



Exogenous factors in female entrepreneurship, Brazzaville, Congo

Aimée Tathiana KOULOUNDA* and Jean-Paul FAVRE

ESM, Ecole Supérieur de Management, Geneva, Switzerland
aimee.koulounda@gmail.com

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 17th August 2021, revised 7th December 2021, accepted 8th May 2022

Abstract

In this work, we studied the cultural and socio-economic factors that influence women's entrepreneurship in the informal sector, which accounts for 70% of jobs. The specific case of the Kongo ethnic group with the distinction of being recognized as an entrepreneurial ethnic group was studied in this work. The quantitative method based on individual interviews was used but also the observation of the behaviour of women entrepreneurs on certain sensitive issues such as belief. A questionnaire as a collection instrument made it possible to obtain the parameters sought during the interview, which was generally conducted in the Kongo language. The results show that lack of employment and the need to support the family are the main reasons for women's involvement in informal entrepreneurship. The results also show that half of women entrepreneurs use their own funds. Our study also revealed that traditional belief, especially kindoki (witchcraft) and religious, appear to be a factor favouring in the sense that they bring serenity and security to the action of undertaking.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship, economics factors, social factors, cultural factors, belief.

Introduction

The promotion of entrepreneurship is seen by governments as a "imperative of economic growth"¹. This phenomenon is conditioned by the political, social and cultural context of each country. However, for most industrialised countries, it is nevertheless a solution to combat the social treatment of unemployment².

This current enthusiasm for entrepreneurship is not only manifested in developed countries; it concerns the global economy as a whole, including Africa and the Congo in particular, whose economy is based on the primary sector and mainly on oil exploitation. The question of economic diversity is raised only in the context of the formal sector and does not take into account other sectors such as the dominance of informal entrepreneurship which suffers from a lack of interest from the public authorities. The reason given is the difficulty of accessing credit for local actors who are essentially faced with the lack of guarantees to be presented to financial institutions.

The informal sector represents 70% of jobs and the Kongo ethnic group has the distinction of being recognized as an ethnic entrepreneur³. On the one hand, our interest has focused on an emerging form of entrepreneurship that is described as "necessity", "survival" or "resourcefulness" and that is little studied in the classical literature, which is mainly dominated by the theory of so-called entrepreneurship "of opportunity" but which arouses renewed interest among some researchers⁴. On the other hand, this entrepreneurship of necessity mainly affects women, the subject of our study in developing countries and which generates a significant turnover that the State should integrate into the policy of socio-economic development⁵.

It is thus possible to question a possible correlation between the development of women's entrepreneurial spirit and the oil crisis that has affected Congo since 2015, a sector that represents no less than 80% of GNP.

This is at least one of the variants envisaged by the Congolese government to diversify its economy and to solve the problem of the unemployment rate estimated at more than 10.947% and which affects most households⁶.

Unfortunately, the reforms undertaken were not enough to improve the business climate, because of the many structural difficulties: difficulty in benefiting from domestic and foreign investments, time-consuming administrative and judicial procedures for business creation and corruption. This places Congo in 180th place out of 190 in the Doing Business 2019 ranking relating to the ease of doing business⁷.

The problem of this work revolves around the identification of the exogenous factors that drive women to undertake⁸. This approach, which is very uncommon in entrepreneurial studies, focuses more on the environment and more specifically on environmental conditions.

Methodology

We used the discursive method by using individual interviews but also by observing the behaviour of women entrepreneurs on some sensitive issues such as belief⁸. Priority is given to taking notes in the event of refusal of the sound recording. Investigators record interviews with a dictaphone. The resulting data are analyzed and interpreted. However, we will seek to gather past facts and behaviours rather than impressions or opinions.

The questionnaire as a collection instrument is constructed in such a way as to counter the subjective discourse of the entrepreneur in order to obtain all the parameters sought during the interview. The interview is conducted in Kongo language to put women in confidence and thus avoid either frustrating or discouraging or even scaring them. The use of the Kongo language creates proximity and the manner of asking the questions is therefore very important. We chose to recruit four students to help us complete our investigation.

