

Between Caregiving and Commerce: Single Mothers' Entrepreneurship in Crisis-Era Myanmar

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Abstract

Despite extensive research on women's entrepreneurship in Western contexts, the entrepreneurial experiences of single mothers in crisis-affected Southeast Asian nations remain critically underexplored. This study examines how single mothers in Myanmar navigate entrepreneurship amid political upheaval, economic collapse, and pervasive social stigma following the 2021 military coup. Through semi-structured interviews with eight single mother entrepreneurs, analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), three interrelated themes emerged: (a) a transformation from necessity to agency, in which crisis-driven survival strategies evolved toward unexpected empowerment; (b) the paradoxical operation of stigma as both barrier and bond, simultaneously excluding women from mainstream networks while fostering solidarity and mutual support; and (c) the redefinition of entrepreneurial success through maternal frameworks, measured by caregiving capacity rather than profit. These findings challenge deficit-based narratives in Western-centric entrepreneurship discourse and reveal how marginalized women construct alternative economies grounded in maternal ethics and mutual aid. The study carries significant implications for policymakers and development practitioners, emphasizing the necessity of context-sensitive approaches that recognize women-centered solidarity economies.

Keywords: women's entrepreneurship, single mothers, Myanmar, crisis entrepreneurship, solidarity economy

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Introduction

The intersection of caregiving responsibility, social marginalization, and economic crisis creates conditions that mainstream entrepreneurship scholarship has largely failed to examine. Research on entrepreneurship has been dominated by Western, relatively stable contexts in which enterprise is conceptualized primarily as a vehicle for opportunity exploitation, innovation, and wealth creation (Brush et al., 2009; Kyriakou et al., 2025; Welter, 2011). These frameworks obscure the entrepreneurial realities of millions of women in the Global South who build livelihoods not from identified opportunities but from urgent necessity, and who do so while carrying the sole responsibility for dependent children in societies that stigmatize their family status.

Myanmar since the military coup of February 2021 represents an extreme instance of this broader phenomenon. The seizure of power by the *tatmadaw* triggered one of the most severe economic contractions in the country's modern history: GDP declined by an estimated 18% in the first post-coup year (Kyriakou et al., 2025; World Bank, 2022), the kyat lost more than half its value, and banking system dysfunction, supply chain collapse, and escalating civil conflict compounded these shocks, producing dramatic increases in household poverty with women and children disproportionately affected (OCHA, 2022). Into this environment, single mothers, who already occupied a precarious social position shaped by patriarchal norms that stigmatize divorce, widowhood, and separation, were forced to construct or radically adapt economic strategies to sustain their families.

Despite the scale and significance of this phenomenon, the scholarly literature offers limited guidance. Research on women's entrepreneurship in Myanmar predates the coup and does not address post-crisis conditions (Anh & Duong, 2018). The broader literature on crisis entrepreneurship has addressed natural disasters and post-conflict recovery but has paid insufficient attention to ongoing conflict contexts, to the specific situation of caregiving women, and to the Global South more generally (Kyriakou et al., 2025; Williams & Vorley, 2015). The necessity entrepreneurship literature, while relevant, has tended to frame necessity-driven venture creation primarily through the lens of what entrepreneurs lack rather than what they construct (Hessels et al., 2008). Feminist entrepreneurship scholars have challenged these deficit narratives (Blecker & Braunstein, 2022; Hughes et al., 2012; Ilkcaracan, 2025; Marlow & McAdam, 2013), yet empirical work situated in crisis-affected Asian contexts remains notably sparse.

This study responds to this gap by examining the lived entrepreneurial experiences of single mothers in Myanmar in the post-coup period, drawing on feminist phenomenological methodology to center participants' voices and sense-making. It is situated within feminist economics, which regards care work as constitutive of rather than peripheral to economic life (Blecker & Braunstein, 2022; Folbre, 2001; Nelson, 2006), and within research on solidarity economies that takes seriously non-capitalist economic forms (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Ilkcaracan, 2025).

