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**The Contextual Embeddedness of Female Entrepreneurship:
Investigating the Influence of Macro and Motherhood
Factors In Bahrain**

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The Contextual Embeddedness of Female Entrepreneurship: Investigating the Influence of Macro and Motherhood Factors In Bahrain

Abstract:

Purpose

The paper aims to shed light on the factors that affect female entrepreneurship at the macro-environment level and motherhood in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Design/methodology/approach

Drawing on the 5M model and an institutional approach, this paper uses a qualitative semi-structured in-depth interview approach with 44 female entrepreneurs.

Findings

The results uncover several findings highlighting the important influence of the macro-environment on female entrepreneurs in Bahrain, grouped under formal (complex regulations, double employment constraints, and financial obligations) and informal (societal perceptions) institutions, as well as the nuanced role of motherhood factors.

Originality/value

The study addresses the motherhood aspect of female entrepreneurs comprising household, family, child/elderly care, and societally perceived female duties. Therefore, it constitutes the primary building blocks in a more gender-aware approach to female entrepreneurship. Addressing societal perceived gender roles leads to a comprehensive perspective on the study of female entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Female Entrepreneurship; Women Entrepreneurs; Bahrain; Institutions; Macro-Environment.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a phenomenon embedded in social contexts (Bruton and Ahlstrom, 2003; Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Martinelli, 2004; Minniti, 2009). Researchers have highlighted this context as important, particularly when studying female entrepreneurship (Welsh and Kaciak, 2018). This contextual embeddedness significantly influences business ventures' success and extends to shaping entrepreneurs' experiences in their journeys (Welter, 2011; Castaño et al., 2015). Here, formal (e.g., rules, regulations, laws, and policies) and informal (e.g., norms, customs, culture, and beliefs) institutions, which constitute an important part of the environment, can considerably affect entrepreneurial activity (North, 1990; Steyaert and Katz, 2004). Despite this, the link between these institutional factors and entrepreneurial performance has been relatively overlooked, resulting in repeated calls to investigate this relationship (Brush et al., 2009; Su et al., 2017). For instance, Su et al. (2017:524) argued that '[entrepreneurship research] ...has a limited understanding of how other institutional logics (professional, family, religious, corporate, and community) influence and interact in the entrepreneurial process'. Interestingly, it has also been acknowledged that female entrepreneurs are often subject to magnified pressures from such institutional factors compared to their male counterparts (De Vita et al., 2014). Therefore, there is a need for a gender perspective when exploring these factors (Mersha and Sriram, 2018; Welsh et al., 2018; Moreira et al., 2019). Literature outlining these influences in the case of female-led entrepreneurial ventures still lags in this regard (Henry et al., 2016; Brush et al., 2009). At the general level, contemporary studies have begun to shed light on aspects that promote or hinder female entrepreneurial success (e.g., Heilman and Chen, 2003; Nicolaou and Shane, 2010; Huarng et al., 2012,

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3 Cabrera and Mauricio, 2017). However, despite these attempts, the role of formal and
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5 informal institutions in shaping female entrepreneurial activity remains underexplored.

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8 There is a need to further investigate the environmental implications for female
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10 entrepreneurs at both the creation and operational levels (Hughes et al., 2012; Welsh et al.,
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12 2018). More importantly, most studies address female entrepreneurship from a general or
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14 purely male entrepreneurship perspective. Thus, a feminist perspective can be adopted
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16 (Ahl, 2002, 2006; de Bruin et al., 2007; Welter, 2011). Hence, Pattersson (2012) called for
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18 more work to adopt a feminist approach when studying entrepreneurship.
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21
22 In practice, women's participation in entrepreneurship activities has experienced a
23
24 significant increase. Notably, the state of women entrepreneurs in the Middle Eastern and
25
26 North African region (MENA) mirrors that of other parts of the world, witnessing a modest
27
28 increase and contributing to various areas of economic development and employment in
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30 the region (Hassan et al., 2014). Nevertheless, like their Western counterparts, women in
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32 MENA are no exception when it comes to societal perceptions and inequality. Although
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34 Islamic culture believes in and preaches women's rights, females still suffer from
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36 obstructive traditions that limit their progress and involvement in business activities
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38 (Ahmed, 2010). In some countries, women must secure permission from their fathers or
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40 husbands to participate in the workforce and obtain financial funding (Welsh et al., 2014;
41
42 UNDP, 2006). Although this situation is slowly changing, the rate of participation in
43
44 economic life is still lower than anywhere else in the world, with only 28% of active female
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46 adult participants considered the lowest in the world (UNDP, 2006; Ahmed, 2010). Hence,
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52 the institutional aspect is evident in this context.
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3 Against this background, this study addresses the following research question: ‘How is
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5 female entrepreneurship affected by formal and informal institutions in the macro-
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7 environment, in light of their gender-assigned roles’? This question was addressed through
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9 the so-called feminist approach of Brush et al.. (2009) 5M model. The latter addresses the
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11 motherhood aspect of female entrepreneurs in terms of household, family, child/elderly
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13 care, and societally perceived female duties. Therefore, it constitutes the primary building
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15 block in a more gender-aware approach to female entrepreneurship by addressing societally
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17 perceived gender roles, which leads to a comprehensive perspective on the study of female
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19 entrepreneurs. The absence of such a perspective in the extant female entrepreneurship
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21 literature allows the traditional interpretations of entrepreneurship studies to dominate,
22
23 echoing customary male-centred views in analysing female entrepreneurial efforts.
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29 We propose a framework that is underpinned by institutional and feminist perspectives. By
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31 incorporating elements from the 5M model that resonates in institutional theory and as a
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33 gender-aware element, namely the macro environment and motherhood elements, this
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35 framework extends the research on female entrepreneurship to report on the societal and
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37 environmental factors that influence female entrepreneurship development. Advancing a
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39 female entrepreneurial study that adopts a specific feminist perspective leads to an accurate
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41 capture of the voices, needs, and experiences of female entrepreneurs and contributes
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43 valuable insights to the field.
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2. Research Context

This study captures the voices, needs, and experiences of female entrepreneurs in the Middle Eastern Arab context. A body of work conducted in the Arab GCC countries and Bahrain is emerging (e.g., Bastian et al., 2021; Bastian et al., 2019; Ghouse et al., 2019; Bertelsen et al., 2017; Naguib and Jamali, 2015). However, further evidence from this region is crucial in highlighting the unique institutional factors that female entrepreneurs face in this distinct context. In this regard, Bertelsen et al. (2017) called for a closer look at gender issues and entrepreneurship in the Gulf States. Likewise, Ghouse et al. (2019:481) acknowledged that 'There has been little research on the problems experienced by Arab women entrepreneurs, as most research on women entrepreneurship is in Western or developed economy contexts'. In addition, Bastian et al. (2019) noted limited research uncovering the influence of institutions on women's entrepreneurship. Ogundana et al. (2021:543) recognised 'a lack of theoretical perspectives accounting for business growth factors applicable to women-owned enterprises in the developing world... amplified by the scarcity of research exploring women entrepreneurship in developing countries'. This void inhibits policy initiatives that support women's entrepreneurship in such contexts. Contextualising female entrepreneurship would shed more light on the reasons behind the low rate of female entrepreneurship activity (Meunier et al., 2017; Welter, 2011; Ahl, 2006). Such factors can arise through regulations, society, culture, funding, networking, family, and motherhood roles (North, 1990; Steyaert and Katz, 2004). Unveiling the influence of these aspects through a feminist approach is a key contribution of this study.

