

## **Youth Entrepreneurship and Gender in the Caribbean: A Guyana Case Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines entrepreneurship from two key perspectives – youth and gender. Research on involvement of women in entrepreneurship is replete with notions of gender inequities. Studies on youth entrepreneurs, particularly in developing countries, seem to confirm this broad pattern. We examine whether gender inequities persist among youth entrepreneurs in the Caribbean country of Guyana or whether there are signs of change. In Guyana and the broader Caribbean, there is emergent cultural conduciveness allied with an active promotion of youth entrepreneurship by governments in partnership with non-governmental, educational and other institutions. In interrogating gender and youth entrepreneurship in this study, we utilized data derived from a survey of youth entrepreneurs conducted in two urban areas in Guyana and examined gender differences in the types of ventures established; perceptions of entrepreneurial challenges faced; access to support systems for establishing and running their businesses; and their mindsets that may influence business sustainability. This study found that 81% of female youth businesses operated in four main categories of business. Male youth businesses, however, were spread across a wider spectrum, while also competing in the areas in which female youth businesses clustered. Youth male and female entrepreneurs were almost uniform in their perceptions of entrepreneurial challenges. They were equally confident in their abilities to sustain their businesses. Both female and male youth entrepreneurs similarly accessed financial, family and entrepreneurial educational support. They evidenced few differences in the mindsets that can influence business sustainability.

**Keywords:** youth entrepreneurship; gender and entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial challenges, Guyana; Latin America and the Caribbean.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

High level of youth unemployment has been a long-term problem in many Caribbean countries (International Monetary Fund, 2017), particularly among young women, with rates averaging 30% compared to their male counterparts at 22% (Jones, 2024). Many Caribbean countries have embraced “youth entrepreneurship” as a core strategy for combating such unemployment. While this strategy is relatively recent for Caribbean countries, including Guyana, youth entrepreneurship has been promoted, for some while, as a viable pathway for engendering job creation, personal fulfillment, economic growth and for the alleviation of poverty, especially in developing countries. Our focus on youth entrepreneurship as opposed to general entrepreneurship stems then from the active promotion of this core strategy in Guyana and other Caribbean countries.

This article examines entrepreneurship from two key perspectives – youth and gender. Male entrepreneurs are generally more numerous and often more privileged than female entrepreneurs (Chauke, 2022; Esnard, 2021; Global Economic Monitor (GEM), 2017; GEM, 2023; GEM, 2025). The narratives of research on involvement of women in entrepreneurship are replete with notions of the persistence of gender inequities (Esnard, 2022; Idowu, 2023). Some studies on youth entrepreneurs confirm this manifestation (Ahmed & Kar, 2019; Chauke, 2022; Idowu, 2023). We examine whether patterns of gender inequity persist among youth entrepreneurs (YE) in the Caribbean or whether there are signs of change. We interrogate female and male youth entrepreneurs to pinpoint similarities and differences in types of businesses established, perceptions of challenges faced, access to support systems, and the mindsets that may influence business sustainability.

The Caribbean is an interesting research domain for the examination of youth entrepreneurship and gender. Based on key educational indicators, girls and young women in the Caribbean have been outperforming their male counterparts (Burunciuc, 2023; Jones, 2024). In Guyana, for example, in the over-25-year-old population, 58.1% of females completed at least lower secondary education compared to 55.6% of males; 36.3% females and 33.8% males completed at least upper-secondary education; and 12.0% females and 10.6% males completed post-secondary education (World Bank, 2024). Female students are outnumbering males at alarming rates at the University of Guyana, the nation’s public university. Of the 8,291 students that were enrolled at that institution, for the 2019-2020 academic year, 63.3% were females and 36.7% males (Guyana Chronicle, 2021). Similar trends obtain in other parts of the Caribbean (Jones, 2024).

Additionally, policy initiatives and pronouncements related to the promotion of youth entrepreneurship in the Caribbean are generally gender neutral. For example, the National Youth Policy (2015) promulgated by the Guyana government recognized the extent of Guyana’s youth unemployment problem and vowed: “To create an enabling environment for the reduction of youth unemployment through self-employment, entrepreneurship, and demand-driven education and training” (Government of Guyana, 2015). This policy document promised strengthening of

vocational training and entrepreneurial services and improving mechanisms for coordinating youth entrepreneurship among other non-governmental agencies.

Gender-neutral policy stances relating to youth entrepreneurship, however, can be limited by broader socio-political, cultural and historical norms that may give rise to differences in the entrepreneurial operations, perceptions and experiences of the young men and women in the Caribbean. Esnard (2021) addressed these norms in the context of “(un) freedoms” for women entrepreneurs in the Caribbean, explaining that some cultural norms helped to introduce constraints on “the being and becoming of women entrepreneurs” (p. 23). Other researchers on Caribbean entrepreneurship (Ferdinand, 2001; Pounder, 2015; Terjesen & Amoros, 2010; Verheul, Stel & Thurik, 2006) chronicled similar norms, conflicts and complexities that constrained Caribbean women in entrepreneurship. Expanding on the socio-cultural norms, Ferdinand included gender discrimination against women in entrepreneurial endeavors, conflicting pressures from balancing domestic responsibility and business commitments, and prevailing perceptions about women’s choices of employment.

Historically, women in Guyana and the broader Caribbean, have had low participation in remunerated economic activity compared to men. Women undertook much of the child-rearing tasks; were involved in unpaid work in family businesses; were in occupations paying exploitative wages and overly represented in community organizations performing unpaid work (Danns, D. 1997). Income earned by many women was largely derived from the informal sector and seen as supplementary income obtained mainly from activities such as food preparation, sewing, art and craft and selling agricultural goods in local markets.

