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Entrepreneurial Intentions and Gender Inequality in MENA (GEM 2019)

RAWIA FUAD NAOUM[1] (Corresponding author) and THI THUY VU[2]

[1]PhD candidate, University of Pécs Faculty of Business and Economics 7622 Pécs, Rákóczi út 80, Hungary, email: rawiahnaoum@gmail.com
[2]PhD candidate, University of Pécs Faculty of Business and Economics7622 Pécs, Rákóczi út 80, Hungary

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the interplay between gender inequality and entrepreneurial intentions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region using 2019 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data and the Gender Inequality Index (GII). The research investigates how networks, perceived opportunities, knowledge/skills, fear of failure, and community perceptions influence entrepreneurial intentions, with gender inequality as a moderator. Employing binary logistic regression on 19,119 respondents across nine MENA countries, the study tests six hypotheses to assess direct and gendered moderating effects. Results reveal that networks, knowledge/skills, courage, and favorable community perceptions significantly drive entrepreneurial intentions for both genders, whereas perceived opportunities lack direct influence. Notably, gender inequality exhibits paradoxical effects: while it does not directly suppress women's intentions, it negatively moderates their network efficacy while amplifying their perceived opportunities. The study challenges simplistic narratives of gender inequality as uniformly detrimental, illustrating its dual role as both a structural barrier and an inadvertent motivator for women. Methodological limitations, including reliance on cross-sectional data, highlight opportunities for future longitudinal and qualitative research. This work advances understanding of gendered entrepreneurship in MENA, offering pathways to promote inclusive economic participation.

INTRODUCTION

The creation of new businesses has a significant influence on economic growth. It is pivotal for developing regions and nations as it creates employment opportunities, increases productivity, diversifies markets, improves social welfare, and promotes economic development. Therefore, policymakers worldwide encourage it to aid economic growth (Abdinnour & Adeniji, 2023; Gu et al., 2021). In the context of the MENA region, Alkasmi et al. (2018) stated in their report that the region is booming as a hub of commercial innovation and entrepreneurial activities. However, the region had one of the highest youth populations. Meanwhile, youth unemployment is also among the highest rates, according to the World Bank (2022). This unemployment rate, in addition to other factors such as the youth population, digital economy, and technology, eases the way for youth to start their businesses (Alkasmi et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2024)

However, according to GEM-Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023), women are still behind in the MENA region's entrepreneurial activities compared to men; for instance, the male percentage of established startups is 8% compared to the female percentage of 4.9%. The report also shows that women have

one of the highest percentages among other regions in terms of “startup or entrepreneurial intention," which is 31.4%, compared to men, which is around 37.9%. As the above percentages show, activity rates generally decline as one moves from startup intentions to established business. This highlights the urgency of understanding early-stage potential entrepreneurs' intentions, which is paramount for practitioners (Touissate & Azdimousa, 2021). Esfandiar et al. (2019, p.173) state, “To ensure a continuous supply of entrepreneurs, academics and practitioners need to know how early-stage potential entrepreneurs' intentions originate as well as what factors stimulate entrepreneurship. Therefore, according to Krueger et al. (2009), entrepreneurial intention is one of the best indicators that could predict the establishment of new businesses, where it is defined as individual inclination and perceived capability and ability to be engaged in startup activities (Oosterbeek et al., 2010). The next content of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the related literature and the hypothesis development; Section 3 is the research methodology; Section 4 presents the empirical analysis; Section 5 discusses the findings and concludes our study with suggestions for future research

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Global female entrepreneurship reflects persistent gender inequalities, with environments structurally favoring men and limiting women’s access to resources and opportunities (Marlow & Patton, 2005). While some scholars argue gender inequality inadequately explains entrepreneurial gender disparities (Baughn et al., 2006; Bastian et al., 2019), others contend advancing equality could bridge this gap (Sarfaraz & Faghih, 2011). This study investigates how gender inequality shapes entrepreneurial intentions in the MENA region, contributing to this unresolved debate.

