

## **PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ABOUT SENSE OF COHERENCE**

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### **—Abstract —**

Sense of coherence is a theoretical formulation that provides a central explanation for the role of stress in human functioning. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of women entrepreneurs about sense of coherence in the South African context. Entrepreneurs affiliated to the South African Council for Business Women participated in this study. Analysis of variance and a t-test were performed to investigate the demographic differences. The only significant difference amongst age groups was found with regard to the total sense of coherence score. However, when the multiple comparisons test results were reported for the total sense of coherence, none of the pairwise comparisons were significant. There were no significant differences between sense of coherence and

duration of owning a business and there were also no significant differences between the provinces. This study adds to the growing body of research seeking to establish an understanding of women entrepreneurs and business success.

**Key Words:** Demographic characteristics, Sense of coherence, Women entrepreneur

**JEL Classification:** C83 Survey Methods, D23 Organisational Behaviour, D71 Associations, J11 Demographic Trends, L26 Entrepreneurship

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is a key area to alleviate unemployment, poverty and low economic growth. Job creation, innovative products and the pursuit of productivity are the main business activities attributed to entrepreneurship (Koe, Sa'ari, Majid & Ismail, 2012). The establishment of new ventures and stimulating the growth of existing businesses contribute to economic growth (Botha, Nieman & Van Vuuren, 2007). 'Therefore, every country is arguably willing to do everything possible to encourage the supportive business environment capable of inspiring the emergence of entrepreneurs' (Anggraeni, Dwiatmadja & Yuniawan, 2017:1).

The contribution of women entrepreneurs to the economy of developed and developing countries has been extensively researched (Minniti & Langowitz, 2007; Sandhu, Hussain & Matlay, 2012; Sarri & Trihopoulou, 2005). Recent research (GEM, 2017) indicated that an estimated 163 million women in 74 economies around the world were either starting new businesses or owned established businesses. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest discontinuances of businesses; this can be related to the high number of businesses that are started in this region (GEM, 2017). GEM (2018) states that Africa has the lowest perceived opportunities in entrepreneurship.

Antonovsky (1987) observed that stress is universal, but not all individuals have negative health outcomes in response to stress. Instead, some people achieve health despite their exposure to potentially disabling stress factors. In light of the above, it appears obvious that the introduction of salutogenesis provides a challenge and contradiction to the established practice of entrepreneurs. An understanding of Antonovsky's salutogenic orientation and sense of coherence (SOC) is presented in the literature review section.

The South African Council for Business Women (SACBW) was established in 1985 with the intention of representing women in business and creating a vehicle for women to network, learn from each other and to grow and mentor other women in the field of business. However, most entrepreneurial ventures are not successful and it is clear from this context that the female entrepreneurs are in need of development (Baum, 2005).

From a scholarly perspective, little, if any, research has been conducted on the demographic differences in SOC of women entrepreneurs in South Africa. The research gap in this study therefore emanates from a lack of knowledge about women entrepreneurs' perceptions about SOC in the South African context. This leads to the purpose of the study: To investigate the perceptions of women entrepreneurs in the South African context about SOC.

## **2. THEORETICAL VIEW**

### **2.1. Demographic characteristics of women entrepreneurs**

The demographic characteristics of people also shape their behaviour toward entrepreneurship. Many studies have highlighted the role of demographic characteristics, such as age, religion, gender, experience, background and education of entrepreneurs, in their entrepreneurial behaviour and business performance (Welmilla, Weerakkody & Ediriweera, 2011). In this study we explored only age, duration of owning a business and province because few studies have examined these variables in shaping entrepreneurial behaviour (Welmilla et al., 2011; Minns & Rizov, 2005). Researchers have had diverse results regarding age and its relationship to entrepreneurial success (Sajilan, Hadi & Theseen, 2015).

The increasing global interest in women starting and growing businesses is largely an outcome of entrepreneurship that is recognised as a leading driver of economic development and women as active contributors in that area (SPB, 2013).

### **2.2. Sense of coherence**

Antonovsky's (1996) salutogenic orientation introduces a resource-oriented, rather than risk-oriented, perspective on the maintenance, restoration or improvement of entrepreneurs' health. To promote health, Antonovsky (1996) demands an orientation to salutary factors, which allow people to remain on or move further toward the health aspect of what he describes as the health-disease continuum. Hereby, people are empowered to handle the stressors well with

which they are doggedly confronted. This orientation, which should be reflected in both research and action, should refer to all aspects of a person and to everybody, no matter where they are on the health-disease continuum. A salutogenic orientation, then, as the basis for health promotion, directs both research and action efforts to encompass all (Antonovsky, 1996).