The existing literature establishes several relevant frameworks. The concept of necessity entrepreneurship (Blecker & Braunstein, 2022; Reynolds et al., 2002) captures something real about the conditions under which many women in the Global South enter enterprise, even if its binary character has been criticized (Welter et al., 2017). Research on women's entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia has documented barriers including limited access to formal credit, exclusion from male-dominated business networks, and care responsibilities that

constrain time and mobility (Anh et al., 2020; Doanh & Bernat, 2019). The literature on stigma and entrepreneurship has examined how social disapproval shapes entrepreneurial behavior and network formation (Blecker & Braunstein, 2022; Dodd & Anderson, 2001; Ilkkaracan, 2025; Renko et al., 2012), though relatively little of this work addresses the compound stigma faced by single mothers in conservative social contexts. Feminist scholarship on maternal ethics and care (Blecker & Braunstein, 2022; Noddings, 1984; Ruddick, 1989) offers a framework for understanding how caregiving responsibilities might shape, rather than merely constrain, entrepreneurial motivation and strategy.

Building on these frameworks, this study asks: How do single mothers in crisis-era Myanmar experience and make sense of their entrepreneurial journeys, and what do their experiences reveal about the relationship between caregiving, stigma, and entrepreneurial identity in a non-Western crisis context?

Method

This study employs interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative methodology oriented toward understanding how individuals make sense of their lived experiences (Eatough, 2026; Smith & Nizza, 2022). IPA proceeds from a double hermeneutic: participants make sense of their experiences, and the researcher makes sense of that sense-making, requiring sustained engagement with individual accounts before cross-case patterns are identified. Its commitment to idiographic depth and its epistemological orientation, which treats experience as knowable but always perspectival, are consistent with a feminist methodology that privileges participant voices while acknowledging the constitutive role of the researcher.

Participants

Eight single mother entrepreneurs participated in the study, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling via community networks and women's support organizations in Myanmar. Inclusion criteria required that participants: (a) self-identified as single mothers through divorce, widowhood, or separation; (b) had at least one dependent child living with them; (c) were operating an entrepreneurial venture at the time of interview; and (d) had either started or significantly adapted their venture following the February 2021 coup. The sample size is consistent with IPA's emphasis on depth over breadth, with Smith and Nizza (2022) recommending samples of between three and eight participants.

Participants ranged in age from 26 to 44, and their businesses spanned food preparation and vending, tailoring, mobile retail, and online commerce. Specific geographic locations are withheld for participant safety, and all names are pseudonyms with identifying details altered.

Data Collection

All interviews were conducted in person by the first author in Burmese, between mid-2023 and early 2024. A semi-structured interview guide was developed collaboratively by both authors, drawing on the research literature and refined through pilot testing. The guide covered participants' pathways into entrepreneurship, their day-to-day business experience, the simultaneous management of caregiving and commercial responsibilities, experiences of social attitudes toward single mothers, and personal definitions of success. Representative questions included: "Can you describe how you came to start or significantly change your business after

the coup, and what the first few months were like?” and “When you think about whether your business is doing well, what does that mean to you?”

The first author’s native language fluency and deep cultural familiarity enabled access to colloquial registers and locally specific significance unavailable to an outsider researcher. Interviews were conducted in person at locations chosen by participants for comfort and safety, and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. With participants’ consent, interviews were audio-recorded; where recording was declined for security reasons, detailed contemporaneous notes were taken immediately following each interview. All recordings were transcribed verbatim in Burmese and translated into English by the first author, with back-translation checks applied to a subset of transcripts to verify accuracy.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed the IPA procedure described in Smith and Nizza (2022): each transcript was read multiple times in full; initial noting recorded observations about content, language use, and apparent significance; emergent themes were identified within each account; and cross-case analysis identified shared and divergent patterns across accounts. An audit trail was maintained throughout, and emerging interpretations were reviewed by both authors to support analytical rigour. Member checking was not possible in the current security environment but is acknowledged as a limitation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the International Executive School, Strasbourg, France. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including explicit discussion of the security implications of participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw, the use of pseudonyms, and secure data storage. Participant welfare was the primary ethical obligation throughout.

Reflexivity

The first author is from Myanmar and is herself a single mother, with direct embodied experience of the stigma, economic pressures, and caregiving demands participants described. This positionality conferred significant advantages: participants spoke with candor unavailable to an outsider researcher, linguistic fluency extended to colloquial registers and locally specific expressions, and insider understanding enabled contextually grounded follow-up (Naipaul and Kyriakou, 2026). Ongoing reflexive journaling and dialogic debriefing with the second author managed the corresponding risk of premature interpretive closure (Naipaul and Kouyate, 2026).