This study chose the Kingdom of Bahrain as the Middle-Eastern country of focus. The main drivers for choosing this setting is twofold. First, there is no denying the increased

1
2
3 number of female entrepreneurs entering self-employment in Bahrain. According to the
4
5 Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2019, Bahrain was among the top 10 ecosystems with
6
7 the largest share of female founders at 18% (Startupgenome.com). The number of
8
9 enterprises owned by females witnessed steady growth, raising their involvement in
10
11 general commercial businesses to 42% in 2020 (Supreme Council for Women, National
12
13 Gender Balance Report, 2020). Second, there is a lack of scientific research addressing this
14
15 issue in Bahrain (Dechant & Al-Lamky, 2005). Many factors could be behind this recent
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17 surge, especially regarding the raised awareness by the Supreme Council for Women and
18
19 the many women empowerment schemes recently introduced in the country.
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24 The Kingdom of Bahrain has displayed a continuous commitment to improve the
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26 conditions of its female citizens. Equal rights for females and males have been guaranteed
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28 under the constitution since 2002, which also guarantees equal employment opportunities
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30 for both genders. Bahrain has agreed to several laws, charters, and treaties to oversee
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32 women's rights. The positive effects of such efforts can be witnessed in many sectors across
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34 the country, especially education and economy. Furthermore, women have been elected as
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36 members of parliament since 2002. They have occupied ministerial positions since 2011
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38 and have been represented on the Board of Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry
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40 since 2014. They have also reached leadership positions and many Bahraini women now
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42 serve as chief executive officers in private sector companies. Academically, female
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44 university graduates have outnumbered male graduates, providing easier access for females
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46 to tertiary education. Likewise, positive strides in change can be observed in the economic
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48 sector. For instance, the labour market has witnessed increased participation of females in
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50 the workforce, and this trend is expected to continue to increase. The introduced women-
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3 related reforms have had a positive effect that has rippled across all aspects of society in
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5 the country.
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8 Moreover, similar positive changes can be observed in other areas. The progress achieved
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10 by the instigated reforms earned Bahrain a position as one of the leaders in the region
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12 regarding female empowerment, as can be seen in many proceedings of international
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14 conventions and reports relevant to women (National Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain,
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16 2014). Bahrain surpassed other nations in the MENA region in terms of commercial
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18 registrations owned by women, reaching 43% (Jahani, 2022).
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23 Furthermore, other GCC member countries have reported an increase in female business
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25 owners and employers; Bahrain has more than doubled its share, with over 28% of women
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27 extending employment to others. Bahrain has also fared well in terms of economic
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29 participation, opportunity, education, health, and survival gender gaps (The World
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31 Economic Forum Gender Global Gap Report, 2021). Moreover, Bahrain reported women
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33 in leadership positions in the public sector at 37%, followed by Tunis and topping the
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35 average of the MENA region at 29.1% (National Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 2014).
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37 Lastly, the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office issued the Bahrain Human
38
39 Development Report in 2018, stating that 'Bahrain consistently lies in the 'very high
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41 human development' category'. Regarding the Gender Development Index (GDI),
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43 'Bahrain is slightly below the world average for small island developing states. However,
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45 it outperforms the Arab states by a considerable margin'. Therefore, we believe that the
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47 Bahraini context constitutes a fertile ground for studying gender-related issues, particularly
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49 regarding entrepreneurship.
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3. Institutions, The 5M Model, and Female Entrepreneurship

3.1. The 5M Model and the Role of Motherhood

Standpoint feminism considers gender a social construct and not only a biological attribute assumed at birth. Instead, this approach sees that human interactions between men and women constitute material gender relations that reveal the power dynamics of each society. Men and women are exposed to different experiences, forming different practices and convictions than the other (Jackson, 2006). Standpoint feminism argues that unlike empirical feminism, in which societies are viewed as 'individual and flat objects', there are multiple layers of reality. People's characteristics result from their lived experiences in these varied layers of social interactions, power dynamics, norms, and traditions (Symington, 2004; Collins, 2003).

It argues that historically sidelined and dismissed individuals can contribute immensely to the study of societies and traditions (Jackson, 2006). Females can advance knowledge significantly on the failure of patriarchal practices in societies because they have faced it first-hand (Harding, 2006). Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of advancing feminist research approaches that stem from and accurately represent women's voices and lived experiences (Crasnow, 2006). The 5M model for studying female entrepreneurs (Brush et al., 2009) is an extension of the 3 Ms that drives entrepreneurial efforts: money, market and management (Bates et al., 2007). Money represents the funding that acts as a facilitator of entrepreneurial activity (Bruno & Tyebjee, 1982), access to markets is a necessary step for venture creation and trade (Shane, 2003), and managerial capabilities are required for the effective operation of the business (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003).

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3 Nevertheless, access to these three indispensable resources is difficult for female
4 entrepreneurs. Drawing from the notion that culture and society are at the root of
5 entrepreneurial activity (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Steyaert & Katz, 2004), this issue is
6 addressed by extending the 3 Ms by building upon institutional theory and incorporating
7 elements of female entrepreneurship in the 5M model, namely the concept of motherhood
8 and the meso and macro environments. Motherhood denotes the important role that females
9 play in relation to their husbands, parents, and children, as well as the duties and
10 responsibilities of caring for a household. This reflects society's view of the female's role,
11 which has been confined to solely taking care of the family and administering domestic
12 chores. The notion of motherhood is particularly relevant to societies in developing nations,
13 which are often patriarchal, where women entrepreneurs are still responsible for familial
14 duties, signalling an imperative need to explore this issue in women's entrepreneurship
15 (Ogundana et al., 2021). In contrast, evidence, primarily from developed contexts, shows
16 that motherhood could act as a driver of women's entrepreneurship. Foley et al. (2018)
17 acknowledge that entrepreneurship provides an alternative career path that allows mothers
18 to balance their enterprise activity and family commitment. Family roles, such as
19 motherhood, can become a resource that drives entrepreneurship (Qureshi et al., 2022).

