


## Article

# Leadership Behaviors of Women Entrepreneurs in SME Sector of Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** Women's leadership development in entrepreneurial business is critical to improving women's participation in management and businesses in Bangladesh. Research shows that only seven percent of all business establishments in Bangladesh are women-owned and women-headed. This limited ownership and development of women's leadership behavior is a clear gap to be filled. Thus, the study aims to identify women's leadership behavioral factors (WLBFs) and examine the causal relationship between WLBFs and women's leadership behavior practices (WLBP) in line with path-goal leadership theory. We conducted causal research, applying systematic sampling techniques in selecting participants and conducting interviews with 366 women entrepreneurs from the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries database under seven administrative divisional headquarters. We analyzed data through exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modeling techniques. The results show that the factors internal to women as entrepreneurs (including entrepreneurial attitude, intentions, and workplace learning culture), the factors external to women as entrepreneurs (such as training and education), and sociocultural factors are significantly related to the development of WLBP. The external organizational behavior context was not significant. WLBP help develop directive, supportive, participatory, and achievement-oriented leadership practices among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. This study suggests that policymakers, implementing managers, training service providers, and women entrepreneurs focus on entrepreneurial attitude, intention, education and skills development training, workplace learning culture, and sociocultural support among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** women entrepreneurs; women leadership behaviors; directive leadership; supportive leadership; participative leadership; achievement-oriented leadership



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## 1. Introduction

Women's leadership development in management and businesses is a priority socioeconomic development agenda in Bangladesh, because women entrepreneurs lag in economic participation and leadership [1,2]. Female entrepreneurs are emerging as essential players in the economy, but their representation in leadership positions is minimal [3]. According to research, women own and lead only 7% of all business establishments in Bangladesh [1,4]. Thus, the limited ownership and leadership capabilities among women entrepreneurs is a clear research gap that needs to be filled in entrepreneurship business development. Recognition of female leadership roles in SMEs is even more important and influential than in larger organizations [5]. Gender and entrepreneurial leadership are largely unexplored and undocumented topics [6]. Many leadership scholars such as Ludviga and Kalvina, Famakin and Abisuga, and Salanova and Sanni have conducted studies on the path-goal theory and employee job satisfaction [7–9].

However, research shows that a few studies have focused on using the path-goal leadership behavioral style in women-led SME organizations. The challenge is that understanding of entrepreneurial leadership behavior in SMEs is limited [10]. While our

understanding of the strong relationship between the quality of leadership and the management of SMEs is becoming clearer [11], there is considerably less focus on the analysis of leadership and leadership development [10]. So, it is important to conduct further research on women's leadership behaviors and recognize their effectiveness [12]. Hence, an understanding of WLBFs can expedite leadership behavior practices. How do WLBFs help to enhance leadership practices? What is the causal relationship between WLBFs and the directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership behavior among women entrepreneurs? Thus, the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify WLBFs that help to enhance WLBP among female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.
2. To investigate the relationship between WLBFs and directive, supportive, participatory, and achievement-oriented leadership practices among Bangladeshi female entrepreneurs.

## 2. Related Research

Entrepreneurship is an issue directly connected with leadership behaviors. According to Benjamin Higgins [13], entrepreneurship is a function of seeking investment and production opportunities, organizing an enterprise to undertake a new production process, raising capital, hiring labor, arranging the supply of raw materials, finding a site, introducing a new technique and commodities, discovering new sources of raw materials, and selecting top managers of the day-to-day operations of the enterprise. Literature shows that women's entrepreneurship functions continue in a cyclical process, starting with generating business ideas; identifying new entry opportunities [14]; developing a business concept or business planning [15]; transforming opportunities into marketable goods and services [14]; adding value to goods and services through time and resources [14] or through enterprise resourcing and funding the venture [14]; and launching, growing, and ending the new venture [14]. Research postulated that both external and internal factors influence women's entrepreneurship activities, including generating ideas, business planning, enterprise resourcing and management, and enterprise harvesting and growth [16].

Leadership is a heavily researched topic globally. Hence, no common actions can be perceived as effective leadership behavior. Leadership behavior refers to the traits and actions that make a leader effective and acceptable to their followers. Leadership behavior has a critical role in the creation of successful organizations. The success of an organization depends on the quality of work, effectiveness, working environment, employee health, and employee perceptions of the leadership [17]. Leadership behavior is the process by which a person can guide, direct, and influence the work of others to meet specific goals of the organization. Leadership behavior affects employee acceptance of a leader and can be used as a predictor of acceptance of a leader [18].

Research in this emerging field indicates parallels between entrepreneurship and leadership [19]. Leadership and entrepreneurship have been conceived as distinct underpinning traits, behaviors, and competencies [20]. Researchers have provided a treatise on the importance of leadership by arguing that a leader's effectiveness is a major determinant of the success or failure of a group, an organization, or even an entire country [21]. Leadership and management seem to substantially affect some organizational outcomes, such as innovation processes and entrepreneurship. One can understand entrepreneurs through the characteristics of leadership, as they constantly face uncertainty and risk [22]. Entrepreneurs must be equipped with leadership skills [10]. Thus, leadership affects the method of achieving entrepreneurship because it is a driver of entrepreneurship [23]. In entrepreneurship business organizations, women entrepreneurs adopt a leadership style resulting from reflexive individual action and interactions with the group that shape the entrepreneur's leadership style (attitudes and behaviors). Leadership needs to be considered a relational and interactive process [12]. Entrepreneurship and leadership development processes are highly related to entrepreneurs' behavioral aspects that improve women entrepreneurs' cognitive and positive affect. Both internal and external factors influence an enterprise's success

and leadership behavior. Factors internal to the women entrepreneurs, such as attitude, intention, and workplace learning culture, affect their leadership behaviors.

Similarly, factors external to women entrepreneurs, such as organizational behavior contexts, training and education, and sociocultural factors, influence leaders' behaviors. The availability and exercise of these factors enhance women entrepreneurs' knowledge and skills structure. They use "knowledge structures" to make assessments, judgments, or decisions involving opportunity evaluation, creation, and growth [24]. Table A1 shows a list of constructs and variables used in previous literature associated with women's entrepreneurship development.

