

Towards Sustainable Livelihoods: "Unveiling Remarkable Growth: Women Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas"

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KEYWORDS <i>Sustainability, Rural Development, Financial Empowerment, Micro-Entrepreneurship</i>	ABSTRACT Purpose – This study explores rural women’s entrepreneurial journey, highlighting their role in financial empowerment and community development. It examines challenges, triumphs and innovative practices, informing future research, business models, and policy interventions Design / Methodology / Approach - The study utilizes a multi-method approach, including qualitative analysis and case studies, to deeply investigate the stories of rural women entrepreneurs. A bibliometric analysis is also employed to understand the research landscape related to rural women’s entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods. Findings - The findings reveal the often-overlooked stories of resilient rural women who blend creativity with tradition to drive entrepreneurial success. For instance, one case study illustrates how a rural woman leveraged traditional crafting skills to build a thriving business, overcoming financial and logistical challenges. The findings emphasize the need for targeted policy interventions, better access to capital, and further research on integrating technology with rural entrepreneurship to support sustainable community development. Originality / Value – This paper uniquely examines the intersection of tradition and modernity in rural women’s entrepreneurship, with a focus on how technology and collaboration can enhance these efforts. The research not only uncovers the stories of rural women but also advocates for their recognition and empowerment, suggesting that these insights could shape future research, policy and practice in rural entrepreneurship.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rural Women

In the peaceful countryside, there is a special story about rural women. These remarkable individuals embody strength, determination, and resilience (Trivedi, & Petkova, 2022; Pearce, et al,2017; Müller, & Korsgaard, 2018). Unlike the often-highlighted city stories, the lives of these women are marked by a unique grace in rural settings (Ganle, et al., 2015; Galie, et al., 2022). Whether in small villages or large farms, they demonstrate quiet heroism, their hands showing the marks of hard work in nature (Webster, 2017; Kurtege Sefer, 2020). Beneath their rough exterior lies a story of enduring strength and perseverance (Fortunato, 2014). In their simple daily lives, rural women do more than just grow crops; they build community bonds, and nature family ties, and foster connections that sustain rural life (Poon, et al.,2012; Wright, & Annes, 2016). As



guardians of tradition and drivers of change, their roles vary from working in the fields under the sun to creating warmth and comfort in their homes (Wu, & Ye, 2016). Their lives blend old wisdom with new dreams, balancing respect for the past with hopes for the future (De Bruin, et al., 2007; Boateng, & Boateng, 2018). The heart of these rural women holds an extraordinary story waiting to be told (Byrne, et al., 2019; Özsungur, 2019). It's a narrative of resilience, colored by tradition, and highlighted by everyday acts of bravery (Imran, et al., 2020). By exploring their stories, we uncover a rich tapestry where the essence of rural life is seen in the steps of these often-overlooked heroines (Naguib, & Jamali, 2015).

1.2 Rural Women Entrepreneur

In peaceful rural landscapes, remarkable groups emerge—the rural women entrepreneurs (Pato, & Teixeira, 2016; Müller, & Korsgaard, 2018; Muñoz, & Kimmitt, 2019). These women embody resilience, creativity, and an unwavering spirit. In their communities, they weave stories of empowerment, turning challenges into opportunities (Haug, & Talwar, 2016; Okolie, et al., 2022). Amid picturesque scenes, these extraordinary women demonstrate innovation and tenacity as they navigate the complex paths of entrepreneurship (Nasrolahi Vosta, & Reza Jalilvand, 2014; Sarpong, et al., 2022). Rooted in traditional wisdom and local craftsmanship, their endeavours breathe life into sustainable enterprises, contributing to economic prosperity and enriching their communities' cultural fabric (Byrne, et al., 2019). Venturing beyond conventional boundaries, rural women entrepreneurs act as change agents, boldly breaking barriers in agriculture and artisanal crafts (Lenka, & Agarwal, 2017; Ghouse, et al., 2021). With a deep connection to their roots, they blend timeless traditions with contemporary visions, creating enterprises that are economically viable and socially impactful (Addo, 2017; Dana, et al., 2022).

These women entrepreneurs become symbols of hope, guiding others in their communities (Di Giminiani, 2018). Their success stories resonate, inspiring a new generation to dream big, work hard, and embrace the transformative power of entrepreneurship (Lichy, et al., 2021). This is more than a tale of business acumen; it is a celebration of the courage, ingenuity, and unwavering spirit of rural women entrepreneurs who, against all odds, redefine the narrative of their communities. Exploring their stories reveals a symphony of ambition and resilience that transcends geographical boundaries, proving that the entrepreneurial spirit is limitless, and that greatness often emerges.