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43 Meso-environment refers to the supporting elements of a business venture, such as
44 strategies, policies, initiatives, and related industries and networks (Brush et al., 2009). On
45 the other hand, the macro environment comprises a country's regulatory setup, its
46 governing laws and policies, and its cultural norms and economic direction (Brush et al.,
47 2009; Gupta et al., 2014). According to Ameen et al. (2021), motherhood mediates these
48 environmental layers. Here, interactions between motherhood and aspects related to macro-
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3 and meso-levels may exist. Ogundana et al. (2021) confirmed this, outlining that
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5 motherhood, the meso-environment, and macro-environment are intertwined. Such
6
7 interactions imply that successful women's entrepreneurship depends on their abilities and
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9 surrounding environment.
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13 Consequently, there is a perception that 'mumpreneurs' centre their business opportunities
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15 around caring responsibilities, which may preclude them from being considered
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17 entrepreneurs (Mayes et al., 2020). Likewise, women entrepreneurs face the daily tensions
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19 of being mothers and entrepreneurs, which negatively affect their perceived entrepreneurial
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21 status (Lewis et al., 2022). Hence, it influences the support they gain through other
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23 environmental layers.
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28 These complex interactions are subsequently discussed through institutional lenses.
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31 **3.2. Institutional Elements through the Feminist Approach**

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34 There has been growing interest in the influence of institutions on female entrepreneurs
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36 (Parker, 2005). Researchers have investigated various aspects of the phenomenon,
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38 including the role played by institutions in shaping societal socio-economic prosperity,
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40 female occupational choice, entrepreneurial traits, and success factors (Acemoglu et al.,
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42 2005; Cuba et al., 1983; Renko et al., 2012). Utilising an institutional lens helps bring
43
44 unknown aspects and limitations about the labour market, societally perceived roles
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46 attributed to females, and obstacles that hinder the commencement and development of
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48 female self-owned businesses (Aidis et al., 2007; Welter, 2011). It highlights the
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50 weaknesses or strengths of regulatory laws (Estrin et al., 2013; Klyver et al., 2013), cultural
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52 norms, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Singh et al., 2010;
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3 Belwal et al., 2012). The intensity of the influence of institutions on female entrepreneurs
4 is magnified compared with their male counterparts, given the many social, cultural,
5 economic, and religious considerations (De Vita et al., 2014). Hence, further research on
6 female entrepreneurs is required, focusing on their hardships, especially regarding societal
7 perceptions and traditional norms (Hampel-Milagrosa, 2010).

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10 Moreover, from a feminist standpoint, epistemology is a feminist approach that
11 understands an individual's qualities, skills, and knowledge due to their upbringing and
12 location. In other words, people's perspectives and actions result from their historical
13 interactions with their societies and environments (Collins, 2003). Furthermore, failure to
14 address female concerns from a feminist perspective or adopting an inappropriate
15 traditional approach oblivious to feminine particularities can lead to misleading results and
16 leave pressing societal issues unresolved. Amid continually changing entrepreneurship
17 dynamics, with countries' efforts to adequately adapt their rules and regulations to the
18 changing economic scene, the question remains as to which institutions are necessarily
19 facilitating or impeding entrepreneurial entry for individuals. This study divides
20 institutions into formal and informal (North, 1997).

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 **3.2.1. Formal Institutions and Female Entrepreneurship**

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44 Formal institutions are defined as laws and constitutions governing a society that can be
45 quickly reformed to meet a country's changing economic conditions and political climate.
46 They are the evident 'rules of the game' (North 1990). These take the form of rules and
47 regulations. Ideally, they are set up to reduce transaction costs by simplifying interactions
48 and exchanges. They consist of state financial and regulatory institutions, which open
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3 opportunities for entrepreneurship and play an influential role in determining the number
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5 and characteristics of self-employed females.
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9 An enhanced rule of law leads to stronger property rights, and decreased transaction costs
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11 positively affect entrepreneurial entry and survival (Estrin and Mickiewicz, 2009). On the
12
13 other hand, the entrepreneurial landscape in some nations is characterised by weak firm
14
15 entry despite the strong formal institutional scene depicting an engaging entrepreneurial
16
17 environment. Nonetheless, entrepreneurial activities are exposed to unpredictable
18
19 interference from governmental agencies, a weak rule of law, and sporadic execution of
20
21 rules and regulations (Aidis and Adachi, 2007). Furthermore, the impact of institutional
22
23 reforms on easing the barriers faced by female entrepreneurs can have an inverse effect on
24
25 female entrepreneurship. The argument is that the proposed reforms will not be able to
26
27 address the issue of gender inequality in doing business in its entirety, and thus might
28
29 contribute to the discrimination faced by female entrepreneurs instead of reducing it
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34 (Hampel-Milagrosa, 2010).
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38 Financial institutions can be formal or informal. An entrepreneur might prefer obtaining
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40 funding from formal institutions when the formal sector is perceived as strong, and instead
41
42 use informal funding when those institutions are perceived as weak (Korosteleva and
43
44 Mickiewicz, 2008). Nevertheless, informal funding may still be used even when formal
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46 institutions are considered strong, depending on the status of the entrepreneur. Whether
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48 they want to avoid dealing with collateral obligations or risking indebtedness or
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50 discrimination is undoubtedly more prominent in the case of female entrepreneurs (Carter
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52 and Rosa, 1998).
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3.2.2. Informal Institutions and Female Entrepreneurship

Habits, norms, and behaviours shape informal institutions. Collectively, they form the spontaneous culture of a society. According to Noguera et al. (2015), informal institutions play a more significant role than formal institutions in female entrepreneurship. Attitudes and behaviours stem from informal institutions that give direction and legitimacy to entrepreneurial activities and influence women's entrepreneurial desires and business goals (Aidis et al., 2009; Welter et al., 2003). In contrast to formal institutions, informal rules persist even when new formal rules that negate them are formed, as cultural habits are difficult to change (North, 1990). The irregularities between formal and informal institutions can often lead to economic inefficiencies (North, 1997). Resistance to change makes it harder to achieve changes in informal rules (North, 1990). Consequently, formal and informal institutions are interconnected (Williamson, 2000). Although the change may take time, informal institutions change because of changing norms and traditions; this change needs to be reflected in formal institutions.

Similarly, when formal institutions are modified in response to economic and political climates, these changes are eventually absorbed by cultural and informal institutions (Welter et al., 2003). Informal institutions can influence entrepreneurship activities through informal financing and cultural and social norms. These are discussed below.

Women often benefit from informal financing, which positively influences their decisions to engage in entrepreneurship. This aligns with De Soto (2001), who concludes that the availability of informal institutions could compensate for the lack of formal institutions.

Moreover, in developing economies where institutional development is still lagging,

gender variations are bound to appear (Aidis et al., 2010). Earlier studies (Carter and Rosa, 1998; Heilman and Chen, 2003) indicate that obtaining funds is a more challenging barrier for female business owners in Lithuania and Ukraine than for male entrepreneurs, which explains their reliance on informal financing. Moreover, female entrepreneurs might revert to informal financial institutions to fund their businesses because of the absence of collateral guarantees and discriminatory practices (Carter and Rosa, 1998).

Societally gender-assigned domestic and familial roles have been found to limit women's involvement in entrepreneurship activities and reduce their perceived integrity as potential entrepreneurs (Bruni et al., 2004). Self-perception plays a vital role in opportunity recognition and the advancement of entrepreneurial experience (de Bruin et al., 2007; GEM, 2015). It also shapes entrepreneurial goals influenced by societal norms and opinions. Therefore, women can be limited by their self-perceptions imposed by cultural customs (GEM 2015). These customs require them to uphold their roles as housewives, avoid self-employment, restrict their ambitions and entrepreneurial opportunities to whatever society interprets as acceptable female businesses, and encourage fewer women to venture into self-employment (Bruni et al., 2004; Mordi et al., 2010).