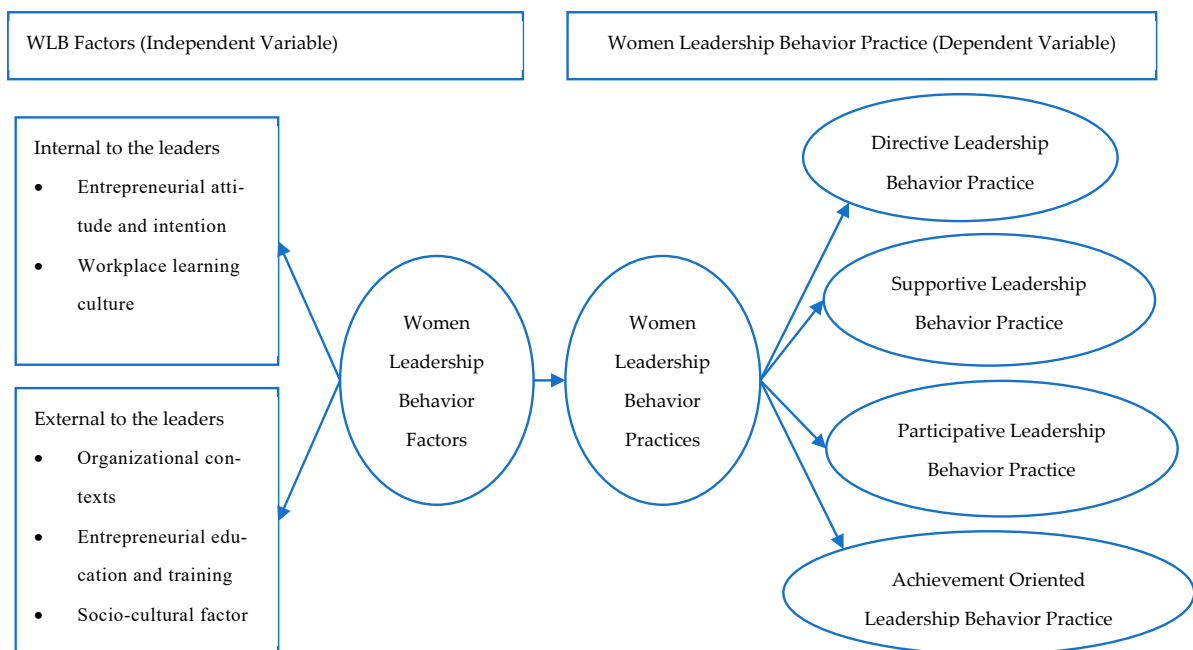
Path-goal theory is about how leaders motivate followers to accomplish designated goals (productivity). In path-goal theory, House and Mitchell [25] defined four types of leadership behaviors or styles: (i) directive, (ii) supportive, (iii) participative, and (iv) achievement-oriented. Path-goal theory explains that a leader's style or behavior should be best suited to the employees and workplace to achieve a common goal. Northouse [26] demonstrated that the path-goal theory focuses on how leaders motivate their followers to achieve set objectives. Bans-Akutey [27] explained that the directive style requires that the leader instructs followers precisely on what to achieve and how to achieve it, including timelines, rules, and regulations. The supportive style creates a friendly environment where subordinates can easily approach the leader. The participative style is an all-inclusive process where associates are involved in decision making.

The final style, the achievement-oriented style, encourages employees to continuously pursue excellence with the leader having confidence that employees can achieve what has been planned. It was posited that increased quality of leadership is one of the most important factors in the success of SMEs. The researchers supported this by suggesting that leadership behaviors are relevant in the SME business environment. In general, women entrepreneurs lead and manage enterprises where few employees work. Their leadership style is transformative and reciprocal among the team. Transformational leadership focuses on the participatory process and mutual trust [12] between the women entrepreneurs and the team members. In the context of micro and small firms, the performance of women-led enterprises is highly dependent on leadership capabilities, managerial and networking skills, technological abilities, and the education level of women entrepreneurs [28]. Northouse [26] argues that effective leadership requires knowledge and capabilities. So, the path-goal leadership theory requires learning leaders, interested in spreading a learning culture, to adopt directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented behavior [29]. We have summarized a list of constructs and associated variables in Table A1 which are used in path-goal theory, with modified variables which have been used in previous literature.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

We have developed a conceptual framework based on extensive first-hand experience and a comprehensive literature review on women's entrepreneurship development, based on path-goal theory and factors and practices of women's leadership behavior (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework for leadership behaviors of women entrepreneurs in SME sector of Bangladesh.

### 3.2. Development of Hypotheses

In the above conceptual framework, we used organizational contexts, entrepreneurial education and training, and sociocultural factors as external factors (external to the women entrepreneurs), because women entrepreneurs have limited influence on these external environmental factors. On the other hand, we used entrepreneurial attitude, intention, and the workplace learning culture created by leaders as internal factors (internal to the leaders). These five constructs were used as independent variables and collectively measured WLBFs. On the other hand, according to the path-goal theory, we used four leadership behavior factors/styles: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership behaviors. These collectively represent the measure of WLBP. The related variables (Annex-A) have been adopted mainly from the path-goal behavior questionnaire and variables used in recent studies. Leadership behavior is affected by independent variables. The hypothesis development is explained below.