The Women’s Entrepreneurship Report (2023) highlights a paradox: women in low-income countries exhibit high entrepreneurial intentions but lower business start-up rates, often due to economic barriers. Scholars attribute this gap to gender discrimination and hostile work environments (Salamzadeh et al., 2013), non-economic drivers like autonomy and work-life balance (Godany & Mura, 2021), and systemic inequalities in resource access, education, and societal norms (Sullivan & Meek, 2012). Thus, we hypothesize:

H1: *Gender inequality negatively correlates with men’s and women’s entrepreneurial intentions in the MENA region.*

Authors such as Alam et al. (2011), Dawson & Henley (2013), Johansen (2013), and Mishra (2015) indicate that such contextual factors as the level of women entrepreneurs’ involvement are associated with the degree of interaction of social networks, social media and professional networks; the difficulty of receiving support is institutional, familiar, and financial. Consequently, the following two hypotheses, a and b, are formulated:

H2a: *The network positively affects the entrepreneurial intentions of men and women in the MENA region.*
H2b: *Gender inequality will negatively moderate the relationship between the network and the entrepreneurial intentions of men and women in the MENA region.*

Emerging economies face distinct barriers to women’s entrepreneurial participation compared to developed nations, including unequal access to capital for both genders (Cardella, 2020; Gautam & Mishra, 2016; Raghuvanshi et al., 2017; Touissate & Azdimousa, 2021). Challenges such as limited institutional, familial, and financial support hinder business creation (Johansen, 2013), while institutional backing, credit access, and social networks motivate female entrepreneurs (Mishra, 2015). This informs the hypotheses:

H3a: *Perceived opportunity positively affects the entrepreneurial intention of men and women in the MENA region.*
H3b: *Gender inequality will moderate the relationship between women's perceived opportunity and entrepreneurial intention compared to men in the MENA region.*

Moreover, knowledge, skills, and risk tolerance are critical for entrepreneurial intentions, yet women face barriers such as fear of failure, low self-confidence, and weak social networks (Dawson & Henley, 2013). Personality traits (e.g., self-efficacy) and contextual factors (e.g., networks) are intertwined in

shaping sustainable ventures (Alam et al., 2011), with fear of failure and self-efficacy identified as key deterrents (Wieland et al., 2019). Thus, we hypothesize:

H4a: *Knowledge and skills are positively correlated with the entrepreneurial intentions of men and women in the MENA region.*
H4b: *Gender inequality will negatively moderate the relationship between knowledge and skills and women's entrepreneurial intention compared with men in the MENA region.*
H5a: *Courage (not fear of failure) is positively correlated with the entrepreneurial intention of men and women in the MENA region.*
H5b: *Gender inequality will negatively moderate the relationship between courage (not fear of failure) and the entrepreneurial intention of women compared with men in the MENA region.*

Social perceptions associating entrepreneurship with masculine traits (e.g., risk-taking, economic ambition) hinder women's entrepreneurial motivation, as women are often stereotyped as caregivers prioritizing social value (Hechavarría et al., 2019; Pereiro, 2019). These stereotypes, coupled with perceived male dominance in business (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007), discourage women from pursuing ventures, exacerbated by lower risk tolerance (Dawson & Henley, 2013) and systemic barriers like limited support and societal stigma (Johansen, 2013; Touissate & Azdimousa, 2021). This informs the hypotheses:

H6a: *Community perception of startups positively correlates with men's and women's entrepreneurial intentions in the MENA region.*

H6b: *Gender inequality will negatively moderate the relationship between women's and men's perceptions of startups in the business community and their entrepreneurial intentions in the MENA region.*

This study primarily aims to explore how individual factors—such as networks, perceived opportunities, knowledge and skills, fear of failure, and community perceptions of startups—influence entrepreneurial intentions among both men and women while also examining the moderating role of gender inequality, as shown in Figure 1.