1.3 Rural Women Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship may be regarded as a phenomenon originating from and nurtured by various sociocultural environments and contexts. There is an increasing interest among both entrepreneurs and policymakers in understanding the contextual factors that influence entrepreneurial activities (Thornton et al., 2011). Entrepreneurship is the systematic pursuit by an individual to generate opportunities for innovation, resulting in unique and additional contributions to society (Stam and Spigel, 2017). Moreover, entrepreneurship is a pursuit that generates advantages, particularly for women, often leading to the acquisition of individual earnings (Hoe, et al., 2012). The evolution of entrepreneurship within a nation is intrinsically linked to the involvement of women. Women's engagement in entrepreneurship has witnessed a substantial rise in both wealthy and developing nations within the last ten years (Widowati, 2012). Particularly significant is the exploration of rural entrepreneurship, which has been conducted through various lenses, including the analysis of the entrepreneurship process, its economic significance, and the distinctive traits exhibited by rural entrepreneurs (Pato and Teixeira 2018). The significant and well-recognized contributions of rural entrepreneurship manifest across three key domains. Firstly, there is a notable impact on rural development, marked by advancements in the locality where the business is located. Secondly, preventing migration to cities, providing intermediate and outsourcing manufacturing to businesses, and attending to the basic needs of the population are factors that impact urban growth. Lastly, there is a broader impact on social and national development, characterized by an elevation in advancements regarding education and specialization, higher employment, output volume, export rates, national income, and per capita income (Saxena 2012). However, women, in particular, face significant barriers to accessing critical resources for entrepreneurship. They are often denied access to land as a capital resource Adetonah et al., (2015), money Chlebicka, (2015); Mandipaka, (2014), mental abilities Langevang et al., (2018), and business chances - as a result of limited social media platforms (Rutashobya et al., 2009; Spring, 2009).

As a result, the setting determines the qualities, scale, and outcomes of entrepreneurial endeavours, as well as the behaviour of female entrepreneurs. (Welter and Smallbone, 2011).

1.4 Sustainable Livelihood

Entrepreneurship sustainable livelihood is the transformative pursuit of creating and nurturing ventures that not only generate economic prosperity but also contribute to the enduring well-being of individuals and communities (Chatterjee, et al., 2022). It embodies a harmonious synergy between entrepreneurial endeavours and the preservation of ecological, social, and economic dimensions, fostering resilience, inclusivity, and a balanced coexistence with the environment (Evans, & Wall, 2020). This concept encapsulates the idea that entrepreneurial activities should not only secure present livelihoods but also cultivate a sustainable legacy, ensuring the prosperity and vitality of generations to come (Okolie, et al., 2022). An ecologically sustainable livelihood not only benefits other livelihoods but also maintains or improves the worldwide and local resources that support it (Panta, & Thapa, 2018). A livelihood is essentially an accumulation of skills, resources, and pursuits that enable people to satisfy their basic requirements and improve their general quality of life (Baffoe, & Matsuda,