Impacting changes, however, took place in response to Guyana’s severe economic difficulties during the late 1970s and 1980s. Many women, mostly young, left their low-salaried jobs, and along with others, joined the entrepreneurial sphere, predominantly as international traders, vendors and smugglers in the underground economy (Danns, G., 1988). Danns explained that what differentiated these activities from the formal and informal economies was their essentially illegal nature. In analyzing the role of women in the underground economy, Danns stated then that:

*Women are pre-eminent actors in the underground economy in Guyana. Women are involved in the underground economic activities as consumers and housewives, international traders, foreign products vendors, smugglers and as officials in the state sector who use their offices for private gain. (Danns, G., 1988, p.221)*

Women and men alike, smuggled out gold, foreign currency and other valuables, returning with goods necessary for the upkeep of the Guyanese people and economy. Much of this was self-employment involving significant risk-taking and entrepreneurial thinking and actions (Danns G, 1988). Some women, who started off in the informal and underground economies, emerged as business leaders in the formal sector, establishing boutiques, specialty shops, broader retail stores and other businesses. There is evidence therefore, that like their male counterparts, Guyanese women, as it is for the broader Caribbean, have for decades been involved in entrepreneurship in differing forms.

This article utilized data derived from a survey of youth entrepreneurs, conducted by the authors, in the developing country of Guyana and examined differences in the types of businesses established by male and female youths in Guyana, their perceptions of the challenges faced, their access to entrepreneurial support systems – entrepreneurial training and financing - for establishing and running their businesses and the mindsets that may influence business sustainability.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Gender and entrepreneurship, as a distinct field of research enquiry, gained momentum in the 1980s as scholars and researchers sought an increased understanding of women’s entrepreneurial activity and the factors that impacted and distinguished their entrepreneurial success from that of their male counterparts (Brush, 1992; Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter & Welter, 2012; Mustafa & Treanor, 2022). Youth entrepreneurship is an even more recent research domain, with most of scholarly work on the topic being conducted on the continent Africa (Fubah, Kansheba, Marobhe & Mohammadparast, 2025). Research at the intersection of youth entrepreneurship and gender has generated some interest, with researchers examining the role of gender, gender differences and gaps in areas such as finance, family support, entrepreneurial education, and perceived barriers (Clauke, 2022; Idowu, 2023; Senou & Manda, 2022; Sharma, 2018; van Ewijk & Belghiti-Mahut, 2018). This article adds to the field by focusing on both gender and youth entrepreneurship in Guyana. It is a contribution also to the emergent scholarly literature on youth entrepreneurship and female entrepreneurship in the broader Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region.

### **Defining Youth Entrepreneurship**

Definitions of ‘youth’ vary widely across countries, spanning from 12 years old in several developing countries and extending to 35 years (UNCTAD, 2015). The Bureau of Statistics, Government of Guyana, defined youth as persons between ages 15 – 35 and reported that youth comprised 33.9% of Guyana’s population (Bureau of Statistics, 2012). For the purposes of this paper, youth is defined as individuals between ages 18 – 35 years. An entrepreneur is an individual who establishes and manages a business for profit and growth; that business is the primary source of income, and it consumes most of the time and resources of the entrepreneur. Consequently, the activity of establishing and managing a business for profit and growth is called entrepreneurship (Goel, Vohra, Zhang & Arora, 2007). The concept of “youth entrepreneurship” has been linked to the concept of “self-employment among youth” (OECD, 2017), both of which are sources of new jobs and economic dynamism; can improve economic livelihoods for young people; generate income, self-reliance and provide innovative paths to earning a living (Schoof, 2006).

### **Youth, Gender and Business Ownership**

A significant gender gap exists in established business ownership with only one in every three entrepreneurs running a business worldwide being a woman (GEM, 2023). Despite the dominance of males in the entrepreneurial sphere, there has been a slight closing of the gender gap in recent years, stemming from a trend of increasing female entrepreneurial activities (GEM, 2017). The

LAC region, with female business start-up rates of 21.25% for 2022/23 stood out as the most entrepreneurial region in the world for women (GEM, 2023). Additionally, female enterprise ownership rates in some parts of the Caribbean are higher than for the broader LAC region, ranging from 32% to 57% for Jamaica, St Lucia and Grenada compared to 31% in the entire region (Burunciuc, 2023). These trends extend also to youth-owned businesses. World Bank (2015) dubbed the LAC region “a breeding ground for new businesses led by young people” and explained that young people in region did not wait for job opportunities but instead were job creators.

### **Youth, Gender and Business Choices**

Researchers on gender and business choices generally concluded that women were more involved in the retail and services sectors and that family responsibilities prevented them from devoting the time that men did to grow their businesses (Bardasi, Sabarwal & Terrell, 2011; Esnard, 2021; Ferdinand, 2001; Robichaud, Cachon & McGraw, 2015; Salman, 2002). Women’s business decisions were often influenced by members of their households, especially spouses, and intrahousehold dynamics stymied women businesses, contributing to gender gaps in outcomes (Akpalu *et al.*, 2012). Caribbean women operated mainly in micro-enterprises, in few industries and with limited access to finance (Burunciuc, 2025; Ferdinand, 2001; infoDev, 2015; Pounder, 2015). Ferdinand explained that Caribbean women entrepreneurs had a significant presence in the small-scale sector and dominated in the areas of retail/distribution, agriculture and light manufacturing. They were found in large concentrations in areas such as food processing, garment manufacturing, hairdressing and catering. Explanations for this clustering included that business choices were based on their compatibility with women’s family caring roles, the businesses’ closeness to home, allowance for working time flexibility, and the avoidance of financially risky undertakings (Ferdinand, 2001).