Moreover, studies on female entrepreneurship in the Middle East found that, according to cultural, political, and social norms, males are the dominant gender and women are their dependents. This, in turn, creates many difficulties for women in setting up home-based businesses (Al-Alak and Al-Haddad, 2010; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010). For instance, in some countries, approval from the extended family must be obtained for a woman to be self-employed so that aspects of the family household are not compromised (Al-Alak and Al-Haddad, 2010, Welsh et al., 2014). Likewise, in Algeria, Benhabib et al. (2014) found

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3 that the family's role can negatively influence women's perceptions and motivation to
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5 become entrepreneurs.
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8 **4. Research Methodology**

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10 This study adopts an interpretivist phenomenological approach (Burrell and Morgan,
11 2005). The rise of female entrepreneurship as an influencing and contributing factor to
12 economic development across nations has led to the classification of a special phenomenon.
13 Phenomenology seeks to understand why certain phenomena affect and how they manifest
14 themselves (Moran, 2000). It stresses the importance of human experience and attempts to
15 explain and describe it. Hence, phenomenology fits best within the interpretivist
16 epistemological paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 2005).
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19 As phenomenology aims to provide meaning to human experiences, phenomenologists
20 approach their studies through the lens of the individuals studied (Cope, 2005, Burrell and
21 Morgan, 2005). This approach to accurately portraying lived female entrepreneurial
22 experiences and deeply understanding them requires suspending all previous conceptions
23 before undergoing phenomenological investigation (Cope, 2005; Moran, 2000). In
24 addition, the individual's interpretation of the phenomena they have experienced is a
25 necessary and significant part of the phenomena under investigation (Patton, 1990).
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28 The qualitative approach adopted in this study has enabled researchers to capture the
29 thoughts and circumstances in which female entrepreneurs operate that would have
30 otherwise remained uncovered with a quantitative analysis (Henry et al., 2016; Mordi et
31 al., 2010). This method of investigation provides access to hands-on, meaningful data
32 rather than statically observed facts, as achievable through quantitative analysis
33 (Silverman, 2004).
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4.1. Data Collection

The interviews took place between the last quarter of 2018 and first quarter of 2019. The same research team members conducted experiments to preserve consistency. The semi-structured interviews allowed the respondents to elaborate when they felt inclined to do so and allowed the interviewer to probe for more information. Interviews started with questions regarding female entrepreneurs' backgrounds and how they became self-employed. They were later followed by questions regarding the issues that arose and their challenges in setting up and running their businesses. For instance, what regulatory factors faced by female entrepreneurs impede or deter the development of female entrepreneurship in the Kingdom of Bahrain? What societal factors faced by female entrepreneurs enhance or encourage the development of female entrepreneurship in the Kingdom of Bahrain? What are the motherhood factors faced by female entrepreneurs that enhance or encourage the development of female entrepreneurship in the Kingdom of Bahrain?. Consent was obtained prior to conducting the interviews. Ethical principles were followed before, during, and after the study.

A total of 44 semi-structured interviews with female entrepreneurs were conducted. The interviewees were contacted mainly through referrals, personal connections (face-to-face or telephone), and a snowballing technique. The interviews lasted for approximately 60-90 minutes.

4.2. Respondents' Profiles

The 44 female entrepreneurs constituted a mixture of locals and expats operating their businesses in Bahrain. The interviewed participants and their demographics are presented

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3 in Table 1. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 55 years. The vast majority of
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5 participants were married and had children. Of the 44 respondents, 29 were Bahraini and
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7 the others were expatriates. The participants had hospitality, health, retail, and education
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9 businesses, and most of these sectors were in the service industry. The data were coded and
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11 analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study are presented in the subsequent
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13 sections.
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18 Insert Table 1 Here.
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21 **4.3. Data Analysis**

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24 The data analysis process was based on Bogdan and Biklen (2007). After conducting and
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26 transcribing the interviews, the transcripts were coded, and the data were subjected to a
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28 data reduction process (Creswell, 2014, Esterberg, 2002, Merriam and Grenier, 2019).
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30 Later, the data were subjected to thematic analysis, whereby related data were arranged
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32 meaningfully together (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Subsequently, a data reduction process
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34 was conducted to concentrate on the most relevant and significant data, and themes
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36 emerged, such as complex regulations, double employment constraints, financial
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38 obligations and societal perceptions (see Table 2). Afterwards, the data were gathered
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40 under these themes according to their similarities. The analysis results were synthesised
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42 and grouped into three main categories (motherhood, formal, and informal institutions),
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44 each with related subthemes (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The progression of the analysis from
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46 codes to themes is illustrated with the sample codes for each theme in Table 2.
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5. Findings

In relation to the elements at the motherhood and macro-environment levels affecting female entrepreneurship, this study reveals three main themes from which several subthemes emerge. The first pertains to motherhood, with two sub-themes; the second covers formal institutions, under which three subthemes are identified; the third is related to informal institutions. The following sections analyse each theme and subtheme in detail.

5.1. Motherhood and Entrepreneurship

The motherhood construct represents the family context, namely in terms of the household unit more so than in terms of the extended family background (Brush et al., 2009). This is especially significant when realising that a female's role, responsibilities, and attitudes towards her household influence her ability to disconnect and focus on her work, requiring more attention and effort. Therefore, the many duties assigned to the female, the mother within the household, require that the study of female entrepreneurship expand to include the overall family context rather than merely focusing on the entrepreneur herself, as a consequence of her central household role, in which she is mainly affected by her surroundings (Brush & Manolova, 2004; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). Previous works by Aldrich and Cliff (2003) and Carter and Ram (2003) addressed this issue and concluded that the household context plays a significant role in female entrepreneurs' opportunity development, recognition, and access to appropriate resources. Aligned with the codes in the data analysis, the two subthemes were motherhood ideals and motherhood environs. Findings related to motherhood are discussed in the following sections.

5.1.1. Motherhood Ideals

The theme of motherhood ideals pertains to the thoughts and emotions of female entrepreneurs in relation to their roles as mothers and heads of households. As highlighted in Table 2, this theme progressed from the following codes: planning for children, motherhood guilt, and family–business balance (See Table 2).

Most of the interviewed women entrepreneurs expressed how the thought of motherhood was a factor in their decision to enter entrepreneurship. As part of their preparation to become mothers or their current motherhood status, planning to spend more time with their children played an influential role in their search to combine their roles as mothers while still contributing financially to the household. Moreover, many of the females interviewed explained how entrepreneurship helped them stay productive and fulfil a sense of personal satisfaction in their lives while balancing their duties as mothers.

Some female entrepreneurs expressed a myriad emotions following becoming mothers.

‘I think what pushed me to quit my job and open this shop mainly was having kids. Motherhood left me wanting more of it; I felt like this was my purpose, what I was born to do, not just as a temporary phase. That is when I decided to quit my job and take it further’. Interviewee MHN.

‘After having kids, I wanted to become like my mother, a stay-at-home mom (SAHM), but I could not because my mom was supported by my dad whereas my husband was jobless. So, I decided to quit my full-time job and focus on self-employment to be closer to my kids as much as I can’. Interviewee NSF.

‘I need to spend quality time with my daughter. I am not going to work myself to death; ok, I have a service that is valuable I am going to charge what it deserves to be charged so I can also have time with my kid. I could never go back to be an employee like I was before’. Interviewee RWD.