#### 3.2.1. The Relationship between Entrepreneurial Attitude, Intention, and the WLBP

Women entrepreneurs develop business concepts [14] to transfer opportunities to marketable goods and services [14] and to identify, assemble, and allocate resources. They perform enterprise management activities such as planning operations; management of production and marketing; organization of employees, machines, and materials; management of customer expectations; and maintaining quality assurance of the products/services. In this regard, women entrepreneurs need an entrepreneurial attitude and intention to create a business, a risk-taking tendency, creativity, innovative ideas, and the intention to achieve success through hard work. There is a clear connection between human relations (responsibility delegation and motivation of others, hiring the right people, monitoring performance) and personal competencies (decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, perseverance, self-confidence, communication, and self-management skills) among female entrepreneurs [5]. Research shows that the women entrepreneurs with high motivation, entrepreneurial intention, and managerial skills can improve their business and achieve success more easily [30]. Women's entrepreneurial intention and confidence positively influence their business success [31]. Personal skills and competencies significantly impact the adopted leadership style [5]. Thus, the authors wanted to test the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Entrepreneurial attitude and intention positively and significantly expedite leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.*

### 3.2.2. The Relationship between the Workplace Learning Culture and WBLPs

Entrepreneurial leadership positively and significantly affects employees' innovative work behavior [32]. Entrepreneurial leadership is a critical factor that enables, encourages, and promotes employees' innovative work behavior [33]. Women entrepreneurs need to lead and manage people and processes to achieve expected productivity and production. As the SME sector is highly labor-intensive and team members are highly interdependent, employees need to have a learning-focused workforce and a decent work environment. Women entrepreneurs identify training needs for employees using technical and management skills. They also arrange training for employees to understand how to work better with others, provide coaching support to team members on new product development, appreciate good work culture, and address employees' grievances. Thus, we reached the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *The workplace learning culture positively and significantly expedites leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.*

### 3.2.3. The Relationship between the External Organizational Behavioral Contexts and WLBPs

Entrepreneurship development requires access to finance and financial services, affordable market facilities, effective coordination among the service delivery institutions, and easy and simplified regulatory services [34]. Institutional loan facilities help women entrepreneurs to allocate and assemble resources and manage enterprises. External economic factors, such as skilled labor and appropriate raw materials, are also required to operate an entrepreneurial business. The convenient market facilities support entrepreneurs to ease the supply chain process and reach the end customers. The overall external support services influence the leadership behaviors of women entrepreneurs. In the women's context, SMEs lacking finance for developmental and other innovative strategies cannot gain and sustain a competitive advantage or manage the political, economic, and social issues themselves [35,36]. Based on the previous literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *External organizational behavioral contexts positively and significantly expedite women's leadership behavior practices in Bangladesh.*

### 3.2.4. The Relationship between Entrepreneurial Training and Education and WLBPs

The availability of business start-up training through the business registration process, enterprise financing, and market linkages helps women entrepreneurs to generate business ideas and develop business concepts. The availability of an adequate supply of women trainers and skill-development training, through human resource management and financial management, such as communication skills, product development, quality assurance, and customer relationship management, enhance women entrepreneurs' knowledge and skills structure. The learning process helps develop leadership behavior in enterprises, especially in leading and managing enterprise resources and people. According to Isenberg [37], entrepreneurs are most successful when they have access to the human, financial, and professional resources they need. Human capital, education and experience, and access to resources affect women entrepreneurs' success [38]. Human capital is developed through access to education and training programs, executive coaches or mentors, and stretch job assignments [39]. Thus, we wanted to test the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** *Entrepreneurial training and education positively and significantly expedite leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.*



### 3.2.5. The Relationship between Sociocultural Factors and WLBP

The role of the family members of women entrepreneurs is crucial and positive when external support systems are limited [40]. Family support works as a source of economic support, especially at the start of a business. The authors of [41,42] analyze the different barriers that female entrepreneurs face, including lack of family support. So, support from family affect entrepreneurship development and women's leadership behavior practices. In Islamic countries, social and cultural norms, on the one hand, and family issues, on the other hand, are the most serious issues for women entrepreneurs [43]. Women's entrepreneurial career choices revolve around and are shaped by a complex interplay of sociocultural factors. Balakrishnan et al. [44] postulated that sociocultural factors (religious, family, etc.) significantly affect women entrepreneurs' decision making and success in developing economies. The entrepreneurship functions require the public mobility of women entrepreneurs. In the context of Bangladesh, women's public mobility is hindered by their husbands and family members. Family support in general mobility, responsibilities of managing home and family, and husband cooperation in taking care of children in the family help women manage businesses and balance work–family life [34]. Thus, we wanted to test the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5 (H5).** *Sociocultural factors positively and significantly expedite women's leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.*

### 3.2.6. The Overall Relationship between WLBFs and WLBP

The leadership behavioral factors in women's entrepreneurship functions help enhance several leadership behavior styles, such as the directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented styles, as explained in the path–goal leadership theory.

### 3.2.7. Relationship between WLBFs and Women's Directive Leadership Behavioral Practices in Entrepreneurial Business

Empirical research conducted by Belás [45] found that the directive leadership style is preferred and adopted by many managers. Assertiveness/dominance is linked to leadership and leadership emergence. Assertiveness was positively related to employee-rated change, satisfaction and production [27,46,47]. Directive leadership implies that leaders play an active role in problem solving and decision making and expect their followers to be guided by their decisions [48]. Stephan and Pathak [49] provided evidence on self-productive leadership and entrepreneurial activity, showing that these characteristics ultimately affect entrepreneurial activity.

### 3.2.8. Relationship between WLBFs and Women's Supportive Leadership Behavior Practices in Entrepreneurship Business

Supportive leadership behavior acts as emotional support for employees. Adopting supportive behavior positively affecting employees' job satisfaction in the workplace. Research shows that supportive leadership behavior facilitates employee attachment to their jobs [50]. Supportive leaders recognize employees' interests and help them reconcile that with the objectives of the organization [51]. Research proves that when employees perceive other employees and management to be supportive of them, they perform better [52].

### 3.2.9. Relationship between WLBFs and Women's Participative Leadership Behavior Practices in Entrepreneurship Business

The essential tool of the participative style is that this style allows knowledge to be passed within the organization and allows for ideas, opinions, and suggestions to be shared [29]. Linski [53] explained the participative approach, stating that “employees are encouraged to contribute ideas towards identifying and setting organizational goals, problem-solving, and other decisions that may directly affect them”. The participative approach allows employees to share leadership and responsibilities [54]. Participative

leadership positively influences innovative entrepreneurship across countries [55]. Franco and Haase [56] provided evidence that participative leaders encourage collaboration within firms, so collaborative entrepreneurship emerges.