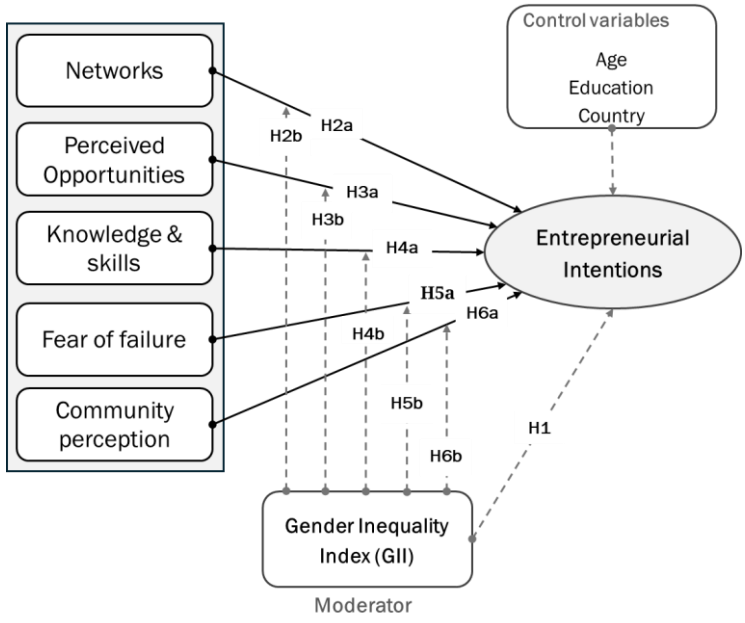

Figure 1. Research conceptual framework
Source: Own illustration

2. METHODOLOGY

The dataset to test the hypotheses is collected from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Adult Population Survey (APS) 2019 and the Gender Inequality Index (GII) for the year 2022[1]. The dataset includes 19,119 observations. Table 1 provides variable descriptions and sources. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) is a globally recognized research initiative established in 1999 to assess entrepreneurial activity, attitudes, and ecosystems across over 100 countries. It employs standardized surveys, including the Adult Population Survey (APS), which collects individual-level data on perceptions, intentions, and barriers related to entrepreneurship, ensuring cross-country comparability. For this study, the 2019 GEM dataset was utilized to analyze nine MENA countries, focusing on binary variables such as network (knowing an entrepreneur), perceived opportunity, knowledge/skills, fear of failure, and community perception of startups, alongside the dependent variable entrepreneurial intentions (expecting to start a business within three years), as shown in table (1). GEM's rigorous methodology and emphasis on early-stage entrepreneurial dynamics make it ideal for exploring gender disparities, as its harmonized data allows for nuanced comparisons of how social, cultural, and institutional factors shape intentions in the MENA region.

Table 1. Variable descriptions and sources

Variable	*Description*	*Scale*	*Source*
Dependent variable			
Entrepreneurial intention	Expecting to start a new business in the next three years	1: Yes, 0: No	GEM
Independent variable			
Network	Knowing someone personally who started a business in the past two years.	1: Yes, 0: No	GEM
Perceived opportunity	Perceiving good opportunities for starting a business in the next six months	1: Yes, 0: Else	GEM
Knowledge and Skills	Has the knowledge, skill and experience required to start a new business	1: Yes, 0: No	GEM
Fear to Fail	Having a fear of failure to start up a business	1: Yes, 0: No	GEM
Community Perception	Perceived perception of startups by the community in their country, where most people consider starting a new business a desirable career choice	1: Yes, 0: Else	GEM
Moderator			
Gender Inequality Index	The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects gender-based disadvantages in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market.	It ranges between 0, where women and men fare equally, and 1, where one gender fares as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions	GII[2] - 2022
Control variable			
Age	Aged 18–64		GEM
Gender	Male or Female	1: Male, 2: Female	GEM
Education	The level of education	1: Above Secondary Education, 0: Secondary Education or below	GEM
Country	Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates		GEM

Source: own processing

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

[1] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022, Human Development Report, Undp.org.

[2] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2022, Human Development Report, Undp.org.

3.1 Descriptive statistics

The number of female and male respondents for each country is not much different, except in the case of Oman, Qatar and United Arab Emirates where the number of male respondents is nearly 2 times higher than the number of female counterparts. On average, male respondents have higher entrepreneurial intention, except for Egypt and Oman. Moreover, while the United Arab Emirates has the lowest GII at 0.035, and Iran has the highest at 0.484. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for participants' gender, age, education, and Gender Inequality Index (GII) for each country.

