

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376189862>

# Understanding the dimensions of women entrepreneurs' empowerment: a systematic review of the microfinance literature and avenues for research

Article in *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* · December 2023

DOI: 10.1108/IJGE-06-2023-0162

CITATIONS

0

2 authors:



Nzanu Y'Ise Kivalya  
Université de Mons

1 PUBLICATION 0 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

READS

69



Tristan Caballero-Montes  
Université de Mons

9 PUBLICATIONS 10 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

# Understanding the dimensions of women entrepreneurs' empowerment: a systematic review of the microfinance literature and avenues for research

Dimensions of  
Women  
entrepreneurs'  
empowerment

Nzanzu Y'Ise Kivalya and Tristan Caballero-Montes  
*Université de Mons, Mons, Belgium and  
Center for European Research in Microfinance (CERMi), Mons, Belgium*

Received 23 June 2023  
Revised 6 September 2023  
Accepted 14 November 2023

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of the present paper is to provide a systematic overview of dimensions that need to be enfolded or considered in microfinance policies and strategies designs as well as impact studies aiming to empower or assess the empowerment of a specific category of women, namely women entrepreneurs. Afterward, the study aims to suggest some directions for future studies.

**Design/methodology/approach** – To meet its purpose, the paper applies the systematic review approach. The applied methodology follows guidelines for systematic reviews of social and economic interventions as set out by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA). More specifically, the authors examine 87 empirical papers from 6 databases investigating the impact of microfinance institutions on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs.

**Findings** – Overall, findings of the study suggest that dimensions of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs are formed and conditioned by normative, cognitive and regulative institutional logics. Additionally, the systematic review suggests key research avenues and calls for more inclusive empirical studies in terms of geographical coverage, microfinance services/products assessed and method designs applied.

**Research limitations/implications** – Findings of the current review provide clear theoretical contribution and useful practical implications in the field of microfinance and the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. On the one hand, the study suggests to scholars key avenues for future studies likely to bring new insights in terms of theory, context and methods. On the other hand, this study extends the understanding of microfinance practitioners on the concept of women empowerment as the field of female entrepreneurship is concerned. This implication is likely to enable the design of appropriate microfinance strategies and policies, allowing women entrepreneurs to achieve an overall empowerment.

**Originality/value** – The present paper contributes to the debate around the multidimensionality of the concept, “women empowerment.” The multidimensional nature of the addressed concept is well established in the existing literature. However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has provided a conceptual analysis of empowerment dimensions of a particular category of women, namely women entrepreneurs. Unlike most of the studies assuming that all women face identical challenges, the present paper brings new insights on the topic as it is built on a different assumption. The paper takes ground from the institutional theory and applies it to the specific case of female entrepreneurship.

**Keywords** Microfinance, Female entrepreneurship, Women empowerment, Empowerment dimensions

**Paper type** Literature review

The authors would like to thank Marc Labie And Pascal Wele Idrissou for their relevant suggestions that gave a clear orientation to this paper. They are also thankful to Cécile Godfroid, Giuliano Romina, Clair Dupont and Samuel Anokye Nyarko for their helpful and valuable comments that significantly improved the quality of this paper. A special thanks to Stéphane Moyson for his availability and fruitful exchanges on the implementation of the PRISMA approach. The first author is particularly grateful for the mentoring support from the Förderverein Uni Kinshasa e.V., through the BEBUC scholarship program.



## 1. Introduction

The microfinance industry shows promises of using financial services to empower women through entrepreneurship (Noor *et al.*, 2021; Trivedi and Petkova, 2021). For instance, authors argue that by enabling women to engage into entrepreneurship through the provision of financial and non-financial services, the microfinance sector is likely to increase their income and their bargaining power within the household (Swain and Wallentin, 2009; Sultana *et al.*, 2017). Some scholars hold that this should lead to various mutually reinforcing social, psychological and even legal and political effects such as better self-esteem and self-confidence, an improvement in status within the family and the community, better spatial mobility and greater visibility of women in public spaces (Swain and Wallentin, 2009; Mersland and Strøm, 2012; Sultana *et al.*, 2017).

However, throughout the empirical literature, the evidence that the microfinance industry empowers women entrepreneurs is still debated and controversial (Trivedi and Petkova, 2021). Among reasons behind mixed findings, it appears that given the multidimensionality of the concept of women empowerment (Malhotra and Schuler, 2002; Mahmud *et al.*, 2012), empirical studies addressing this issue, only address specific dimensions. The selection of these dimensions is driven by different factors, such as the understanding that authors have on the concept of women's empowerment (Nessa *et al.*, 2012) and the socioeconomic profile of the targeted women (Khan and Noreen, 2012). Such a partial selection of dimensions limits conclusions of concerned studies. Khan and Noreen (2012) argue that the assessment of women empowerment is incomplete and biased if it fails to measure important related dimensions. To this end, we conduct a systematic review addressing the following question: What are dimensions and indicators to consider when investigating the empowerment of women entrepreneurs?

Even though there are several systematic reviews in the research field of microfinance and women empowerment, we justify the need for the current review by different reasons. First, a great deal of existing systematic reviews focus on reviewing evidence of the impact of microfinance on women empowerment rather than on providing a conceptual review (See Van Rooyen *et al.*, 2012; Addae, 2015; O'Malley and Burke, 2017; Gichuru *et al.*, 2019; Parwez and Patel, 2022). Second, existing studies focus on married/unmarried or rural/urban women's empowerment (Nahar and Mengo, 2022). The entrepreneurial orientation remains unexplored when investigating the empowerment of women in microfinance. Choosing to focus on women entrepreneurs is relevant as from its inception, the microfinance industry targeted women involved in entrepreneurial activities (Mersland and Strøm, 2012; Newman *et al.*, 2017). Third, as supported by Nahar and Mengo (2022), existing reviews do not provide any framework capturing the different dimensions and indicators of women's empowerment. Consequently, our knowledge of different empowerment dimensions of women entrepreneurs remains, to a large extent, fragmented. Thus, by addressing the highlighted gaps in previous reviews, the current paper is distinctive and responds to the call for more studies aiming to extend our knowledge and understanding on the concept of women empowerment (Malhotra and Schuler, 2002; Ali and Hatta, 2012; Galie *et al.*, 2019).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The second section presents the scope and methodology of the study. The third section is about data analysis. The fourth section suggests directions for future studies. The fifth section highlights implications of the study, before concluding in the sixth section.

## 2. Scope and methodology of the review

To meet the objective of this paper, which consisted of providing a systematic overview of dimensions of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs and suggest some directions for future studies, we applied the systematic review method. This approach allows to identify, analyze and summarize knowledge on a given area of research (Herbert *et al.*, 2009; MacInnis, 2011; Shlonsky

*et al.*, 2011; Cooper *et al.*, 2018). It is considered as an approach that enables theoretical extensions and development; it allows the identification of research priorities, but also allows to address questions that individual studies could have difficulties to answer (Fawcett *et al.*, 2014; Al Khayyal *et al.*, 2021; Page *et al.*, 2021; MacInnis, 2011). In the context of women entrepreneurs' empowerment through microfinance, a systematic review is thus relevant. Indeed, given the promises of the microfinance industry to be a powerful tool to empower women via entrepreneurship, several studies have been interested in assessing the effectiveness of the microfinance stated mission. However, empirical findings are controversial and debated. In this sense, a systematic review allows to identify bottleneck in this research stream and give orientations for future studies as well as research priorities (Page *et al.*, 2021).

Similar to other studies (Cyril *et al.*, 2016; Hermes and Hudon, 2018; Santoso *et al.*, 2019; Al Khayyal *et al.*, 2021), the applied methodology in this paper follows guidelines for systematic reviews of social and economic interventions as set out by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The PRISMA statements (Liberati *et al.*, 2009; Shlonsky *et al.*, 2011; Page *et al.*, 2021) are critical appraisal tools developed by scholars, methodologists, practitioners and policymakers adhering to rigorous methodological standards ensuring the quality, credibility and the merit of a particular review to answer a specific research question.

These standards include clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, an explicit search strategy for the identification of studies, systematic coding and analysis of included studies and quality assessment (Liberati *et al.*, 2009; Brody *et al.*, 2015; Al Khayyal *et al.*, 2021).

### 2.1 Study and report eligibility

For the construction of inclusion and exclusion criteria, the literature reports different frameworks as well as some of their variations. We applied the PICo (population, interest and context) framework to specify inclusion and exclusion criteria of studies reviewed in this paper (Davies, 2011; Cooper *et al.*, 2018; Page *et al.*, 2021).

### 2.2 Search strategy

Studies included in the review were collected from a broad search of available studies through different sources. Six electronic databases were searched for peer-reviewed papers. These databases were selected based on their reputation as relevant for the topic of performance and microfinance. They include Business Source Elite, EconLit, Online Library Wiley, ProQuest Central and Scopus (Reichert, 2018). In order to be more comprehensive, we added CAIRN for French-written articles.

When searching for papers in the different databases, we used a combination of keywords as well as their related terms. The following list of keywords and related terms was constructed in accordance with the existing literature related to our research question but also in line with the application of the PICo framework to our research methodology.

- (1) Microfinance: credit, savings, insurance, finance and financial services;
- (2) Women: female, gender;
- (3) Entrepreneur: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial, business, enterprise and small and medium enterprise (SME);
- (4) Empowerment: autonomy, agency, discrimination, impact and outcome

To avoid the risk that, from the initial identified references, a particular study is mistakenly included or excluded in the review, similar to Moyson *et al.* (2018), we performed a double-check screening process. The two authors separately examined all the identified studies by

screening the titles and abstracts to make sure that they met the inclusion criteria and the current paper objective. This process resulted into two lists of included studies for review after the exclusion of irrelevant studies based on the defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Each list was then double-checked again by each author, and the consensus on studies included in the review was found between the authors by comparing the two lists.

As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), selected studies for the review in this paper went through a multistep screening process based on clear inclusion and exclusion criteria (see [Table 1](#)).

3. Data analysis and findings

3.1 Analysis of the studies

In order to analyze the different studies included in the review, we combined two approaches at the same time: a deductive approach and an inductive approach. This reasoning logic for analyzing studies has been adopted in various systematic literature reviews ([Riche et al., 2021](#); [Sabbe et al., 2021a,b](#)).

Following guidelines of previous reviews, the deductive approach allowed us to divide dimensions of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in three broad categories: the normative, cognitive and regulative dimensions. Similar to [Riche et al. \(2021\)](#), these categories have been decided on purpose and set beforehand in order to organize in an efficient way the information collected, afterward, in reviewed studies. However, it is worth to note that the choice of broad categories was informed by the institutional theory ([Bui et al., 2018](#); [de la O Cordero and Pulido, 2020](#)).

