

Likelihood Ratio Tests				
Effect	Model Fitting Criteria	Likelihood Ratio Tests		
	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	3.673[a]	.000	0	.
Q2	18.811[b]	15.138	8	.057
Q4	181.466[b]	177.793	6	.000
Q5	11.794[b]	8.121	8	.422
Q6	22.029[b]	18.356	8	.019
Q10	23.480[b]	19.807	8	.011
Q11	21.594[b]	17.920	8	.022
Q12	7.605[b]	3.932	8	.863
Q13	18.372[b]	14.699	6	.023

Model evaluation includes an intercept-only model that provides a baseline comparison, with a -2 Log Likelihood value of 3.673. Additionally, effect-specific models are assessed by observing the model reduction fit when each predictor is excluded. Significant deterioration in model fit, indicated by low p-values, suggests the importance of the excluded predictor.

As per the findings, the following variables have a significant impact on gender bias in family business i.e. males are preferred over female leaders when it comes to succession planning:

Variable No.	Statement	Finding
Q4	Societal expectations often limit women's involvement in family business.	Statistically significant
Q6	Women face greater scrutiny and challenges in earning respect as leaders in family businesses.	Statistically significant
Q10	Males are often perceived as better suited to handle financial risks and complexities in the family business.	Statistically significant
Q11	Male family members receive more external support (e.g., from clients, and banks) than female members.	Statistically significant
Q13	Female leadership in family businesses challenges traditional societal roles.	Statistically significant

The researcher could establish the relationship among these independent variables based on their respective p values which were less than 0.05 and their chi-square values are more than the estimated value (at 6 = 12.592 and 8 = 15.507 respectively). There we can conclude that they are statistically significant and impact the dependent variable.
On the other hand, the following variables' relationship could not be proved to be statistically significant i.e.

Variable No.	Statement	Finding
Q2	Male family members are traditionally expected to lead family businesses over females.	Statistically not significant
Q5	Cultural norms lead parents to prioritize sons over daughters as successors.	Statistically not significant
Q12	Cultural norms and traditions favor males over females as business successors.	Statistically not significant

Although the chi-square values of the above variables were found to be above the estimated value of chi-square (at 6 = 12.592 and 8 = 15.507 respectively) as their respective p values were greater than 0.05, their relationship or impact on the dependent variable cannot be called statistically significant.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms the persistent gender discrimination in family business succession processes while recognizing female leadership competence. Research surveys indicate several fundamental social obstacles, including gender discrimination, financial constraints, and cultural norms, that prevent women from participating in decision-making processes. A large 90% of respondents agree that ancestral business succession should be based on competencies and dedication rather than gender. Although gender disparities persist, societal attitudes regarding women heading family-owned businesses are shifting in a positive direction. Financial support networks, mentorship networks, and a shift in social norms within transition programs are all necessary for the improvement of inclusive leadership. Executive leaders and legislators need to work toward resolving inherent barriers to give women equal opportunities in leadership positions. The research strengthens academic dialogue about gender in business through its emphasis on future studies and legal measures necessary to establish equal family business inheritance practices. Researchers should explore rapid methods to enhance gender inclusivity along with studying how female leaders impact the extended-term sustainability of family enterprises.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can help create more inclusive and productive environment:

- Promote a culture of equality-install policies that ensure gender equality in leadership roles, succession planning, and decision-making processes. Encourage a merit-based approach to roles and responsibilities.
- Promoting women's leadership - actively supporting and preservatives in leadership positions by providing professional development opportunities, leadership training, and networking platforms.
- Encourage women's engagement in decision-making- Ensure that women's family members are involved in major commercial decisions and are involved in the strategic plan to avail various approaches and promote innovation.
- Identify unique skills and strengths- women often bring a long-term vision for emotional intelligence, conflict solutions, and business operations. Accept and integrate these powers into company strategies.
- Apply flexible work policies, support-to-life balance through the arrangement of flexible work, parents holiday policies, and family-friendly work environment to maintain and empower women in leadership roles.
- Develop a clear succession plan - addressing gender prejudices in succession plans by ensuring that women family members are considered equally for leadership roles based on ability and experience.
- Encourage entrepreneurship among women in the family - provide women with resources, capital, and support to launch or expand business initiatives within the family trade structure.

Limitations

This study has multiple restrictive factors that affect its findings. The statistical findings might fail to capture the complete experience of female members in family-controlled enterprises because of limited participant numbers. The self-reported information presented potential errors and participant-related biases because the study had this data collection restriction. Future investigations should employ diverse data sources combined with a larger and more heterogeneous participant number to validate these findings.

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