### 3.2.10. Relationship between WLBFs and Women's Achievement-Oriented Leadership Behavior Practices in Entrepreneurship Business

Achievement-oriented leadership is characterized by a leader who challenges employees to perform their work at the highest possible level. Such leaders show a high level of confidence and are capable of establishing and accomplishing challenging targets. When leaders are seen as fair and acknowledge good performance, their employees are more enthusiastic in the workplace [57]. When women lead their businesses, they set an example for other women. Entrepreneurship boosts the confidence, self-esteem, and well-being of women entrepreneurs and gives them a sense of control over their life [58]; accordingly, such practices boost employees' confidence. Self-confidence is developed because of leadership experiences and successes.

In line with the above literature, and exercising the different types of leadership behaviors, this study wanted to test how the leading factors in entrepreneurship help to enhance WLBFs among women entrepreneurs. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

**Hypothesis 6 (H6).** *WLBFs positively and significantly help to enhance directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.*

### 3.3. Research Methods and Data Analysis

We conducted causal research using a quantitative method to establish a hypothesized causal relationship between WLBFs and WLBFs. We collected primary data from the women entrepreneurs of seven administrative divisional headquarters in Bangladesh using listed entrepreneurs of BWCCI. We used the systemic probability sampling technique to identify participants and we conducted interviews with 366 women entrepreneurs to obtain results that were adequate for performing the multivariate analysis (Hair et al., 2010). In the systematic sampling design, we chose the sample by selecting a random starting point and then picking every  $i$ th element in succession from the sampling frame. We used a random number  $r$  between 1 and  $i$  to determine the first selection, where  $i$  is the sampling interval ( $i = N/n$ , dividing the population size  $N$  by the sample size  $n$ ), rounding to the nearest integer. The remaining selections were obtained by taking every  $i$ th listing from the ordered list to yield the sample of size  $n$  as follows;  $r, r + i, r + 2i, r + 3i, r + 4i, \dots, r + (n - 1)i$ . Here, the  $i$ th is each 9th listing element. The researchers arranged the entire population in a sequence and then selected a sample size. As the population was known, the researchers used an adjusted sample size formula to determine a sample size of 366 (95% confidence interval and 5% margin of errors). The sampling interval was 9, we chose a random number and repeated this procedure to reach the total sample size.

The primary survey was conducted in 2019 using the Likert scale. The authors used 57 variables under different factors and utilized exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modeling techniques to analyze the data. The common factor analysis, with an orthogonal rotation (Promax) method, was conducted using SPSS (v-22.0) to extract a significant number of significant factors that develop women's leadership behavior factors and women's leadership behavior practices. We analyzed SEM using AMOS software to examine the overall effects. By EFA, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test of sampling adequacy found 0.846, indicating that the strength of the relationship between the variables was meritorious. By communality test, 39 variables were extracted, and the average communalities value was  $0.688 > 0.60$  (highest-0.817, lowest-0.600), which satisfied the Kaiser reliability criterion. The authors found an Eigenvalue greater than 1 in 9 factors, and these factors explain 68.705% of the total variance of the dataset.

We conducted a reliability test to ensure the instruments were error-free and reflected reality. We used Cronbach's alpha (CA), a convergent validity test with factor loadings, an

average variance extracted (AVE) test, a composite reliability (CR) test, and discriminant validity to see whether the factors and constructs were independent and distinctly different from each other. Table 1 shows that all CA values were higher than 0.80 ( $CA > 0.70$ ), and all factor loadings (highest—0.922; lowest—0.741) were greater than 0.70 (factor loadings  $> 0.50$  [59]). The AVE and the CR of all the eight latent constructs values were greater than 0.60 ( $AVE > 0.50$  [59]) and 0.80 ( $CR > 0.70$  [59]), respectively. All constructs demonstrated discriminant validity [60]. So, all the criteria exceeded the minimum acceptable values.