SOC is an important contributor to an individual's health. A higher SOC enables people to manage tension and develop effective ways to find solutions, resulting in less anxiety, depression, perceived stressors and post-traumatic stress disorder (Antonovsky, 1993; Van der Westhuizen, 2018). Remes et al. (2018) refer to SOC as the manner in which a person observes life as being predictable, manageable and meaningful; if this is the case, the person will have fewer health problems. SOC is a theoretical formulation that provides a central explanation for the role of stress in human functioning and it consists of three dimensions, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987; Muller & Rothmann, 2009).

An individual with a high level of sense comprehensibility will expect that stimuli that can be encountered in the future will be predictable, systematic and understandable (Flensburg-Madsen, Ventegodt & Merrick, 2005). Morrison and Clift (2005:366) refer to manageability as follows: 'people who experience their world as manageable have the sense that, aided by their own resources or by those of trustworthy others, they will be able to cope'. Carstens and Spangenberg (1997) explain meaningfulness by stating that an individual who experiences the world in a meaningful way will not be overwhelmed by adverse situations. The individual will rather deal with these situations by regarding the situations as challenges and seeking sense in them, thus trying to overcome them with dignity.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research design**

A cross-sectional survey design and a quantitative research approach were utilised to collect data from the sampled population. A quantitative method was used as the researchers wanted to collect data from a large population.

#### **3.2. Research participants**

The population consisted of 846 South African women entrepreneurs affiliated to the SACBW. The SACBW consists of 19 branches situated in different provinces in South Africa. The researchers decided, for objective validity and reliability

reasons that this study would focus on women entrepreneurs who attend networking functions of the SACBW branches. Convenience sampling was therefore used and 261 respondents participated in this study.

The majority of the respondents resided in Gauteng, comprising 119 (45.6%) of the total respondents. This was followed by Mpumalanga, with 94 (36%) respondents. Western Cape was third, with 20 respondents (7.7%).

The next important information answered how respondents from the different branches (or affiliations) of the SACBW completed the questionnaire. The majority of the completed questionnaires were from the Centurion branch (area), with 57 (21.8%) respondents, followed by Nelspruit/Mbombela with 51 (19.5%) respondents.

Regarding the age distribution of the respondents, 101 (38.7%) of the 261 responses were from the 40 to 49 years age group. This represented the majority of the respondents. The next major group was the 30 to 39 years age group, which constituted 65 responses (24.9%). Thirdly, 53 responses (20.3%) were from the 50 to 59 years age group. It can be concluded that the women entrepreneurs either worked in the formal business sector or owned other businesses, or that their children's upbringing was given higher priority before starting a business.

The duration of business ownership was investigated. The majority of respondents, totalling 119 (45.6%), fell in the category of 'less than a year'. Equally, the majority of women entrepreneurs owning businesses for between one and three years represented 45 (17.2%) of the total respondents. A decline in years was indicated from four years onward. It seems from these results that the majority of businesses did not survive after three years. Only 15 respondents had had businesses for more than five years. There could be explanations other than only economic reasons for why these businesses did not last, such as that the businesses were closed due to the inability to manage a business or voluntarily due to family responsibilities.

### **3.3. Measuring instrument**

The Life Orientation Questionnaire of Antonovsky (1987) was used to measure SOC. Face validity was ensured by using 15 experts in the field of organisational behaviour. The Cronbach's alpha was determined to ensure the internal reliability of the questionnaire. The instrument consisted mostly of Likert-type scale questions with four- and seven-point scales. Bryman (2004) posits that, in such a

case, Cronbach's alpha is the most appropriate test to determine the internal reliability of the instrument.

Bryman and Bell (2011), Cortina (1993), Cronbach (1951), Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) as well as Pietersen and Maree (2014) indicate that an acceptable value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.70 for internal reliability, although 0.80 is deemed desirable. Table 1 presents Cronbach's alpha for SOC.

**Table 1: Cronbach's alpha for SOC**

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Sense of coherence: Comprehensibility	0.907	18
Sense of coherence: Manageability	0.639	6
Sense of coherence: Meaningfulness	0.669	4

Table 1 indicates that the Cronbach's alpha for comprehensibility was 0.907, while manageability and meaningfulness had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.639 and 0.669 respectively. Although the Cronbach's alpha for both manageability and meaningfulness was slightly less than 0.70, Cortina (1993) deems the internal reliability of meaningfulness and manageability as acceptable.