In sub-Saharan Africa, researchers point to a gendering of youth business choices and a clustering of their businesses generally in the consumer-oriented sector, comprising retail sales, transportation services, restaurants, health, education and other consumer services (Chigunta & Mwanza, 2016; Gough & Langevang, 2016; Namatovu *et al.*, 2016; Owusu *et al.*, 2016;). Almost 88 % of Uganda’s young women entrepreneurs compared to 77% of young men entrepreneurs were in the consumer-oriented services sector, while more young men (16.8%) than women (7.6%) operated businesses in construction, manufacturing, transportation and utilities (Gough & Langevang, 2016). In Ghana, young entrepreneurs often had two or more businesses, grabbing opportunities in several areas. Approximately 77% of Ghana’s young women entrepreneurs were in the consumer services sector (mainly retail trading) compared to 54.6% for the men (Owusu *et al.*, 2016). Ghana’s robust extractive sector attracted young men entrepreneurs (25.7%) at rates higher than their female counterparts (12.5%). Young women entrepreneurs were dominant in the provision of catering services, restaurants and bars for Ghana’s mining industry (Kala, 2016) while in rural Uganda, young men found entrepreneurial opportunities in the transportation business, operating motorcycle taxi (*boda-boda*), in manufacturing, tailoring and welding (Kristensen *et al.*, 2016).

### **Youth, Gender and Entrepreneurial Challenges**

There is an overlap of challenges affecting both youth and women entrepreneurs and such challenges impact both their start-up and continuance in business (Bryan, 2023; Chigunta, 2002; Danns & Danns, 2022; Ferdinand, 2001; GEM, 2017). Women entrepreneurs, particularly in developing economies encounter cultural obstacles and patriarchal attitudes, gender discrimination; lack of education, finances, societal acceptance and business-ownership experience; an inability to obtain loans, own land or other assets; conflicting family responsibilities, and a myriad of other challenges (Ahmed & Kar, 2019; Alam, Senik & Jani, 2012; Hanson & Blake, 2009; Idowu, 2023; Moses & Amalu, 2010; Muhumad, 2016; Robichaud *et al.*, 2015; Smith-Hunter, 2006). Idowu found that Nigerian youth, irrespective of gender, displayed remarkable entrepreneurial enthusiasm but female youth entrepreneurs faced distinct challenges securing investment financing, navigating patriarchal expectations, and accessing male-dominated markets. Ferdinand found that challenges for women entrepreneurs in the Caribbean, arose from factors directly related to gender issues and their position in the society but posited that some challenges affected both men and women entrepreneurs in the Caribbean setting. Bryan (2023) writing about Jamaica, explained that institutional classism presented significant barriers to entrepreneurial success especially for marginalized groups, including women entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurs.

Similar to research on women entrepreneurs, researchers pointed to several challenges facing youth entrepreneurs including lack of business skills and entrepreneurial education, inability to recruit employees outside the family, limited innovation and access to finance (Danns & Danns, 2022; OECD, 2017). Access to finance is probably the key challenge for young entrepreneurs (Danns & Danns 2019; Dzisi, 2014; Gwija, Eresia-Eke & Iwu, 2014; UNCTAD, 2015). Typically, lenders view young people as risky; lacking credit history, work history, banks accounts and having insufficient collateral to secure loans or lines of credit (UNCTAD). Other challenges included lack of management experience and the unavailability of youth support structures (Gwija, Eresia-Eke & Iwu, 2014). Youth entrepreneurship is also impacted by social and cultural factors including negative orientations to business (Dzisi, 2014); low tolerance for risk and fear of failure; and legal factors where youth entrepreneurs may face a multiplicity of administrative issues such as obtaining licenses and permits and registering their businesses.

### **Youth, Gender and Entrepreneurship Support**

Perusal of practices and patterns worldwide reveal a composite of international, regional, national, governmental, non-governmental, educational, community, private sector and other groupings and institutions lending support to youth entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship promotion strategies especially in developing countries (Danns & Danns, 2022; Green 2013; ILO, 2012; IMF, 2017; OECD, 2016;). Danns and Danns (2022) developed a Youth Entrepreneurship Institutional Support (YEIS) Model as a framework for explaining the support system for youth entrepreneurship in developing countries and described it as:

*a multi-actor framework which exists on the international, regional, national and local levels and which provides policies, programs, funding, as well as counselling, mentoring and training through the public sector, private sector, nonprofit agencies, international institutions, communities and families. (Danns & Danns, p. 144)*

In the LAC region, public and private sector support for young people involved training, technical assistance and small credits, all aimed at reducing the failure rate of youth enterprises and addressing critical issues during their start-up process (Listerri *et al.*, 2006). There is also a pivotal role for social capital - family, friends and linkages to the local community - in the support and success of youth entrepreneurs (De Gobbi, 2014).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article seeks to examine the differences in the types of businesses established by male and female youths in Guyana, their perceptions of the challenges faced, their access to entrepreneurial support systems for establishing and running their businesses and, the mindsets that may influence business sustainability. The research questions answered by this study were:

- Are there gender differences in the types of businesses established by youth entrepreneurs in Guyana?
- Are there gender differences in access to entrepreneurial support – entrepreneurial training and business financing - by youth entrepreneurs?
- Are there gender differences in the perceptions of challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs?
- Are there gender differences in mindsets that may influence business sustainability?