**Table 1.** An overview of the constructs.

| Constructs                               | Variables   | Communality | Factor Loads | CR    | AVE   | CA    |
|--|---|-------------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Entrepreneurial attitude and intention   | Entrepreneurial intention to create business              | 0.700       | 0.862        | 0.886 | 0.661 | 0.884 |
|  | Risk-taking tendency                                      | 0.676       | 0.821        |       |       |       |
|  | Creative and innovative                                   | 0.612       | 0.804        |       |       |       |
|  | Intention to achieve through hard work                    | 0.678       | 0.763        |       |       |       |
| Workplace learning culture               | Coaching on product development                           | 0.708       | 0.856        | 0.910 | 0.670 | 0.910 |
|  | Identify training needs (technical and soft skills)       | 0.688       | 0.821        |       |       |       |
|  | Arrange training for employees                            | 0.671       | 0.811        |       |       |       |
|  | Having grievance processes                                | 0.681       | 0.809        |       |       |       |
|  | Appreciation of good work culture                         | 0.656       | 0.805        |       |       |       |
| Organizational contexts                  | Institutional loan facilities for project financing       | 0.747       | 0.861        | 0.908 | 0.711 | 0.907 |
|  | Friendly regulatory services                              | 0.732       | 0.852        |       |       |       |
|  | External market conditions                                | 0.720       | 0.851        |       |       |       |
|  | Economic factors (skilled labor and raw materials)        | 0.675       | 0.809        |       |       |       |
| Training and Education                   | Availability of skill development training                | 0.750       | 0.847        | 0.903 | 0.652 | 0.904 |
|  | Availability of business start-up training                | 0.697       | 0.821        |       |       |       |
|  | Availability of women trainers                            | 0.625       | 0.812        |       |       |       |
|  | Available advisory/mentoring services                     | 0.600       | 0.800        |       |       |       |
|  | Entrepreneurship education                                | 0.697       | 0.764        |       |       |       |
| Sociocultural factor                     | Responsibilities of managing home and family              | 0.795       | 0.887        | 0.920 | 0.743 | 0.919 |
|  | Husband support in taking care of children                | 0.760       | 0.873        |       |       |       |
|  | Family support in public mobility                         | 0.757       | 0.870        |       |       |       |
|  | Work–family life balance                                  | 0.674       | 0.820        |       |       |       |
| Directive leadership behavior            | Tasks instruction to employees                            | 0.693       | 0.848        | 0.881 | 0.650 | 0.881 |
|  | Scheduling tasks and duties                               | 0.697       | 0.803        |       |       |       |
|  | Assertiveness/dominance                                   | 0.632       | 0.800        |       |       |       |
|  | Self-productive leadership                                | 0.640       | 0.777        |       |       |       |
| Supportive leadership Behavior           | Give attention on personal needs                          | 0.807       | 0.881        | 0.909 | 0.667 | 0.908 |
|  | Helps to overcome employee problems                       | 0.699       | 0.852        |       |       |       |
|  | Maintain friendly relationships                           | 0.614       | 0.804        |       |       |       |
|  | Having empathy (ability to understand and share feelings) | 0.625       | 0.801        |       |       |       |
|  | Encourage respectful workplace                            | 0.644       | 0.741        |       |       |       |
| Participative leadership behavior        | Share plans and seek ideas                                | 0.817       | 0.922        | 0.905 | 0.706 | 0.905 |
|  | Exercise coaching abilities                               | 0.769       | 0.896        |       |       |       |
|  | Ability to empower and inspire people                     | 0.620       | 0.795        |       |       |       |
|  | Consult in decision-making process                        | 0.655       | 0.752        |       |       |       |
| Achievement-oriented leadership behavior | Build self-confidence and self-efficacy to achieve        | 0.680       | 0.822        | 0.882 | 0.652 | 0.882 |
|  | Drive for highest results                                 | 0.647       | 0.817        |       |       |       |
|  | Caring continuous improvement of team performance         | 0.659       | 0.798        |       |       |       |
|  | Make tasks pleasant and meaningful                        | 0.649       | 0.794        |       |       |       |

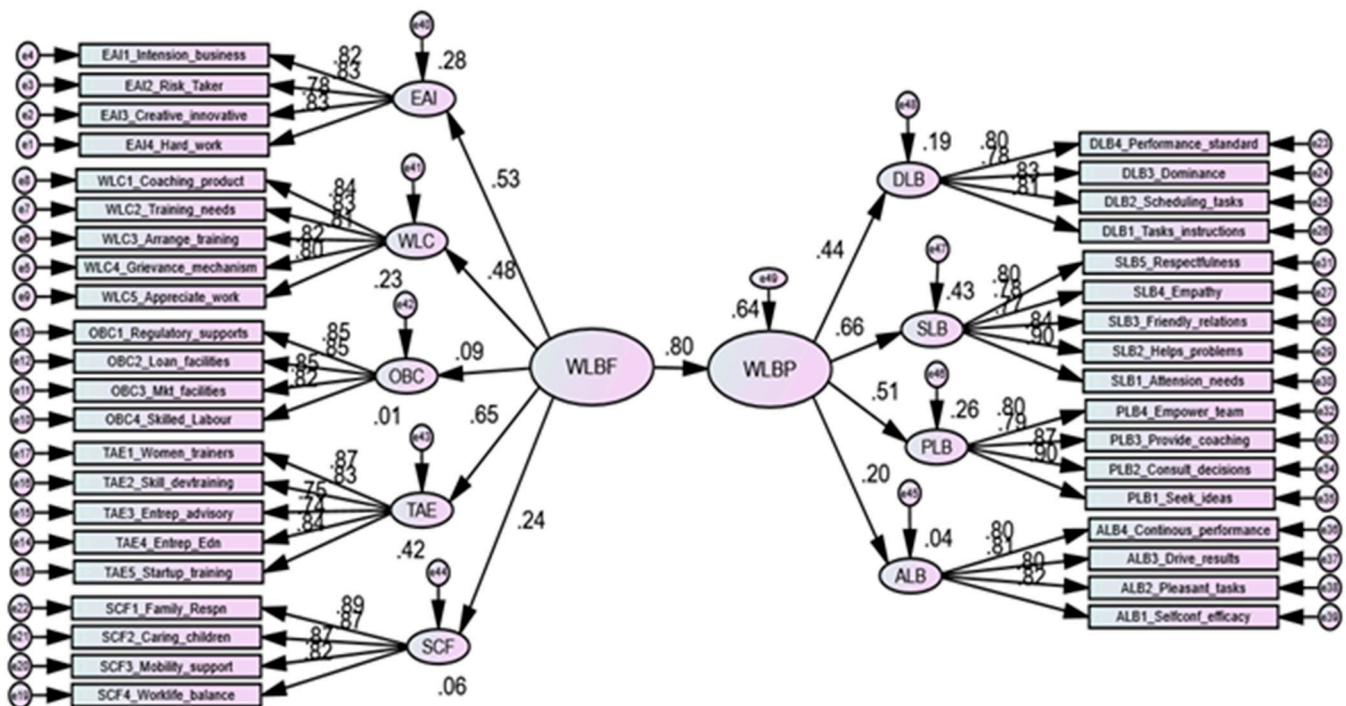
Extraction methods: maximum likelihood; rotation method: Promax with Kaiser normalization.



#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1. WLBFs Help to Expedite WLBP among Women Entrepreneurs

Through structural equation modelling (SEM), we converted the conceptual framework into an AMOS graphic path diagram (Figure 2). The WLBFs external to women entrepreneurs include organizational behavior contexts, entrepreneurial education and training, and socioeconomic factors; factors internal to women entrepreneurs included entrepreneurial attitude, intention, and workplace learning culture. WLBFs influence leadership behavior practices. Figure 2 shows the overall effects of WLBFs on WLBP. Based on the path analysis, we presented the multiple hypotheses test results.