On the job and given the scope of the Total market, the investigators carried out a systematic grid of the area in order to meet the requirements of the problem, the concern being to reproduce the reality of the field. Interviews were conducted every 40 or so metres separating two female entrepreneurs, using the one-in-20 (250 women targeted out of a total of 5,000) draw method within the total female entrepreneur population.

Results and discussion

Interviews were conducted at the total market in Brazzaville, Congo (latitude -4°15'56S Longitude 15°16'59E) using the quantitative method on a sample of 269 people for a mother population of 5,000. The choice of a quota sampling allowed us to retain the criterion of age and type of entrepreneurial activity.

Factors motivating entrepreneurship: Figure-1 shows the curve representing the percentage of female entrepreneurs surveyed based on the response to the question asked about the reasons for undertaking.

These results show that lack of employment is the main reason (53.5%) for the replies) as well as the need to support the family (20.6%). The reasons for the school failure which represents 9.03% of women entrepreneurs and the situation of orphaned

women representing 4.36% remain insignificant. The analysis of these results shows that economic necessity is the main reason for women to undertake.

Our results are in line with those found by “Xavier-Oliveira et al. on the existence of a dependent relationship between low household income and entrepreneurship⁹. The economic constraint that drives women to undertake in the absence of alternative livelihoods from an economic base that allows them to take risks has been confirmed by our various interviews. This particularly affects developing countries and the informal sector¹⁰.

The originality of our approach tends to consider and value the entrepreneurship of necessity which consists in considering that the least risk for these women is that of undertaking and the major risk is that of inactivity which can lead to the disappearance or death of the entrepreneur.

Our surveys also revealed that, from a management perspective, these women entrepreneurs remain very primary about the use of management tools because some women have acknowledged that they do not use a statement or a daily income register.

Family involvement in entrepreneurship: Figure-2: shows the curve representing the percentage of female entrepreneurs surveyed based on the answer to the question asked about the family’s reactions to the intention to undertake and the implementation of the entrepreneurial project.

The results show that 58.95% of women entrepreneurs say they have received a positive reaction from the family about the intention and implementation of the project, compared to 10.82% who say they have received a negative reaction.

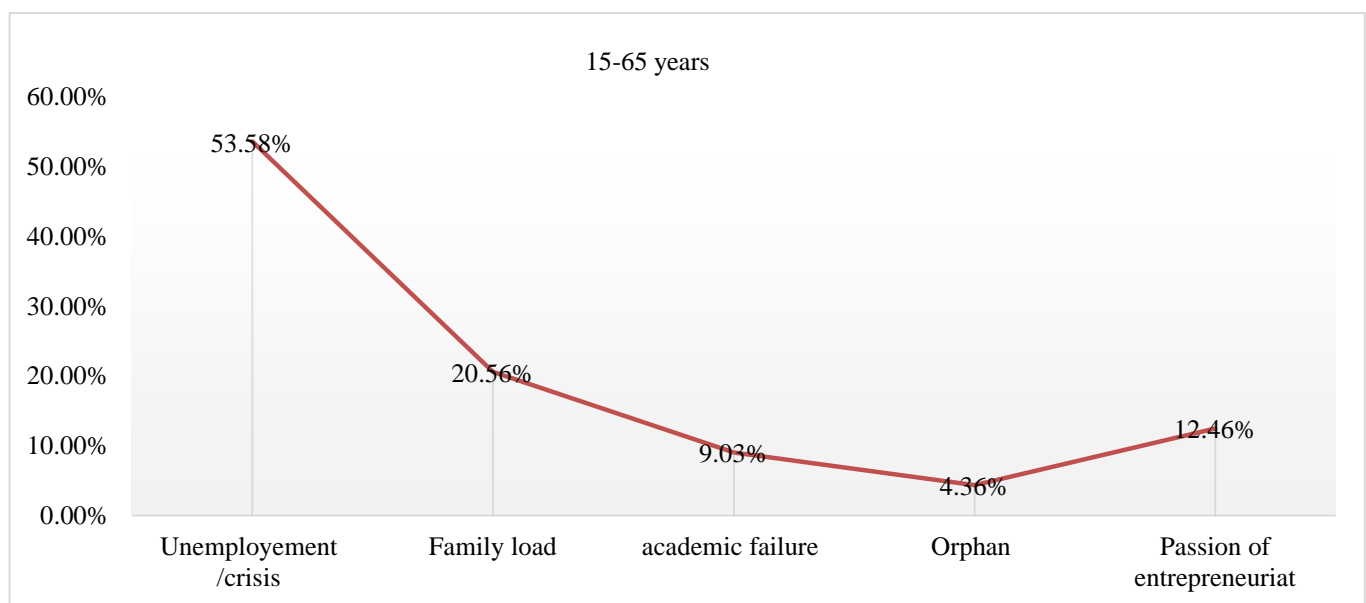


Figure-1: Variations in the number of female entrepreneurs by reason evoked.