2018). The creation of livelihoods seeks to satisfy experiential as well as material needs (Afshan, et al., 2021). It is crucial to understand that livelihoods are not limited to specific locales but are instead closely connected to larger national, regional, and international settings through processes related to the surroundings, economy, politics, and culture (Castro, 2002; Mayer, et al., 2016; Rashid, & Ratten, 2020). A person's ability to sustain their necessities and well-being through their activities, possessions, and capabilities is referred to as their livelihood (Kabir, et al., 2012; Bhuiyan, & Ivlevs, 2019; Lepeley, et al., 2019). Sustainability in livelihood is achieved when it demonstrates resilience to disturbances, can recover, and expands its resources to open doors for methods of sustainable life. This entails resolving both short- and long-term concerns while creating net advantages for both current and next generations at both the local and global levels (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Husein & Nilson, 1998; Scoones, 1998; Scoones, 2009; Broegaard et al., 2017; Baker et al., 2018). Women's entrepreneurship is therefore seen as a key factor in the creation of sustainable livelihoods, as it integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The success of women-owned enterprises faces multifaceted challenges, including conflicts, societal issues, and psychological barriers (Rahabhi, et al., 2021; Rudhumbu, et al., 2020; Tundui, & Tundui, 2021; Al-Qahtani, et al., 2022). Addressing these issues is essential for promoting entrepreneurial success in rural areas. As highlighted by Rashid, and Ratten, (2020); Tundui, & Tundui, (2021), educational and training opportunities are vital in overcoming these obstacles. The provision of adequate financial resources and the establishment of network affiliations are crucial strategies for enhancing women's entrepreneurship activities (Mashapure, et al., 2023). Despite these challenges, women's entrepreneurship contributes significantly to sustainable livelihoods in rural communities. For instance, research on Zimbabwe demonstrates the positive impact of women's entrepreneurial activities on local economies, even in the face of patriarchal societal structures and limited entrepreneurial knowledge (Mashapure, et al., 2023). Similarly, Mahato, et al., (2023) and Bhuiyan, & Ivlevs, (2019) find that financial inclusion plays a critical role in achieving sustainable livelihoods, with micro-entrepreneurship serving as a major mediating factor in Odisha, India. Integrative business approaches, as discussed by Masukujjaman et al., (2015), are effective in addressing knowledge, skills, and affordability gaps through training and financial support, thereby enhancing livelihoods and alleviating poverty. Fitrianto (2017) Future emphasizes that social engineering can mitigate social challenges faced by communities, such as those affected by users, contributing to improved community resilience. Moreover, the adoption of a sustainable business-based integrated model can significantly benefit female entrepreneurs. Hendratmi, et al., (2022) suggest that utilising components of the Sustainability in Livelihood Pentagon can positively impact business planning and execution. This approach aligns with Serrat, et al., (2012), who identify various strategies that lead to improved livelihood outcomes, including better income, well-being, less susceptibility, enhanced security of diet, and effective utilization of natural resources. The integration of livelihood assets from communities and NGOs, as proposed by Amofah, et al., (2022), accelerates poverty alleviation and livelihood empowerment. This model, leverages collaboration to enhance workspace, market access, and social capital. Okoye (2013), supports this by advocating for initiatives that alter women's perceptions of their entrepreneurial abilities and improve financial literacy, which is crucial for effective integration into promotion programs.

Kabir, et al., (2012) underscore the importance of measuring household livelihood status to set global goals for uplifting the poorest populations. Success in the area relies on collaborative efforts with families and communities to address essential needs, including safety, health, and participation in decision-making. Addressing the challenges faced by informal microenterprises, Malanga, & Banda, (2021) suggest that government and NGO incentives for free business registration could enhance access to formal support services. This would aid in the long-term survival of women-led enterprises. Simanihuruk, & Sitorus, (2017) note that many small businesses face challenges due to low-tech processes and difficulties in obtaining raw materials, highlighting the need for improved infrastructure and support. Sivanesan, (2014) points out that rural women entrepreneurs benefit from specialized training institutes to enhance their urban counterparts. Self-Helo-Group can play a pivotal role in bridging this gap. Rani, et al., (2016) identify key challenges for women entrepreneurs in rural Haryana, including lack of family support and psychological barriers, further emphasizing the need for a comprehensive support system. Kungwansupaphan, et al., (2016) demonstrate that successful entrepreneurial ventures rely on the synergy of various types of capital, including human and social capital. Parveen (2014) suggests that identifying potential rural women entrepreneurs and simplifying banking procedures can further enhance their socioeconomic status and contribution to national development. Finally, Sahu, et al., (2021) observe that rural women often engage in survival-driven livelihoods, with limited financial scope due to societal constraints. Programs like the Mudra Yojana could help broaden their perspectives. Sharma, (2018) emphasizes the importance of women's education and organized training programs to unleash their potential, while Meenakshi, et al., (2013) Highlight that acquiring new skills and managing micro-enterprises can significantly benefit rural women and their communities.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PRISMA: Flow Diagram

