

# Family business experience and the probability of starting a venture: gender differences in Poland\*

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The aim of this study is to analyse whether the experience of working in a family member's business is related differently to the assessed probabilities of men and women starting their own new venture in the future. The research is conducted on a sample of 334 Polish undergraduate students. Poland is an efficiency-driven European economy with a substantial gender gap in entrepreneurship. The results obtained indicate that the relationship studied differs significantly across gender. Women assess their probability of starting their own ventures as lower than men do. This difference is only found among those with experience gained in a family member's business. Men and women without such experience do not differ in their assessments. Our findings indicate that the mere inclusion of women in a family's business activities may not be sufficient to reduce the gender gap.

**Keywords:** women's entrepreneurship; gender gap; family business; entrepreneurial intentions

## 1. Introduction

Even though family businesses are one of the most important contributors to the development of contemporary economies, for a long time they received an insufficient amount of attention from entrepreneurship scholars (Miller/Le Breton-Miller 2007). Their role is of particular importance as they not only account for a significant percentage of GDP but also in a unique way affect local communities and numerous stakeholders, including suppliers, customers and those who are involved in their operations (Astrachan/Shanker 2003; PARP 2009; Barrett/Moores 2012). This uniqueness is related to the priorities of family businesses. In the family business literature these have been named the four Cs: continuity, community, connection and command (Miller/Le Breton-Miller 2007; Miller et al. 2010). The essence of these priorities is that such businesses adopt a long-term orientation, perform actions guided by strong values and a clear mission and build enduring relationships with stakeholders. Additionally, there are powerful actors in family businesses who are capable of making decisions that are aligned with these priorities without the constraints that often apply in enterprises that have more quick-profit-oriented shareholders (Chua/Chrisman/Sharma 1999).

This long-term orientation and freedom in decision-making allows people managing family businesses to become role models and to involve younger genera-

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tions in entrepreneurial activities, which can have a profound effect on their development and future career choices. Findings from previous research indicate that this effect may be complex. On the one hand, it has been discovered that people whose parents or other close relatives run businesses are more willing to engage in a start-up activity (e.g. Hout/Rosen 2000; Dunn/Holtz-Eakin 2000). There are several processes that may be responsible for this effect and they will be discussed in a later section of this article. On the other hand, people with a family business background have been found to sometimes prefer other types of employment than establishing their own companies or becoming a successor in the family business (Zellweger/Sieger/Halter 2011). This may be an effect of the dark side of the family business context, which includes family life revolving around business activities (PARP 2009), young family members observing struggles and stress among their older family members related to running the business and a lack of time to devote to other family activities (Douglas/Shepherd 2002). Moreover, family business experience may affect young men and women in different ways. Recently, it has been increasingly argued that involvement in the family business may be a way of unleashing the potential of women because it creates an opportunity to gain entrepreneurial and managerial experience (e.g. Meroño-Cerdán/López-Nicolás 2017).

The aim of this paper is to provide evidence on whether experience gained in a family business has the same relationship with men's and women's assessments of their probabilities of starting their own businesses. The article has several types of theoretical and practical importance. First, it seeks to advance the current state of knowledge regarding gender gaps in entrepreneurship in the family business setting. Even though the gender gap has recently decreased globally (Kelley et al. 2015), it still calls for actions and policies that can prove effective in increasing the number of women pursuing entrepreneurial careers. One possible and viable option is a greater inclusion of women in family business activity, as having a self-employed close family member may have a substantial effect on women's willingness to start their own business. The paper's first contribution is therefore related to a verification of this proposed relationship as previous research findings about positive and negative aspects of women's involvement in the family business are inconsistent.

In addition, the article presents empirical evidence from Poland, a European efficiency-driven economy characterized by a substantial gender gap in entrepreneurship. Findings from emerging countries have been under-represented in the current academic discourse on entrepreneurship. Poland can be considered an interesting case as it is characterized by rapid development and an ambition to become an advanced economy (Sharma 2017). Decreasing the gender gap by utilizing women's potential may be one way of contributing to the country's development. It is therefore important to learn whether involving both young men and young women in family business operations can lead to a decrease in the

gender gap in this specific Eastern European context. Providing insights from this under-represented cultural context is the second contribution to the literature that the paper aims to make.

As such research findings can lead to the development of certain recommendations for those in charge of family businesses and educators, the article also has practical implications. These will be discussed later in the article and are meant to be its third contribution.