This study utilized data from a survey of youth entrepreneurs in the urban areas of Linden and Rose Hall/Port Mourant, Guyana. The town of Linden is the second largest town in Guyana with a population of approximately 30,000 persons (Bureau of Statistics, Government of Guyana, 2012). Linden was once a thriving mining town. The bauxite industry which was Linden's economic mainstay has diminished considerably resulting in an escalation of youth unemployment in the town. The Rose Hall/Port Mourant urban area has a population of approximately 11,000 persons (Bureau of Statistics, Government of Guyana, 2012). The sugar industry, upon which this area was heavily dependent, suffered a similar fate to the bauxite industry and at the time of our survey, the industry was diminishing considerably. Sugar and bauxite are two major industries owned by the government and upon which the Guyana economy was reliant. The decline in the two industries and concomitant diminution in employment opportunities prompted our selection of the study communities.

Youth entrepreneurs in the studied communities function mainly as self-employed informal/semi-formal economic operatives. Most of their businesses are unregistered; taxes and social security obligations invariably are not adhered to and, limited official records are available on these entrepreneurs. Due to these circumstances, it was necessary to use non-probability sampling. Access to youth entrepreneurs for interviewing was accomplished through the assistance of community leaders; fanning out of research teams in key business districts and other areas within

the towns/communities to identify youth entrepreneurs; and, by employing the snowball technique to find and interview additional youth entrepreneurs. One hundred and seventy-eight (178) youth entrepreneurs were identified and interviewed using a survey instrument. Seventy-seven (77) respondents derived from the town of Linden and 101 were from the Rose Hall/Port Mourant urban communities. This combination of techniques assured access to available youth entrepreneurs in the communities. No limit was placed on the number of youth entrepreneurs needed for the survey. All available youth entrepreneurs in the two communities were accessed and interviewed. In the absence of an official registry, we were confident that we reached a significant and essentially representative number of youth entrepreneurs in the study areas. Our topic was not a sensitive one and we found entrepreneurs were willing to provide answers to our survey questions.

The survey instrument comprised demographic, business characteristics, business operations and economic assessment questions. Included in these broad categories were questions on business type, startup capital, revenue, profit, access to loans and other forms of financing, access to entrepreneurial skills training, number of employees, working hours, family and other support systems, perceptions about business successes and challenges facing youth entrepreneurs.

Survey data from the entrepreneurs are used and various tests employed (T-test; Z-tests; chi square; Fisher's exact tests on contingency tables) to determine primarily the differences in means, and statistically significant differences between and among respondents by gender. Although the focus of this paper is on gender differences, other demographic factors are interrogated to find answers when significant deviations from means were noted.

## **RESULTS**

One hundred and seventy-eight (178) youth entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 35 were interviewed. Seventy-seven (43.3%) respondents were from the town of Linden and 101 (56.7%) were from the Rose Hall/Port Mourant community. Of the 178 youth entrepreneurs, 84 or 47.2% were females and 94 or 52.8% males. Seventy-one (39.9%) were between the ages of 18 and 25; 45 or 25.3% were between 26 and 30 years old; and 62 or 34.8% fell within the 31 to 35 years age group.

Ninety-nine of the 178 youth entrepreneurs (55.6%) reported that secondary school was their highest level of education, while 12 (6.7%) attained only primary education. Forty-eight respondents (27%) reported that technical/vocational education was their highest level of education, and 16 respondents (9%) attended university. In sum, 64 respondents (36%) had tertiary or post-secondary education.

### **Gender Differences in Business type and Business Characteristics**

Table 1 provides a breakdown of respondents by length of time in business and gender. Almost 15% of respondents were in business for less than 2 years; 36.5% were in business for 2 to less than 6 years; 20.8% were in business for 6 to less than 10 years while 25.8% reported being in business for 10 years or longer. Notably, 6.7% reported being in business for 15 years or more.

There was a statistically significant difference ( $p < .01$ ) between the length of time women and men entrepreneurs were in business. Male respondents in this survey were generally in business longer than the female respondents. This ties in with the fact that 46.4% of the females in the survey were in the youngest age bracket (18 – 25) compared to just 34% of the males.

<b>Table 1: Length of time in Business by Gender</b>			
	<b>% of Females</b>	<b>% of Males</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Less than 2 years	21.4%	8.5%	14.6%
2 to less than 6 years	42.9%	30.9%	36.5%
6 to less than 10 years	16.7%	24.5%	20.8%
10 to less than 15 years	15.5%	22.3%	19.1%
15 years and more	1.2%	11.7%	6.7%
Can't Remember/ no response	2.4%	2.1%	2.2%
<i>P-value = 0.0055</i>			

Almost 86% of respondents earned most of their income from their owned businesses while 6.2% had jobs or gigs along with their businesses and 6 others assisted their spouses to earn other income. One hundred and twenty-seven respondents started their businesses at 18 years or older while 48 or 27% started at ages younger than 18; 69.1% of the respondents started their businesses between the ages of 16 and 25 years. One hundred and twenty-seven respondents (71.3%) were the sole owners of their businesses while 49 (27.5%) were in business with others including parents, siblings and other relatives. One hundred and twenty-six respondents (70.8%) reported having no employees with no statistically significant difference between the genders.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of respondents' types of business activity by gender. The most dominant business type in which respondents operated was retailing/vending with 38% or 73 respondents naming this category. Other popular business types were beauty and grooming services (12%), snack preparation/catering (9%), livestock rearing (7%) and transportation services (7%). Besides these more prevalent business types, youth entrepreneurs were engaged in event planning, agriculture, appliances/computer repairs, carpentry and garment manufacturing. They owned restaurants, bars and meat shops; and provided art and craft services, tutoring, printing and other services.

