

CANADIAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS, RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this report is to summarize key research findings about Canadian women business owners. This report also provides an inventory of Canadian studies and research about women's entrepreneurship. The emphasis of the review is on recent, large-scale, representative studies that explicitly examine gender and growth-oriented small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In early research, Brush (1992: 6) set the stage for the evolution of this body of scholarly work when she stated:

"differences between male and female business owners have been found in educational and occupational backgrounds, motivations for business ownership, business goals, business growth, and approaches to business creation. To date, these differences have been recognized, but not explained."

Canadian researchers have echoed the call for rigorous research studies that can lend a better understanding of the dynamics of women's entrepreneurship (Moore, 1988, 1990; Stevenson, 1990). For example, Fischer, Reuber & Dyke (1993: 151) observed:

"With the rising number of women-owned businesses has come a considerable amount of research, and even more speculation, on differences between male and female entrepreneurs and their businesses. To date, these findings and speculations have been largely atheoretical, and little progress has been made in understanding whether such differences are pervasive, let alone why they might exist. Thus public policy-makers have had little guidance on such difficult issues as whether or not unique training and support programs should be designed for women versus men."

Much of the early research, undertaken in the 1980s and early 1990s, sought to document the status of women in business and the ways in which women-owned firms might differ from businesses owned by men. Many of these studies were based on women-only samples. A second phase of scholarship (mid-1990's to 2000) centred on the effects of gender of ownership on venture performance. This phase also saw the introduction of relatively more feminist theory into research about women's entrepreneurship and the use of advanced statistical analyses (e.g., techniques that allowed the researcher to control for 'other' owner-related and firm-related attributes). More recently, research has concentrated on gaining a better