Beyond the institutional theory, many theories are available in the field of women entrepreneurship (see [Yadav and Unni, 2016](#)). For instance, the feminist theory posits social

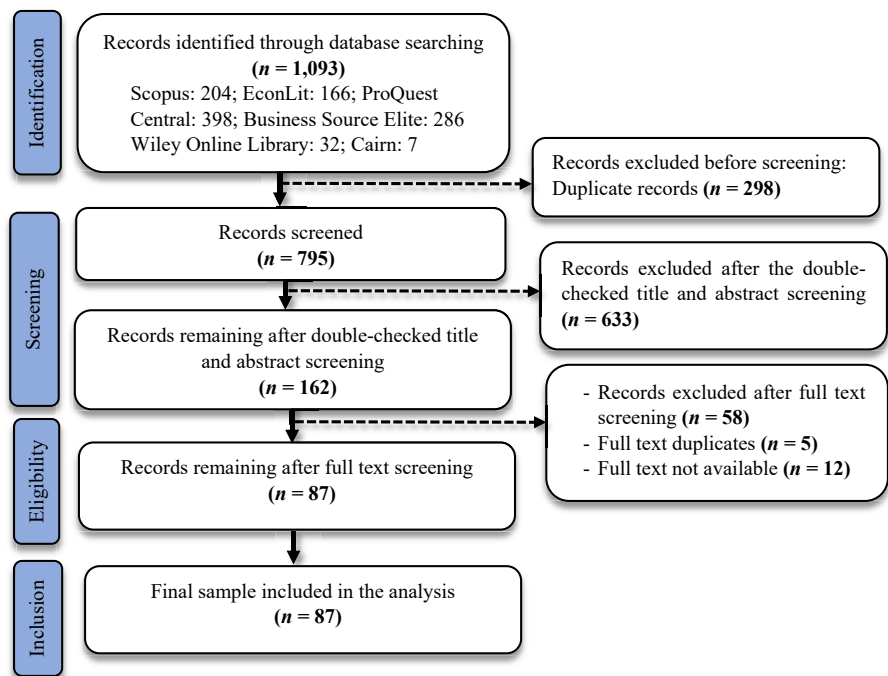


Figure 1.  
Flowchart of included  
studies

Source(s): The authors

			Dimensions of Women entrepreneurs' empowerment
	PICo framework	Inclusion criteria	
Study eligibility criteria	<p><i>P – Population</i> (characteristics of the population)</p> <p><i>I – Interest</i> (defined event or activity)</p> <p><i>Co – Context</i> (setting or distinct characteristics)</p>	<p>Only studies investigating women entrepreneurs were included</p> <p>Included studies should investigate the provision of microfinance services, financial or non-financial</p> <p>We included studies empirically investigating the effect of the microfinance intervention on the client side. More specifically, we included studies on the women entrepreneurs' empowerment only. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were included. No restriction was placed for the study context. Papers implemented in developing and developed countries were included</p> <p><i>Language</i> – Studies written in English and French were included</p> <p><i>Publication status</i> – In order to ensure the quality of analyzed studies, we included only peer-reviewed papers</p> <p><i>Year of publication</i> – We selected studies realized from 1990 onward. The year 1990 was chosen, as before the 1990s, only very few studies were conducted on the microfinance efficiency (Brau and Woller, 2004; Hermes and Hudon, 2018; Reichert, 2018)</p>	
Report eligibility criteria			
Source(s): The authors			Table 1. Inclusion criteria

structures supporting gender differences as the main barrier for the female entrepreneurship (Mirchandani, 1999). The expectancy theory argues that the belief that specific actions will lead to rewarding outcomes is sufficient to stimulate female entrepreneurship (Sullivan and Meek, 2012). The career theory argues that the need, commitments, aspirations and interests for entrepreneurship are determined by the professional experience within a working life of an individual (Bowen and Hisrich, 1986). However, many of the existing theories are limited in scope. By capturing normative, cognitive and regulative aspects of the female entrepreneurship phenomenon, the institutional theory not only encompasses and covers aspects from other theories but also and mainly offers a holistic understanding of the women entrepreneurship reality. Consequently, compared to other theories, the institutional theory has got a wide recognition and has been the most used in the women's entrepreneurship research field (Zerwas, 2019).

Furthermore, while broad categories were set from the start and rooted in the institutional theory, in contrast and similar to Riche *et al.* (2021) and Sabbe *et al.* (2021a, b), subcategories emerged inductively out of the thematic mapping and during the analysis of reviewed studies. Subcategories provide two important insights: the dimensions of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs and their related indicators.

### 3.2 Overview of the reviewed studies

Table 2 presents an overview of relevant characteristics of the studies we reviewed. Unsurprisingly, microcredit (45%, 39 papers) appears to be the service most assessed by researchers investigating the impact of the microfinance industry on the women entrepreneurs' empowerment. Additionally, even when not exclusively related to microcredit, most papers have, at least, combined a study linked with microcredit and another service of the sector. This supports the view that microcredit has received most of the spotlight within the microfinance literature as the channel through which microfinance institutions empower women entrepreneurs (Gutiérrez-Nieto and Serrano-Cinca, 2019). As detailed later on, this shows the need for further research on other microfinance services than microcredit, including the role of savings, insurance and non-financial services.

Year	Geographical coverage				Services assessed			Methods applied			
	Total	Africa	Asia	South America	Microcredit and microfinance plus	Microcredit and microfinance plus	Microcredit and microfinance plus	Other combinations	Qualitative method	Quantitative method	Mixed method
2001	2		2		1		1		2		
2004	1	1			1						1
2005	1		1		1				1		
2006	2	2				1			1		
2009	2	1	1			1				2	
2010	3	1	2		1	1			2		1
2011	3	2		1							
2012	4	2	2		2	1				3	1
2013	7		6	1	3					2	
2014	5	1	3	1	2	1			1	6	1
2015	5		5		2			1	2	4	
2016	6		6		2	1				3	
2017	11	5	5	1	4		1		2	8	1
2018	5	1	4		1	3			2	3	
2019	11	1	10		1	2		1	2	8	1
2020	5	3	2		2					5	
2021	8	3	5		1	1		1	2	6	
2022	6		4	2		1		1	4	2	
Total	87	23	58	6	20	13	8	4	22	59	6
Frequency	1	0.26	0.67	0.07	0.23	0.15	0.09	0.05	0.25	0.68	0.07

Besides, we find that the first paper assessing the impact of microfinance institutions on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs was published in 2001. In the following decade, the academic attention was relatively moderate. From 2013, the research on the issue got a momentum. Indeed, almost 80% of papers (69 papers) included in our review are published between 2013 and 2022. This finding supports that attention for social performance of microfinance institutions is recent and started only around 2010 (Hermes and Hudon, 2018). Compared to Africa (26%, 23 papers) and South America (7%, 6 papers), Asian countries have received the largest coverage (67%, 58 papers), and, particularly, the Indian microfinance industry has received the most consideration (35.6%, 31 papers). We argue that several reasons may explain the high attention to India. Firstly, we point out to the unexpected reversal in the narrative of the microfinance sector resulting from ethical criticisms reported in India around 2010. Similar to other countries, Indian microfinance industry was accused of exploitative lending techniques, forceful loan recovery practices and cases of over-indebtedness (Hulme and Arun, 2011; Hudon and Sandberg, 2013). Second, as for many other microfinance related research topics, India and Bangladesh appear to be trendy countries in the microfinance research due to the fact that the microfinance industry historically and strongly developed there (Hudon and Sandberg, 2013). Third, the high consideration of the self-help group (SHG) in India as the improved model of the microfinance delivery scheme may have played a role in alerting the attention of researchers to question the real rather than imagined effectiveness of the SHG model to empower women entrepreneurs (Janaki and Sesha Mohan, 2013; Ahmad *et al.*, 2020). As a matter of fact, the SHG emerged from our findings as the most assessed microfinance delivery scheme.

The SHG model is an adaptation of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh developed in the early 1970–1980s (Ahmad *et al.*, 2020; Nayak and Panigrahi, 2020; Lalitha and Ramar, 2022). The model aligns with principles of group dynamics (mutual trust, peer pressure, etc.), homogeneity of group members (women from a similar background or socioeconomic status), small and manageable group size (10–15 women per group), free collateral loan, friendly loan interest rate, skill training, capacity building and women empowerment (Priyanka *et al.*, 2019; Nayak and Panigrahi, 2020; Ahmad *et al.*, 2020). In India, SHGs are considered as powerful tools to deliver microfinance services to women, provide them with economic benefits and empower them both socially and politically (Nayak and Panigrahi, 2020). For Kusugal (2020), SHGs are praised for different reasons. First, SHGs allow women to grow their savings and access to credit, thanks to SHG-bank linkages. Second, SHGs are presented as spaces for women to provide support to one another. Third, participation in SHGs teaches women to cooperate and work in group environment. Fourth, SHGs enable women to become active and take actions in public affairs like standing for local elections. Last but not least, we find that from 2001 to 2006, studies in our database are primarily qualitative. However, very soon, criticisms emerged, arguing that qualitative designs were unable to unveil effects on people not receiving the microfinance intervention which could be relevant for providing a more comprehensive picture of the microfinance impact (Gutiérrez-Nieto and Serrano-Cinca, 2019). With the emergence of “randomized control trials”, quantitative methodologies started to take over around the year 2010 (Guérin *et al.*, 2019; Gutiérrez-Nieto and Serrano-Cinca, 2019). As a matter of fact, quantitative studies represent almost two-third of the papers in our database (68%, 59 papers). Only more recently, rigorous mixed methods (7%, 6 papers) are gaining the attention of researchers but with a very low progress and attention.

### *3.3 Dimensions of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs*

This subsection reviews the empowerment dimensions and related indicators of women entrepreneurs. To this end, a manual thematic mapping and analysis was manually performed simultaneously by the two authors. More practically, we went through the



following steps: in the first position, we identified and transcribed in an Excel sheet different aspects of empowerment in exact key words used by authors in each of the 87 papers included in our database. In the second position, we analyzed identified aspects, and, in order to avoid overlaps, we grouped together aspects that had the same meaning. In the third position, we compiled the different aspects in homogeneous groups using our own key words, and these formed dimensions of women entrepreneurs' empowerment as presented in the paper. Afterward, we categorized the different dimensions in three main categories decided beforehand as detailed earlier. This allows us to organize our findings around normative, cognitive and regulative dimensions. For a simple visualization, findings of this process are summarized in [Table 3](#).

*3.3.1 Normative dimensions.* Rooted in the institution theory, normative dimensions refer to norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and standards of acceptable behavior in a society ([Naguib and Jamali, 2015](#); [Carranza et al., 2018](#)). At this level, gender roles are created by defining what is considered as appropriate behavior both for men and women ([Naguib and Jamali, 2015](#); [Carranza et al., 2018](#)). For instance, entrepreneurship is generally perceived as a male domain ([Manolova et al., 2008](#); [Singh, 2013](#)). In highly patriarchal societies, women are not allowed to leave home alone; they are not allowed to initiate their own businesses or run businesses that involve contacts with men ([Tambunan, 2009](#)). Women must comply with their "womanly" duties as homemakers, children caregivers, housewife, husband's wife and so forth ([Tambunan, 2009](#); [Panda, 2018](#)).

Such a normative consideration is reported to contribute to women's tendency to consolidate and extend their domestic roles by focusing on skills linked to their gendered identity rather than their entrepreneurial capacities ([Xheneti et al., 2019](#)). Consequently, compared to men, women are featured with a low level of education, information and literacy; less experience in business; weak technical knowledge; and poor managerial and entrepreneurial skills that extremely challenge the takeoff of the female entrepreneurship ([Mezgebo et al., 2017](#); [Ghosh et al., 2018](#); [Afshan et al., 2021](#)). Besides, given the different gender social norms, women entrepreneurs are reported to suffer from various forms of gender stereotypes. In their study, [Agier and Szafarz \(2013\)](#) remark that with a same project as men, women are given a lower credit amount because of gender stereotypes among loan officers that women lack entrepreneurial skills. Additionally, the lack of supportive network appears to be among negative consequences of gender discriminative social norms on female entrepreneurship.

From our findings, the normative dimensions are the most considered in investigating the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the microfinance empirical literature. Out of 339 occurrences, 86.1% of studied dimensions are normative. As already highlighted, to a large extent, normative considerations reproduce gender-based inequalities across economic, financial and social spheres of life as well as gendered power relations ([Marcus, 2018](#)). Hence, we identified 6 dimensions at this level. They include the economic empowerment, the bargaining power, the sociocultural empowerment, the business development, the financial empowerment and the human capital development.