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3 Most of the women interviewed admitted that motherhood pushed them into becoming
4 female entrepreneurs. They described the mental and emotional changes associated with
5 motherhood. In addition, for financial and personal reasons, they could not stay at home as
6 mothers; therefore, they needed to become entrepreneurs, make ends meet, and fulfil their
7 personal satisfaction. Being a stay-at-home mum was the preferred option for many of the
8 interviewed female entrepreneurs. However, financial and societal commitments have
9 forced them to either keep a steady job or turn to entrepreneurship as a middle ground
10 between staying home and working full time.
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13
14 However, some of the female entrepreneurs who were interviewed expressed their most
15 significant obstacle in working in their businesses as dealing with the feeling of guilt when
16 working. They prefer to be with their children. They try to balance competing interests
17 between home, children, and business, which is challenging, especially regarding their
18 emotional attachment to their children and their desire to devote all their time to them.
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22 These emotions and difficulties were expressed through the following passages articulated
23 by female entrepreneurs during their interviews.
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27 *‘These are the obstacles, to have my daughter in the car the whole time from 6 am*
28 *sometimes from 4:30 am, she does not sleep enough hours as a child should sleep,*
29 *and she does not eat how she should eat, always on the go. Not spending enough*
30 *time with her, being so exhausted with no energy for her, for myself. Yeah, the*
31 *obstacles are more emotional than regulatory. Moreover, it slows me down’.*
32 *Interviewee APP.*
33

34
35 *‘[...], I have kids, that is what people do not realise, I need to spend time with them*
36 *more then I spend with people, so for them, this has become a part of their life; they*
37 *are used to it, but now they are beginning to say just give up on it, just close it, we*
38 *are tired, we want you’.* Interviewee FMG.
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3 These statements demonstrate how frustrated female entrepreneurs become when
4 simultaneously dealing with their roles as mothers and business owners. The difficulties
5 lie mainly in their inability to overcome their emotions of guilt, deficiency of duties as
6 mothers, and responsibilities towards their children. The struggle becomes so real that
7 some even described it as a crippling sensation, leaving them helpless and sad at times.
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14 15 **5.1.2. Motherhood Environs** 16

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18 The theme of motherhood environs refers to elements in the environment surrounding
19 female entrepreneurs. It identifies whether they encourage or discourage their
20 entrepreneurial efforts, such as husbands' attitudes and support opportunities, as discussed
21 next. Table 2 indicates how this theme progressed from the following codes: partners'
22 attitudes and opportunities (See Table 2).
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31 The availability of cheap childcare was a recurring positive aspect of being a female
32 entrepreneur in Bahrain. This allows women to depend on the availability of nannies when
33 needed. However, it also gives them the opportunity to immerse themselves in the
34 intricacies of running and growing their businesses. This is especially evident in the
35 opinions of expat female entrepreneurs, who find this matter crucial when looking after
36 children while running their ventures. Women in Western societies are left alone to deal
37 with the difficulties of raising children and running a business simultaneously. The
38 following excerpt explains this further:
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51 *'There are great opportunities presented to mothers here because one can afford*
52 *skilled nannies for cheap, which is something not available elsewhere'. Interviewee*
53 *OLM.*

54
55 *'Having nannies makes it easier to be able to leave the kids and tend to urgent work*
56 *matters. We are very lucky in this'. Interviewee STB.*
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5 Female entrepreneurs also expressed being blessed to receive so much support from their
6
7 husbands, friends, and families. The following is an excerpt from a local female
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9 entrepreneur who talks about the different possibilities of childcare available for them,
10
11 which are not available for women elsewhere.
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15 *'My husband is my silent partner in the background. Many things I do not have to*
16 *worry about because my husband takes care of them without me. Which is a*
17 *blessing really, to not have to deal with everything myself'. Interviewee AAZ.*
18 *'Us as mothers and entrepreneurs being able to have this connection and support*
19 *from family and friends is great. We are so lucky compared to the women*
20 *entrepreneurs in the West because they do not have that type of connection over*
21 *there and support from the people around them. It must be very difficult for them*
22 *to catch up. This is a very positive thing in our society'. Interviewee SBA.*
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27 However, more is expected regarding the provision of additional support and appropriate
28
29 childcare options for mothers, as expressed by some of the female entrepreneurs
30
31 interviewed. This can be summarised in the following statements extracted from the
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33 interviews:
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37 *'This does not replace the need to have specialised centres for our kids. Moreover,*
38 *there should be nurses instead of nannies in such centres. It is what we lack here'.*
39 *Interviewee FJL.*
40

41 *'Taking the kids to football practice, ballet, and art lessons is a struggle on its own.*
42 *We need educational centres that cater to different activities for different kid's ages*
43 *without the need for nannies, and that can add value to the children'. Interviewee*
44 *LOM.*
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48 Female entrepreneurs in Bahrain can benefit from family members willing to care for their
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50 children when they tend to urgent business matters, particularly their mothers and sisters,
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52 which is rarely available to women entrepreneurs in Western societies. They believe that
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54 they could not have achieved what they had achieved so far without this tremendous
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3 amount of assistance. This is primarily due to the cultural background wherein family
4 comes first and is expected to always be available for other family members in their times
5 of need, providing physical and financial support. However, this type of support is rarely
6 available for female entrepreneurs in Western societies; as such, women and female
7 entrepreneurs are expected to depend on themselves when running the household and their
8 businesses. However, support from their husbands plays a significant role in the
9 entrepreneurial experiences of female entrepreneurs. Although the concept of patriarchy
10 exists within societal communities, it does not manifest itself as much as expected in
11 marital relations between female entrepreneurs and their husbands. This in turn helps
12 female entrepreneurs direct more of their efforts toward the operation of their businesses
13 while gaining more momentum without being required to be responsible for every aspect
14 of the household by themselves.
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31 **5.2. Formal Institutions and Entrepreneurship**

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34 In terms of formal institutions, three factors emerged: complex regulations, financial
35 burden, and double employment constraints. These factors were aligned with the codes
36 present in the data analysis, in which the following three subthemes were identified:
37 complex regulations, double employment constraints, and financial obligations (see Table
38 2). These were highlighted several times by the respondents and are explored in detail in
39 the subsequent sections.
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50 **5.2.1. Complex Regulations**

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53 Although the business climate in Bahrain shows great strands of change in terms of
54 updating rules and regulations to match the innovative directions of entrepreneurs, many
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of these changes are slow to materialise or even be implemented. The following codes led to the emergence of this theme: Changing regulatory setting, numerous and complex rules and lengthy processes (see Table 2). Seventeen interviewees expressed their frustration with the lengthy processing and fees they must endure while awaiting the activation of these changes. Some of these delays resulted in considerable expenses for female entrepreneurs. They had to maintain rented property to obtain their businesses' commercial registration (CR). This was a hindering factor and struggle for some female entrepreneurs to keep things afloat even over a year after being granted CR. The excerpts about this are as follows.

'The process was lengthy and emotionally draining. I had spent months being thrown back and forth and wasted money, effort and time before I could get my CR. I ended up paying a whole year's rent before getting it'. Interviewee VBS.