The second author is the first author’s doctoral supervisor, with a research background in hospitality management and scholarly expertise in the gendered and cultural dimensions of work and enterprise in non-Western and migrant contexts. Her outsider position served as a productive counterweight: her questions about aspects of the data that appeared self-evident to the first author pushed the analysis toward greater explicitness and reduced the risk of cultural assumptions remaining unexamined.

Results

The analysis generated three superordinate themes: (a) *From Necessity to Agency*; (b) *Stigma as Barrier and Bond*; and (c) *Maternal Frameworks for Success*. Each comprises two subordinate themes. All participant names are pseudonyms and identifying details have been altered to protect participant safety.

Theme 1: From Necessity to Agency

Subordinate Theme 1a: Crisis as the Trigger for Entrepreneurial Entry

All eight participants described their entry into entrepreneurship as a direct consequence of the economic disruption caused by the coup rather than as a planned or aspirational choice. The dominant emotional register across accounts was urgency, expressed through colloquial Burmese that conveyed the felt weight of having no alternative.

Aye, a 34-year-old former clerical worker whose employer had collapsed following the coup, described her decision to sell food from home:

I was so embarrassed, so deeply ashamed. But there was no other path open to me. Every night when I thought about my child going to sleep hungry, I knew I could not just sit there and do nothing. So I started selling food.

For Aye, the decision was made against a background of social humiliation as much as material necessity, and it was the thought of her child's hunger that overcame that humiliation. This tension between shame and maternal compulsion recurred across several accounts.

Nwe, 28, who began taking in tailoring work using her late mother's sewing machine, described her situation as follows: "After the coup, there was no one left to rely on. When I thought about how else I would feed the children, I just looked at the sewing machine." The image of simply looking at the machine conveys the improvised, resource-near character of early entrepreneurial decisions: no strategic assessment of market opportunity, just a domestic object, a skill, and a child who needed feeding.

Subordinate Theme 1b: Growing Into the Business

While necessity defined the point of entry, participants described a subsequent and often surprising process in which the ongoing practice of running a business produced transformations in self-perception, confidence, and identity. This shift was not immediate and was not uniformly positive, but it was consistent across all eight accounts.

Khin, 38, who ran a mobile retail operation, described the change in how she understood herself after approximately one year in business:

I surprised myself, honestly. I started keeping proper track of everything, managing the money carefully, thinking ahead. And then I realized: I can actually do this business. I can run it. I never once thought I had that kind of ability in me before.

Ma Htwe, 41, offered an account that implicitly rebutted prior external judgments: "My ex-husband used to say I could not manage money properly. Well. When I had to do it all myself,

it turned out he was wrong about that.” The understated tone conveys a quiet but significant re-authoring of identity: the business had become not only a livelihood but evidence against a story that had previously defined her.

Theme 2: Stigma as Barrier and Bond

Subordinate Theme 2a: The Costs of Being Seen as Alone

All participants described social stigma related to their status as single mothers as having direct and practical effects on their ability to do business. Three recurring forms of stigma-related constraint emerged across accounts: exclusion from or disadvantage within male-dominated commercial networks; difficulties accessing informal credit; and the ongoing cognitive and emotional burden of managing social perception.

Sein, 36, who sold cooked food at a market, described how male traders treated her: “The men do not trust you. They can see there is nobody standing behind you. So they do not give you a good price and they do not give you a good spot.” This points to a specific social meaning in informal Myanmar commercial settings: the absence of a male patron or guarantor translates into reduced access to credit, poorer trading terms, and marginal physical positioning within markets. Single mothers were not merely disadvantaged by their gender but by the visible absence of male social backing.

Thin, 33, who ran an online commerce business through Facebook, described the cognitive burden of constant identity management:

Every single interaction, I am thinking. How much do I say. I never mention the children. I never mention that there is no husband, because the moment I do, I can see them calculating, making their judgments. If there is no husband, what kind of woman is she, what kind of risk is she. It is exhausting to carry that all day.

Thin’s account illuminates a dimension of entrepreneurial labour invisible in conventional business analysis: the continuous, effortful management of social perception as a precondition for being able to trade at all.

Subordinate Theme 2b: Finding Each Other

Despite these experiences of marginalization, all eight participants described the development of close, reciprocal support networks with other women in similar circumstances. These networks had not been formally organized; they grew from shared situation and shared understanding, and participants consistently described them as among their most important resources.