There is another category that is described as “neutral” and that represents people who have not demonstrated a clearly supportive or hostile response of 24.25%. Women entrepreneurs who claim to have received other types of reactions account for only 3.35% while those who claim to have received mixed reactions, either positive or negative, from their families represent only 2.61%.

These results reveal an openness of culture at the family level with a double effect: i. Increasing supportive effect (temporal evolution) in the decision to undertake, ii. An increasing, albeit minority, inhibitory effect based on the family’s incentive to pursue studies for women.

According to our investigations, the Kongo family is therefore a source of support and encouragement both in the intention and in the decision to undertake. This result is consistent with that found by several authors (Sahbbir and Grégorio) which shows that the family plays a key role in female entrepreneurship¹¹.

It is important to remember that the notion of the family seen from the African perspective has a much broader connotation insofar as the fruits of women’s entrepreneurship do not only benefit households but also to help parents whose livelihoods are generally low¹².

Entrepreneurship is culturally present in the authorized role of the Kongo woman, whether single or married and at any age¹³. More generally, the kongo culture gives greater freedom to the woman who can choose her spouse, her professional activity and decide her lifestyle while respecting certain rules¹⁴.

Method of financing entrepreneurship: Figure-3: Curve representing the percentage of female entrepreneurs surveyed based on the response to the question asked about funding for the women’s entrepreneurship project.

Half of women entrepreneurs, or 43.29%, use their own funds, compared with 42.14% who seek financial assistance from their

families. In addition, 2.68% of women received financial assistance from outside the family. As for kitemo, it represents only 4.21%.

The question of financing entrepreneurship as an impacting factor shows results on the reduced use of kitemo as a traditional savings system and on the other hand, the mobilization of seed capital that often comes from the immediate family when it occurs, which in no way presupposes the sufficiency of these start-up resources mobilized by the women entrepreneurs interviewed. In addition, our interviews revealed that these women entrepreneurs use collective financing during their activity, either in the traditional form of kitemo or in the more modern form of micro-credit for still a very small minority of women entrepreneurs who consider the conditions of granting difficult (because often requiring a guarantor) and the conditions of repayment often drastic and unfavourable.

Our results, in line with those of Lelart show the importance of kitemo became undeniable in the process of development of women’s entrepreneurial activity¹⁵. But in the face of the gloomy economic situation, this system of assistance has diminished and is tending to create, as our investigation also confirms, a strong distrust and fear on the honesty and solvency of the tontinières. This situation can have a double effect: on the one hand, that of reinforcing the conviction of these women to integrate kitemo to improve their activities and or save what is in particular the case of the oldest women (45-65 years) followed by the youngest women (15-25 years) which have particularly demonstrated a strong tontinière practice.

In short, our results show that external start-up financing of a company is not a factor of great importance and valence to undertake; being certainly necessary, it does not seem to be a trigger or on the contrary blocking; at most it can be considered that it can be limiting.