Table 2. Cross tabulation of country, participants' gender, age, education, Gender Inequality Index (GII)

Country	*Participants*		*% Yes: Entrepreneurial Intention*	*Age Average*	*% Education (more than a secondary degree)*	*Gender Inequality Index*
	Gender	*Count (%)*				
Egypt	Female	846 (46.2%)	79.7	33	65.5	0.389
	Male	985 (53.8%)	50	36	64.1	
Iran	Female	1,255 (49.5%)	41.8	36	59.9	0.484
	Male	1,282 (50.5%)	49.6	37	67.6	
Israel	Female	586 (49.2%)	25.1	39	74.1	0.092
	Male	605 (50.8%)	32.1	39	67.8	
Jordan	Female	925 (51.3%)	25.7	39	16.6	0.449
	Male	877 (48.7%)	33.2	40	19.3	
Morocco	Female	1,556 (49.4%)	40.2	35	33.0	0.404
	Male	1,593 (50.6%)	48.5	35	31.0	
Oman	Female	549 (34.3%)	69.2	34	69.2	0.267
	Male	1,053 (65.7%)	68.3	34	68.3	
Qatar	Female	652 (26.2%)	58.3	32	77.3	0.212
	Male	1,839 (73.8%)	52.6	34	75.7	
Saudi Arabia	Female	1,237 (41.7%)	30.4	38	52.0	0.229
	Male	1,730 (58.3%)	34.7	37	57.6	
United Arab Emirates	Female	475 (30.7%)	41.9	33	73.5	0.035
	Male	1,074 (69.3%)	51.7	35	79.3	
Total	*Female*	*8081 (42.3%)*	*40.7*	*36*	*50.8*	*Ave = 0.284*
19,119	*Male*	*11038 (57.7%)*	*49.0*	*36*	*55.1*	

Source: own processing

Table 3 reports descriptive statistics for the independent variables. It shows that females in Saudi Arabia exhibit the highest confidence in their "entrepreneurial networks," with 83.8% network perception. Conversely, Jordanian females report the lowest network perceptions at 38.4%. Among males, Saudi Arabia maintains the highest network perception (85.8%), while Jordanian males show the lowest (52.5%). As for the "perceived opportunities," Egyptian female respondents perceive ample entrepreneurial opportunities (73.4%), while Israeli female respondents express the lowest perception at 27.1%. On the male respondents' side, Egyptians perceive ample entrepreneurial opportunities with 71.7%, contrasting with Iran's lowest perception (30.2%). Moreover, regarding "knowledge and skills", female respondents from Saudi Arabia feel the most equipped with knowledge and skills (81.5%), whereas Israeli females exhibit the lowest confidence at 34.1%. Saudi Arabia again stands out for male respondents with the highest percentage (83.9%), while Israeli male respondents demonstrate the lowest confidence (50.7%). For "fair to fail," Jordanian female respondents expressed the highest fear of failure (63.8%), contrasting with Omani females, who displayed the lowest fear at 39.7%. Among males, Iranian respondents show the lowest fear (35.3%), while Jordanian males express the highest (64.0%). Egyptian females exhibit the highest community perception at 78.1%, while Iranian female respondents demonstrate the lowest at 38.3%. For males, Omani male respondents have the highest perception (76.9%), while Iranian male respondents exhibit the lowest (38.8%).

Table 3. Cross tabulation of country, participants' gender, and independent variables of study

Country	*Gender*	*Network (%)*		*Perceived Opportunity (%)*		*Knowledge & Skills (%)*		*Fear to Fail (%)*		*Community Perception (%)*	
		No	Yes	Else	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Else	Yes
Egypt	Female	59.6	40.4	26.6	73.4	34.2	65.8	46.2	53.8	21.9	78.1
	Male	38.4	61.6	28.3	71.7	26.0	74.0	48.3	51.7	24.9	75.1
Iran	Female	54.0	46.0	60.9	39.1	38.4	61.6	56.8	43.2	61.7	38.3
	Male	34.4	65.6	55.1	44.9	23.0	77.0	64.7	35.3	61.2	38.8
Israel	Female	31.2	68.8	72.9	27.1	65.9	34.1	41.0	59.0	54.1	45.9
	Male	29.4	70.6	69.8	30.2	49.3	50.7	45.8	54.2	54.7	45.3
Jordan	Female	61.6	38.4	56.8	43.2	49.2	50.8	36.2	63.8	25.5	74.5
	Male	47.5	52.5	69.6	30.4	31.9	68.1	36.0	64.0	31.6	68.4
Morocco	Female	54.1	45.9	53.6	46.4	46.3	53.7	48.5	51.5	23.7	76.3
	Male	41.9	58.1	47.7	52.3	28.7	71.3	58.4	41.6	23.6	76.4
Oman	Female	32.2	67.8	31.1	68.9	42.8	57.2	60.3	39.7	23.0	77.0
	Male	20.9	79.1	37.9	62.1	36.9	63.1	59.0	41.0	23.1	76.9
Qatar	Female	49.2	50.8	32.8	67.2	34.4	65.6	60.1	39.9	23.9	76.1
	Male	33.4	66.6	30.7	69.3	21.2	78.8	55.5	44.5	29.7	70.3
Saudi Arabia	Female	16.2	83.8	29.4	70.6	18.5	81.5	56.8	43.2	32.7	67.3
	Male	14.2	85.8	32.8	67.2	16.1	83.9	55.1	44.9	38.0	62.0
United Arab Emirates	Female	41.5	58.5	44.4	55.6	42.3	57.7	51.4	48.6	37.1	62.9
	Male	34.9	65.1	45.7	54.3	34.4	65.6	58.9	41.1	41.4	58.6
Total	Female	45.4	54.6	46.2	53.8	39.9	60.1	50.8	49.2	34.0	66.0
	Male	32.0	68.0	43.5	56.5	27.3	72.7	54.9	45.1	35.4	64.6