#### (1) Economic empowerment and business development

Individuals are considered economically empowered when provided with tools they need in order to achieve their self-reliance ([Ezeanya, 2014](#)). The link between economic empowerment and entrepreneurship is not unidirectional. On the one hand, economic empowerment is considered as an antecedent to entrepreneurship since studies demonstrate the extent to which poverty negatively affects the ability of individuals to create new businesses or to become entrepreneurs ([Ezeanya, 2014](#)). On the other hand, entrepreneurship is regarded as an effective strategy to achieve economic empowerment

Categories (occurrence; frequency)	Dimensions (occurrence; frequency)	Microfinance impact on dimensions	Indicators of empowerment dimensions (occurrence; Frequency)	Microfinance impact on indicators
Normative dimensions (292; 0.861)	Economic empowerment (86; 0.254)	Mixed	- Income generation (29; 0.086)	Mixed
			- Assets creation (12; 0.035)	Mixed
			- Household welfare (11; 0.032)	Mixed
			- Asset ownership (9; 0.027)	Mixed
			- Economic independence (8; 0.024)	Mixed
			- Contribution to family expenditures (7; 0.021)	Mixed
	Sociocultural empowerment (65; 0.192)	Mixed	- Personal expenditure level (5; 0.0147)	Mixed
			- Employment opportunities (5; 0.0147)	Mixed
			- Physical mobility (10; 0.029)	Mixed
			- Social consideration (10; 0.029)	Positive
			- Social interactions (9; 0.027)	Mixed
			- Voice empowerment (8; 0.024)	Positive
			- Social support (8; 0.024)	Mixed
			- Access to improved healthcare (7; 0.021)	Mixed
			- Intimate partner violence (6; 0.018)	Mixed
			- Resistance to social norms (5; 0.015)	Mixed
			- Entertainment and psychological satisfaction (2; 0.006)	Positive
	Bargaining power (60; 0.177)	Mixed	- Decision-making power (43; 0.127)	Mixed
			- Control over resources (17; 0.049)	Mixed
	Business development (31; 0.091)	Mixed	- Business outcome/Performance (17; 0.050)	Mixed
			- Business entry/start of entrepreneurial activities (11; 0.033)	Mixed
			- Business exit/Survival of existing businesses (3; 0.009)	Mixed
Cognitive dimensions (38; 0.112)	Financial dimension (27; 0.080)	Mixed	- Savings constitution (12; 0.035)	Mixed
			- Access to credit (8; 0.024)	Positive
			- Familiarity with financial institutions (5; 0.015)	Positive
			- Use of credit (1; 0.003)	No effect
	Human capital development (23; 0.068)	Mixed	- Use of savings accounts (1; 0.003)	Positive
			- Entrepreneurial skills (10; 0.029)	Mixed
			- Leadership skills (8; 0.024)	Mixed
			- Educational literacy (5; 0.015)	Mixed
	Personal empowerment (27; 0.078)	Positive	- Self-confidence (17; 0.049)	Positive
			- Self-esteem (6; 0.018)	Positive
			- Self-efficacy (3; 0.009)	Positive
Regulative dimensions (9; 0.027)	Political and legal dimension (9; 0.027)	Positive	- Self-awareness (1; 0.003)	Positive
			- Aspirational hope (6; 0.018)	Positive
			- Risk taking ability (4; 0.012)	Positive
			- Entrepreneurial commitment (1; 0.003)	Positive
			- Awareness of the political system (5; 0.015)	Positive
			- Awareness of legal and civil rights (3; 0.009)	Positive
			- Political responsibilities (1; 0.003)	Positive

**Source(s):** The authors

## Dimensions of Women entrepreneurs' empowerment

**Table 3.**  
Dimensions and  
related aspects of the  
women entrepreneurs'  
empowerment  
addressed in the  
microfinance empirical  
literature

(Swain and Wallentin, 2009; Sultana *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, in line with findings of our review, the possibility for women to develop a business is considered an important dimension for the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. This includes the ability for women to start new businesses, the survival of women owned-enterprises but also the performance or outcome of the women-owned enterprise.

Based on our findings, the economic empowerment of women through the development of their business materializes in the level of income generated (Kaushal and Sharma, 2020), assets created (Adhariani, 2022), the level of contribution women entrepreneurs have on the welfare of their household and on the expenditures of their family (Submitter *et al.*, 2021), the level of assets owned by women entrepreneurs (Zafarullah and Nawaz, 2019), the level of economic independence (Yazıcı Cörüt and Cörüt, 2022), personal expenditures achieved by women entrepreneurs (Das and Dhancholia, 2016) and the level of jobs created by women entrepreneurs for other women (Islam, 2020; Nayak and Panigrahi, 2020).

Papers in our database addressing the impact of microfinance institutions on the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs through business development suggest mixed findings. Most quantitative studies confirm the positive relation between microfinance intervention and economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs. However, qualitative and mixed method studies offer a nuanced picture. For instance, Haile *et al.* (2015) conclude that findings on the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs via the provision of microcredit are inconclusive given the prevalence of cross-borrowing among women entrepreneurs. This makes it difficult to be confident that the observed economic empowerment is the sole result of the intervention of the studied microfinance institutions. On the other hand, Salia *et al.* (2017) conclude that the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs through microfinance is associated with adverse impacts such as intra-household conflicts, due to the amount of time women entrepreneurs allocate to their businesses and the perceived neglected traditional gender role.

Furthermore, only very few studies consider the effect of normative behavior on the women economic empowerment and business development process. Nilakantan *et al.* (2013) conclude that while microfinance institutions have the potential to enable women entrepreneurs to achieve economic empowerment, this potential is negatively affected by what the authors refer to as “ethical violation”. This is the male takeover of the microfinance-funded female-owned business. For instance, in their study, Nilakantan *et al.* (2013) found that almost a three-quarter of surveyed women indicated that their husbands took over their businesses. Such a result suggests that in the absence of control over their business, women are simple borrowers for the benefit of their husbands. In this way, it is unclear whether women entrepreneurs effectively use and benefit from the business outcome and different economic empowerment aspects such as the income generated and the asset created and owned.

Milgram (2005) concludes that while aiming to empower women entrepreneurs economically through the provision of microcredit, microfinance institutions fail to remodel social infrastructures that generate economic inequalities they intend to redress. Consequently, authors (Milgram, 2005; Nilakantan *et al.*, 2021) advocate for more transformative initiatives from microfinance institutions that require a shift from the traditional role of a lender to programs enfolding social change objectives that integrate a holistic view of the situation of women entrepreneurs.

#### (1) Bargaining power, human capital development and sociocultural empowerment

Based on our findings, the bargaining power dimension takes two forms: the decision-making power and the ability to access and control resources. In the existing literature, the women’s intra-household bargaining power has been recognized as a key contributing factor for women’s abilities to become and succeed as entrepreneurs (Lin and Tai, 2022).

It is argued that by providing women with access to financial services as well as non-financial services, microfinance institutions allow women to enter the financial, economic and entrepreneurial system (Daher *et al.*, 2022). Such a microfinance intervention entails a boost in human capital development like the female leadership, organizational competences and business/entrepreneurial skills (Huis *et al.*, 2019a, b); increased income for women (Adhariani, 2022); more financial autonomy and economic independence (Yazıcı Cörüt and Cörüt, 2022); more women's ability to make small and large purchase on their own (Ekele *et al.*, 2018); more involvement in the family expenditure and household welfare (Bansal and Singh, 2020; Al-shami *et al.*, 2021); and better employment prospects (Agarwala *et al.*, 2022). The different features highlighted result in a strong sense of self-worth that enhances women's ability to leave or threat to exit an abusive relationship which may provide women with more bargaining power within the household (Ranganathan *et al.*, 2021). This way, women may easily negotiate better conditions for their entrepreneurial aspiration and needs (Ranganathan *et al.*, 2021; Lin and Tai, 2022), decide to invest more in their human capital development, through educational literacy for instance (Islam, 2020), and decide to access improved healthcare and medical treatment (Belwal *et al.*, 2012).

However, from an empirical perspective, results are not straightforward. It is reported that following the patriarchal system practices, women's economic empowerment does not necessarily translate into a better bargaining power within the household (Al-shami *et al.*, 2021). As they deviate prevailing societal norms, women are rather exposed to diverse forms of social exclusion, violence and man's controlling behavior (Huis *et al.*, 2019a, b; Nyarko, 2022).

In this sense, Huis *et al.* (2019a, b) argue that the change in the existing gender roles and norms is a joint responsibility both for men and women. It is then relevant for microfinance institutions aiming to increase women's bargaining power within their household to consider involving husbands in their interventions. Bulte *et al.* (2017) find that women inviting their husbands to microfinance training programs get more empowered compared to women coming without their husbands. Two reasons are possible. First, in husband-participated training programs, women learn more due to further discussions with their spouse. Second, inviting husbands to microfinance training sessions allows to mitigate potential intra-household tensions resulting from the women entrepreneurship involvement.

It is worth noting that a better economic position and bargaining power effectively achieved at the household level has a community perspective that manifests in the empowerment of women entrepreneurs on the sociocultural dimension. More practically, women feel comfortable to express their opinions and ideas in public affairs as well as to their husbands (Bercaw, 2012; Dutt and Sharma, 2016). Such a voice empowerment enables women to mark their presence in the community and to benefit from a better social dignity or status (Qazi and Rashidi, 2018; Islam, 2020), to experience more social interactions and a better physical mobility (Islam, 2020; Agarwala *et al.*, 2022), to access a large supportive network (Daher *et al.*, 2022), but also to show a higher ability to resist social norms (Amankwa *et al.*, 2021; Adhariani, 2022).

#### (1) Financial dimension

It is reported that women entrepreneurs often face greater difficulties raising funding capital, accessing credit and mobilizing formal savings (Agier and Szafarz, 2013; Tambunan, 2017). Based on our findings, these features refer to aspects of the financial dimension. In a way, lack of capital, low access to credit and formal savings are not isolated in nature but interrelated in the sense that women-related characteristics such as weak credit record, insufficient work history and inadequate savings negatively affect women's ability to raise capital (Panda, 2018). As regards credit access, women lack adequate collateral, since they are often denied

property ownership, which are generally perceived too risky and less profitable (Panda, 2018). In this perspective, women need savings to compensate for this lack of physical collaterals, but also to protect their income (Ekpe *et al.*, 2010). Besides, savings can be reinjected into the business as they allow to accumulate the necessary capital to launch economic activities, stimulate innovations, increase production and ultimately contribute to the growth of the business (Ekpe *et al.*, 2010; Jagadeesh, 2015).

In our database, studies are almost unanimous on the positive relationship between the microfinance sector and the financial empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Findings of our review establish that microfinance institutions allow women to be familiar with financial institutions (Vijaykumar and Sangeeth, 2021), access to formal credits (Rashid and Ejaz, 2019; Sarr and Fall, 2021) and access to formal savings (Abhinav *et al.*, 2019; Amankwa *et al.*, 2021).

Access to finance is a key contributing factor in the empowerment of women entrepreneurs, but the effective use of finance is much more relevant (van Dongen *et al.*, 2022). However, most of the empirical investigations in our database do not consider how social norms and more particularly the low women's intra-family bargaining power negatively affect the use of finance and consequently inhibit the female entrepreneurship development as well as the overall empowerment objective. Only in a very few cases, studies in our database extended the analysis from the mere access to the effective use of finance.

**3.3.2 Cognitive dimensions.** From a definition perspective, the cognitive dimensions indicate the extent to which women internalize and/or accept normative conceptions as legitimate social thoughts and actions (Baughn *et al.*, 2006; Naguib and Jamali, 2015). Fear of failure, risk-aversion, lack of self-esteem, low expectance and entrepreneurial self-efficacy are examples of cognitive mindsets resulting from internalized normative social embedment that inhibit women choices as regard to entrepreneurship (Addae, 2015; Siba, 2019; Reichert *et al.*, 2021). For instance, Chen *et al.* (1998, p. 296) argue that "there may be many women who shun entrepreneurial activities not because they actually lack necessary skills but because they believe they do."