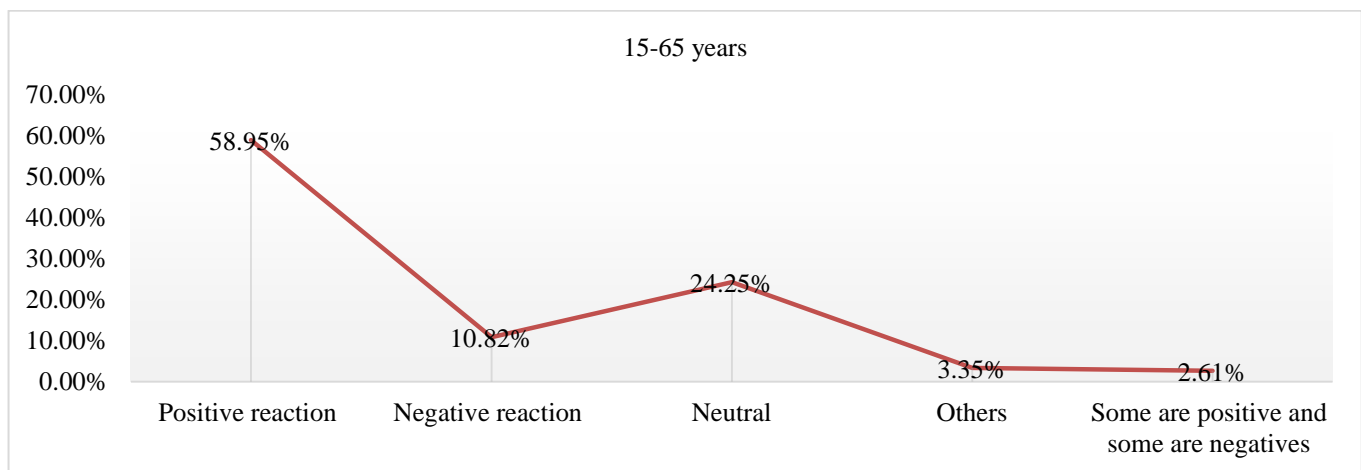


Figure-2: Variations in the number of female entrepreneurs by reason evoked.

Role of wifcraft in entrepreneurship: Figure-4: Curve representing the percentage of female entrepreneurs interviewed based on the answer to the question asked about the role of witchcraft in business success. No one refutes the question on the pretext that witchcraft does not exist: there is therefore an implicit recognition of its existence in society and daily life. The results show that just under half (47%) say that witchcraft does not play a role in business and especially in its contribution to its success.

By contrast, 40.5% of women entrepreneurs recognize that witchcraft is present and plays a role in business success.

Moreover 13%, while remaining dubious, show that they give a potential role, specific to each person, to witchcraft, thus recognizing its existence and its ability to act in business. This means that 53.5% of female respondents believe more or less firmly in a role of witchcraft in business success: 60% believe positively in the role of witchcraft, 15% believe negatively in

the role of witchcraft, and 25% believe strongly in the role of potential.

As for the sensitivity of this question, the very high level of expression on the subject indicates that it is not a taboo subject to the point of not being able to talk about it; this is corroborated by the observation of a more or less strong behavioural response for only about one third of the respondents (levels 5 to 10 of the observed response scale). Our results attest that traditional belief (kindoki, fetishist), while still very present and operative in everyday life and at all ages, plays a very limited role in the intention and action to undertake; this does not mean that the place of belief is losing speed; rather, we are witnessing a substitution of traditional belief by an equally or even more fervent Christian religious belief, which plays a positive adjuvant role for success in business, not to mention a potential role of protection or antidote to the traditional belief mentioned above and always present.