Source: own processing

3.2 Regression Results and discussion

3.2.1 Direct Effects

The data analysis in Table 4 revealed some interesting gender-based differences in entrepreneurial intentions with the effect of the country's model. Contrary to our initial hypothesis (H1) predicting a negative impact for both genders, the gender inequality variable showed no significant effect on women. Interestingly, it had a positive and significant association for men with a coefficient of 1.681, therefore, the results do not support hypothesis H1. Supporting our hypothesis (H2a), the networking variable emerged as significant for both men and women, with a stronger influence on the women's variable (coefficient of 0.667) compared to the men's variable (coefficient of 0.304). The model's results did not support our hypothesis (H3a) that perceived opportunity has a positive influence, as it showed no significant effect on either gender's perceived opportunity variable. In contrast, the knowledge and skills variable played a significant role (confirming H4a) with a more substantial positive effect on women (coefficient of 1.132) compared to men (coefficient of 0.765). For instance, for each unit increase in knowledge and skills, the odds of having entrepreneurial intention among women increase by approximately 3 while men by 2.2, holding all other variables constant. Wald's statistics for knowledge and skills are the highest among other variables for both genders. Moreover, it can be interpreted that the coefficient for knowledge and skills is significantly different from zero. Hence, knowledge and skills significantly affect entrepreneurial intention among females. Similar to H4a, our hypothesis (H5a) that courage (not fearing failure) is positively linked to entrepreneurial intention was confirmed for both genders, with a more robust coefficient for the men's courage variable (0.506) than the women's (0.304). Finally, supporting H6a, the community perception of startups variable emerged as a significant factor for both genders. Interestingly, the effect was more substantial for the women's variable (coefficient of 0.590) than the men's (coefficient of 0.289).

3.2.2 Moderating Effects

Table 4 shows that the impact of gender inequality differs between genders. It did not affect the relationship between networking and entrepreneurial intentions for men. However, it acted as a negative moderator for women, with a coefficient of -0.859. The odds ratio of 0.423 indicates that for a one-unit increase in gender inequality, the odds of having entrepreneurial intention among females decrease by approximately 0.42, holding all other variables constant. Consequently, H2b is not fully supported. Similarly, perceived opportunity played a different role for each gender. It significantly impacted entrepreneurial intentions for women (coefficient of 1.243) but not for men. The odds ratio of 3.466 indicates that for a one-unit increase in gender inequality, the odds of having entrepreneurial intention among females increase by approximately 3.466, holding all other variables constant. This finding suggests that H3b is also not fully supported. The moderating effect of gender inequality on knowledge and skills (H4b), courage (H5b), and community perception (H6b) was not significant for either men or women. Therefore, hypotheses H4b, H5b, and H6b are all rejected. Table 5, provides a summary of the Hypotheses and Results Summary