'My CR application was immediately denied because a cargo business is not listed under the businesses allowed for a female. I registered it under my brother's name and worked hard to change the regulation. Eventually, it did and now it allows females to register businesses traditionally classified as 'male businesses''. Interviewee HJC.

These statements show that when the regulatory and legal environment is not properly set up to embrace innovative venture creation, it can threaten the survival of innovative entrepreneurs' businesses. This is further heightened by a bureaucratic structure that slows down regulatory approvals, allowing them to introduce their innovative concepts lawfully.

5.2.2. Double Employment Constraints

Eighteen women entrepreneurs complained of current commercial laws forbidding individuals from having full-time government jobs and private businesses. This limits the

1
2
3 potential growth prospects of entrepreneurs' ventures by restricting access to proper
4
5 funding, government initiatives, and supporting programs. This theme progressed from the
6
7 following codes: commercial law constraints, government employees, and legal (see Table
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9
10 2). Bahraini entrepreneurs are required to quit their jobs to be granted the legitimacy of a
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12 commercial registration. This is based on the potential existence of a conflict of interest
13
14 when attempting to combine public services and private businesses simultaneously. The
15
16 female entrepreneurs interviewed in this study viewed the law as retrogressive. They
17
18 requested that government authorities understand that female entrepreneurs add to the
19
20 country's economic growth. Therefore, there should be rules allowing them to maintain
21
22 their 'double employment' status, as they call it, until they can achieve a certain level of
23
24 independence in their businesses, allowing them to leave paid employment comfortably.
25
26 They argue that inadequate support and proper access to sufficient funding stifles their
27
28 businesses. Hence, the public sector finances also help or act as a way to raise capital. This
29
30 option seems to be the best alternative available instead of being forced to quit their jobs,
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32 as a necessary condition for the initial step of obtaining commercial registration (CR). The
33
34 following are some extracts from the interviews that highlight these points:
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41 *'Quitting my full-time government job to be eligible for a CR is now not an option*
42 *because profit from my business is not enough to make ends meet'. Interviewee*
43 *APP.*
44

45 *'To ask entrepreneurs to quit their jobs first in order to qualify for a CR is by itself*
46 *limiting for entrepreneurs. Why can't I have both my work and my business at the*
47 *same time? They need to see that entrepreneurs are helping the economy of the*
48 *country with their businesses, regardless of their daytime job'. Interviewee STB.*
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5.2.3. Financial Obligations

The theme of financial obligation was developed from the following codes: increasing financial burdens, funding difficulties, and limited funds (see Table 2). In this study, 13 of the interviewed female entrepreneurs expressed their discomfort with the fees and obligations placed on entrepreneurs during the venture creation process and as soon as they opened for business. They complained of the difficulties that arose after the initial setup phase, especially regarding obligations and rising fees for electricity, municipality, rent, water, CR renewal, Labor Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) foreign labour recruitment fees, and many other charges endured by the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs do not see the benefits of such fees. The following comments reflected the participants' shared views on this issue.

'I have to pay many things such as LMRA fees, utility fees, municipality fees and rent expenses, everything became expensive. The services are overpriced compared with their benefits'. Interviewee GJC.

'They have linked all the fees together so if we miss one, they stop all other services. If I miss the municipality service fees, they block my water and electricity'. Interviewee GJC.

The above excerpts indicate that female entrepreneurs are burdened by many crippling financial obligations. Most service fees are increasing, many of which are not used by them. Some entrepreneurs propose that the government attempts to gain buy-in before introducing such financial increases and obligations. These 'indirect taxes' affect entrepreneurs, as discussed in the literature (Mickiewicz, 2009).

5.3. Informal Institutions and Entrepreneurship

In terms of informal institutions, societal perceptions were the main influencing factors. Female entrepreneurs are affected by their surroundings, and the attitudes of their

entourage strongly influence their entrepreneurial prospects. This theme progressed from the following codes: social stereotyping, changing societal attitudes, and family attitudes (Table 2). Furthermore, like any traditional Arab society, the Bahraini society classically views females as merely housewives with limited contributions to the economy. This can be seen directly from the female entrepreneurs' responses, where 18 interviewees mentioned this factor. However, a changing culture encourages female entrepreneurs to succeed in their businesses. Below is an extract that highlights this issue.

'Society is slowly changing. They want your product; if they are happy with it, they will give you the deal, if not they will give to someone else whether male or female'. Interviewee BEM.

However, the following accounts by some of the interviewed female entrepreneurs highlight a different societal aspect and explain the situation from another perspective:

'I had to struggle with my family to allow me to open my business. They wouldn't accept because they felt that having a job is more prestigious than having to run around to selling my products'. Interviewee SPS.

'I still get those looks from people when I am participating at night in some pop-up market or event. It is worrisome that society might still patronise a self-employed woman'. Interviewee NOC.

'Although my husband knew from the beginning that I'm not going to be around much and he agreed, he still expects me to be fully in-charge of the household, even if I am working 20 hours a day'. Interviewee VBS.

In addition, the following account by one of the interviewed foreign female entrepreneurs highlighted her experience at the airport:

'I felt looked down at in the airport. When the airport employee checked my passport, he laughed because the naming on the profession category is actually 'businessman' instead of 'businesswoman' in Arabic. They still don't have a

category for 'businesswoman' to denote female entrepreneurs. This made me very sad'. Interviewee OLM.

The above statements denote that gendered societal perceptions are still prevalent. Although some interviewed female entrepreneurs reported an increasingly accepted view of society, most were subjected to negative societal perceptions and attitudes. There remain societies, families, and husbands who do not support female entrepreneurs and hinder their entrepreneurial activities. These gendered societal perceptions interfere with and influence the career paths that females embark on. This aligns with the literature on the influence of society as an informal institution and confirms how socially prescribed gender roles precede other characteristics (Lorber, 2008). The dual role that female entrepreneurs must play as heads of households and heads of businesses distracts them from entirely focusing on their businesses, constraining their progress as entrepreneurs (Leung, 2011). Furthermore, female entrepreneurs are affected by their surroundings, and the attitudes of their entourage strongly affect their entrepreneurial prospects. Nonetheless, these perceptions seem to be slowly fading and making room for a culture that embraces female entrepreneurship, achievements, and leadership abilities.