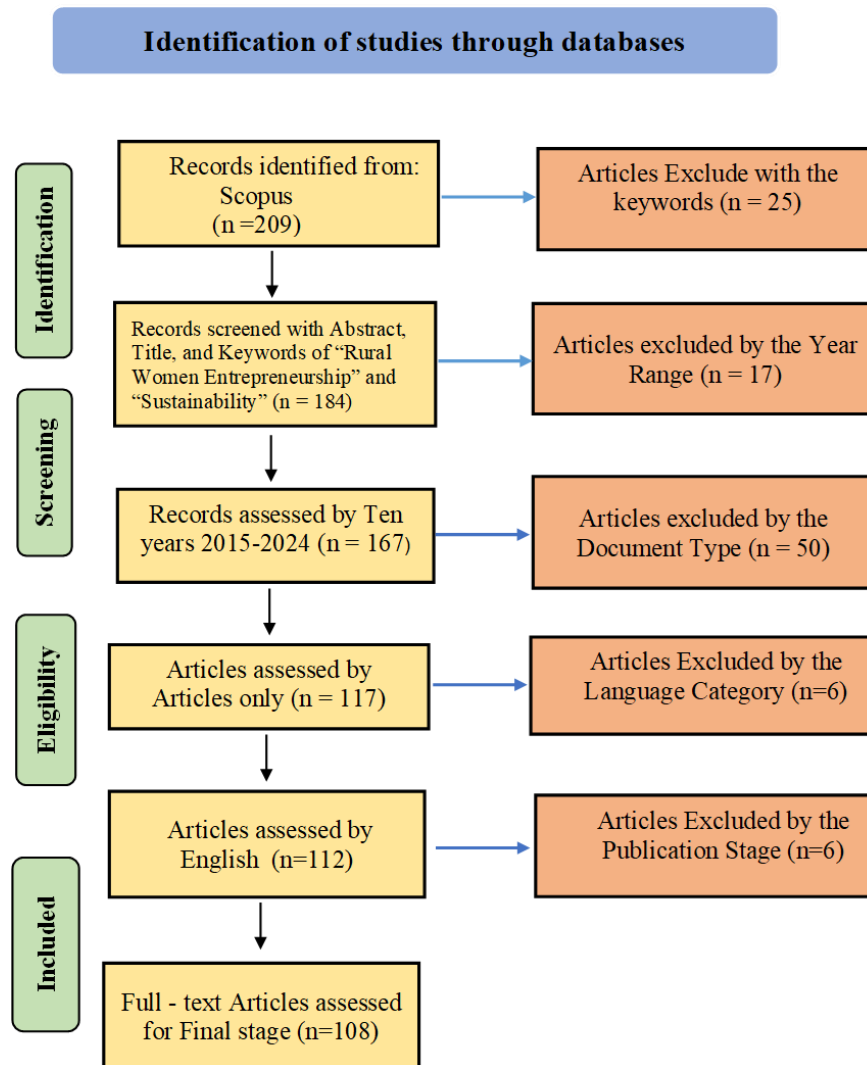


Figure 1

We employed specific principles outlined in Figure 1 to determine the inclusion of papers in a systematic review of research. Initially, we started with 209 published papers sourced from the Scopus database for the investigation with Subject Area: Abstract, Title, and Keywords "Rural Women Entrepreneurship" and "Sustainability," from this initial pool, we narrowed down the selection based on criteria. First, we refined the dataset to include only articles published between 2015 and 2024, which resulted in 184 papers. Further, we concentrated solely on documents categorized as articles, reducing the total to 167. To ensure the relevance and accessibility of the articles, we filtered for the English language documents, bringing the number down to 117. Subsequently, we applied specific keywords, to enhance the focus of our review, resulting in 112 papers. Finally to ensure that our review, we excluded articles based on their Publication Stage, ultimately retaining 108 papers. This meticulous process was executed following the Fig 1 Prisma Flow Chart technique.

4. BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

In our research, we employed a bibliometric review, akin to a systematic literature review, which necessitated a substantial amount of study data. For the data analysis phase, we utilized Bibliometrics in R-Studio, a valuable tool for such analyses. This platform enabled us to delve into various aspects of Rural Women's Entrepreneurship Sustainability, providing insights into numerous issues. Specifically, we leveraged its capabilities to compile comprehensive research data including information on the most pertinent authors, highly cited countries, the Corresponding Author Country, Word Cloud, and a Country's Scientific Production. Our dataset, which spanned from 2015 to 2024, was analyzed using these features to gain a deeper understanding of trends and patterns in the field. The bibliometric analysis, focusing on identifying research outputs based on keywords, has gained prominence in reviewing publications related to Rural Women entrepreneurs and Sustainability. This approach, to the best of our knowledge, is particularly valuable in the context of bibliometric research.