A factor analysis was conducted to determine the construct validity of the questionnaire. Bartlett's test of sphericity should be significant at the five per cent level, or  $p < 0.05$ , to continue with factor analysis (Dauriat et al., 2011). The factors/items that loaded below 0.3 were ignored. This is in line with Knafl and Grey (2007) who state that, when interpreting the factors in factor analysis, it is common to 'suppress or ignore items that have an absolute loading of less than 0.3'. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.880 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Therefore, the sample of this study was adequate to continue with a factor analysis. The same factors or scales that were identified in the literature review, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, were evident in the factor analysis.

#### **3.4. Research procedure and ethical considerations**

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Tshwane University of Technology. Data were collected using Survey Monkey to ensure confidentiality. The survey was designed in such a way that the respondents had

to first consent to participate in the research before answering the questions. The questionnaire was distributed to the 846 affiliated members of the SACBW.

### **3.5. Statistical analysis**

SPSS version 25 was used to perform statistical procedures. Factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha were used, as mentioned earlier. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test were used to compare various groups and to determine whether these groups differ significantly with regard to the group's mean scores of a single quantitative measure. The significance level (Sig.) of 0.05 was used. If the p-value is smaller than a 0.05 significance level, it indicates that there is a significant difference between the means. If the p-value is larger than 0.05, one can conclude that there is no significant difference between the means.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. ANOVA for age**

A one-way ANOVA was performed to establish whether the different age groups differ significantly on the various scales. From Table 2, it would appear that the only significant difference between age groups was found with regard to the total SOC score ( $p < 0.05$ ). Age differences on all the other scales were non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 2: ANOVA amongst age groups**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Comprehensibility	Between Groups	6,662	4	1,665	2,154	0,076
	Within Groups	155,388	201	0,773		
	Total	162,050	205			
Manageability	Between Groups	1,223	4	0,306	0,377	0,825
	Within Groups	162,858	201	0,810		
	Total	164,081	205			
Meaningfulness	Between Groups	8,808	4	2,202	1,947	0,104
	Within Groups	227,285	201	1,131		
	Total	236,093	205			
SOC Total mean	Between Groups	5,830	4	1,457	2,754	<b>0,029</b>
	Within Groups	106,354	201	0,529		
	Total	112,183	205			

In Table 3, the results of the multiple comparisons test were reported for the total SOC. Results show that even though there was a marginally significant overall difference between age groups according to the ANOVA, none of the pairwise comparisons were significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). It may thus be concluded that age groups did not differ significantly with regard to any of the scales.

**Table 3: Multiple comparisons test SOC**

Multiple Comparisons							
Scheffe							
Dependent Variable		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
SOC Total mean	18–29 years	30–39 years	-0,32271	0,21465	<b>0,688</b>	-0,9901	0,3446
		40–49 years	-0,33293	0,20447	<b>0,619</b>	-0,9686	0,3028



		50–59 years	-0,63623	0,21571	<b>0,073</b>	-1,3069	0,0344
		60+ years	-0,51361	0,27031	<b>0,463</b>	-1,3540	0,3268
30–39 years		18–29 years	0,32271	0,21465	<b>0,688</b>	-0,3446	0,9901
		40–49 years	-0,01022	0,13165	<b>1,000</b>	-0,4195	0,3991
		50–59 years	-0,31352	0,14851	<b>0,351</b>	-0,7753	0,1482
		60+ years	-0,19090	0,22044	<b>0,945</b>	-0,8763	0,4945
		18–29 years	0,33293	0,20447	<b>0,619</b>	-0,3028	0,9686
40–49 years		30–39 years	0,01022	0,13165	<b>1,000</b>	-0,3991	0,4195
		50–59 years	-0,30331	0,13338	<b>0,274</b>	-0,7180	0,1114
		60+ years	-0,18068	0,21054	<b>0,946</b>	-0,8353	0,4739
		18–29 years	0,63623	0,21571	<b>0,073</b>	-0,0344	1,3069
50–59 years		30–39 years	0,31352	0,14851	<b>0,351</b>	-0,1482	0,7753
		40–49 years	0,30331	0,13338	<b>0,274</b>	-0,1114	0,7180
		60+ years	0,12262	0,22148	<b>0,989</b>	-0,5660	0,8112
		18–29 years	0,51361	0,27031	<b>0,463</b>	-0,3268	1,3540
60+ years		30–39 years	0,19090	0,22044	<b>0,945</b>	-0,4945	0,8763
		40–49 years	0,18068	0,21054	<b>0,946</b>	-0,4739	0,8353
		50–59 years	-0,12262	0,22148	<b>0,989</b>	-0,8112	0,5660