<b>Table 2: Business Types by Gender</b>			
<b>Businesses type</b>	<b>Female N = 84</b>	<b>Male N = 94</b>	<b>Total N = 178</b>
Agriculture	0	2	2
Appliances/Computer Repair Shops	0	6	6
Bar/Restaurant	2	3	5
Beauty & Grooming services	14	10	24
Carpentry/Welding/Fabrication/ Mechanical/ Electrical services	0	5	5
Construction	0	2	2
Garment Manufacturing	2	0	2
Jewelry Manufacturing	1	1	2
Livestock rearing	4	9	13
Lumber yard	0	1	1
Meat shop	0	1	1
Other services	13	14	27
Retailing/Vending	41	32	73
Snack preparation/Catering	13	4	17
Transportation services	0	13	13
<b>*Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>193</b>
<i>* Some youths had more than one business</i>			

A breakdown by gender pointed to some interesting differences in the types of businesses owned by young men and young women. Eighty one percent (81%) of the female youth entrepreneurs clustered in 4 main areas – retailing/vending, snack preparation, beauty and grooming and other services which included printing, event management, art and craft and tutoring. Male youth entrepreneurs, on the other hand, operated in all the represented areas except garment manufacturing. Male-only areas were transportation services, mechanical/electrical services, owning meat shops and lumber yard, construction businesses, welding and fabrication, agriculture, appliances and computer repairs. Table 2 shows that male entrepreneurs were also competing in the areas where the female youth entrepreneurs clustered. Women therefore operated in the highly competitive business areas in their communities, undoubtedly affecting their possible revenue, profitability and growth potential. It should be noted that no statistical tests were conducted on the contents of table 2 because of the low cell frequency in a large percentage of the cells.

The distribution of male entrepreneurs into more varied business areas prompted an examination of whether the technical training that favored males in this survey was a key factor in the many male-only entrepreneurial choices. Data did not show this to be the case. In general, both the male and female youth entrepreneurs tended not to credit their highest level of official schooling for providing them with the necessary skills for their chosen entrepreneurial activity. When asked how they acquired relevant skills for their businesses, there were few differences in the way men and

women said that they acquired the requisite skills. The dominant ways were from family members (28.7%); Self-taught (22.5%); from friends/acquaintances (5.1%); taking specialized courses (12.4 %) and from previous employment (14%). See table 3 for a further breakdown.

**Table 3: Places and People that respondents acquired skills for their businesses**

	% of Female	% of Male	% of Total
Family member(s)	25.0%	31.9%	28.7%
Friends/Acquaintances	3.6%	6.4%	5.1%
Specialized workshops/courses/classes	16.7%	8.5%	12.4%
Self-Taught	26.2%	19.1%	22.5%
From Previous employment/work attachment	8.3%	19.1%	14.0%
Secondary School	6.0%	5.3%	5.6%
Technical /Vocational School	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%
University	1.2%	0.0%	0.6%
Observing others	2.4%	3.2%	2.8%
Social media/Internet	4.8%	2.1%	3.4%
Can't remember/don't know/no response	14.3%	11.7%	12.9%

While there were no significant differences in the way young women and men entrepreneurs acquired the skills necessary for their entrepreneurial activities, the women were more likely than men to report being self-taught and to taking short courses and workshops specific to their chosen business type. This was especially true for women in beauty and grooming and in snack preparation and catering businesses. The men were more likely than women to acquire the necessary skills from their previous jobs and from family and friends.

Most of the youth entrepreneurs in the survey (69 females - 82.1% and 69 males - 73.4%) grew up seeing close relatives operate their own businesses or supplementing family income through entrepreneurial activities and were likely socialized into the entrepreneurial culture. Of those who saw close relatives undertake entrepreneurial activities, 76.1% (females - 79.7% and males - 72.5%) pointed to parents and siblings among those close relatives.

**Table 4: Relatives who youth entrepreneurs grew up seeing run businesses**

	% of Female N = 69	% of Male N =69	% of Total N = 138
Mother only	30.4	26.1	28.3
Father only	8.7	14.5	11.6
Both Parents only	15.9	11.6	13.8
Siblings only	4.3	4.3	4.3
Parent(s) and siblings	7.2	4.3	5.8
Other relatives only	20.3	27.5	23.9
Parent(s)/siblings and other relatives	13.0	11.6	12.3

**Gender differences in the perception of challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs**

Respondents were posed with a list of 29 subject areas for which they had to state whether they strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree that it was a challenge facing them as a young entrepreneur. A Likert scale was used to ascertain the level of the specific challenges (1- Strongly disagree that it is a challenge, 2 – disagree, 3 – agree and 4 – strongly agree). Means and standard deviations were calculated by gender and T-tests done to determine the differences (if any) between female and male respondents’ perceptions. Table 5 presents the results by gender.

<b>Table 5: Mean scores for Perception of Entrepreneurial Challenges faced by Gender</b>						
<b>Entrepreneurial challenges</b>	<b>Female Resp.</b>		<b>Male Resp.</b>		<b>All Resp.</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean score</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean score</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean score</b>
Lack of information	82	2.23	91	2.10	173	2.16
Necessary skills and knowledge	83	2.17	93	2.05	176	2.11
Getting loans*	83	2.48	90	2.00	173	2.23
Family members to help	84	1.89	91	1.89	175	1.89
Crime or fear of crime	83	2.52	93	2.76	176	2.65
Not Enough opportunity in market	84	2.58	92	2.58	176	2.58
Uncertainty about future	82	2.60	93	2.69	175	2.65
Support from government	82	2.78	92	2.57	174	2.67
Finding a business partner	82	1.94	91	1.99	173	1.97
A weak economic environment	82	3.13	93	3.16	175	3.15
Getting funding information*	84	2.49	94	2.18	178	2.33
Getting money to invest	83	2.48	93	2.52	176	2.50
Lack of family and friends to help	84	1.93	92	1.97	176	1.95
Lack of collateral to obtain loan	81	2.41	94	2.21	175	2.30
Lack of business experience	84	1.74	94	1.85	178	1.80
Fear of Risk	83	2.31	94	2.50	177	2.41
No people encouraging me	84	1.82	94	1.87	178	1.85
Limited mgmt & entp knowledge	84	2.15	93	2.18	177	2.17
High cost of running business	83	2.70	94	2.49	177	2.59
Making enough profit	83	2.51	91	2.47	174	2.49
Having a good understanding of accounting	82	1.94	94	2.02	176	1.98
Finding good labor	80	2.10	93	1.88	173	1.98
Finding materials/ stocks for business	83	2.01	94	1.96	177	1.98
Having good ideas to grow business	84	1.88	94	1.79	178	1.83
Having right contacts to grow business	84	2.18	94	2.17	178	2.17
Not the right time to expand	81	2.21	94	2.18	175	2.19
Too young for this responsibility	84	1.43	94	1.43	178	1.43
Business involves too much work*	84	2.20	93	1.92	177	2.06
Support from community*	84	2.19	93	1.85	177	2.01