CMIN = 1152.012; DF = 692.000; CMIN/DF = 1.665 < 2; CFI = 0.951 > 0.950; RMSEA = 0.043 < 0.06; PClose = 0.998 > 0.05.

Figure 2. The overall effects of WLBFs on WLBP among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

The test results (Table 2) show that the relationship between the entrepreneurial attitude and intention (EAI) and WLBFs (H1) is positive and highly significant ( $\beta = 0.529$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The significant relationship between the entrepreneurial attitude and intention and women's leadership behavior is that women entrepreneurs perform entrepreneurship functions, as follows: generating business ideas; developing business concepts; resourcing machines and materials; managing people, products, processes, and performance. In that endeavor, women entrepreneurs possess entrepreneurial intentions to create a business where they can apply creative and innovative ideas, such as developing new products and business opportunities and assessing and taking risks. They also have the dedication to work hard (need for achievement) to manage enterprise operations, deal with customers, and maintain external communications to be successful. The previous studies also show similar findings, such as the need for achievement, including enterprise resourcing and managerial skills [61]. These have a positive and significant impact on the women entrepreneurs' success.

**Table 2.** Test results of multiple hypotheses.

| Hypothesis | Construct | Path | Construct | Std. Beta Estimate | S.E.  | C.R.  | <i>p</i> | Comments        |
|------------|-----------|------|-----------|--------------------|-------|-------|----------|-----------------|
| H1         | EAI       | ←    | WLBF      | 0.529              | 0.334 | 4.386 | 0.001    | Significant     |
| H2         | WLC       | ←    | WLBF      | 0.477              | 0.374 | 4.261 | 0.001    | Significant     |
| H3         | OBC       | ←    | WLBF      | 0.093              | 0.242 | 1.314 | 0.189    | Not Significant |
| H4         | TAE       | ←    | WLBF      | 0.651              | 0.475 | 4.425 | 0.001    | Significant     |
| H5         | SCF       | ←    | WLBF      | 0.237              | 0.272 | 2.938 | 0.003    | Significant     |

The test results also show that the relationship between the creation of a workplace learning culture and WLBFs (H2) is direct and highly significant ( $\beta = 0.477$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The reason for the significant relationship is that in resourcing and managing business organizations, women entrepreneurs provide coaching and mentoring services to their employees regarding product development. In operating the production process and ensuring smooth operations, women entrepreneurs promote a workplace learning culture to nurture respectful behavior among their team members. Women entrepreneurs identify related soft and technical skills training and arrange such activities for their team members. They promote appreciation of good work culture in the workplace. Moreover, women entrepreneurs give attention to listening to grievances and systemically solve these. So, the internal factors (positive attitude, intention, and the creation of a workplace learning culture) expedite the process of women's leadership behavior.

The study results show that the relationship between organizational behavior contexts and women's leadership behavior factors (H3) is positive but not significant (standardized beta coefficient,  $\beta = 0.093$ ,  $p = 0.05 > 0.189$ ). The government regulatory services, such as the license approval process, policy implementation, and coordination mechanisms among public and private institutions, do not favor women entrepreneurs. Moreover, the existing access to finance, access to market facilities, and availability of skilled labor does not favor women entrepreneurs at the divisional headquarters in Bangladesh. Due to these limitations, women entrepreneurs cannot take loans from banks or non-bank financial institutions as required. Thus, women entrepreneurs cannot assemble and allocate resources towards expanding business and organization of employees, machines, and materials, as and when they are needed. The limitation of regulatory services, access to finance, market facilities, and lack of skilled labor does not influence women entrepreneurs in enhancing leadership behavior practices. Previous studies also concluded that women entrepreneurs face challenges such as access to finance and market facilities, including arranging loan guarantors, mortgage documents, lack of knowledge of the banking system, product marketing, e-marketing, and internet use [1]. Women entrepreneurs lack institutional support and face problems in acquiring financial resources [42].

This study revealed that entrepreneurship training and education (TAE) is the strongest factor that expedites women's leadership behavior factors (H4) in Bangladesh. The direct effect of entrepreneurship education and training (TAE) on WLBF is 65% ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the relationship between the TAE and WLBFs is highly significant. The significant relationship is that business start-up information, such as business registration process, enterprise financing, and market linkages, help women entrepreneurs generate business ideas and develop business concepts. The availability of an adequate supply of trainers and skills development education and training, in topics including human resource management, financial management, communication skills, product development, quality assurance, and customer relationship management, enhance women entrepreneurs' knowledge and skill structure. The skills acquisition and application of the learning help develop leadership capabilities among women entrepreneurs to lead and manage enterprise resources and people. Previous studies revealed similar findings in other countries. Entrepreneurs are most successful when they have access to the human, financial, and professional resources they need [37]. Another study shows that human capital, education and experience, and access to resources affect the success of women's entrepreneurship [38].

The test results show that sociocultural factors (SCFs) positively and significantly expedite women's leadership behavior among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh (H5). The direct effect of SCF on WLBP is 24% ( $p < 0.001$ ). This significant relationship is because the family supported women entrepreneurs in caring for their home and family, enterprise responsibilities, and public mobility, and their husbands had supported them in taking care of children in the family. These sociocultural factors helped women to manage businesses and balance work–family life. External factors, including economic and sociocultural factors, positively and significantly impact women entrepreneurs' success [61].

#### 4.2. WLBP Help Develop Directive, Supportive, Participative, and Achievement-Oriented Leadership Behavior among Women Entrepreneurs in Bangladesh

This study revealed that WLBP helped to develop directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership practices among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

Table 3 shows that WLBP help to develop women entrepreneurs' directive leadership practices (H6a). The direct effect of WLBP on directive leadership behavior practices is approximately 44% ( $\beta = 0.435$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The reasons for the significance are that, through women entrepreneurs engaging in enterprise resourcing, management, and performance evaluation, they instructed their employees and team members about their tasks and provided a schedule of functions and duties. In performing such tasks, women entrepreneurs become assertive and show strong leadership. They also demonstrate self-productive leadership behavior so that their team members follow their lead.