3.2.3 Country Effects

Table 4 reveals the influence of the national context on entrepreneurial intentions. The independent variables have a significant positive effect in most countries except Iran. Egypt, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates all exhibit a positive correlation between the variables and entrepreneurial intentions. However, the strength of this correlation differs. Oman boasts the highest coefficients (1.072 for men, 1.546 for women), while Qatar displays a weaker positive correlation (0.271 for men), and the United Arab Emirates shows the weakest positive correlation for women (0.549). This highlights the role of country-specific factors in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations. Interestingly, Jordan and Saudi Arabia present a contrasting picture. Here, the coefficients for both genders hold negative values (e.g., Jordan: -0.348 for women, -0.540 for men; Saudi Arabia: -0.525 for women, and -0.501 for women). This suggests that cultural or traditional aspects in these countries might discourage entrepreneurship. These results showcase the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial intention. While individual characteristics are essential, national context, including culture and traditions, plays a significant role.

Table 4. Binary logistic regression

Variable	*Female*			*Male*		
	B	*Wald*	*Exp(B)*	*B*	*Wald*	*Exp(B)*
Control Variables						
Age	-0.018***	64.23	0.982	-0.016***	86.21	0.984
Education	-0.297***	29.56	0.743	-0.223***	24.62	0.800
Independent Variables						
Gender Inequality	1.089	3.46	2.972	1.681***	11.85	5.372
Network	0.667***	21.43	1.948	0.304**	8.308	1.355
Perceived Opportunity	-0.085	0.35	0.919	-0.084	0.687	0.920
Knowledge & Skills	1.132***	59.69	3.101	0.765***	48.73	2.150
Courage (not fear of failure)	0.304*	5.47	1.355	0.506***	28.47	1.659
Community Perception	0.289*	4.19	1.335	0.590***	35.13	1.805
Moderating effects						
Gender Inequality X Network	-0.859*	4.74	0.423	-0.295	0.87	0.745
Gender Inequality X Perceived Opportunity	1.243**	9.99	3.466	1.004	10.6	2.730
Gender Inequality X Knowledge & Skills	-0.100	0.06	0.905	-0.006	0.00	0.994

Variable	*Female*			*Male*		
	B	*Wald*	*Exp(B)*	*B*	*Wald*	*Exp(B)*
Gender Inequality X Fear to Fail	0.645	3.07	1.906	1.161	15.32	3.194
Gender Inequality X Community Perception	-0.422	1.12	0.656	-1.381	19.88	0.251
Dummy variables: Countries (reference country is Morocco)						
D-Egypt	0.745***	63.55	2.106	0.769***	76.80	2.157
D-Iran	0.145	1.84	1.156	-0.176	3.31	0.838
D-United Arab Emirates	0.549***	11.39	1.731	0.671***	27.83	1.957
D-Jordan	-0.348***	11.08	0.706	-0.540***	30.78	0.583
D-Oman	1.546***	181.12	4.691	1.072***	155.26	2.920
D-Qatar	0.923***	66.59	2.518	0.271***	11.63	1.311
D-Saudi Arabia	-0.525***	29.76	0.592	-0.501***	40.59	0.606
Constant	-1.616***	55.18	0.199	-1.350***	59.71	0.259
Cox & Snell R Square	0.167			0.108		
Nagelkerke R Square	0.226			0.144		
R Square changes	0.073			0.063		
Percentage Correct (%)	69.1			64.1		
Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficient	1478.2***			1257.9***		
Note: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05.						

Source: own processing

3.2.4 Goodness of fit

Cox and Snell R^2 (conservative) and Nagelkerke R^2 (adjusted to 0–1 range) were used to assess model fit. For females, Nagelkerke R^2 improved from 0.153 (prior model) to 0.226, and males increased from 0.081 to 0.144 in Table 5, indicating stronger explanatory power. Classification accuracy also improved: females rose from 64.4% to 69.1%, and males from 59.1% to 64.1%, reflecting better predictive performance. The Omnibus tests confirmed both models significantly outperformed the null model (females: χ^2=1478.2, p<.001; males: χ^2=1257.9, p<.001), with all predictors collectively enhancing fit. These results, alongside higher R^2 and accuracy, validate the robustness of the final models.