*Source: (List of challenges were adapted from: Fatoki, & Chindoga, 2011)*  
*\* Indicate a statistically significant difference by gender (p < .05)*

Data analysis indicated statistically significant differences of perceptions of challenges by gender in just four areas. Youth female entrepreneurs perceived the amount of work involved in running a business, the lack of funding information, the lack of support from the community and getting loans as greater challenges for them than did the youth male entrepreneurs. Of these four challenges the widest variation in perception between female and male entrepreneurs was in the areas of getting loans.

The overall results held some useful insights into the general perception of youth entrepreneurs. Results showed that greater than 50% of respondents *agreed or strongly agreed* that the following were challenges facing them – the weak economic environment (76.6%); lack of support from the government (58.0%); lack of money to invest (50.5%); not enough opportunity in the market (55.6%); crime or fear of crime (56.2%); the high cost of running their business (54.7%); uncertainty about the future (59.4%); not enough profit (50.1%); and the fear of risk (50.2%).

Delving a little more into this data, we found a greater number of statistically significant differences in perceptions of challenges by community and by age group rather than by gender. Youth entrepreneurs in the Linden community perceived a lack of funding information, lack of support from government, difficulty getting loans, lack of collateral to get loans, lack of money to invest and not having the right contacts to grow their businesses as much greater challenges than their counterparts in the Rose Hall/Port Maurant area. On the other hand, the Linden entrepreneurs perceived crime or fear of crime, not enough opportunities in the market, uncertainty about the future, a weak economic environment, lack of business experience, limited management and entrepreneurial ability and lack of good ideas to grow their businesses as less of a challenge than their counterparts in Rose Hall/Port Maurant.

When analyzed by age, results revealed statistically-significant higher level of perceived challenges among the 31 – 35 age group than respondents between 18 and 30 in relation to following challenges - lack of support from government, fear of risk, not enough profit. Conversely, the lack of collateral to obtain loans and difficulty getting loans were perceived as much greater challenges for the 18 - 30 age group than the 31 – 35 age group.

Irrespective of gender, community or age, respondents were confident or sure about their own abilities to run their businesses and about the support from family and community. Greater than 70% of youth entrepreneurs disagreed or strongly disagreed that the following were challenges for them - family members or friends to help (77.2%); finding a business partner (76.2%); lack of business experience (77.4%); no persons to encourage me (80.9%); do not have a good understanding of accounting for business (78%); finding good labor (76.9%); finding materials/stocks for the business (72.3%); don't have good ideas to grow the business (83.1%); too young for this responsibility (94.9%); business involves too much work (71.2%); lack of support from community (71.2%).

### Gender differences in access to entrepreneurial support systems

In this section, we analyzed two main areas of entrepreneurial support – entrepreneurial education/training and access to funding - to determine how youth entrepreneurs interact with the support system by gender.

**Entrepreneurial training.** Forty-three respondents (24.2%) attended workshops/seminars or special training programs that taught them about entrepreneurship and business management prior to starting their businesses. One hundred and thirty-five respondents (75.8%) did not receive any special training in entrepreneurship and business management. There was no statistically significant difference between male and female youth entrepreneurs’ attendance or entrepreneurial training prior to establishing their businesses. However, a statistically significant difference was found between communities ( $p = 0.0044$ ). Youth entrepreneurs from the town of Linden were 2.3 times more likely to attend entrepreneurship and business training than those from the Port Mourant/Rose Hall area. Female respondents in Linden were far more likely to obtain business or entrepreneurship training than their male counterparts in Linden or than youth entrepreneurs in general in the Rose Hall/Port Mourant area.

Respondents were asked about business training since starting their businesses. Thirty-one respondents (17.4%) reported receiving business training since starting their business but there was no statistically significant difference by gender (15% male; 20% female).

**Sources of Funding.** Two questions were asked to ascertain what financial support youth entrepreneurs got from the institutional support system. They were asked: 1. Where did you get financing from to start your business and 2. Have you been able to secure any financing to grow your business since starting: if yes from where/whom? Table 6 presents findings on sources of start-up capital by gender.

Where did financing come from*	Female		Male	
Own funds	48	57%	57	61%
Borrowed from the bank	3	4%	14	15%
Borrowed from another agency	4	5%	1	1%
Someone financed and I have to repay	2	2%	8	9%
Someone financed and I do not have to repay (Family and friends)	25	30%	25	27%
Grant from a Guyana governmental agency	1	1%	0	0%
Grant from a non-governmental agency	4	5%	1	1%
Other	0	0%	1	1%
I did not need start-up money	2	2%	3	3%
No response	1	1%	1	1%

\*Some respondents named more than one source

Statistical tests did not reveal significant differences in how males and females got their start-up financing. However male entrepreneurs reported receiving more loans from banks for start-up businesses than their female counterparts - 15% for males and 4% for females. There were a few notable differences when analyzed by community. A greater percentage of Rose Hall/Port Maurant youth entrepreneurs (37%) said they got financing from family and friends compared to Linden respondents (16.9%). When the categories of financing were merged, 82.6% reported getting start-up funds from their own savings and/or family and friends. Linden female entrepreneurs were the main recipients of non-governmental grants.