Aye described how a weekly gathering in her neighbourhood had evolved from informal socializing into something more economically significant:

We started out just sitting together and talking. About the children, about everything, about nothing. And then slowly we realized: our problems are exactly the same. After that we just naturally started helping each other. One person’s customer becomes another’s. One person’s child is watched by another. We share everything. That is just how it became.

Ma Htwe described a practical childcare-sharing arrangement that had extended her productive capacity: “Me and Ma Khin, we take turns. When I go to the market, she takes the children. When she goes, I take them. We free each other up a little bit. You cannot do business if you cannot free yourself up a little bit.” The pragmatic register, emphasizing the practical arithmetic of time and caregiving, captures a form of economic coordination that operates entirely outside formal business or development frameworks.

Nwe connected the foundation of these networks explicitly to the shared experience of stigma:

Other people do not really understand, even when they try to be kind. They cannot know what it is like. But these women, they know. They live it every day, they carry it in the same way I carry it, they have the same children depending on them. There is no need to explain. They already understand.

Theme 3: Maternal Frameworks for Success

Subordinate Theme 3a: Feeding and Schooling as the Measures That Matter

When asked how they defined success and assessed whether their businesses were performing well, participants departed strikingly and consistently from conventional entrepreneurial metrics. Success was defined through the language of caregiving: the capacity to feed children, maintain their schooling, and cover medical expenses without falling into debt.

Khin articulated this framework with characteristic directness:

What is success for me? Every day, the children eat a proper meal. Every day, they can go to school. If one of them gets sick, I can take them to the hospital and pay for it without borrowing from anyone. That is all I need. That is exactly what I am working toward every single day.

The directness of this account does not indicate limited aspiration. It reflects a considered, ethically grounded framework in which the purpose of economic activity has been clearly and deliberately defined: the business existed to make these things possible.

Sein described a decision not to expand her food operation that makes sense only within this framework: “There was an opportunity to expand. I could have done it. But then I would be sharing those hours with the children. I would not be giving the evening to the children. The evening hours belong to the children.” This treats time as a form of care currency whose allocation is moral rather than purely economic. The rejected expansion was not irrational but governed by a logic of sufficiency rather than accumulation.

Subordinate Theme 3b: Dignity, Enough, and the Refusal of Debt

A related subordinate theme concerned participants’ consistent emphasis on dignity and the refusal of debt.

Ma Htwe described what success meant to her:

I do not need to have a lot. I do not need to be rich. What I need is to have no debts, to not have to go and ask anyone for anything. I want to have dignity. I want my children

to live properly, and I want to live properly alongside them. That is what success means to me. That is all it means.

For Ma Htwe, entrepreneurial success was the means of avoiding that loss of standing: not simply the achievement of a revenue target, but the preservation of the capacity to live without having to ask.

Thin brought these threads together: “I am not working to have a lot. I am working to have enough. My children’s needs, my needs. For us to live properly, that’s it.” This distinction between excess and sufficiency was not presented as resignation but as a deliberate ethical orientation: not the limit of what was achievable, but a considered account of what was worth achieving.

Discussion

The central finding of this study is not simply that single mothers in crisis-era Myanmar engage in entrepreneurship under difficult conditions. It is that their entrepreneurship reveals the extent to which the dominant frameworks used to understand, evaluate, and support enterprise are built on assumptions that do not travel well beyond the Western, relatively stable, and implicitly male contexts in which they were developed. When those frameworks encounter women who are simultaneously the sole carer for dependent children and the sole economic provider for their families, operating in the aftermath of a military coup that collapsed their employment and destabilized their currency, they systematically fail to see what these women are doing and why. The contribution of this study is not to add Myanmar to a database of women entrepreneurs in difficult circumstances. It is to show, through close engagement with the lived experience of eight participants, what entrepreneurship looks like when it is organized around care rather than accumulation, when solidarity networks emerge from shared exclusion rather than strategic alliance, and when the self doing business is reconstituted by the doing itself. These are not exceptional features of a particular context; they are features that mainstream entrepreneurship scholarship, by its own design, has been unable to see.