**Table 3.** The hypotheses test results.

| Hypothesis | Construct                                | Path | Construct                          | Stand. Beta Estimate | S.E.  | C.R.  | $p$   | Comments    |
|------------|--|------|------------------------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| H6a        | Directive Leadership Behavior            | ←    | Women Leadership Behavior Practice | 0.435                | 0.156 | 4.386 | 0.001 | Significant |
| H6b        | Supportive Leadership Behavior           | ←    | Women Leadership Behavior Practice | 0.659                | 0.197 | 5.535 | 0.001 | Significant |
| H6c        | Participative Leadership Behavior        | ←    | Women Leadership Behavior Practice | 0.506                | 0.212 | 4.752 | 0.001 | Significant |
| H6d        | Achievement Oriented Leadership Behavior | ←    | Women Leadership Behavior Practice | 0.204                | 0.141 | 2.610 | 0.009 | Significant |

WLBP help enhance supportive leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs (H6b). The relationship between WLBP and SLBP is direct and highly significant ( $\beta = 0.659$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The direct effect of WLBP on SLBP is approximately 66%. The reasons for the significant relationship are that women entrepreneurs generally work in a small team and with employees, which is why both the employees and the women entrepreneurs achieve empathetic abilities, through which they can understand each other and share personal feelings. Women entrepreneurs can give attention to employees' individual needs and help overcome employee problems, building friendly relationships. Women entrepreneurs encourage a respectful workplace culture to exercise supportive leadership behavior. Bullough et al. [62] revealed that women entrepreneurs achieved specific leadership capabilities through entrepreneurship, including gaining public speaking and presentation skills, networking with people, negotiation skills, relationships building, and developing strategic business plans. The study results are supported by Nurillah [63], in that the behavior of women entrepreneurs displayed a democratic leadership style in a particular situation, and there was a tendency for supportive leadership behavior among women entrepreneurs. Narisa [64] argues that entrepreneurs believe that the success of their business depends on their collaboration with people, which is similar to supportive leadership behavior.

WLBP help to enhance participative leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs. The relationship between WLBP and PLBP is direct and highly significant ( $\beta = 0.506, p < 0.001$ ). The results show that women entrepreneurs practice participatory leadership behavior through entrepreneurship businesses, particularly sharing work plans and seeking ideas within their team, practicing consultation before decision making, providing coaching to improve employee performance, and empowering and inspiring their team members. Esmer and Dayi [15] found that women entrepreneurs achieve entrepreneurial leadership capabilities, including risk-taking, innovation, and problem-solving skills. Malleswara et al. [65] show that most women entrepreneurs adopt the participative leadership style (56.25%) compared with other styles. Hersey and Blanchard in Miftah Thoha [66] argues that leaders who provide guidance and high support tend to have a coaching leadership style. Coaching leadership behavior leads to a relationship-oriented leadership style that is synonymous with the participatory/democratic leadership style, which is widely found in women leadership's style.

WLBP help to enhance achievement-oriented leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs (H6d). The relationship between WLBP and ALBP is direct and significant ( $\beta = 0.204, p < 0.009$ ). The results show that, through entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs develop the ability to build self-confidence and self-efficacy, helping to drive employees towards higher results, and giving attention to continuous improvement in their team's performance. They exercise improved abilities to make tasks pleasant and meaningful. The findings are supported by Dunaetz [67], who posits that the achievement-oriented style encourages employees to pursue excellence continuously, with the leader having confidence that subordinates can achieve what has been planned.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Development of leadership capabilities among women entrepreneurs is valuable for leading and managing entrepreneurship businesses. The key finding of this study is that women's entrepreneurship businesses help in developing leadership behaviors, particularly supportive, participatory, directive, and achievement-oriented leadership practices, among women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. The important findings of this study are as follows:

The first finding is that, among the five WLBFs, four factors (entrepreneurial attitude and intention; creation of workplace learning culture; accessing entrepreneurship training and education; and sociocultural factors) directly and significantly affect the overall leadership behavior practices among women entrepreneurs. Among them, the major contributing factors are accessing entrepreneurship training and education, entrepreneurial attitudes and intention, and creating a workplace learning culture.

The second finding is that the women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh primarily exercise supportive leadership behaviors, followed by participative leadership practices. They also practice directive and achievement-oriented leadership behaviors in certain situations. They develop supportive leadership behaviors, such as empathetic abilities to understand and share feelings; giving attention to employees' personal needs; solving employee problems; building friendly relationships; and encouraging respectful workplace cultures. Women entrepreneurs practice participatory leadership behavior, particularly through sharing work plans with their team and seeking ideas; performing consultations before decision making; providing coaching to improve performance; and empowering and inspiring team members.

Women entrepreneurs also practice directive (instruct team members about tasks, give due charges and duties, become assertive and demonstrate self-productive leadership behavior). They also exercise achievement-oriented leadership behaviors (build self-confidence and self-efficacy, drive employees towards higher results, pay attention to continuous improvement of team performance, and make tasks pleasant and meaningful).

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. Thus, the study recommends the following:

- (i) Training service providers should focus on specific entrepreneurship education and training, including subjects of business start-ups, communications, financial management, and product development. They should also ensure adequate women trainers and experts to provide training and advisory services for women entrepreneurs at a local level.
- (ii) Women entrepreneurs should have an entrepreneurial attitude and the intention to create business ventures. They can apply creative and innovative ideas, take risks, have a dedication to working hard (needed for achieving success) in managing enterprise operations, dealing with customers' expectations, and maintaining external communications.
- (iii) They should create a workplace learning culture by undertaking coaching and mentorship services, encouraging a culture of respectful behavior and appreciation of good work.
- (iv) They should seek support from family members regarding public mobility, performing responsibilities in managing businesses, consulting with their husbands in taking care of their children, and balancing work–family life.