Table 5. Hypotheses and Results Summary

Hypothesis	*Description*	*Result*
H1	Gender inequality negatively correlates with men's and women's entrepreneurial intentions in the MENA region	Not Supported
H2a	The network positively affects the entrepreneurial intentions of men and women in the MENA region	Supported
H2b	Gender inequality will negatively moderate the relationship between the network and the entrepreneurial intentions of men and women in the MENA region	Not fully supported
H3a	Perceived opportunity positively affects the entrepreneurial intention of men and women in the MENA region	Not Supported
H3b	Gender inequality will moderate the relationship between women's perceived opportunity and entrepreneurial intention compared to men in the MENA region	Not fully supported
H4a	Knowledge and skills are positively correlated with the entrepreneurial intentions of men and women in the MENA region	Supported
H4b	Gender inequality will negatively moderate the relationship between knowledge and skills and women's entrepreneurial intention compared with men in the MENA region	Not Supported
H5a	Courage (not fear of failure) is positively correlated with the entrepreneurial intention of men and women in the MENA region	Supported
H5b	Gender inequality will negatively moderate the relationship between courage (not fear of failure) and the entrepreneurial intention of women compared with men in the MENA region	Not Supported
H6a	Community perception of startups positively correlates with men's and women's entrepreneurial intentions in the MENA region	Supported
H6b	Gender inequality will negatively moderate the relationship between women's and men's perceptions of startups in the business community and their entrepreneurial intentions in the MENA region	Not Supported

Source: Own

4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS

While this study provides comprehensive insights into the interplay of gender inequality and entrepreneurial intentions in the MENA region, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The reliance on secondary data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) may introduce constraints related to the depth of personal and cultural insights that primary data could offer. Additionally, the study's scope is limited by the cross-sectional nature of the data, which restricts our ability to infer causality between gender inequality and entrepreneurial intentions. Future research could benefit from longitudinal data to better understand the dynamics over time and incorporate qualitative approaches to capture more nuanced aspects of the entrepreneurial experience across different genders in the MENA region

CONCLUSION

Based on the model above and the analysis of the MENA region, women's and men's intentions to establish a business are influenced by all factors, namely network, skills and knowledge, courage, and community perception. However, the perceived opportunity predictor does not affect the entrepreneurial intention of both genders. The national context is essential regarding the entrepreneurial intentions of both women and men, and this is in line with several studies that have shown that gender disparity in entrepreneurship differs thoroughly across countries (Hechavarría & Ingram, 2019; Hechavarria et al., 2019).

However, this study shows that gender inequality does not directly affect women's entrepreneurial intentions but surprisingly affects men's entrepreneurial intentions positively and significantly. This could be because men have better access to resources than men in the developing countries in the MENA region (Mishra, 2015; Johansen, 2013), which possibly encourages men to be engaged in entrepreneurial intentions; the more gender inequality exists with women, the more opportunities men will have. Alternatively, it is possible, as Baughn et al. (2006) argued, based on their studies on GEM data, that gender inequality

is not a predictor for the low rate of female entrepreneurship activities. Instead, it is due to the lack of support from the general normative society, which affects women more than men.

On the other hand, gender inequality as a moderator does not moderate any independent variables for men, but it does for women in two predictors: network and perceived opportunity. The network was affected significantly and negatively, which suggests that the more gender inequality exists, the less supportive network women would have. In our study, network means knowing at least one person involved in entrepreneurship activities. In the MENA region, women who have established businesses are between 4% and 5%, according to the GEM women report (2023). Women in the MENA region had fewer choices of having men in their network as entrepreneurs due to the strict social norms that do not allow women in most of the communities to create a network or connection with men; the more negative social norms increase, the more discrimination occurs, which possibly leads to less women's ability to make a network of entrepreneurs.

This study shows that the gender inequality index moderates the relationship between perceived opportunities and entrepreneurial intentions. Women are positively affected. In contrast, gender inequality does not interfere with the ability of men to perceive opportunities, which is in line with other scholars. Kelly et al. (2013) state that gender inequality may positively affect more women. Verheul et al. (2006) state that dissatisfaction with organizational structures, glass ceiling issues, or discriminatory labor laws may push women to leave and start businesses. Also, Bastian et al. (2019; p.19), in their study about the effect of gender inequality on entrepreneurial intentions, stated, we think that the gendered context presents many push factors that motivate women to become entrepreneurs. This dissatisfaction might make women more inclined to select self-employment once the opportunity presents itself. These conditions make women more prone to choose entrepreneurship as a professional "survival strategy" because they experienced discrimination in their previous workplace, the labor market, and the wider environment.

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