Most respondents (89.2% females, 88.3% males) reported reinvesting profits to grow their business. Only 13 got loans from banks; 21 got expansion financing from family; 2 got financing from government programs; 2 got from non-governmental organizations. Eleven of the 13 who got loans from banks were in the 31-35 age category.

### Gender differences in youth entrepreneurs' mindsets about their businesses

There was a group of seven questions asking youth entrepreneurs about their feelings when they think about their businesses. We gleaned from responses to these questions, the positive and negative emotions experienced and whether respondents felt they could run their businesses for a long while. Using a Likert scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being "not at all" and 4 being "very much so," respondents were asked to give a numerical response representing how they felt when they think of their business based on the following measures: a. happy; b. proud; c. I like what I do; d. I can do this for a long time; e. frustrated; f. worried; and g. overwhelmed. These data were analyzed and summary statistics reported by gender in table 7.

Table 7: How Youth Entrepreneurs feel when they think of their Business							
When I think of my business, I feel:	Female Resp.		Male Resp.		All respondents		
	N	Mean score	N	Mean score	N	Mean score	
Happy	83	3.78	94	3.70	177	3.74	0.53
Proud	83	3.73	94	3.70	177	3.72	0.56
I like what I do	84	3.88	94	3.87	178	3.88	0.41
I can do this for a long time	81	3.58	94	3.67	175	3.63	0.77
Frustrated	81	2.20	92	2.04	173	2.12	0.91
Worried	80	2.29	94	2.06	174	2.17	0.98
*Overwhelmed	79	2.45	93	2.15	172	2.28	1.02

\* Indicate a statistically significant difference by gender at the  $p < 0.1$ ; actual level ( $p = .0507$ )

Z-tests of means were conducted on each measure to determine whether differences existed between the responses by gender. Youth entrepreneurs of both genders responded to the high end of the Likert scale when asked about being happy, proud, liking what they do and feeling they can do entrepreneurial activities for a long time. Modal scores for these categories were 4, overall

means between 3.63 and 3.88 and there was no statistically significant difference between responses by gender.

On the other hand, when asked about negative emotions, on the Likert scale between 1 and 4, youth entrepreneurs recorded mean levels closer to 2, indicating that they were not too frustrated, worried and overwhelmed with their business activities. For the three measures, overall mean scores were between 2.12 and 2.28 with a mode and median of two. Analysis did not reveal statistically significant differences in two of these measures – “frustrated” and “worried” when tested by gender. However, the “overwhelmed” measure showed significant differences ( $p < 0.1$  level) in responses by gender. The “overwhelmed” responses were further interrogated for other impacting factors. Broken down into four groups using gender by community, T-tests revealed statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between the responses given to this measure by female entrepreneurs in Linden compared to their female counterparts in Rose Hall/Port Mourant and their male counterparts in both communities. The mean scores for the “overwhelmed” measure by group were 2.72 for Linden female; 2.07 for Linden male; 2.11 for Rose Hall/Port Mourant female and 2.19 for Rose Hall/Port Mourant male.

These indicators suggest that both male and female youth entrepreneurs liked what they did and were committed to being engaged in their businesses for a long while. Additionally, almost 90% said that their businesses had grown since starting, with no difference in how men and women answered this question – (90.4% females, 89.4% males). They were also reinvesting some profits to grow their businesses, indicative of them wanting their businesses to survive.

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND LIMITATION**

Globally, female entrepreneurs have been found to be disadvantaged relative to their male counterparts (Esnard, 2022; Idowu, 2023; GEM, 2017). The findings from this study indicate that the playing field may be leveling for youth female and male entrepreneurs in the Caribbean country of Guyana. This may be a result of several factors. There are no laws or engrained communal norms and values that debar women from activist participation in business and economic life. Indeed, Guyana’s constitution, Section 149F provides women equal rights and status with men. Females are entitled to equal access with males to academic, vocational and professional training, equal opportunities in employment, remuneration and promotion and in social, political and cultural activity. Further, based on some key educational and other indicators, girls and young women in the Caribbean have been outperforming their male counterparts. In Guyana, this is enhanced by the constitutional provision of free education from kindergarten to university.

World Bank Group (2015) dubbed Latin America and the Caribbean “a breeding ground for new businesses led by young people.” From our study, it does appear that youth entrepreneurs in Guyana are becoming bold in the pursuit of business ventures, regardless of gender. This entrepreneurial drive is being supported by parents, other family members, friends and the wider community. Cultural and other barriers to entrepreneurs are being diminished as international, regional, governmental, private sector and other operatives continuously declare the virtues and viability of entrepreneurship as an occupational choice. Secondary schools in Guyana are

becoming pivotal to teaching business and entrepreneurial studies, initiating students to the entrepreneurial disposition and exposing them, through mentoring and support to the possibilities of running their own businesses and employing others. It is unsurprising therefore that our research found youth entrepreneurs in the survey, both male and female, proud of their businesses and happy with what they are achieving.