At this level, the empowerment of women entrepreneurs is approached as a motivational construct referring to internal constraints such as the psychological state of women as regards to entrepreneurship (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Lee and Koh, 2001). In this perspective, the empowerment of women entrepreneurs is achieved when they believe they are able to successfully cope with the purpose they are empowered for (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Cornwall (2016) argues that no external intervention will empower women entrepreneurs unless it fosters a change in women's self-image.

Despite the relevance of cognitive dimensions in the empowering process of women entrepreneurs, our findings reveal that this category of dimensions has received less attention from the microfinance empirical literature aiming to assess the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Out of the three categories, it represents only 11.2% of occurrences in papers included in our database.

More practically, we identify three dimensions at this level: personal empowerment, future orientation and behavioral empowerment.

Findings from our review show a positive relationship between microfinance institutions and personal empowerment. As developed before, enhanced bargaining power, improved human capital and better sociocultural and economic position through microfinance interventions allow women entrepreneurs to experience a high sense of self-confidence (Khobarkar *et al.*, 2016; Esmail Zaei *et al.*, 2018), self-esteem (Nayak and Panigrahi, 2020; Al-shami *et al.*, 2021), self-efficacy (Srinivas *et al.*, 2010; Sarnquist *et al.*, 2021) and self-awareness (Karim, 2014).

In another study, Garcia *et al.* (2020) discuss a relatively understudied psychological concept in the microfinance literature, namely, the aspirational hope as a pathway to the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. The aspirational hope refers to desires developed by

individuals as they observe lives and achievements of people around them. The observed people are considered similar enough to provide benchmark for a specific standard of living. The difference between the current life and the one desired determines the future-oriented behavior. The narrower or the wider the gap between the current life and the one desired, the lower the efforts to act (Ray, 2006; Lybbert and Wydick, 2017; Garcia *et al.*, 2020). Lybbert and Wydick (2017) argue that interventions aiming to relieve internal constraints such as aspirational hope need to be more creative and less conventional than mainstream interventions. In their experimental study in Mexico, Lybbert and Wydick (2017) find a positive relationship between enhanced aspirational hope and the outcomes of women-owned enterprises. The experiment consisted of a three-component intervention. Participants watched a thirty-five-minute documentary featuring women telling their personal narrative on how they successfully use microcredit to expand their businesses. After watching the documentary, participants were offered a refrigerator magnet on which they wrote personal goals for weekly sales in their enterprise, weekly savings in the financial institution and a long-term goal. In the third position, during the weekly meetings, workshops were designed to discuss different pathways to goals set and formulated hope.

*3.3.3 Regulatory dimensions.* This third category comprising regulative dimensions encompasses codified laws, regulations and policies providing support to a specific behavior embedded in society (Busenitz *et al.*, 2000; Baughn *et al.*, 2006). From an entrepreneurial perspective, regulative considerations refer to formal initiatives affecting the launch, organization and management of new ventures by women (Naguib and Jamali, 2015).

In this sense, on the one hand, authors mention the raise of legal and political awareness as an important aspect of women empowerment dimensions. This implies the knowledge of political systems, legal and civil rights as well as the knowledge of existing support for exercising rights (Cheston and Kuhn, 2002; Addae, 2015). On the other hand, Malhotra and Schuler (2002) and Addae (2015) point out regulatory advocacy as an additional aspect of women empowerment dimensions to consider. It comprises mobilization for women's rights, advocacy for rights and legislation, and use of judicial and political systems to redress gender-biased rights.

Providing evidence of gender-biased rights as regards the female entrepreneurship, Carranza *et al.* (2018) report examples of countries (Nigeria, Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, etc.) with laws preventing women from working in certain jobs; providing husbands with legal rights to prevent their wives from working; civil laws preventing women from opening a bank account or signing any type of contract without the permission of their husband; laws denying property inheritance rights to women and so forth.

Based on our findings, among the three categories of dimensions, regulative dimensions receive the least attention from the microfinance literature with regards to the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. It represents only 2.7% of occurrences among dimensions identified in our review.

This finding aligns with that of Cheston and Kuhn (2002) highlighting that only in very few cases, the political and legal empowerment is an outcome of most microfinance organizations. Authors argue that it is fairly rare that microfinance organizations design services with the explicit aim to raise political and legal awareness among women entrepreneurs in such a way that a collective action and advocacy for change in favor of the female entrepreneurship deliberately take place (Hashemi *et al.*, 1996; Cheston and Kuhn, 2002). However, Cheston and Kuhn (2002) argue that even though most microfinance programs lack explicit services to empower women from a regulative perspective, an indirect impact is noticeable. By contributing to women economic empowerment, enhancing women's bargaining power, boosting personal empowerment such as self-confidence and developing women's human capital, microfinance organizations enable women entrepreneurs to step into politics, influence decisions and policies that affect their entrepreneurial aspiration and exercise their rights (Cheston and Kuhn, 2002; Addae, 2015).



Our review reports a positive relationship between microfinance institutions and the political and legal empowerment. Authors find an improvement in indicators like views about political leadership, awareness about the problems in the community, interest in contesting the elections (Janaki and Sesha Mohan, 2013; Subramanian *et al.*, 2013), enhancements in ability to become a member of any political party as well as its related leading committee, ability to vote by self-decision and own judgment (Subramanian *et al.*, 2013; Agarwala *et al.*, 2022) and awareness about and participation in government programs (Subramanian *et al.*, 2013; Khobarkar *et al.*, 2016; Bansal and Singh, 2020).

#### 4. Avenues for future research

One important finding of our review is the identification of research gaps in the current literature assessing the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the microfinance industry. Reported gaps arise from (a) a low diversity of assessed microfinance services, (b) the trend of assessing the empowerment of women entrepreneurs upon normative dimensions only, (c) the geographical coverage biased toward Asian countries and (d) a trend of methodological designs skewed toward quantitative methods. On this basis, the present section concentrates on making recommendations for future research directions. Following the approach adopted in previous reviews (Paul *et al.*, 2017; Dabić *et al.*, 2020; Mishra *et al.*, 2021), this sections aligns with the “theory, context and methodology” (TCM) framework.

##### 4.1 Future directions – theory

Findings of the present study provide insights for expanding theoretical elements around the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in two ways.

**-First-** In the current paper, we show that microcredit has received much consideration from researchers compared to other microfinance services. Almost half of the studies included in our database assess microcredit as the only channel through which women entrepreneurs are empowered (see Table 2). We argue that assessing the impact of microfinance institutions on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs based mainly on the provision of microcredit may result in biased findings. As demonstrated in our conceptual framework, women entrepreneurs face several constraints that may not be challenged by the sole provision of microcredit. Low managerial and entrepreneurial skills, fear of failure, risk-aversion, lack of self-esteem, low expectance and entrepreneurial self-efficacy are examples of aspects that may not be enhanced by a simple access to microcredit.

Services like microsavings, microinsurance as well as non-financial services may play a key role in the empowering process of women entrepreneurs. For instance, Hulme and Arun (2011) stress that low-income people, including women, value access to secure savings services more than access to credit. Taking the specific case of commitment savings, authors find that access to such a product has a positive impact on the empowerment of women through various mechanisms. (a) In restricting legal control to one individual, the commitment savings positively affect the bargaining power of women both legally and psychologically (Sanders and Schnabel, 2006; Ashraf *et al.*, 2010). (b) By committing withdrawals to a specific goal-date, goal-amount or goal-purpose, through commitment savings account, women establish norms within the household on the use of fund (Anderson and Baland, 2002; Ashraf *et al.*, 2010; Hansen *et al.*, 2021). (c) For marriages on the verge of breaking down, opening individual and separate saving account threatens household dynamics. Interactions with MFI's staff members may increase women's sense of external social support, but also increased savings give women an option for economic and financial independence outside the marriage in case of a breakdown (Ashraf *et al.*, 2010). These mechanisms are expected to have various empowering effects like enhancing the sense of

self-confidence, risk-taking ability, freedom for physical mobility and future orientation (Sanders and Schnabel, 2006; Ashraf *et al.*, 2010).

However, we argue that in case of non-commitment savings, the different empowering effects detailed earlier may benefit more women with control over their saving accounts than those without any control. In this perspective, studies should differentiate between access to provided services and their effective usage (van Dongen *et al.*, 2022). Empirical evidences report a big gap between access and usage of financial services, indicating the extent to which access does not automatically translate into usage (Morawczynski *et al.*, 2010). For instance, in highly patriarchal contexts, Hunt and Kasynathan (2001) report that women are compelled to take loans for their husbands, sons or sons-in-law, leaving them with the repayment burdens. Similarly, Garikipati (2008, 2012, 2013) indicates that in patriarchal societies, credit lent to women, rather than benefiting them, benefits more their husband and household assets over which they have no control. Furthermore, it increases women's dependency on men for loan repayment, which in extreme situations results in domestic dissension and violence.

**-Second-** As evidenced in Table 3, findings of the current study report trend of empowerment assessments biased toward normative dimensions. In all, 86.1% of papers in our review focus on normative dimensions versus 11.2% for cognitive dimensions and 2.7% for regulatory dimensions. It is generally assumed that by improving normative dimensions, cognitive and regulatory dimensions will simultaneously follow (Cheston and Kuhn, 2002; Addae, 2015; Bayissa *et al.*, 2018). However, more and more, authors argue that normative dimensions may be necessary but not sufficient by themselves to achieve the overall empowerment (Bayissa *et al.*, 2018). In this perspective, Malhotra *et al.* (2002, p. 11) stress that "it should not be assumed that if a development intervention promotes women's empowerment along a particular dimension that empowerment in other areas will necessarily follow. It may or may not."

In the perspective of expanding the theoretical elements around the multidimensionality of the concept of women empowerment, these ideas may be used as testable hypothesis for future research agenda. Such studies may provide new theoretical insights like shedding light on the understanding of how normative dimensions are central in the overall empowerment of women entrepreneur, to what extend are the different dimensions connected and so forth.

#### 4.2 Future directions – context

Findings of our paper revealed that studies empirically investigating the impact of microfinance organizations on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs are mostly country case studies. The huge knowledge we have on this issue mostly comes from conclusions of studies conducted in Asian countries, and more specifically from India (cf. Table 2). This denotes a lack of cultural diversity on the issue, which, in turn, may translate into a limitation on conclusions we draw on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. In this perspective, there is a need to extend the geographical coverage beyond Asian countries and investigate more African, South American or East European countries, to which less or none attention has been dedicated so far. In line with Duvendack *et al.* (2011), we postulate that extending investigations to different research contexts would shed light on conditions, circumstances and characteristics of women entrepreneurs to whom microfinance institutions have been or could be effective in terms of empowerment.

As conceptualized by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007), the notion of women empowerment is context-specific as it is rooted in sociocultural relationships. For Ojong *et al.* (2021), women entrepreneurs are embedded in their own social network as well as in the broader political, economic, social and cultural structures in different continents, countries and societies they



are based in. For instance, while in India (Abhinav *et al.*, 2019), Indonesia (Adhariani, 2022) and so forth bargaining power appeared to be a determinant dimension of women empowerment, in Central America, more precisely Guatemala, Carter (2002) reports that women felt empowered when their husband got involved in the empowering process, and not when merely achieving autonomy and decision-making power within the household. The same result is reported in Sri Lanka (Huis *et al.*, 2019a, b).