6. Discussion

This study highlights the rich interplay between macro-level influencing factors, especially in terms of regulations, financing, and societal perceptions, and at the motherhood level, explaining their undeniable effect on the entrepreneurial prospects of potential entrepreneurs. The regulatory environment in Bahrain still lags in terms of the financial and regulatory burdens placed on entrepreneurs, lengthy processes of registering a venture,

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3 slow implementation of new rules, and staffing issues. These findings align with the World
4
5 Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report (p.108, 2011-2012), which ranks as the
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7 most problematic issues concerning entrepreneurs in 142 countries, including the Kingdom
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9 of Bahrain. The report highlights that entrepreneurs in the Kingdom of Bahrain rank the
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11 complexity of commercial and labour regulations at the height of their concerns, which ties
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13 in with the study findings on the theme of formal institutions. Entrepreneurship scholars
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15 have consistently raised this issue (Begley et al., 2005; Huarng et al., 2012; Erixon and
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17 Weigel, 2016) which associates the myriad of rules and regulations which entrepreneurs
18
19 need to abide by as a deterrence that might discourage potential entrepreneurs from
20
21 entering self-employment. The study findings are echoed by the results of other literary
22
23 works reporting the impact of the complexity of the regulatory environment on women's
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25 entrepreneurship efforts, especially in Arab and developing settings. For instance, Welsh
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27 et al. (2014) outlined the lack of government support and the shortage of laws protecting
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29 women's investments and customers as main operating obstacles in Saudi Arabia. Ahmad
30
31 et al. (2011) found that women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia are often exposed to
32
33 bureaucratic red tape, limited formal capital, and a lack of support services. Ghouse et al.
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35 (2017) concluded that women entrepreneurs in Oman lacked formal financial support, with
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37 incentives and governmental support inaccessible.
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46 Similarly, in a broader development context, Tambunan et al. (2007) concluded that
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48 complex business regulations and restrictions were the main obstacles faced by women
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50 entrepreneurs in Indonesia. Lakovleva et al. (2013) found that, in Ukraine, women
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52 entrepreneurs did not receive substantial support from the government for
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54 entrepreneurship. Moreover, complex regulations, inaccessible government information,
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3 and high-income taxes were among the challenges reported by Nguyen et al. (2020) for
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5 women entrepreneurs in Vietnam. Interestingly, Ozasir-Kacar and Essers (2021:12)
6
7 acknowledged that ‘the regulatory environment in Turkey for women entrepreneurs is
8
9 supportive via prompt policies, yet biased and gendered with patriarchal norms and
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11 practices both in the private and public spheres’. In other words, women entrepreneurs in
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13 Turkey need to accommodate and accept patriarchal practices to access the existing support
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15 mechanisms.
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20 Overall, women entrepreneurs may negatively perceive inefficient government regulation
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22 (Urbano and Turro, 2013; Gnyawali and Fogel, 1994). Institutional theory literature refers
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24 to this macro-environmental aspect, as disorganised government regulation negatively
25
26 affects the economy by deterring potential entrepreneurs (Gnyawali and Fogel, 1994).
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28 First-time women entrepreneurs would find it beneficial if the entities in charge accelerate
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30 the business formation process, reduce costs (Van Stel et al. 2007), and instigate assistance
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32 programs to support the solid foundation of new ventures. Findings on financial constraints
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34 also align with previous evidence suggesting that female entrepreneurs are more affected
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36 by start-up costs than their male counterparts (Horrell and Krishnan, 2007). This is
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38 corroborated by the findings of Van Stel et al. (2007). They argue that one of the main
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40 regulations that can be implemented by entrepreneurship policymakers seeking to increase
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42 rates of new firm formation is to enable the starting of a business to take place as quickly
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44 and cheaply as possible.
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51 In terms of informal institutions, gendered societal perceptions continue to be responsible.
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53 While some interviewed female entrepreneurs reported an increasingly accepted view of
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55 society, most were subjected to negative societal perceptions and attitudes. Societal
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3 perceptions are significant for female entrepreneurs because of the negative associations
4 with female self-employment (Byrne et al., 2018). In addition, regulations have a more
5 substantial impact on female entrepreneurial efforts than on their male counterparts,
6 particularly financial difficulties, considering their dual familial-business role (Friedson-
7 Ridenour and Pierotti, 2018; Marti et al., 2015). In general, gender is seen as an informal
8 institution, interfering with and dictating the career paths that females embark on. This
9 aligns with the literature on gender as an institution and confirms how socially prescribed
10 gender roles and expectations precede other personal or religious characteristics (Lorber,
11 2008).

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25 With regard to motherhood, prior studies suggest that aspects of motherhood through
26 household responsibilities are likely to inhibit women's access to money, management, and
27 the market due to adverse societal norms (Ogundana et al., 2021). In contrast, the current
28 findings suggest that women entrepreneurs identify strongly with the roles of mothers and
29 heads of households and that strong identification represents the factor that ultimately
30 pushes them into becoming entrepreneurs. This is seen through female entrepreneurs' plans
31 using their motherhood instinct, expressing their desire to be available to raise their
32 children and take care of the household while still working and achieving financial stability
33 for their families (Thebaud, 2010). In this regard, Daymard (2015) concluded that while
34 children mobilise resources that could be dedicated to the business and hence prevent
35 women from continuing their business, they can encourage women to become
36 entrepreneurs to seek work flexibility and a better work-life balance, which are considered
37 pull factors (Mroczek et al., 2020). Similarly, Nel et al. (2010) argued that 'mumpreneurs'
38 see entrepreneurship as the only way to balance money-making and family duties.

Moreover, this study outlined easier and cheaper access to domestic helpers in Bahrain and support from husbands as potential factors that mitigate the negative influence of motherhood. That said, the Bahraini landscape is very family oriented, and familial relationships are deeply rooted in the cultures and traditions of the country. This implies that female entrepreneurs will still need to deal with many duties and tasks as heads of households, mothers, and caretakers, and their responsibilities as venture heads in charge of all business operations. Women entrepreneurs' desire to handle familial matters such as caring for children and the elderly was apparent through the interviews, which may distract them from their businesses. Moreover, motherhood was also considered a source of guilt and deficiency of duties as mothers and responsibilities towards their children, which respondents saw as a barrier to entrepreneurship. In short, gender as an informal institution could play a dual role as an enabler of women's entrepreneurial aspirations and a limitation constraining their progress as entrepreneurs (Leung, 2011).

7. Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the key formal and informal institutional forces and motherhood aspects affecting women-led small and medium new ventures in Bahrain, and constitutes the primary building blocks of a more gender-aware approach to female entrepreneurship and its societally perceived gender roles in the MENA region. More importantly, these findings shed light on the nuanced role of motherhood in shaping female entrepreneurship. Therefore, extant voids in the entrepreneurship literature include the lack of a gender-based/feminist approach to examining the relationship between institutional factors and the entrepreneurial process, are addressed (Patterson, 2012; Mersha and Sriram, 2018; Welsh et al., 2018; Moreira et al., 2019). In short, this study portrays how societally assigned