The critical contribution of this study is that it has integrated two different concepts—women entrepreneurship business development and women leadership behavior practices—among the women entrepreneurs, in line with the path–goal theory. The five established business development external and internal factors, and the four leadership behavior factors (according to the path–goal theory—directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented) are integrated into the conceptual framework. The factors external to women entrepreneurs include access to entrepreneurship development education and training, organizational context, and sociocultural factors. The factors internal to women entrepreneurs are entrepreneurial attitude and intention, and the creation of a workplace learning culture. Another contribution is that the study identified four factors—accessing entrepreneurship development education and training, sociocultural factors, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, and creating a workplace learning culture—which directly enhance women's entrepreneurial leadership behavior practices in Bangladesh.

The study's main limitation is that the survey covered only urban women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh. So, in the future, researchers should conduct a study covering both urban and rural women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh to encompass a wider scope of leadership behavior practices.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1.** A list of factors and associated variables affecting women’s leadership behavior and women’s leadership behavior practice.

| Factors Affecting Women’s Leadership Behavior (Independent Variables) |   |  | Women Leadership Behavior Practices (Dependent Variables) |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| Constructs  | Variables   | Authors  | Constructs  | Variables   | Authors   |
| Entrepreneurial attitude and intention (Bullough et al., 2015)        | Entrepreneurial intention to create business        | Bullough et al., 2015;   | Directive leadership behavior                             | Tasks instructions to employees                           | Davidson et al., 2019   |
|   | Risk-taking tendency                                | Esmer and Dayi, 2017; Bagheri, 2013.   |   | Scheduling tasks and duties                               | Davidson et al., 2019   |
|   | Creative and innovative                             | Li et al., 2020; Utoyo, 2020.  |   | Assertiveness/dominance                                   | Karlsen and Langvik, 2021; Carsrud et al., 2018;                  |
|   | Intension to achieve through hard work              | Khan et al., 2021  |   | Self-productive leadership                                | Stephan and Pathak, 2016  |
| Workplace learning culture (Bayan, 2018)                              | Coaching on product development                     | Esmer and Dayi, 2017; Dunne et al., 2016.  | Supportive leadership behavior                            | Give attention to personal needs                          | Davidson et al., 2019   |
|   | Identify training needs (technical and soft skills) | Cardella et al., 2020; Laura et al., 2020.   |   | Helps to overcome employee problems                       | Kapoor, 2019; Esmer&Dayi, 2018).                                  |
|   | Arrange training for employees                      | Cardella et al., 2020; CEB (2015).   |   | Maintain friendly relationships                           | Sallah and Caesar, 2020; Kapoor, 2019; Ferdousi and Mahmud, 2019. |
|   | Having grievances mechanism                         | Kapoor, 2019; Esmer and Dayi, 2018; Sebert Kuhlmann et al., 2017.                    |   | Having empathy (ability to understand and share feelings) | Karlsen and Langvik, 2021; Hadia, 2017                            |
| Organizational contexts (Deborah et al., 2015)/                       | Appreciation of good work culture                   | Bullough et al., 2015; CEB (2015).   | Participative leadership behavior                         | Encourage respectful workplace                            | Mamun et al., 2018; Huis et al., 2017.                            |
|   | Institutional loan facilities for project financing | Laura A. et al., 2020; Osama et al., 2020; Ferdousi F., 2019; ILO (2014).            |   | Share plans and seek ideas                                | Davidson et al., 2019   |
|   | Friendly regulatory services                        | Laura A. et al., 2020; Osama et al., 2020;   |   | Exercise coaching abilities                               | O’Neil, 2015  |
|   | External market conditions                          | Laura A. et al., 2020; Clough et al., 2019; OECD (2017); Ahmed N., 2017; ILO (2014). |   | Ability to empower and inspire people                     | Carsrud et al., 2018; Dunne et al., 2016; Bullough et al., 2015;  |
|   | Economic factors (skilled labor and raw materials)  | (Khan et al., 2021; Wube, 2010)  |   | Consult in the decision-making process                    | Karlsen and Langvik, 2021; Claudia 2019                           |

Table A1. Cont.

| Factors Affecting Women's Leadership Behavior (Independent Variables) |  |   | Women Leadership Behavior Practices (Dependent Variables) |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| Constructs  | Variables                                    | Authors   | Constructs  | Variables   | Authors   |
| Training and Education<br>(Bullough et al., 2015)                     | Availability of skill development training   | Cárdela et al., 2020; Siba Eyerusalem, 2019; Ferdousi F., 2019.                       | Achievement-oriented leadership behavior                  | Build self-confidence and self-efficacy to achieve    | Khan et al., 2021; Mamun et al., 2018; Esmer and Dayi, 2018, O'Neil, 2015 |
|   | Available business start-up training         | Nazrul Islam et al., 2019; MIWE (2019).   |   | Drive for the highest results                         | Hadia, 2017   |
|   | Availability of women trainers               | Ahmed N. et al., 2017; ILO (2017).  |   | Collaboration for win-win results                     | Pallavi and Khushboo, 2014; Knopik and Moerer, 2008).                     |
|   | Available advisory/mentoring services        | ILO (2014); Osama et al., 2020;   |   | Caring for continuous improvement of team performance | CEB (2015)  |
|   | Entrepreneurship education                   | Osama et al., 2020; Laura et al., 2020; Cardella et al., 2020; Islam N. et al., 2019. |   | Make tasks pleasant and meaningful                    | House and Mitchell, 1974  |
| Sociocultural factor (Khan et al., 2021)                              | Responsibilities of managing home and family | Deborah et al., 2015  |   |   |   |
|   | Husband support in taking care of children   | Nazrul et al., 2019; Hoffmann et al., 2014.   |   |   |   |
|   | Family support in public mobility            | Kapoor, 2019; Heintz et al., 2018; Shingla and Singh, 2015.                           |   |   |   |
|   | Work–family life balance                     | UN (2018); Sebert Kuhlmann et al., 2017.  |   |   |   |

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