Moreover, as argued by Huis *et al.* (2017), the way women experience different dimensions of empowerment may differ according to whether context-specific cultures are more self or socially oriented. In individualist cultures, the way women experience different dimensions of empowerment may be less relational than in cultures with strong social bounds and social interdependences. For instance, in Africa, more specifically Tanzania, Dutt *et al.* (2016) find that women participating in cooperatively owned business achieved higher levels of empowerment compared to women who independently own their businesses. In cooperative-owned businesses, women experienced more agency and decision-making power in the household but also lower experience of intimate partner violence, enhanced personal empowerment like self-confidence, self-esteem and so forth than women in independently owned businesses.

#### 4.3 Future directions – methodology

Results summarized in Table 2 indicate that in the current literature, most empirical studies investigating the issue of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs adopt quantitative approaches. Compared to qualitative and mixed method designs, studies applying quantitative methods represent almost a two-third of studies included in our database.

Quantitative designs, and more precisely “randomized control trials,” have got recognition from several authors as a key contributing factor in understanding impacts in development economics (Guérin, 2019; Bouguen *et al.*, 2019; Cai *et al.*, 2020). However, Guérin *et al.* (2019) highlight one major limitation of such quantitative designs. Even if the latter allow to understand the effect of an external intervention on a specific target, they are criticized for failing to understand the complexity and diversity of rationales behind the observed effect. For instance, Guérin *et al.* (2019) argue that, from a behavioral perspective, what quantitative research designs interpret as women’s preference for the household welfare may reflect a gendered social and unequal role. Thus, the microfinance intervention through the provision of microcredit to women may reinforce this form of gender inequality rather than acting toward empowerment.

In this context, we postulate that studies with more diverse method designs may allow to have a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of microfinance in terms of empowerment on women entrepreneurs. For Hulme and Arun (2011), it is of a greater importance to wisely select the methodological design to apply in impact studies as results are dependent on the analytical methods chosen, whether qualitative or quantitative or simply the combination of the two.

More practically, Table 4 summarizes potential ideas for future studies.

### 5. Implications of the study

By investigating the issue involved in this study, the present paper contributes to the microfinance as well as the development and gender policies literature. Results of this paper inform researchers on dimensions of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs that should be enfolded in impact studies but also in managerial policies and strategies for microfinance organizations and related stakeholders. More practically, as presented in Table 5, findings of the present paper identify diverse implications for research that bridge the gap between theory and practice. Table 5 summarizes key implications derived from the current study.

			Dimensions of Women entrepreneurs' empowerment
Topics	Gaps identified	Future research questions	
<i>Future direction – theory</i>			
Services diversity	Need to expand analysis beyond microcredit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Compared to microcredit, to what extent do microsavings, microinsurance, remittances, . . . determine the empowerment of women entrepreneurs?</li><li>Between financial and non-financial services in microfinance, what matter for the empowerment of women entrepreneurs?</li><li>Could the integration of both financial and non-financial services contribute to achieve more empowerment for women entrepreneurs than a financial stand-alone microfinance program, and vice versa?</li><li>What relationship could be established between the different dimensions of women entrepreneurs' empowerment and various microfinance services?</li></ul>	
Multidimensionality of the concept “women empowerment”	Need for studies analyzing women empowerment beyond the normative dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Does empowerment in normative dimensions necessarily lead to empowerment in cognitive and regulative dimensions?</li><li>Which correlations can be established among the different dimensions of women entrepreneurs' empowerment?</li><li>Do different dimensions of empowerment equally matter for all women entrepreneurs?</li></ul>	
<i>Future direction – context</i>			
Geographical coverage	Need to expand context to African, South American and East European countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>How do different sociocultural settings affect the empowerment process of women entrepreneurs?</li><li>How to conciliate local conceptions of empowerment with international conventions that offer, sometimes, conflicting approaches of women empowerment?</li><li>How do microfinance institutions' characteristics in different contexts affect the achievement of women entrepreneurs' empowerment?</li></ul>	
<i>Future direction – methodology</i>			
Method designs applied	Need for qualitative and mixed-method designs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In what ways do the use of qualitative and mixed-method designs offer a more comprehensive insights compared to a single quantitative method?</li><li>How may methodological comparison and triangulation expand and strengthen the understanding of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the microfinance industry?</li></ul>	
Source(s): The authors			

Table 4. Potential ideas as avenues for future research

**Table 4.**  
Potential ideas as  
avenues for future  
research

## 6. Conclusion

The objective of the present paper consisted on providing a systematic overview of dimensions that need to be enfolded in microfinance policies and strategies aiming to empower women entrepreneurs as well as in related impact studies. Authors argue that unless the concept of women empowerment is clearly conceptualized and its processes clearly articulated, it will be difficult for concerned stakeholders to be confident that women are being empowered through their efforts (Malhotra and Schuler, 2002; Galiè *et al.*, 2019). Based on the PRISMA approach (Liberati *et al.*, 2009; Shlonsky *et al.*, 2011; Page *et al.*, 2021), this paper contributes toward this objective by systematically reviewing empirical studies

	Main findings (trends identified)	Implications
<b>Table 5.</b> Summary of key implications	Almost no review exists on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the microfinance industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reviews that focus on women entrepreneurs differentiating them from household women, women from the wage sector ... are needed. This will enable microfinance institutions that aim at empowering women to target and improve upon variables that effectively support the empowerment of a specific category of women</li></ul>
	Trends of microcredit-based studies and limited investigations on additional microfinance services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Microfinance managers will benefit from studies assessing a large bunch of microfinance services, including financial and non-financial services, in understanding<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Services effectively contributing to the empowerment of women entrepreneurs</li><li>✓ Mechanisms through which these services influence empowerment</li></ul></li></ul>
	Empowerment assessment skewed toward normative dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Studies providing more insights on cognitive and regulative dimensions are needed to complement normative dimensions in order to<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Have a broader view and better understanding of dimensions shaping the empowerment of women entrepreneurs</li><li>✓ Identify determinant dimensions for the empowerment of women entrepreneurs</li><li>✓ Report how interrelated the different dimensions are</li></ul></li></ul>
	Main focus on Asian countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Studies in diverse sociocultural contexts beyond Asian countries are needed to enable microfinance practitioners to design socially embedded policies, services and delivery schemes that are effective for the empowerment of women entrepreneurs</li></ul>
	Empirical analysis mainly based on quantitative designs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The use of qualitative and mixed-methods will provide microfinance managers, researchers, funders ... with better insights of the “why” and “how” identified effects are observed</li></ul>
<b>Source(s):</b> The authors		

examining the relationship between microfinance and the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. More specifically, we examined 87 studies searched from 6 databases in accordance with clear inclusion criteria detailed in [Table 1](#).

Adopting the institutional theory as the conceptual framework for our analysis, we argue that dimensions of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs are formed and conditioned by institutional logics. In this perspective, we distinguish three categories of dimensions, namely, the normative, cognitive and regulative dimensions. Our review highlights major trends in the microfinance research assessing the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. This allowed us to identify a number of research gaps giving directions for future studies. More practically, we suggest that future studies aiming to investigate the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the microfinance industry should fill research gaps regarding theory, context and method. We believe that findings and avenues for future studies derived from our review have relevant implications both for academicians and microfinance practitioners but also for any other stakeholder interested in this research topic.

Nevertheless, we recognize limitations likely to arise from choices made during the implementation of the PRISMA approach. First, we limited our analysis on peer-reviewed papers and systematically excluded studies published in other formats like conference papers, working papers, books and book chapters. This choice may lead to a selection bias. However, we argue that the large number (almost 100) of authors analyzed in this review counterbalance this shortcoming as many of them might have published results of their studies in other research formats. Moreover, by restricting our analysis to peer-reviewed papers, we ensured a

minimum level of quality to our database. This is common as choice in review papers aligning with the PRISMA approach (Hermes and Hudon, 2018; Squevin *et al.*, 2021). Second, the failure to cover all languages and the eligibility criteria mainly restricted to studies published only in English may lead to an additional potential bias. Still, as argued by Randour *et al.* (2020), this limit is compensated by the diversity of analyzed authors' characteristics like authors' origins. Besides, the large number of countries covered in our review (30 across three continents, namely, Asia, Africa and Latin America) allows to address this limit.

## References

- Abhinav, M.C., Lazarus, T.P., Santha, A.M. and Joseph, B. (2019), "Economic impact of SUBICSHA on SHG members of Kozhikode District", *Economic Affairs*, Vol. 64 No. 1, pp. 271-276, doi: [10.30954/0424-2513.1.2019.31](https://doi.org/10.30954/0424-2513.1.2019.31).
- Addae, J.A. (2015), "Effect of microfinance on women's empowerment: a review of the literature", *ADRRI Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 13 No. 8, 8, doi: [10.55058/adrriass.v13i8.197](https://doi.org/10.55058/adrriass.v13i8.197).
- Adhariani, D. (2022), "Microfinance and the role of accounting in supporting family-resilience-based women's empowerment", *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 366-384, doi: [10.46743/2160-3715/2022.4249](https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.4249).
- Afshan, G., Shahid, S. and Tunio, M.N. (2021), "Learning experiences of women entrepreneurs amidst COVID-19", *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 162-186, doi: [10.1108/IJGE-09-2020-0153](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-09-2020-0153).
- Agarwala, V., Maity, S. and Sahu, T.N. (2022), "Female entrepreneurship, employability and empowerment: impact of the mudra loan scheme", *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 27 No. 01, 2250005, doi: [10.1142/S1084946722500054](https://doi.org/10.1142/S1084946722500054).
- Agier, I. and Szafarz, A. (2013), "Microfinance and gender: is there a glass ceiling on loan size?", *World Development*, Vol. 42, pp. 165-181, doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.06.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.06.016).
- Ahmad, D., Mohanty, I., Irani, L., Mavalankar, D. and Niyonsenga, T. (2020), "Participation in microfinance based Self Help Groups in India: who becomes a member and for how long?", *PLOS ONE*, Vol. 15 No. 8, pp. 1-26, doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0237519](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0237519).
- Al Khayyal, A.O., Alshurideh, M., Al Kurdi, B. and Salloum, S.A. (2021), "Women empowerment in UAE: a systematic review", in Hassani, A.E., Slowik, A., Snásel, V., El-Deeb, H. and Tolba, F.M. (Eds), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Advanced Intelligent Systems and Informatics 2020*, pp. 742-755, Springer International Publishing, doi: [10.1007/978-3-030-58669-0\\_66](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-58669-0_66).
- Al-shami, S.A., Al Mamun, A., Rashid, N. and Al-shami, M. (2021), "Microcredit impact on socio-economic development and women empowerment in low-income countries: evidence from Yemen", *Sustainability*, Vol. 13 No. 16, 16, doi: [10.3390/su13169326](https://doi.org/10.3390/su13169326).
- Ali, I. and Hatta, Z.A. (2012), "Women's empowerment or Disempowerment through microfinance: evidence from Bangladesh", *Asian Social Work and Policy Review*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 111-121, doi: [10.1111/j.1753-1411.2012.00066.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-1411.2012.00066.x).
- Amankwa, M.O., Bawole, J.N., Mensah, J.K. and Mohale, T.G. (2021), "The politics of microcredit facilities as pro-poor intervention in solving gender inequality in Ghana: the political settlement perspective", *Global Social Welfare*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 287-299, doi: [10.1007/s40609-020-00178-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40609-020-00178-0).
- Anderson, S. and Baland, J.-M. (2002), "The economics of roscas and intrahousehold resource allocation", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 117 No. 3, pp. 963-995.
- Ashraf, N., Karlan, D. and Yin, W. (2010), "Female empowerment: impact of a commitment savings product in the Philippines", *World Development*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 333-344, doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.05.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.05.010).
- Bansal, S. and Singh, A.K. (2020), "Examining the social and entrepreneurial development of women through Microfinance in Indian context", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 407-421, doi: [10.1108/JMD-05-2019-0146](https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-05-2019-0146).