**4.2. ANOVA for duration of owning the business**

In Table 4, ANOVA analysis indicates that there were significant differences between the groups in duration of owning the business with regard to CEC ( $p < 0.05$ ). No other differences were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 4: ANOVA between factors and ‘duration of owning the business’ groups**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Comprehensibility	Between Groups	5,788	3	1,929	2,561	0,056
	Within Groups	144,625	192	0,753		
	Total	150,413	195			
Manageability	Between Groups	5,799	3	1,933	2,465	0,064
	Within Groups	150,537	192	0,784		
	Total	156,336	195			
Meaningfulness	Between Groups	5,666	3	1,889	1,596	0,192
	Within Groups	227,145	192	1,183		
	Total	232,811	195			
SOC Total mean	Between Groups	3,186	3	1,062	2,043	0,109
	Within Groups	99,839	192	0,520		
	Total	103,025	195			

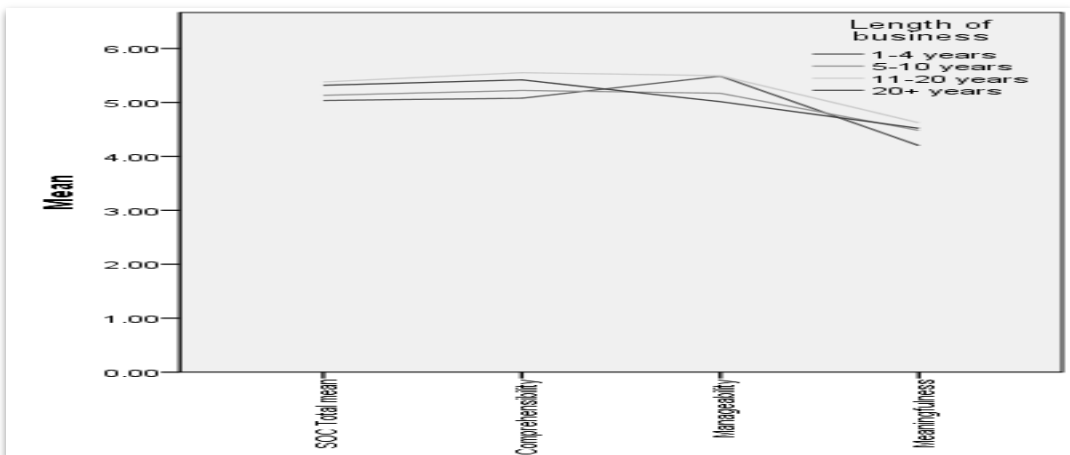
Post hoc tests (Table 5) revealed that there were no pairwise differences. It can thus be inferred that the period that respondents owned their businesses had no relation to the scales measured in this study.

**Table 5: Post hoc test**

Dependent Variable		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Conceptual competencies	1-4 years	5-10 years	-0,21123	0,13157	<b>0,463</b>	-0,5823	0,1599
		11-20 years	-0,38569	0,16466	<b>0,143</b>	-0,8501	0,0787
		20+ years	-0,48495	0,23493	<b>0,238</b>	-1,1475	0,1776
	5-10 years	1-4 years	0,21123	0,13157	<b>0,463</b>	-0,1599	0,5823
		11-20 years	-0,17446	0,17537	<b>0,804</b>	-0,6691	0,3202
		20+ years	-0,27372	0,24256	<b>0,736</b>	-0,9578	0,4104
	11-20 years	1-4 years	0,38569	0,16466	<b>0,143</b>	-0,0787	0,8501
		5-10 years	0,17446	0,17537	<b>0,804</b>	-0,3202	0,6691
		20+ years	-0,09926	0,26198	<b>0,986</b>	-0,8382	0,6397
20+ years	1-4 years	0,48495	0,23493	<b>0,238</b>	-0,1776	1,1475	
	5-10 years	0,27372	0,24256	<b>0,736</b>	-0,4104	0,9578	
	11-20 years	0,09926	0,26198	<b>0,986</b>	-0,6397	0,8382	

Figure 1 clearly reflects that there were no significant differences between SOC and duration of owning a business (time period). Therefore, SOC did not have a significant effect on the respondents' time period of owning a business. As previously indicated, the fact that the majority of businesses were start-ups may have had an influence on the outcome.