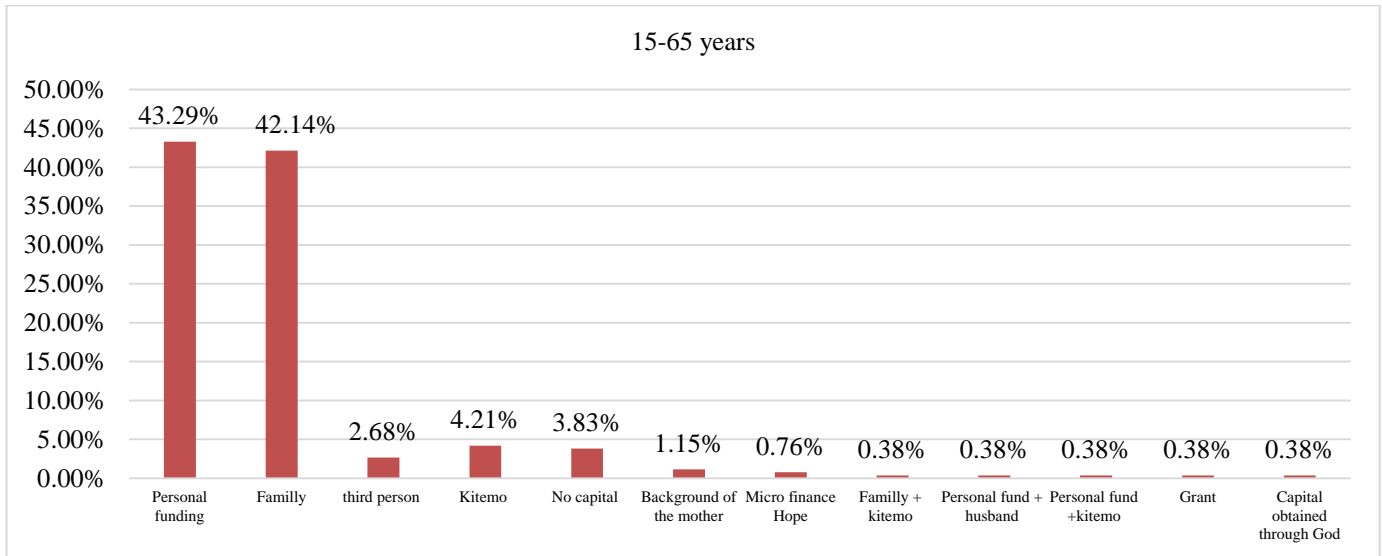


Figure-3: Variations in the number of female entrepreneurs by reason evoked.

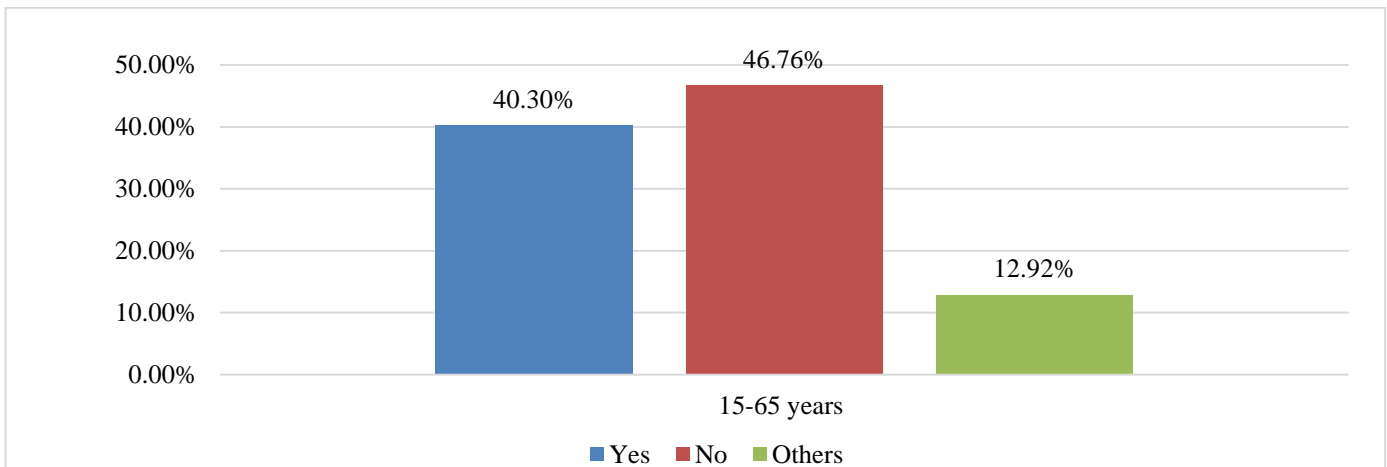


Figure-4: Variations in the number of female entrepreneurs by reason evoked.

The fear of kindoki: Figure-5 shows the curve representing the percentage of female entrepreneurs surveyed based on the answer to the question asked about the fear of kindoki. 64.5% of women entrepreneurs say they do not fear Kindoki, compared to 34.5% who say they fear it. On the other hand, 0.75% of women entrepreneurs say they are not totally afraid of kindoki, compared to 0.37% who simply say they do not believe in kindoki. Among the reasons announced, 73% of the respondents mention the fact of believing in God, and moreover 24% show fear of the curse (envouement, blocking...) or even death. Finally, the 97% of people who give a reason to fear or not to fear the Kindoki (or 77% of the respondents) implicitly recognize the existence of the Kindoki and therefore of witchcraft.