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3 gender roles and motherhood responsibilities interact with institutional determinants to
4 affect female entrepreneurship. The findings highlight key areas of influence that require
5 attention from researchers, policymakers, and women entrepreneurs to advance female
6 entrepreneurship. The implications are discussed below.
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13 Societal perceptions were found to play a significant role in the development of female
14 entrepreneurship in Bahrain. Therefore, we call upon Middle Eastern institutions and
15 organisations in charge of promoting entrepreneurship to take concrete actions to address
16 social and cultural taboos that continue to limit the participation of women in certain areas
17 of public and private businesses. Such organisations should promote a healthy working
18 culture by creating awareness of the importance of maintaining good work ethics and
19 business morals, especially when dealing with women entrepreneurs. This can be done
20 through programs targeting school and university students, highlighting the importance of
21 integrity, loyalty, and honesty towards the job, and encouraging the adoption of proper
22 ethical and moral standards. We also suggest that organisations and government bodies
23 involved in female entrepreneurial support, such as women's empowerment and financing
24 entities, publicise their roles and services in promoting and supporting female
25 entrepreneurial activities.
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43 Moreover, measures should be established to provide adequate financial support for female
44 entrepreneurs to continue their businesses. This can be achieved by adopting a national
45 plan to include female-venture-gear schemes in the budgeting efforts of ministries,
46 government bodies, and partnering entities. All of these recommendations can be
47 implemented as part of a national strategy to improve and develop the state of female
48 entrepreneurship and reinforce its important contributions.
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6 Theoretically, despite the growing interest in female entrepreneurship worldwide, female
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8 entrepreneurs in emerging economies do not receive much attention, especially in the
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10 MENA landscape (Hattab, 2012; Dechant and Al-Lamky, 2005). This study contributes to
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12 the existing literature on female entrepreneurship by examining the contextual
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14 embeddedness of female entrepreneurs in an Arab context. This is in response to the lack
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16 of adequate literature on female entrepreneurs in a context other than the Western one.
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18 Combining institutional elements with a female entrepreneur's perspective allows the
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20 framework to respond to literary calls to extend the literature on female entrepreneurship
21
22 by providing insights into the emotions, beliefs, and attitudes of female entrepreneurs in
23
24 response to the various institutional pressures they face with (Ahl, 2006; Brush et al., 2009;
25
26 Hampel-Milagrosa, 2010). Consequently, this aids in gaining deeper insights into the real
27
28 journeys of female entrepreneurs and the difficulties and opportunities they encounter. The
29
30 reality is that female entrepreneurs' working environment is not flat, linear, or
31
32 straightforward. However, a mixture of complex elements and circumstances can render
33
34 the entrepreneurial journey a draining experience for most women entrepreneurs. Similarly,
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36 addressing the macro-environment sheds light on the economic, regulatory, and cultural
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38 factors that influence the development of female entrepreneurship and underlines the
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40 societal habits and norms that influence how society views female entrepreneurs and
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42 affects their daily operations.
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50 **8. Limitations**

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53 This study has several limitations. First, qualitative interviews are typically associated with
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55 researcher bias since their interpretations are shaped by the researcher's perspective (Dean
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3 et al., 2017). Therefore, we do not exclude such bias and call for further quantitative work
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5 to validate the present findings. Second, this study adopts a single-country perspective,
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7 namely, the Kingdom of Bahrain. While this helps isolate the contextual effect, the results
8
9 need to be validated in countries such as Oman and Kuwait to argue for generalisability. It
10
11 would be interesting to see whether the findings obtained at the country level still hold at
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13 the regional level, and whether the identified influencing factors affect different settings
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15 differently.
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20 Moreover, further extension of the research approach can incorporate other levels of
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22 investigation, such as the meso-environment, micro-environment, and motherhood-
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24 environment of female entrepreneurs, to capture more elements that are directly concerned
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26 with the entrepreneur's nature and competencies, prevailing initiatives and policies, and
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28 gender assigned roles and duties. Finally, aspects such as age, education, and migration
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30 status could play a role in how institutional factors are perceived. Therefore, further studies
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32 are needed to explore the intervening roles of these factors.
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TABLES

Table 1: Demographics of Interview Sample Participants.

	Interviewee	Business Venture	Years in Business	Age	Marital Status	Children	Bahraini National
1.	FMG	Kids' Gym activities center	10-15	35-45	M	2	N
2.	HSB	Activity box	0-5	35-45	M	1	N
3.	AAZ	Kids soft clay activities center	0-5	35-45	M	3	Y
4.	FJL	Chef/ restaurateur	0-5	25-30	D	3	Y
5.	GJC	Kids Arts Activities	0-5	35-45	M	2	Y
6.	GSD	Interior Decorator	0-5	35-45	M	2	Y
7.	BWE	Professional Storyteller	0-5	25-30	M	4	Y
8.	MHN	Parental and Kids guidance	0-5	30-35	M	2	Y
9.	VSO	Language Center	5-10	35-45	M	3	Y
10.	STB	Baker	0-5	30-35	M	-	Y
11.	JMW	Mommy spa	0-5	35-45	M	1	Y
12.	SMG	Clearing Agency	10-15	45-55	M	4	Y
13.	NHC	Events Management Agency	0-5	35-40	M	-	Y
14.	JBP	Preschool Owner	Over 25	Over 55	M	2	N
15.	LOM	Osteopath	5-10	Over 55	M	1	N
16.	SBA	Organic Clothes Maker	0-5	30-35	M	2	N
17.	MGS	Gift and Stationary Shop	5-10	Over 55	M	3	Y
18.	MKK	Children's Activities	0-5	35-40	M	5	Y
19.	RWD	Swimming Skills	0-5	35-45	D	1	N
20.	OLM	Music and Arts School	15-25	35-45	M	2	N
21.	BEM	Events and Media Agency	10-15	35-45	D	1	Y
22.	SBE	Baby Items Shop	0-5	30-35	M	3	N
23.	NOC	Online Clothes Shop	0-5	25-30	M	1	Y
24.	SPS	Online Stationary Shop	0-5	25-30	M	-	Y
25.	JHP	Healthy Pizza Concept	0-5	35-45	M	1	Y
26.	HDD	Nutrition Center	0-5	35-45	M	2	N
27.	MMS	Makeup and Beauty Shop	15-25	35-45	S	-	Y
28.	YBS	Luxury Salon	5-10	25-30	S	-	Y
29.	HBN	Cosmetic Hospital Owner	0-5	30-45	M	-	Y
30.	NFS	Flowers and Chocolates Shop	15-25	Over 55	M	2	Y
31.	HJC	Cargo and Customs Clearing	15-25	35-45	M	4	Y
32.	VBS	Baker	0-5	35-45	M	1	N

33.	SBC	Café Owner	0-5	35-45	M	1	N
34.	SLS	Preschool owner	15-25	45-55	M	1	N
35.	APP	Professional Photographer	5-10	30-35	S	-	Y
36.	RBJ	Kids Activities Center	0-5	30-35	M	2	Y
37.	MHG	Coffee and Dates Business	5-10	Over 55	W	2	Y
38.	IAF	Online Food Business	5-10	Over 55	M	3	Y
39.	MPS	Pet Grooming Shop	0-5	45-55	W	-	N
40.	SHC	Health Card	5-10	35-45	S	-	Y
41.	BDS	Ladies Boutique	10-15	45-55	M	3	Y
42.	EMF	Accounting Firm	5-10	35-45	S	-	Y
43.	LBA	Organic Clothes Maker	0-5	30-35	M	2	N
44.	ACS	Commercial Services	Over 25	Over 55	M	4	Y

Note: M: Married; S, Single, Yes: Y, N: No.

Table 2: Illustrating the progression from codes to themes.

Codes	Sub-Themes	Category
Planning for Children Motherhood Guilt Family-Business Balance	Motherhood Ideals	Motherhood
Partner's Attitudes Great Opportunities	Motherhood Environs	Motherhood
Changing Regulatory Setting Numerous and Complex Rules Lengthy Processes	Complex Regulations	Formal Institutions
Commercial Law Constraints Government Employee Being Legal	Double Employment Constraints	Formal Institutions
Increasing Financial Burdens Funding Difficulties Limited Funds	Financial Obligations	Formal Institutions
Social Stereotyping Changing Societal Attitudes Family's Attitudes	Societal Perceptions	Informal Institutions