The necessity/opportunity binary that structures much of the global entrepreneurship literature (Hessels et al., 2008; Reynolds et al., 2002) has long functioned as an implicit quality hierarchy: opportunity entrepreneurs innovate, create value, and drive growth; necessity entrepreneurs survive. This framing has been criticized on theoretical grounds (Welter et al., 2017), but the experiences documented in this study offer something more specific: a demonstration of what the framework cannot see when applied to women in crisis contexts. Participants entered entrepreneurship under conditions of acute economic constraint, without prior entrepreneurial identity, using the domestic resources immediately at hand. By the criteria of mainstream enterprise scholarship, this is necessity entrepreneurship at its most basic. Yet the ongoing practice of running a business under these conditions produced something the deficit framing cannot account for, and what emerged across accounts was a recursive process in which the doing of business reconstituted the self doing it. The woman who looked at her mother’s sewing machine because there was nothing else, and the woman who realized, after a year of mobile trading, that she could manage money in ways her ex-husband had told her she could not, are not well described by a framework that asks only whether they exploited an identified opportunity. They are better understood through feminist scholarship that conceptualizes empowerment as emergent from material agency rather than a precondition for it (Cornwall, 2016; Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999): not a quality individuals bring to enterprise, but one that enterprise, under certain conditions, produces. This is a significant theoretical claim, because

it inverts the conventional causal logic. In the deficit framing, constrained entry conditions produce inferior outcomes. In the accounts gathered here, constrained entry conditions produced the conditions under which a particular form of identity transformation became possible. Crisis, paradoxically, was productive. This does not mean crisis is desirable; it means that a scholarship confined to identifying where necessity entrepreneurs fall short will consistently miss what their practice generates.

The relationship between social exclusion and entrepreneurial network formation is typically theorized as a straightforward obstacle: exclusion from dominant networks constrains access to resources, information, and markets, producing disadvantage (Brush et al., 2009; Ilkcaracan, 2025; Kyriakou et al., 2025; Verheul et al., 2006). What the participants in this study experienced was more complicated, and more theoretically interesting, than this account allows. The same absence of male social backing that produced market exclusion simultaneously became the social foundation for networks that formal business development programmes consistently fail to build. The women who shared customers, watched each other's children, and sat together until they recognized that their problems were the same did not form these networks through strategic calculation; they formed them through the embodied recognition of shared marginalization. Ethnic minority entrepreneurship research has long documented how exclusion from majority networks drives the development of alternative business communities organized around trust, reciprocity, and social solidarity (Blecker & Braunstein, 2022; Ilkcaracan, 2025; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Waldinger, 1995), but this study extends that insight into territory the literature has not previously explored. It shows that gender-based and family-structure-based exclusion generates equivalent dynamics, and that acute political crisis intensifies both the exclusionary pressures and the solidarity responses, producing networks whose depth of trust reflects not calculated alliance but the somatic recognition of a shared condition. These are not informal arrangements waiting to be formalized; they are a distinct mode of economic organization with their own logics of value and reciprocity. Gibson-Graham's (2006) diverse and solidarity economies framework captures something important here: what these women built is not a poor substitute for mainstream market participation but a different kind of economic formation, organized around the reproduction of community and care rather than the accumulation of capital. Recognizing this matters for policy, because interventions premised on integrating these women into existing market structures will miss the specific forms of economic value their current arrangements already generate.

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge this study poses to mainstream entrepreneurship scholarship concerns the question of what enterprise is for. The accumulation assumption, the implicit premise that the purpose of entrepreneurial activity is to maximize business outcomes, is so thoroughly embedded in the field's evaluative frameworks that it rarely needs to be articulated. It shapes what gets measured, what gets funded, and what gets recognized as success. When these frameworks encounter women whose consistent articulation of success centres on whether their children ate today, whether they can pay for school fees without borrowing, and whether they can live without having to ask anyone for anything, the standard response is to read this as evidence of low aspiration, limited capability, or inadequate access to growth-enabling resources. What this study argues instead is that these women are articulating a coherent and ethically grounded account of what economic activity is for, and that the deficit reading reflects not an accurate assessment of their entrepreneurship but the cultural and historical specificity of a theoretical tradition developed in contexts where market participation and caregiving were structurally separated. That separation rendered care invisible as an economic logic. Here, it is the centre of everything, and the frameworks built