These results overlap those of Benoît Libali who confirm in the Congolese context, the influence and preponderance of the Christian religion, which has more female followers but is nevertheless seen to be completed by the so-called revival Pentecostal churches that participate in the cultural deconstruction of the notion of the traditional family in the extent to which family ties can be broken by seeking to explain family difficulties through witchcraft problems¹⁶. These claims, which are more concerned with belonging to religion in general, are exposed in an indirect way in the works of Dzaka and Milandou who were more interested in the role of witchcraft as a social function as a modality of cultural management of the risk of undertaking¹⁷. Belief, therefore, is paramount because it dictates, among other things, to women entrepreneurs the course of action to guard against the dangers they may face¹⁸.

The traditional belief limits the survey results of these authors who consider the entrepreneur beyond his economic functions as the bearer of a sacred culture that leads him on the path of professional success by granting him supernatural protection.

In conclusion, belief in kindoki is very present for more than 2/3 of women. It can represent a form of cultural risk insurance that is supposed to be effective.

Our survey reveals that traditional belief as religious appears to be a positive factor in the sense that they provide security for the success of the entrepreneurship project.

Conclusion

The position adopted was to consider entrepreneurship in its environment, with the intention of identifying how and to what extent the environment has an explanatory effect on the advent of the entrepreneur. Our results reveal a radically different conception of an entrepreneurship of necessity, stemming from essentially economic constraint or even survival, based on an injunction and a vital obligation imposed on the entrepreneur and his need to support the family. In other words, we have taken the decision to understand the world of entrepreneurship in its various dimensions that can play a role in the existence and physiognomy of it. The economic situation at the forefront, but also the social conditions, of which the community and the culture in which it conceals as role, function and values, are all potentially acting on the emergence and the reality of entrepreneurship.

The results show that lack of employment and the need to support the family are the main reasons for women's involvement in informal entrepreneurship. The results also show that half of women entrepreneurs use their own funds.

Our study also revealed that traditional belief, especially Kindoki (witchcraft) and religious, appear to be a factor favouring in the sense that they bring serenity and security to the action of undertaking.

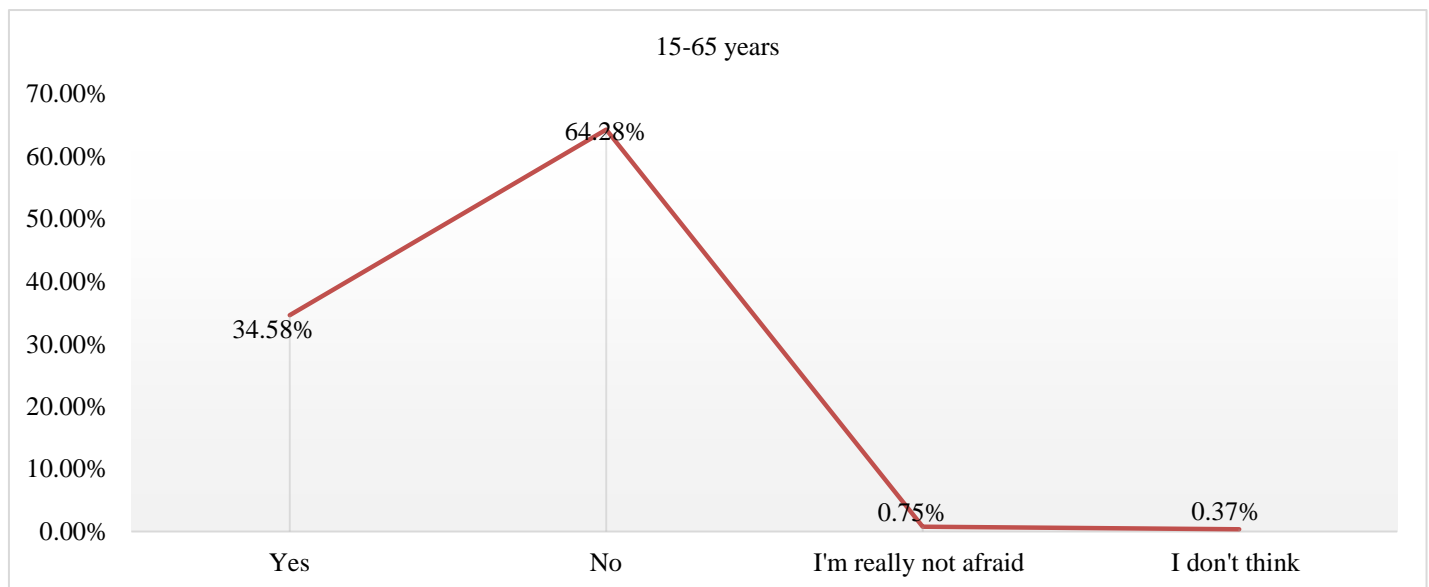


Figure-5: Variations in the number of female entrepreneurs by reason evoked.