- Baughn, C.C., Chua, B.-L. and Neupert, K.E. (2006), "The normative context for women's participation in entrepreneurship: a multicountry study", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 30 No. 5, pp. 687-708.
- Bayissa, F.W., Smits, J. and Ruben, R. (2018), "The multidimensional nature of women's empowerment: beyond the economic approach", *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 661-690.
- Belwal, R., Tamiru, M. and Singh, G. (2012), "Microfinance and sustained economic improvement: women small-scale entrepreneurs in Ethiopia", *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 24 No. S1, pp. S84-S99, doi: [10.1002/jid.1782](https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1782).
- Bercaw, D.W. (2012), "Empowering women through microfinance: microfinance interventions in Ghana and South Africa", *International Forum of Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 23-36.
- Bouguen, A., Huang, Y., Kremer, M. and Miguel, E. (2019), "Using randomized controlled Trials to estimate long-run impacts in development economics", *Annual Review of Economics*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 523-561, doi: [10.1146/annurev-economics-080218-030333](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080218-030333).
- Bowen, D.D. and Hisrich, R.D. (1986), "The female entrepreneur: a career development perspective", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 393-407, doi: [10.5465/amr.1986.4283366](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1986.4283366).
- Brau, J. and Woller, G. (2004), "Microfinance: a comprehensive review of the existing literature", *The Journal of Entrepreneurial Finance*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 1-28, available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/jef/vol9/iss1/2>
- Brody, C., de Hoop, T., Vojtkova, M., Warnock, R., Dunbar, M., Murthy, P. and Dworkin, S.L. (2015), "Economic self-help group programs for improving women's empowerment: a systematic review", *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 1-182, doi: [10.4073/csr.2015.19](https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2015.19).
- Bui, H.T.M., Kuan, A. and Chu, T.T. (2018), "Female entrepreneurship in patriarchal society: motivation and challenges", *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 325-343, doi: [10.1080/08276331.2018.1435841](https://doi.org/10.1080/08276331.2018.1435841).
- Bulte, E., Lensink, R. and Vu, N. (2017), "Do gender and business trainings affect business outcomes? Experimental evidence from vietnam", *Management Science*, Vol. 63 No. 9, pp. 2885-2902, doi: [10.1287/mnsc.2016.2472](https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2016.2472).
- Busenitz, L.W., Gomez, C. and Spencer, J.W. (2000), "Country institutional profiles: unlocking entrepreneurial phenomena", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 43 No. 5, pp. 994-1003.
- Cai, S., Park, A. and Wang, S. (2020), "Microfinance can raise incomes: evidence from a randomized control trial in China", SSRN Scholarly Paper 3670721, doi: [10.2139/ssrn.3670721](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3670721).
- Carranza, E., Dhakal, C. and Love, I. (2018), "Female entrepreneurs", Job working paper (World Bank Group Jobs), Issue No. 20.
- Carter, M.W. (2002), "« Because he loves me': husbands » involvement in maternal health in Guatemala", *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 259-279.
- Chen, C.C., Greene, P.G. and Crick, A. (1998), "Does entrepreneurial self-efficacy distinguish entrepreneurs from managers?", *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 295-316, doi: [10.1016/S0883-9026\(97\)00029-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026(97)00029-3).
- Cheston, S. and Kuhn, L. (2002), "Empowering women through microfinance", *Draft, Opportunity International*, Vol. 64, pp. 1-64.
- Conger, J.A. and Kanungo, R.N. (1988), "The empowerment process: integrating theory and practice", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 471-482, doi: [10.5465/amr.1988.4306983](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1988.4306983).
- Cooper, C., Booth, A., Varley-Campbell, J., Britten, N. and Garside, R. (2018), "Defining the process to literature searching in systematic reviews: a literature review of guidance and supporting studies", *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, Vol. 18 No. 1, p. 85, doi: [10.1186/s12874-018-0545-3](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0545-3).
- Cornwall, A. (2016), "Women's empowerment: what works?", *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 342-359.

- 
- Cyril, S., Smith, B.J. and Renzaho, A.M.N. (2016), "Systematic review of empowerment measures in health promotion", *Health Promotion International*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 809-826, doi: [10.1093/heapro/dav059](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dav059).
- Dabić, M., Vlačić, B., Paul, J., Dana, L.-P., Sahasranamam, S. and Glinka, B. (2020), "Immigrant entrepreneurship: a review and research agenda", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 113, pp. 25-38, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.013).
- Daher, M., Rosati, A. and Jaramillo, A. (2022), "Saving as a path for female empowerment and entrepreneurship in rural Peru", *Progress in Development Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 32-55, doi: [10.1177/14649934211035219](https://doi.org/10.1177/14649934211035219).
- Das, K.K. and Dhancholia, S.K. (2016), "Women empowerment and economic development: a study on women self help group (WSHG) in Cuttack District of Odisha", *Splint International Journal of Professionals*, Vol. 3 No. 8, pp. 102-112.
- Davies, K.S. (2011), "Formulating the evidence based practice question: a review of the frameworks", *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 75-80.
- de la O Cordero, D. and Pulido, D.U. (2020), "Female entrepreneurial activity in Latin-America: a literature review within perspective of Institutional Theory", *Revista Academia and Negocios*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 9-27.
- Dutt, R. and Sharma, R.K. (2016), "An empirical investigation in the role of micro-finance institutions fostering financial inclusion for women in Haryana", *CLEAR International Journal of Research in Commerce and Management*, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 6-10.
- Dutt, A., Grabe, S. and Castro, M. (2016), "Exploring links between women's business ownership and empowerment among Maasai women in Tanzania", *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 363-386.
- Duvendack, M., Palmer-Jones, R., Copestake, J.G., Hooper, L., Loke, Y. and Rao, N. (2011), *What is the Evidence of the Impact of Microfinance on the Well-Being of Poor People?*, EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, London.
- Ekele, F., Zubairu, U., Ayorinde, A. and Abdul-Waheed, D. (2018), "Empowering Nigerian women entrepreneurs through microfinance", *Journal of Economics and Business Research*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 81-96.
- Ekpe, I., Mat, N. and Che Razak, R. (2010), "The effect of micro-finance factors on women entrepreneurs' performance in Nigeria: a conceptual framework", *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 1, pp. 255-263.
- Esmaeil Zaei, M., Kapil, P., Pelekh, O. and Teimoury Nasab, A. (2018), "Does micro-credit empower women through self-help groups? Evidence from Punjab, Northern India", *Societies*, Vol. 8 No. 3, doi: [10.3390/soc8030048](https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8030048).
- Ezeanya, C. (2014), "Indigenous knowledge, economic empowerment and entrepreneurship in Rwanda: the Girinka approach", *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 6 No. 10, pp. 241-263.
- Fawcett, S.E., Waller, M.A., Miller, J.W., Schwieterman, M.A., Hazen, B.T. and Overstreet, R.E. (2014), "A trail guide to publishing success: tips on writing influential conceptual, qualitative, and survey research", *Journal of Business Logistics*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 1-16, doi: [10.1111/jbl.12039](https://doi.org/10.1111/jbl.12039).
- Galiè, A., Teufel, N., Korir, L., Baltenweck, I., Webb Girard, A., Dominguez-Salas, P. and Yount, K.M. (2019), "The women's empowerment in livestock index", *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 142 No. 2, pp. 799-825, doi: [10.1007/s11205-018-1934-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-018-1934-z).
- Garcia, A., Lensink, R. and Voors, M. (2020), "Does microcredit increase aspirational hope? Evidence from a group lending scheme in Sierra Leone", *World Development*, Vol. 128, 104861, doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104861](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104861).
- Garikipati, S. (2008), "The impact of lending to women on household vulnerability and women's empowerment: evidence from India", *World Development*, Vol. 36 No. 12, pp. 2620-2642, doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.11.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.11.008).



- Garikipati, S. (2012), "Microcredit and women's empowerment: through the lens of time-use data from rural India", *Development and Change*, Vol. 43 No. 3, pp. 719-750, doi: [10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01780.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01780.x).
- Garikipati, S. (2013), "Microcredit and women's empowerment: have we been looking at the wrong indicators?", *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 41 No. sup1, pp. S53-S75, doi: [10.1080/13600818.2012.744387](https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2012.744387).
- Ghosh, P.K., Ghosh, S.K. and Chowdhury, S. (2018), "Factors hindering women entrepreneurs' access to institutional finance- an empirical study", *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 279-291, doi: [10.1080/08276331.2017.1388952](https://doi.org/10.1080/08276331.2017.1388952).
- Gichuru, W., Ojha, S., Smith, S., Smyth, A.R. and Szatkowski, L. (2019), "Is microfinance associated with changes in women's well-being and children's nutrition? A systematic review and meta-analysis", *BMJ Open*, Vol. 9 No. 1, e023658.
- Guérin, I. (2019), "Breaking away from normative approaches to financial practices Isabelle Guérin, Solène Morvant-Roux and Jean-Michel Servet", pp. 39-49, doi: [10.4337/9781788114226.00011](https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788114226.00011).
- Guérin, I., Morvant-Roux, S. and Servet, J.-M. (2019), "Breaking away from ready-made remedies and normative approaches to financial practices", in *A Research Agenda for Financial Inclusion and Microfinance*, Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Gutiérrez-Nieto, B. and Serrano-Cinca, C. (2019), "20 years of research in microfinance: an information management approach", *International Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 47, pp. 183-197, doi: [10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.01.001).
- Haile, H.B., Osman, I., Shuib, R. and Oon, S.W. (2015), "Is there a convergence or Divergence between feminist empowerment and microfinance institutions' success indicators?", *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 27 No. 7, pp. 1042-1057, doi: [10.1002/jid.3041](https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3041).
- Hansen, N., Huis, M.A. and Lensink, R. (2021), "Microfinance services and women's empowerment", in San-Jose, L., Retolaza, J.L. and van Liedekerke, L. (Eds.), *Handbook on Ethics in Finance*, pp. 161-182, Springer International Publishing, doi: [10.1007/978-3-030-29371-0\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29371-0_4).
- Hashemi, S.M., Schuler, S.R. and Riley, A.P. (1996), "Rural credit programs and women's empowerment in Bangladesh", *World Development*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 635-653, doi: [10.1016/0305-750X\(95\)00159-A](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(95)00159-A).
- Herbert, R.J., Gagnon, A.J., Rennick, J.E. and O'Loughlin, J.L. (2009), "A systematic review of questionnaires measuring health-related empowerment", *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 107-132, doi: [10.1891/1541-6577.23.2.107](https://doi.org/10.1891/1541-6577.23.2.107).
- Hermes, N. and Hudon, M. (2018), "Determinants of the performance of microfinance institutions: a systematic review", *Journal of Economic Surveys*, Vol. 32 No. 5, pp. 1483-1513, doi: [10.1111/joes.12290](https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.12290).
- Hudon, M. and Sandberg, J. (2013), "The ethical crisis in microfinance: issues, findings, and implications", *Business Ethics Quarterly*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 561-589.
- Huis, M.A., Hansen, N., Otten, S. and Lensink, R. (2017), "A three-dimensional model of women's empowerment: implications in the field of microfinance and future directions", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 8, p. 1678.
- Huis, M.A., Hansen, N., Otten, S. and Lensink, R. (2019a), "The impact of husbands' involvement in goal-setting training on women's empowerment: first evidence from an intervention among female microfinance borrowers in Sri Lanka", *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 336-351, doi: [10.1002/casp.2404](https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2404).
- Huis, M., Lensink, R., Vu, N. and Hansen, N. (2019b), "Impacts of the gender and entrepreneurship together ahead (GET ahead) training on empowerment of female microfinance borrowers in Northern vietnam", *World Development*, Vol. 120, pp. 46-61, doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.04.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.04.001).
- Hulme, D. and Arun, T. (2011), "What's wrong and right with microfinance", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46 No. 48, pp. 23-26.
- Hunt, J. and Kasynathan, N. (2001), "Pathways to empowerment? Reflections on microfinance and transformation in gender relations in South Asia", *Gender and Development*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 42-52, doi: [10.1080/13552070127738](https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070127738).