on that separation are the ones that consistently fail to see what these women are doing. The misrecognition is not incidental; it is structural. Feminist economic theory has long argued that care is constitutive of economic life rather than external to it (Blecker & Braunstein, 2022; Folbre, 2001; Nelson, 2006), and maternal ethics scholarship treats caring practice as a form of ethical reasoning rather than a constraint on rational action (Ilkcaracan, 2025; Noddings, 1984; Ruddick, 1989). Sufficiency economy frameworks from the Southeast Asian context (Ilkcaracan, 2025; Piboolsravut, 2004) offer a non-Western account of economic purpose that resonates directly with participants' articulations of what they were working toward. What these frameworks share is an insistence that economic activity cannot be adequately understood or evaluated without attending to the values that give it direction, and that those values are not universal. A scholarship that continues to apply accumulation-oriented criteria to women whose entrepreneurship is organized around care and sufficiency will continue to misrecognize what they are building, and the policy interventions it generates will continue to miss them.

What the findings of this study collectively reveal is that entrepreneurship in crisis contexts does things that mainstream entrepreneurship scholarship has not been designed to see. It reconstitutes identities. It generates solidarity from exclusion. It organizes economic life around care, sufficiency, and the daily reproduction of family wellbeing in ways that the accumulation-oriented frameworks of the field cannot adequately capture or evaluate. Recognizing this requires more than adding new variables to existing models or extending existing frameworks to new populations. It requires attending to the possibility that the women in this study are not failed versions of the entrepreneurs the field knows how to study, but a different kind of entrepreneur altogether, one whose practice illuminates the limits of the categories through which entrepreneurship has been defined.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The theoretical argument developed above has direct consequences for how policymakers and development practitioners approach women's economic empowerment in crisis-affected settings. The dominant paradigm for such interventions, business planning training, growth-oriented financial literacy, and market integration support, was designed for a version of entrepreneurship that the women in this study do not practice and do not aspire to. Applying it here is not merely ineffective; it actively misrecognizes the economic forms these women have already built, and risks displacing them with models that neither fit the context nor serve the goals that participants themselves articulated.

Effective support must begin from what these women have already constructed rather than what policy frameworks assume they need. The solidarity networks documented in this study are not informal arrangements waiting to be formalized; they are functional economic institutions organized around trust, reciprocity, and mutual care, and they deserve to be resourced on their own terms. Care infrastructure, including flexible childcare and working arrangements, is not a welfare supplement to economic programming but a precondition for it, given that the caregiving and commercial dimensions of participants' lives are inseparable. Credit access frameworks must be redesigned around the realities of women without collateral, formal documentation, or male guarantors. And the measures of success embedded in any support programme must reflect what these women are actually working toward, which is not profit maximization but the capacity to sustain their families with dignity. Development frameworks that continue to evaluate women's entrepreneurship against accumulation-oriented criteria will continue to find it wanting, when the more accurate conclusion is that the criteria are wrong.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample of eight participants, while appropriate for IPA, cannot represent the full diversity of single mother entrepreneurs in Myanmar, and the specific conditions of post-coup Myanmar limit the direct generalizability of findings, though the analytical frameworks developed may have broader applicability. Member checking, which would have strengthened analytical rigour, was not feasible given the security environment at the time of data collection. The translation process, carefully managed by the first author as a native speaker of Burmese, nonetheless introduces the possibility of nuanced meaning being lost between languages. As with all qualitative research, the interpretive framework reflects the researchers' positionalities, which have been made as explicit as possible in the Reflexivity section. Future research might extend this work to other crisis-affected Southeast Asian contexts, examine longitudinal trajectories of necessity entrepreneurship among women caregivers, or engage larger samples through mixed-methods designs.

Conclusion

This study set out to understand how single mothers in crisis-era Myanmar experience and make sense of their entrepreneurial journeys, and the findings, organized through the three IPA themes of transformation from necessity to agency, stigma as both barrier and bond, and maternal frameworks for entrepreneurial success, demonstrate that entrepreneurship here is simultaneously a survival imperative, a site of identity formation, and a form of quiet resistance to the economic and social structures that have marginalized these women. Taken together, these findings challenge deficit-based and accumulation-oriented frameworks dominating mainstream entrepreneurship scholarship by revealing how marginalized women construct livelihoods around maternal ethics, relational solidarity, and carefully articulated sufficiency; and they call for a scholarship and policy landscape capable of seeing, and adequately valuing, what these women have built.

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