Consistent with the literature (Chigunta & Mwanza, 2016; Gough & Langevang, 2016; Namatovu *et al.*, 2016; Owusu *et al.*, 2016;), we found youth businesses predominantly in the consumer-oriented sectors. Respondents in our survey reported businesses predominantly in retailing/vending, beauty and grooming services, snack preparation, livestock rearing and transportation services. Besides these more prevalent business categories, youth entrepreneurs were engaged in event planning, catering, agriculture, appliances/computer repairs, carpentry/welding/ block making and garment manufacturing. They owned restaurants, bars and meat shops; and provided art and craft services, tutoring, printing and other specialties.

The literature on youth entrepreneurship pointed to a clustering of women businesses in few areas (Burunciuc, 2025; Ferdinand, 2001; infoDev, 2015; Pounder, 2015). This study found similar patterns. Eighty one percent (81%) of the female youth entrepreneurs clustered in four main areas – retailing/vending, snack preparation, beauty and grooming and other services. Male youth entrepreneurs, on the other hand, operated in all the represented areas of businesses except garment manufacturing. Male-only areas were transportation services, mechanical/electrical services, owning meat shops and lumber yard, construction businesses, welding and fabrication, agriculture, appliances and computer repairs. Male entrepreneurs were also competing in the areas in which the female youth entrepreneurs clustered. Young women therefore operated in the highly competitive areas, undoubtedly affecting their possible revenue, profitability and growth potential.

A sizeable number of both male and female youths grew up seeing family members run business or supplement income from entrepreneurial activities. Some respondents reported acquiring the requisite skills for their business from these sources. Parents were the leading sources for both male and female youth being socialized and inspired into starting their own business. These inter-generational patterns of business socialization, while very positive, may be partly responsible for the continued differentiated patterns of business types chosen by young men and young women. Such socialization may be a positive influence in the embrace of entrepreneurship by youths irrespective of gender.

Female and male respondents were almost uniform in their perceptions of challenges they faced with their businesses with differences only in a few areas. From the list of 29 possible entrepreneurial challenges, youth female entrepreneurs perceived the high cost of running a business, the lack of funding information, the lack of support from the community and getting loans as greater challenges than did the youth male entrepreneurs. Irrespective of gender or age, respondents were confident about their own abilities to run their businesses and about the support from family and community. Contrary to the literature outlining the enormity of challenges faced by female entrepreneurs (Ahmed & Kar, 2019; Alam, Senik & Jani, 2012; Hanson & Blake, 2009; Moses & Amalu, 2010; Muhumad, 2016; Robichaud *et al.*, 2015; Smith-Hunter, 2006) , the young

female respondents, like their male counterparts, in this study were certain that a number of areas were not challenges for them. Greater than 70% of respondents across genders disagreed or strongly disagreed that the following were challenges - family members or friends to help, finding a business partner; lack of business experience, persons to encourage them; not having a good understanding of accounting for business; finding good labor; finding materials/stocks for the business; not having good ideas to grow the business; too young for the responsibility; business involves too much work; and, lack of support from community. The perception of the foregoing as not being challenges for most respondents speaks to support offered by family and the local community. These findings are consistent with what De Gobbi (2014) pinpointed as the pivotal role of social capital - family, friends and linkages to the local community - in the support and success of youth entrepreneurs.

Female youth entrepreneurs in Guyana accessed financial, family and other institutional support largely similar to their male counterparts. Overall, there were no significant differences in how males and females got their start-up financing or finances to expand their businesses. Most of the youth entrepreneurs used their own savings or got family financial support to start their businesses. We did not find a statistically significant difference between the genders receiving entrepreneurial training, but we found that female respondents in the town of Linden were far more likely than their counterparts to obtain business or entrepreneurship training. This was particularly true for women in the beauty and grooming and in the restaurant/catering businesses.

A surprising finding from this study was that youth entrepreneurs generally did not credit their highest level of formal education for the acquisition of the necessary skills for their line of business. There were few differences in the way young men and women said they acquired the requisite skills. Dominant ways were from family members (28.7%); Self-taught (22.5%); from friends/acquaintances (5.1%); taking specialized courses (12.4 %) and from previous employment (14%). The young women entrepreneurs in particular credited their hair dressing and beauty courses and, catering classes for the acquisition of skills.

Youth entrepreneurs of both genders responded to the high end of the Likert scale when asked about being happy, proud, liking what they do and feeling they can do entrepreneurial activities for a long time. In contrast, respondents generally had lower mean scores for feelings such as worried, frustrated and overwhelmed. These had higher deviations from the mean and were further investigated. Females reported a statistically significant higher level of being “overwhelmed” than their male counterparts.

In Guyana, as indeed the rest of the Caribbean there are indications that youths are being exposed to entrepreneurial and business training in the school curriculum at a younger age. In some cases, this pattern carries over to vocational and technical college training. Universities in the region are also doing their part in providing entrepreneurial incubators and training. Additionally, the support system is expanding in communities, with mentorship and linkages to some funding agencies. Female youths are accessing some of these facilities and embracing the challenges.

**Limitations.** This research used non-probability sampling techniques to find and access youth entrepreneurs for the survey. The limitations to the generalizability of non-probability sampling

are well known and here acknowledged. However, the trained research teams, some members of whom were university students who derived from the studied communities, worked closely with community leaders, community agencies and others to find as many youth entrepreneurs as possible in the towns. No limit was placed on the number of youth entrepreneurs needed for the survey. All available youth entrepreneurs in the two communities were accessed and interviewed. We were confident that we reached a significant and essentially representative number of youth entrepreneurs in the study areas. Our topic was not a sensitive one and we found entrepreneurs were willing to provide answers. Future research can possibly replicate this study in other Caribbean countries.

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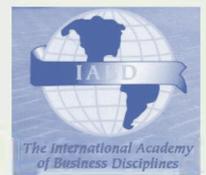
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