- 
- Ibrahim, S. and Alkire, S. (2007), "Agency and empowerment: a proposal for internationally comparable indicators", *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 379-403, doi: [10.1080/13600810701701897](https://doi.org/10.1080/13600810701701897).
- Islam, M.S. (2020), "Role of islamic microfinance in women's empowerment: evidence from rural development scheme of islami bank Bangladesh limited", *ISRA International Journal of Islamic Finance*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 26-45, doi: [10.1108/IJIF-11-2019-0174](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJIF-11-2019-0174).
- Jagadeesh, D. (2015), "The impact of savings in economic growth: an empirical study based on Botswana", *International Journal of Research in Business Studies and Management*, Vol. 2 No. 9, pp. 10-21.
- Janaki, T.V. and Sesha Mohan, V.V. (2013), "Women empowerment and SHG federations: different pathways for micro-entrepreneurs and others", *IUP Journal of Entrepreneurship Development*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 6-34.
- Karim, L. (2014), "Analyzing women's empowerment: microfinance and garment labor in Bangladesh", *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 153-166.
- Kaushal, S.L. and Sharma, N. (2020), "Women empowerment through self help groups in HP: an analysis", *Productivity*, Vol. 61 No. 2, pp. 125-136, doi: [10.32381/PROD.2020.61.02.2](https://doi.org/10.32381/PROD.2020.61.02.2).
- Khan, R.E.A. and Noreen, S. (2012), "Microfinance and women empowerment: a case study of District Bahawalpur (Pakistan)", *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 6 No. 12, pp. 4514-4521.
- Khobarkar, V., Ingole, D.N. and Nage, G.V. (2016), "Performance of self-help groups in micro finance", *Economic Affairs*, Vol. 61 No. 4, pp. 608-613, 609, doi: [10.5958/0976-4666.2016.00075.9](https://doi.org/10.5958/0976-4666.2016.00075.9).
- Kusugal, P.S. (2020), "Women empowerment through self-help groups: an empirical study in haveri District of Karnataka", *Women Empowerment*, Vol. 84, pp. 84-89.
- Lalitha, J. and Ramar, P. (2022), "Women self HELP group members in India-present scenario and challenges", *International Journal of Management*, Vol. 11 No. 12, pp. 4016-4031.
- Lee, M. and Koh, J. (2001), "Is empowerment really a new concept?", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 684-695, doi: [10.1080/713769649](https://doi.org/10.1080/713769649).
- Liberati, A., Altman, D.G., Tetzlaff, J., Mulrow, C., Gøtzsche, P.C., Ioannidis, J.P.A., Clarke, M., Devereaux, P.J., Kleijnen, J. and Moher, D. (2009), "The PRISMA statement for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses of studies that evaluate health care interventions: explanation and elaboration", *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, Vol. 62 No. 10, pp. e1-e34, doi: [10.1016/j.jclinepi.2009.06.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2009.06.006).
- Lin, T.-C. and Tai, M. (2022), "Intra-family relationship and female entrepreneurship", (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3692274) doi: [10.2139/ssrn.3692274](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3692274).
- Lybbert, T.J. and Wydick, B. (2017), "Hope as aspirations, agency, and pathways: poverty dynamics and microfinance in Oaxaca, Mexico", in *The Economics of Poverty Traps*, University of Chicago Press, pp. 153-177.
- MacInnis, D.J. (2011), "A framework for conceptual contributions in marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 75 No. 4, pp. 136-154, doi: [10.1509/jmkg.75.4.136](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.75.4.136).
- Mahmud, S., Shah, N.M. and Becker, S. (2012), "Measurement of women's empowerment in rural Bangladesh", *World Development*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 610-619, doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2011.08.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2011.08.003).
- Malhotra, A. and Schuler, S. (2002), "Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development", *Measuring Empowerment: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 71-88.
- Malhotra, A., Schuler, S.R. and Boender, C. (2002), "Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development", Background paper prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives, 28.
- Manolova, T.S., Brush, C.G. and Edelman, L.F. (2008), "What do women entrepreneurs want?", *Strategic Change*, Vol. 17 Nos 3-4, pp. 69-82, doi: [10.1002/jsc.817](https://doi.org/10.1002/jsc.817).



- 
- Marcus, R. (2018), "The norms factor: recent research on gender, social norms, and women's economic empowerment", *International Development Research Centre*.
- Mersland, R. and Strøm, R.Ø. (2012), "The past and future of innovations in microfinance", *The Oxford Handbook of Entrepreneurial Finance*, pp. 859-891.
- Mezgebo, G.K., Ymesel, T. and Tegegne, G. (2017), "Do micro and small business enterprises economically empower women in developing countries? Evidences from Mekelle city, Tigray, Ethiopia", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 30 No. 5, pp. 767-778, doi: [10.1108/JOCM-12-2016-0257](https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-12-2016-0257).
- Milgram, B.L. (2005), "From margin to mainstream: microfinance, women's work and social change in the Philippines", *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 341-383.
- Mirchandani, K. (1999), "Feminist insight on gendered work: new directions in research on women and entrepreneurship", *Gender, Work and Organization*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 224-235, doi: [10.1111/1468-0432.00085](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00085).
- Mishra, R., Singh, R.K. and Koles, B. (2021), "Consumer decision-making in omnichannel retailing: literature review and future research agenda", *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 147-174, doi: [10.1111/ijcs.12617](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12617).
- Morawczynski, O., Hutchful, D., Cutrell, E. and Rangaswamy, N. (2010), "The bank account is not enough: examining strategies for financial inclusion in India", *Proceedings of the 4th ACM/IEEE International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies and Development*, pp. 1-11, doi: [10.1145/2369220.2369242](https://doi.org/10.1145/2369220.2369242).
- Moyson, S., Raaphorst, N., Groeneveld, S. and Van de Walle, S. (2018), "Organizational socialization in public administration research: a systematic review and directions for future research", *The American Review of Public Administration*, Vol. 48 No. 6, pp. 610-627, doi: [10.1177/0275074017696160](https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074017696160).
- Naguib, R. and Jamali, D. (2015), "Female entrepreneurship in the UAE: a multi-level integrative lens", *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 135-161.
- Nahar, S. and Mengo, C.W. (2022), "Measuring women's empowerment in developing countries: a systematic review", *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 322-333.
- Nayak, A.K. and Panigrahi, P.K. (2020), "Participation in self-help groups and empowerment of women: a structural model analysis", *The Journal of Developing Areas*, Vol. 54 No. 1, doi: [10.1353/jda.2020.0001](https://doi.org/10.1353/jda.2020.0001).
- Nessa, T., Ali, J. and Abdul-Hakim, R. (2012), "The impact of microcredit program on women empowerment: evidence from Bangladesh", *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 3 No. 9, pp. 11-20.
- Newman, A., Schwarz, S. and Ahlstrom, D. (2017), "Microfinance and entrepreneurship: an introduction", *International Small Business Journal*, Vol. 35 No. 7, pp. 787-792, doi: [10.1177/0266242617719314](https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242617719314).
- Nilakantan, R., Datta, S.C., Sinha, P. and Datta, S.K. (2013), "The impact of microfinance on women empowerment: evidence from Eastern India", *International Journal of Development and Conflict*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 27-40.
- Nilakantan, R., Iyengar, D., Datta, S.K. and Rao, S. (2021), "On ethical violations in microfinance backed small businesses: family and household welfare", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 172 No. 4, pp. 785-802, doi: [10.1007/s10551-020-04499-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04499-0).
- Noor, S., Isa, F.M. and Nor, L.M. (2021), "Women empowerment through women entrepreneurship: a comparison between women entrepreneurs and fulltime housewife in Pakistan", *Iranian Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 347-363, doi: [10.22059/ijms.2020.302633.674074](https://doi.org/10.22059/ijms.2020.302633.674074).
- Nyarko, S.A. (2022), "Gender discrimination and lending to women: the moderating effect of an international founder", *International Business Review*, Vol. 31 No. 4, 101973, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2022.101973](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2022.101973).

- 
- Ojong, N., Simba, A. and Dana, L.-P. (2021), "Female entrepreneurship in Africa: a review, trends, and future research directions", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 132, pp. 233-248, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.032](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.032).
- O'Malley, T.L. and Burke, J.G. (2017), "A systematic review of microfinance and women's health literature: directions for future research", *Global Public Health*, Vol. 12 No. 11, pp. 1433-1460.
- Page, M.J., Moher, D., Bossuyt, P.M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T.C., Mulrow, C.D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J.M., Akl, E.A., Brennan, S.E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J.M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M.M., Li, T., Loder, E.W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., McGuinness, L.A., Stewart, L.A., James, T., Andrea, C.T., Vivian, A.W., Penny, W. and McKenzie, J.E. (2021), "PRISMA 2020 explanation and elaboration: updated guidance and exemplars for reporting systematic reviews", *BMJ*, Vol. 372, p. n160, doi: [10.1136/bmj.n160](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n160).
- Panda, S. (2018), "Constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in developing countries: review and ranking", *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 315-331, doi: [10.1108/GM-01-2017-0003](https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-01-2017-0003).
- Parwez, S. and Patel, R. (2022), "Augmenting women empowerment: a systematic literature review on microfinance-led developmental interventions", *Journal of Global Responsibility*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 338-360.
- Paul, J., Parthasarathy, S. and Gupta, P. (2017), "Exporting challenges of SMEs: a review and future research agenda", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 52 No. 3, pp. 327-342, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2017.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2017.01.003).
- Priyanka, T., Sudha, B. and Surya, M. (2019), "Evaluation of women empowerment through self HELP groups", *Science, Technology and Development*, Vol. VIII XII, pp. 481-489.
- Qazi, S.W. and Rashidi, M.Z. (2018), "Nurturing women empowerment? A phenomenological study of the linkages between women, micro entrepreneurship and access to microcredit", *Journal of Management Sciences*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 3-21.
- Randour, F., Perrez, J. and Reuchamps, M. (2020), "Twenty years of research on political discourse: a systematic review and directions for future research", *Discourse and Society*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 428-443, doi: [10.1177/0957926520903526](https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926520903526).
- Ranganathan, M., Knight, L., Abramsky, T., Muvhango, L., Polzer Ngwato, T., Mbobelatsi, M., Ferrari, G., Watts, C. and Stöckl, H. (2021), "Associations between women's economic and social empowerment and intimate partner violence: findings from a microfinance plus program in rural North west province, South Africa", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 36 Nos 15-16, pp. 7747-7775, doi: [10.1177/0886260519836952](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519836952).
- Rashid, A.G. and Ejaz, L. (2019), "Interest free micro credit loans: Pakistani female entrepreneurs", *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 860-873, doi: [10.1108/JIMA-04-2018-0071](https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-04-2018-0071).
- Ray, D. (2006), "Aspirations, poverty, and economic change", *Understanding Poverty*, Vol. 1, pp. 409-421.
- Reichert, P. (2018), "A meta-analysis examining the nature of trade-offs in microfinance", *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 46 No. 3, pp. 430-452, doi: [10.1080/13600818.2018.1427223](https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2018.1427223).
- Reichert, P., Bird, M.D. and Farber, V. (2021), "Gender and entrepreneurial propensity: risk-taking and prosocial preferences in labour market entry decisions", *Social Enterprise Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 111-139, doi: [10.1108/SEJ-07-2020-0050](https://doi.org/10.1108/SEJ-07-2020-0050).
- Riche, C., Aubin, D. and Moyson, S. (2021), "Too much of a good thing? A systematic review about the conditions of learning in governance networks", *European Policy Analysis*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 147-164, doi: [10.1002/epa2.1080](https://doi.org/10.1002/epa2.1080).
- Sabbe, M., Moyson, S. and Schiffino, N. (2021a), "Citizen-agency versus state-agency at the frontline in prisons and probation services: a systematic literature review", *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 55 No. 1, pp. 206-225, doi: [10.1111/spol.12633](https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12633).

