

## Are Gender and Immigration a Double Disadvantage? Exploring the Experiences of Sri Lankan Female Immigrant Entrepreneurs in London, United Kingdom

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**Abstract:** Ethnic minority female entrepreneurs play a vital role in developed countries, yet they rarely receive recognition. The research explores the experiences of Sri Lankan female immigrant entrepreneurs and their challenges in London, the United Kingdom. The research followed the path of a narrative approach of qualitative methodology, which is an efficient method to explore people's experiences through a sociologically based theory on “othering” and “belonging.” Seven participants were purposively approached and asked to narrate their stories and share their experiences. The research findings suggest that female immigrant entrepreneurs face many hardships in their businesses. Institutional and consumer racism and a lack of networking are the external barriers they had to face. The internal challenges include the liability of newness and the host country's cultural values. Sri Lankan female entrepreneurs' identities are labeled as an “othered” social group in the UK business community context, treated as outsiders, and made to face structural exclusion. However, gender is not the real villain; ethnicity is the actual undercover devil at business. This research offers a unique insight into female and immigrant entrepreneurship, thereby casting light on an aspect of Sri Lankan female entrepreneurs living in the United Kingdom, which is currently under research.

**Keywords:** immigrant entrepreneurs, female entrepreneurs, gender, qualitative, narratives.

The nature and number of immigrant entrepreneurship have changed considerably over the past two decades (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2021). For example, self-employment among immigrants increased by more than 50% in the European Union, and 12% of the immigrants in the European Union (EU) were considered entrepreneurs in 2020, which was a little lower than the percentage of non-immigrants (14%) (OECD, 2021). Researchers have highlighted the significance of global immigrants' contributions (Duan et al., 2021; OECD, 2021; Promise et al., 2021). This implies the job creation ability of immigrant entrepreneurs. The gender gap related to entrepreneurial activities was somewhat smaller among immigrants than natives. Men's participation in entrepreneurial activities is 1.6 times more than immigrant women, comparable to a gap of 1.8 times among natives (OECD, 2021). In the UK, businesses run by immigrant entrepreneurs contribute around £25-£32 billion annually (Carter et al., 2013), and a whopping £105 billion is contributed by female entrepreneurs to the UK economy every year. However, there is so much more potential to be unlocked (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2020).

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