**Figure-1: Means plot for length of owning a business and SOC**



### 4.3. T-test for provinces

The t-test is performed when two independent groups need to be compared based on their average score on a quantitative variable (Pietersen & Maree, 2014:225). The t-test was therefore performed on the two independent groups that represent the provinces of Gauteng and Mpumalanga. These two provinces had the most total meaningful responses from the women entrepreneurs.

Table 6 gives an indication of descriptive statistics of the variable scores for each of the groups.

**Table 6: Descriptive statistics of the variable scores for each group**

In which province is the SACBW branch which you attend?		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Comprehensibility	Gauteng	94	5,1596	0,88804	0,09159
	Mpumalanga	72	5,1339	0,95113	0,11209
Manageability	Gauteng	94	5,3901	0,87120	0,08986
	Mpumalanga	72	5,2940	0,92458	0,10896
Meaningfulness	Gauteng	94	4,4362	0,96089	0,09911
	Mpumalanga	72	4,3472	1,10501	0,13023
SOC Total mean	Gauteng	94	5,0940	0,75784	0,07817
	Mpumalanga	72	5,0692	0,77335	0,09114

The two provinces that had the highest number of respondents were Gauteng and Mpumalanga. The results as depicted in Table 6 indicate there were no significant group differences between the mean scores of the two provinces on any of the scales ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 7: Independent samples test**

Independent Samples Test		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Comprehensibility	Equal variances assumed	1,154	<b>0,284</b>	0,179	164	0,858	0,026	0,143	-0,258	0,309
	Equal variances not assumed			0,177	147,324	0,860	0,026	0,145	-0,260	0,312
Manageability	Equal variances assumed	0,172	<b>0,679</b>	0,686	164	0,494	0,097	0,140	-0,181	0,373
	Equal variances not assumed			0,680	148,111	0,497	0,097	0,141	-0,183	0,376
Meanfulness	Equal variances assumed	3,004	<b>0,085</b>	0,554	164	0,581	0,089	0,161	-0,228	0,406
	Equal variances not assumed			0,544	140,961	0,588	0,089	0,164	-0,235	0,412
SOC Total mean	Equal variances assumed	0,146	<b>0,703</b>	0,207	164	0,836	0,025	0,120	-0,212	0,261
	Equal variances not assumed			0,207	151,347	0,837	0,025	0,120	-0,212	0,262

Table 7 gives graphical representations of the mean scores per province. As reflected, there were no significant differences between the provinces regarding SOC.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions that women entrepreneurs in the South African context have about sense of coherence. A

significant difference amongst age groups was found with regard to the total SOC score. This concurs with the findings of Volanen, Lahelma, Silventoinen and Suominen (2004), who state that working age, people's experiences and understanding of their work environment may have an impact on their SOC. When the test results of the multiple comparisons were reported for the total SOC, none of the pairwise comparisons were significant. Therefore, the various age groups did not significantly differ from each other. This contradicts the study of Sajilan et al. (2015), who found that young entrepreneurs impact more on the firm's performance than older entrepreneurs.

There were no significant differences between SOC and duration of owning a business (time period). Therefore, SOC did not have a significant effect on the respondents' time period of owning a business. As previously indicated, the fact that the majority of businesses were start-ups may have had an influence on the outcome. Unlike the study by Hundera, Duysters, Naudé and Dijkhuizen (2019), who found that there were differences related to the stage of business, this study did not find such differences. Women-owned firms have higher average turnovers amongst the youngest group of firms (less than five years old), chiefly because of high turnovers by women-owned business services firms in this group (SPB, 2013) and this deviates from the results of this study. The GEM Women's Entrepreneurship report (2016/2017:30) indicates that the majority of the businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa were established businesses. This resulted from previously high start-up rates for new businesses. Lastly, there were no significant differences amongst the provinces.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This current study adds to the growing body of research seeking to establish an understanding of women entrepreneurs and business success. It is extremely important for women entrepreneurs to demonstrate the ability to deal with stress to co-ordinate the business and its interests to successfully manage their own business venture. Coping strategies are therefore essential. If this is not the case, their business may not be effective.

It is recommended that this study be supplemented by findings of a future study that makes use of a probability sampling method to ensure that the data can be generalised to the larger population. It would be best if more empirical research were conducted, perhaps on a larger sample size or greater geographical region to improve the accuracy of the empirical results.

Future research could possibly investigate the qualitative perspective of South African women entrepreneurs to obtain rich data about their lived experiences about their SOC.

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