- Sabbe, M., Schiffino, N. and Moyson, S. (2021b), "Walking on thin ice: how and why frontline officers cope with managerialism, accountability, and risk in probation services", *Administration and Society*, Vol. 53 No. 5, pp. 760-786, doi: [10.1177/0095399720970899](https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399720970899).
- Salia, S., Hussain, J., Tingbani, I. and Kolade, O. (2017), "Is women empowerment a zero sum game? Unintended consequences of microfinance for women's empowerment in Ghana", *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 273-289, doi: [10.1108/IJEBR-04-2017-0114](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-04-2017-0114).
- Sanders, C.K. and Schnabel, M. (2006), "Organizing for economic empowerment of battered women: women's savings accounts", *Journal of Community Practice*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 47-68.
- Santoso, M.V., Kerr, R.B., Hoddinott, J., Garigipati, P., Olmos, S. and Young, S.L. (2019), "Role of women's empowerment in child nutrition outcomes: a systematic review", *Advances in Nutrition*, Vol. 10 No. 6, pp. 1138-1151, doi: [10.1093/advances/nmz056](https://doi.org/10.1093/advances/nmz056).
- Sarnquist, C.C., Ouma, L., Lang'at, N., Lubanga, C., Sinclair, J., Baiocchi, M.T. and Cornfield, D.N. (2021), "The effect of combining business training, microfinance, and support group participation on economic status and intimate partner violence in an unplanned settlement of Nairobi, Kenya", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 36 Nos 7-8, pp. 3903-3921, doi: [10.1177/0886260518779067](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518779067).
- Sarr, N.F. and Fall, M. (2021), "Les fruits tiennent-ils les promesses des fleurs? Une analyse des pratiques de microcrédit de l'UM-Pamecas au Sénégal", *RECMA*, Vol. 362 No. 4, pp. 117-130, doi: [10.3917/recma.362.0117](https://doi.org/10.3917/recma.362.0117).
- Shlonsky, A., Noonan, E., Littell, J.H. and Montgomery, P. (2011), "The role of systematic reviews and the campbell collaboration in the realization of evidence-informed practice", *Clinical Social Work Journal*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 362-368, doi: [10.1007/s10615-010-0307-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-010-0307-0).
- Siba, E. (2019), "Empowering women entrepreneurs in developing countries: why current programs fall short", *Africa growth initiative*.
- Singh, P. (2013), "Socialization and Nurturing entrepreneurship among Indian women", *Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management*, Vol. 6 No. 10, 10, doi: [10.17010/pijom/2013/v6i10/60036](https://doi.org/10.17010/pijom/2013/v6i10/60036).
- Squevin, P., Aubin, D., Montpetit, É. and Moyson, S. (2021), "Closer than they look at first glance: a systematic review and a research agenda regarding measurement practices for policy learning", *International Review of Public Policy*, Vol. 3 No. 2, 2, doi: [10.4000/irpp.2083](https://doi.org/10.4000/irpp.2083).
- Srinivas, S., Asgar, A. and Padmaja, K. (2010), "Leveraging livelihoods for muslim women in hyderabad role of SHGs", *Indian Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 71 No. 1, pp. 103-115.
- Submitter, G.J., Sherwani, F.K., Shaikh, S.Z. and Shaikh, Z.Z. (2021), "Interest-free microfinance arrangements and its impact on the livelihood of women in India", (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3942433), available at: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3942433>
- Subramanian, S., Rajan, A.S. and Gowri, P.A. (2013), "Social change and development of women through SHGs—an empirical research", *Journal of Marketing and Communication*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 15-36.
- Sullivan, D.M. and Meek, W.R. (2012), "Gender and entrepreneurship: a review and process model", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 27 No. 5, pp. 428-458, doi: [10.1108/02683941211235373](https://doi.org/10.1108/02683941211235373).
- Sultana, H., Jamal, M. and Bazlullah, D. (2017), "Impact of microfinance on women empowerment through poverty alleviation: an assessment OF SOCIO- economic conditions in Chennai city of Tamil NADU", *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 175-183.
- Swain, R.B. and Wallentin, F.Y. (2009), "Does microfinance empower women? Evidence from self-help groups in India", *International Review of Applied Economics*, Vol. 23 No. 5, pp. 541-556, doi: [10.1080/02692170903007540](https://doi.org/10.1080/02692170903007540).
- Tambunan, T. (2009), "Women entrepreneurship in Asian developing countries: their development and main constraints", *Journal of Development and Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 027-040.

- 
- Tambunan, T.T.H. (2017), "Women entrepreneurs in MSEs in Indonesia: their motivations and main constraints", *JWEE*, Vols 1-2, pp. 56-86.
- Trivedi, S.K. and Petkova, A.P. (2021), "Women entrepreneur journeys from poverty to emancipation", *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 358-385.
- van Dongen, E., Ahmad, S., Lensink, R. and Mueller, A. (2022), "Trapped by the lack of control over savings: evidence from Pakistan", *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 13, 867841, doi: [10.3389/fpsyg.2022.867841](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.867841).
- Van Rooyen, C., Stewart, R. and De Wet, T. (2012), "The impact of microfinance in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review of the evidence", *World Development*, Vol. 40 No. 11, pp. 2249-2262.
- Vijaykumar, P. and Sangeeth, S. (2021), "The impact of Kudumbashree scheme on the marginalized women with reference to Alappuzha District, Kerala", *IUP Journal of Entrepreneurship Development*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 7-23.
- Xheneti, M., Madden, A. and Thapa Karki, S. (2019), "Value of formalization for women entrepreneurs in developing contexts: a review and research agenda", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 3-23, doi: [10.1111/ijmr.12172](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12172).
- Yadav, V. and Unni, J. (2016), "Women entrepreneurship: research review and future directions", *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, Vol. 6 No. 1, p. 12, doi: [10.1186/s40497-016-0055-x](https://doi.org/10.1186/s40497-016-0055-x).
- Yazıcı Cörüt, G. and Cörüt, İ. (2022), "The neo-liberal conception of empowerment and its limits: micro-credit experiences of self-employed women in the bazaars of Bishkek", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 118-137, doi: [10.1080/02634937.2021.1969897](https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2021.1969897).
- Zafarullah, H. and Nawaz, F. (2019), "Pathways to women's empowerment in Bangladesh: employment and microfinance as interventions", *Asian Education and Development Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 387-404, doi: [10.1108/AEDS-11-2018-0168](https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-11-2018-0168).
- Zerwas, C.S. (2019), *Work-Life Balance and Women's Entrepreneurship*, Springer, Cham.

(The Appendix follows overleaf)

	Years	Total	Geographical coverage	Methods applied		Mixed methods
				Qualitative methods	Quantitative methods	
	2001	2	Bangladesh (1); Philippines (1)	Grounded theory (1); participatory action research (1)		
	2004	1	South Africa (1)			Focus group discussions and descriptive statistics analysis (1)
	2005	1	Philippines (1)	Participatory action research (1)		
	2006	2	South Africa (1); Sudan (1)	Focus group discussions analysis (1)		Semi-structured interviews and inferential statistics analysis (1)
	2009	2	India (1); Tanzania (1)		Descriptive statistics analysis (2)	
	2010	3	Uganda (1); Indonesia (1); India (1)	Participatory action research (2)	randomized control trial (1)	
	2011	3	Kenya (1); Gabon (1); Mexico (1)		Randomized control trial (1); difference-in-difference estimate (1)	In-depth interviews and descriptive statistics analysis (1)
	2012	4	Ethiopia (1); India (2); regional coverage: Ghana and South Africa (1)		Linear regression (1); inferential statistics (1); randomized control trial (1)	Focus group discussions and descriptive statistics analysis (1)
	2013	7	Brazil (1); India (5); Regional: Middle East (1)	Thematic analysis (1)	Difference-in-difference estimate (1); descriptive statistics analysis 3); structural equation modeling (1); randomized control trial (1)	
	2014	5	India (2); Bangladesh (1); Colombia (1); Kenya (1)	Participatory action research (1)	Descriptive statistics analysis (3); ex post research analysis (1)	
						(continued)

**Table A1.**  
Detailed [Table 2](#),  
characteristics of  
reviewed papers

						Dimensions of Women entrepreneurs' empowerment
Years	Total	Geographical coverage	Methods applied		Mixed methods	
			Qualitative methods	Quantitative methods		
2015	5	India (3); Malaysia (2)	Focus group discussions analysis (2)	Inferential statistics analysis (1); logit regression (1); multinomial logit regression (1)		
2016	6	India (4); Vietnam (1); Malaysia (1)		Ordinary least squares (1); randomized control trial (1); inferential statistics analysis (1); descriptive statistics analysis (1); simple tabular analysis and standardized cost concept (1); quasi-experimental method (1)		
2017	11	Bangladesh (1); Malaysia (2); India (2); Regional coverage: Ghana, Malawi and Uganda (1); Sudan (1); Ghana (2); Mexico (1); Nigeria (1)	Ethnography (1); Grounded theory (1)	Cross-sectional analysis (1); inferential statistics analysis (2); randomized control trial (1); descriptive statistics analysis (3); ordinary least squares (1)	Thematic analysis and hierarchical regression, triadic closure (1)	
2018	5	Nigeria (1); Pakistan (2); India (2)	Thematic analysis (1); hermeneutics phenomenological philosophy (1)	Inferential statistics analysis (1); logistic regression (1); linear regression (1)		
2019	11	Vietnam (1); India (3); Pakistan (4); South Africa (1); Bangladesh (1); Sri Lanka (1)	In-depth interviews analysis (1); interpretive- evaluative inquiry (1)	Factor analysis (1); structural equation modeling (1); logistic regression (3); inferential statistics analysis (2); cross- sectional analysis (1)	Focus group discussions and randomized control trial (1)	
2020	5	Sierra Leone (1); Tanzania (1); India (2); Uganda (1)		Matching approach with inverse probability of treatment weights [IPTW] and a cross-sectional difference-in-difference approach (1); ordinary least squares (1); partial least squares structural equation modeling [PLS-SEM] (1); descriptive statistics analysis (1); structural equation modeling (1)		
2021	8	India (3); Senegal (1); Kenya (1); Ghana (1); Yemen (1); Bangladesh (1)	Anthropological perspective (1); political settlement theory (1)	Conditional mixed process (1); descriptive statistics analysis (1); exploratory and cross-sectional analysis (1); randomized control trial (1); propensity score matching (1); logit regression (1)		
(continued)						Table A1.

			Geographical coverage	Methods applied		Mixed methods
	Years	Total		Qualitative methods	Quantitative methods	
	2022	6	India (2); Peru (1); Indonesia (1); Kyrgyzstan (1); Chili (1)	Descriptive and relational design (1); in-depth semi-structured interviews analysis (1); participatory action research (1); thematic analysis (1)	Ordered logistic regression (1); difference-in-difference estimate (1)	
	Total	87		22	59	6
Table A1.	Freq	1		0.25	0.68	0.07

**Corresponding author**

Nzanzu Y'Ise Kivalya can be contacted at: [nzanzukivalya@gmail.com](mailto:nzanzukivalya@gmail.com)

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:  
[www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)  
Or contact us for further details: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)