References

1. Tessier-Dargent C. (2015). Entrepreneurs by necessity from a simplifying dichotomy to a complex continuum: Definitions and typology of entrepreneurs by necessity study of workable dimension of creation processes by necessity. Grenoble Alpes University, Grenoble, France
2. Bergmann, H. & Sternberg, R. (2007). The changing face of entrepreneurship in Germany. *Small Business Economics*, 28(2), 205-221.
3. Shu Yu and Vorisek. D. (2021). Five reason to be concerned about the shadow economy. World bank.org. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/five-reasons-be-concerned-about-shadow-economy>
4. Zoumba, N.B. (2018). Entrepreneurship by necessity and opportunity: an attempt at understanding in the Burkinabe context. University Paris-Est, Paris, France
5. Hafou Touré Samb (2021). Women entrepreneurship: fostering the emergence of regional champions. *La Tribune* <https://afrique.latribune.fr/think-tank/tribunes/2021-04-22/entrepreneuriat-feminin-favoriser-l-emergence-de-championnes-regionales-883033.html>
6. Okamba, E. (2021). Youth employment or the challenge of mass unemployment in the Congo. ADIAC <https://www.adiac-congo.com/content/emploi-des-jeunes-ou-le-defi-du-chomage-de-masse-au-congo-35373>
7. World Bank group (2019). Doing Business. Key data: Sub-Saharan Africa. Group. https://français.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/media/Fact-Sheets/DB19/FactSheet_DoingBusiness2019_SSA_Fr.pdf
8. Memdjofeng Toche, C. L. (2020). Study of the entrepreneurial dynamics of women in the creation of a collective enterprise: The case of the creation of a women's cooperative in the West region of Cameroon. University of Rennes 2, France, <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-03405447v2>
9. Xavier-Oliveira, E., Laplume, A. O. & Pathak, S. (2015). What motivates entrepreneurial entry under economic inequality?. *The role of human and financial capital. Human Relations*, 68(7), 1183-1207.
10. d'Andria, A. & Gabarret, I. (2016). Women and Entrepreneurs: Thirty Years of Research into Women's Entrepreneurial Motivation. *Review of Entrepreneurship*, 15(3), 87-107.
11. DIA I. (2017). Les motivations des femmes entrepreneurs du secteur informel à Dakar (Sénégal). The motivations of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector in Dakar (Senegal). (No. 81292). University Library of Munich, Germany.
12. Ibrahima Théo Lam (2020). Women entrepreneurship in Africa, an untapped gold mine! L' Harmattan, Senegal. 1-232. ISBN: 978-2-343-19497-4
13. Coquery –Vidrovitch, C. (2021). African women: stories of women from sub-Saharan Africa of the 19th and 20th century. *La découverte*, 1-559. ISBN: 9782707154458
14. Denis Mukwege (2021). The Power of Women: Tapping into Resilience to Repair the World. Gallimard, 1-400. ISBN: 9782072956157
15. Lelart M. (1990). The informal practice of savings and credit in developing countries. John Libbey-Eurotex, 1-360. ISBN: 0-86196-260-5
16. Libali B. (2015). Reproductive behaviour in the Republic of Congo: permanence and changes: for a contextual and dynamic approach to fertility. University of Burgundy.
17. Dzaka T. and Milandou M. (1994). Congolese entrepreneurship to the test of magical powers. A hidden side of management cultural risk. *Politique Africaine*, 56, 108–18.
18. Duyck, J.Y and Mhenaoui, I (2013). Spirituality and Enterprise. *Key measurement concepts and tools Rimhe*, 8(2), 57-70. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-rimhe-2013-4-page-57.htm>