Most Cited Countries

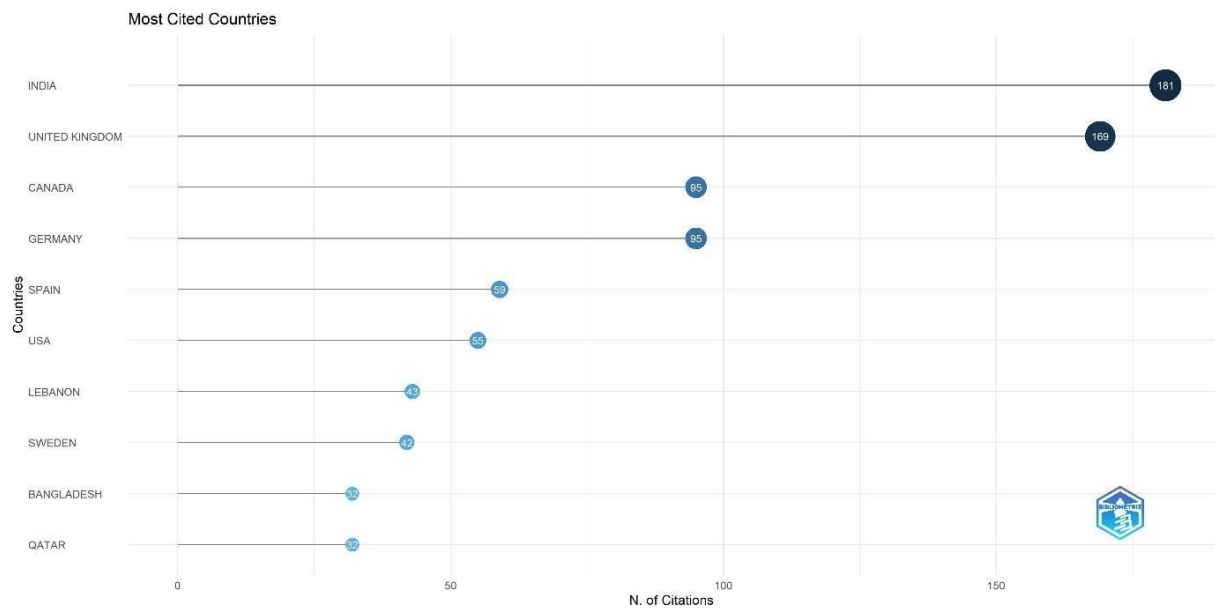


Figure 2

COUNTRY	TC	CPA	Rank
INDIA	181	18.1	1
UK	169	16.9	2
CANADA	95	9.5	3
GERMANY	59	5.9	4
SPAIN	55	5.5	5
USA	43	4.3	6
LEBANON	42	4.2	7
SWEDEN	32	3.2	8
BANGLADESH	29	2.9	9
QATAR	26	2.6	10

Figure 2 illustrates the countries with the highest total citations. India secured the first position with a substantial total of 181 citations, followed closely by the United Kingdom in second place with 169 citations. Canada and Germany share the third position, with 95 citations each. Spain ranks fourth with 59 citations, while the United States follows closely in fifth place with 55 citations. Lebanon, with 43 citations, claims the sixth position, followed by Sweden in seventh place with 42 citations. Bangladesh and Qatar share the eighth position, each accumulating 32 citations.

Mexico secures the ninth spot with 29 citations, and Romania rounds out the top ten with 26 citations. The remaining ranking includes Oman and South Africa 23 citations each. The United Arab Emirates follows with 21 citations, while Chile, Cyprus, and Saudi Arabia share 20 citations each. Zimbabwe claims 17 citations, and Australia claims 10. This data highlights the significant impact of India and the UK, alongside contributions from various other countries across different regions.



Corresponding Author's Countries

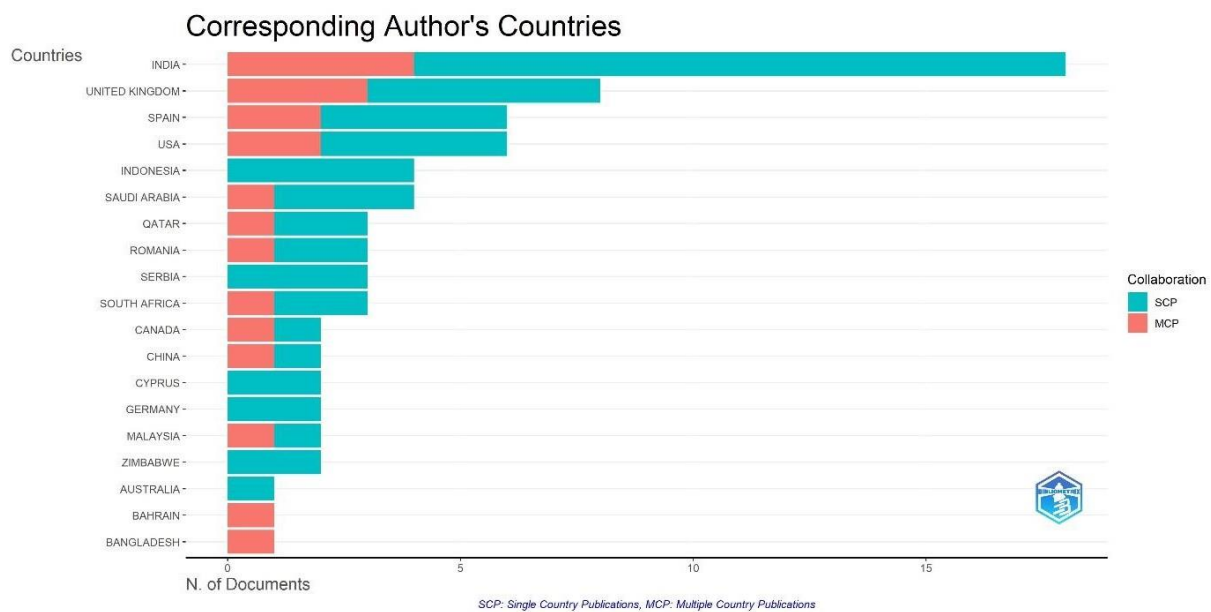


Figure 3

Figure 3 highlights the distribution of articles by Corresponding author's countries, with India leading with 18 articles, 14 single-country, and 4 collaborations. The United Kingdom is second with 8 articles, 5 single-country, and 3 collaborations, while Spain and the USA are third with 6 articles each—4 single-country and 2 collaborations. Indonesia ranks fourth with 4 single-country articles. Saudi Arabia and Romania both have 4 articles, followed by Serbia, Saudi Arabia, Canada, and China with 3 articles each. Qatar has 3 articles as well, with 2 single and 1 collaboration. This distribution underscores the significant contributions from single-country publications and international collaborations across these nations.

Word cloud



Figure 4

The word cloud emphasises key themes in sustainability and entrepreneurship, with "sustainability" and "entrepreneurs" as central concepts. Notable terms like "women's status", "sustainable development", "empowerment", and "business development" highlight the focus on gender, economic development, and sustainability. Keywords such as "regression analytical and strategic aspects of this field. The inclusion of terms like "innovation", "technology adoption", and "economic impact" reflects the evolving nature of entrepreneurship and its role in sustainable development. This word cloud provides a



concise overview of the interconnected themes in these discussions.

Annual Scientific Production

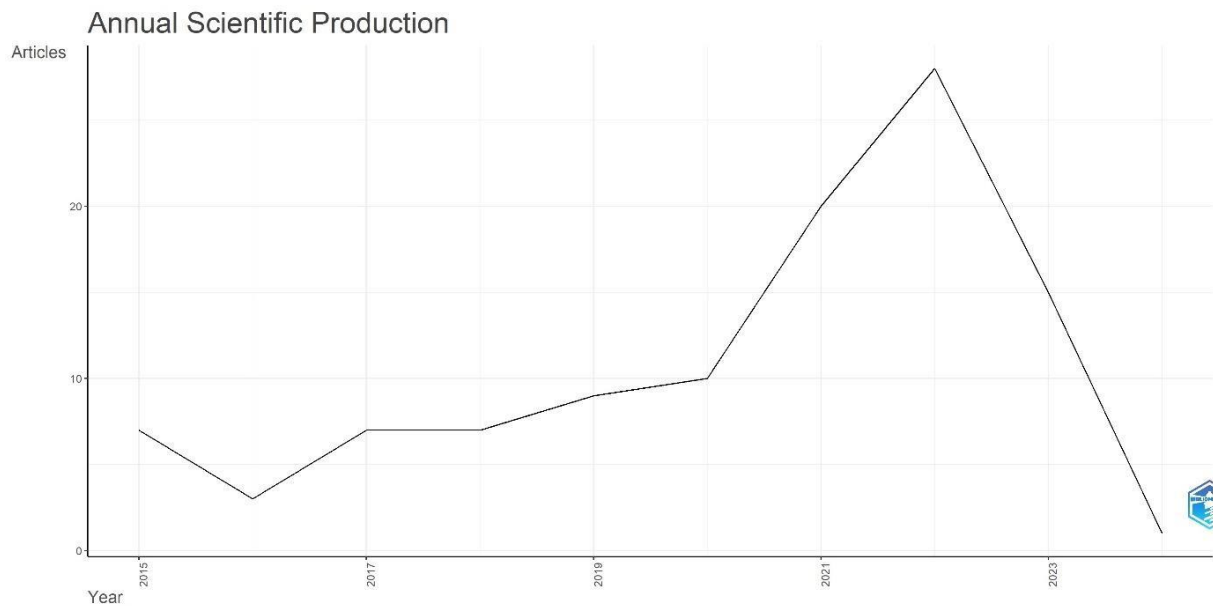


Figure 5

The annual scientific production in Fig 5 showcases varying trends across the years. In 2015, 7 articles were produced, followed by a decrease to 3 articles in 2016. The subsequent years witnessed a consistent rise in production, with 7 articles in both 2017 and 2018. In 2019, there was a further increase to 9 articles, and in 2020, the momentum continued with 10 articles. The year 2021 saw a substantial surge in scientific output, reaching a peak of 20 articles.

This trend continued in 2022, marking the highest production year with 28 articles. In 2023, there was a slight decline to 15 articles, and the dataset concludes with 2024 having the lowest production at 1 article. The analysis of annual scientific production reveals fluctuations, with 2022 emerging as the most prolific year in terms of published articles.

5. EXPLORING FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The findings of this study lead to several areas for further research. *Impact of Digital Technology on Rural Women Entrepreneurs*, As digital technology continues to evolve, understanding its impact on rural women entrepreneurs becomes crucial. Future research should investigate how digital tools and platforms influence business operations, market access, and financial management for rural women. This includes exploring the barriers to digital adoption, such as limited internet access and digital literacy, and assessing how technological advancements can be tailored to meet their specific needs (Müller, & Korsgaard, 2018; Ganle, et al., 2015). *The Intersection of social capital and entrepreneurial success* social capital plays a significant role in entrepreneurship, particularly in rural settings where community connections are vital. Research should delve into how social networks and community support systems contribute to the success and sustainability of rural women-owned enterprises. This includes examining the role of self-help groups, local cooperatives, and informal networks in providing resources, mentorship, and business opportunities (Kungwansupaphan, & Leihaothabam, 2016). *Sustainability Practices And Environment Impact*, Given the increasing emphasis on sustainable development (Ahamed, et al., 2021; Martini, et al., 2020; Polas, et al., 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

In future research on women's entrepreneurship, examining the impact of intersectional factors such as race, class, and disability is crucial. This area could explore how these compounded challenges affect women's entrepreneurial experiences and the unique strategies they employ when facing multiple layers of marginalization. Another Key area is the adoption of digital and emerging technologies like AI and blockchain. Future studies could focus on how women entrepreneurs are leveraging these technologies to scale their businesses and identify the barriers they encounter in this process. Sustainability is also an important topic, where research could analyze the role of women entrepreneurs in promoting sustainable business practices. This could involve exploring how women's emphasis on sustainability compares to that of their counterparts. Gender bias in access to resources, networks, and capital is another area needing attention. Future research should examine how gender bias impacts women entrepreneurs and evaluate the effectiveness of current support systems and policies aimed at achieving gender equality in entrepreneurship. A comparative study of women entrepreneurs in rural versus urban settings



would provide insights into the unique socio-economic and cultural barriers faced by rural women. This research could propose tailored support mechanisms to address these challenges. The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women entrepreneurs are also worthy of investigation. Future research could explore how the pandemic has impacted business continuity, resilience, and recovery strategies, as well as its reshaping of entrepreneurial ecosystems for women. Globalization's impact on women entrepreneurs in various regions should be explored, focusing on cross-cultural differences in entrepreneurial practices and how global market trends affect women-owned businesses. Finally, assessing the influence of government policies and international agreements on women's entrepreneurship is essential. Future studies could investigate how advocacy groups contribute to policy changes and what further actions can be taken to support women entrepreneurs globally.

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