## **2. Experience in a business owned by a family member and pursuing an entrepreneurial career**

Previous studies indicate that family background can be a major factor related to people's willingness to start a new venture. People whose parents or other close relatives run businesses are more willing to engage in a start-up activity (e.g. Dunn/Holtz-Eakin 2000; Hout/Rosen 2000). There are several processes that may be responsible for this effect. These include socialization effects, as the transmission of certain values and skills may facilitate the decision to start a new venture. Additionally, people whose parents or other close family members are successful entrepreneurs have better access to financial resources due to their relatives' higher income. This in turn can make them more likely to start a venture as it provides starting capital and/or insurance against business risks (Hundley 2006). Interestingly, the question of the strength and nature of the relationship between experience gained in a family business context and people's intentions to start their own company still needs further exploration. Zellweger, Sieger and Halter (2011) studied more than five thousand students with family business backgrounds from eight different countries. They analysed how the locus of control, self-efficacy and individual motives are related to declarations about career choices. Their main finding is that, surprisingly, an internal locus of control is positively related to subjects declaring they will seek employment rather than become a successor in a family company or starting their own companies. On the other hand, the effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy is transitive. People who plan to establish their own companies are characterized by a higher level of entrepreneurial self-efficacy than those who plan to become successors in family businesses and students with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to become successors than to seek employment. As the research was conducted in several countries, it also allows for between-country comparisons. Only one efficiency-driven European country (Hungary) was included in the dataset and Zellweger et al. found that the students with a family business background in this country are the most likely to declare an intention to become business founders (all the other countries were innovation-driven). They also found that in the entire sample women were more likely than men to opt for employment and less likely to declare an intention to start a business. This research adds to the understanding of the thinking of people who have been exposed to

entrepreneurial family role models. However, little is still known about how experiences obtained in family business activities may affect attitudes towards becoming an entrepreneur and whether their effects are similar for men and women. This seems to be an interesting research problem and there are reasons to believe that the effects of a mere exposure to role models might be substantially different from the effects of participating in family business operations.

This proposition goes in line with one of the most often utilized theoretical approaches to explaining the development of intentions to engage in start-up activity – Shapero’s model of the entrepreneurial event (Shapero/Sokol 1982). This proposes that perceived desirability, a propensity to act and perceived feasibility influence entrepreneurial intentions. These factors are in turn influenced by social norms, personal self-efficacy and values. Brännback and Carsrud (2012) propose that extending the model by adding family norms as another antecedent may be beneficial for its application to the situation of people involved in a family business. On the basis of this model it can be asserted that experience gained from working in a family business should be an even stronger predictor of people’s willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activity than mere exposure to family role models. One’s own actions and experience of their effects are the most important sources of self-efficacy (Bandura 1994). Moreover, the relationship between actions and attitudes is reciprocal. Holding specific attitudes is predictive of engaging in certain actions (e.g. Pomerantz/Chaiken/Torsedillas 1995) and actions in turn shape attitudes. Attitudes shaped by actions are much stronger, more resistant to change and more emotionally charged than those acquired passively through other means, for example social persuasion (Myers 2005). Therefore, being involved in helping in entrepreneurial activities should affect people’s propensity to pursue an entrepreneurial career in a significant way. However, this effect may not be equally strong for everyone. There are people whose experience in a family business makes them willing to start their own venture and those who decide to pursue wage-employment. Gender might be one of the factors related to this phenomenon. This argument goes in line with a previous result obtained by Hundley (2006), who found that having a self-employed father had a smaller effect on the probability of self-employment for women than for men. Hundley studied in his research a sample from the US, a country in which the gender gap regarding entrepreneurial activity is much smaller than in Poland, where the research described in the present paper is conducted.

### **3. The gender gap in entrepreneurship and the family business context**

In most countries, men decide more often than women to pursue an entrepreneurial career. The recent Global Entrepreneurship Monitor’s special issue on female entrepreneurship (Kelley et al. 2015) indicates that the gender gap

(defined as the difference between the proportions of women and men engaged in entrepreneurial activity) narrowed between 2012 and 2015 but is still substantial globally. The number of women who decide to start their own ventures has always been lower than the number of men (Marlow 2002; Ahl 2006). This number varies greatly between countries and cultures. In the 83 economies analysed in GEM's report on women's entrepreneurship, the percentage of women who have started or are about to start an entrepreneurial activity varies from 2% in Suriname and Japan to 41% in Nigeria and Zambia. The report identifies certain clusters of countries based on the development stage of their economies and their geographical location. The cluster which includes European efficiency-driven economies is characterized by particularly lower proportions of women compared to men that have started or are about to start an entrepreneurial activity. Several reasons have been considered responsible for the prevalence of this gender gap. Some of them, for example, are analysed in a study which involves a large dataset from Germany (Caliendo et al. 2014).

The following section of this article focuses on presenting several of these factors. Based on theoretical considerations and previous research findings, it is proposed that women's involvement in family businesses might result in their having a greater propensity to start their own businesses in the future. This seems plausible because of the way in which the family business context may promote young women's access to business by mitigating the effects of important factors related to the prevalence of the gender gap. This theorizing is the basis for proposing the hypotheses that are tested in the present article.

The first area in which family business involvement may affect women is connected to their perception of the barriers to entrepreneurship, which are regarded as greater impediments by women than by men. Women not only perceive the business environment less favourably but also have more negative attitudes regarding their ability to overcome obstacles (Langowitz/Minniti 2007). A fear of failure, which is related to this phenomenon, is one of the most important barriers to women's entrepreneurship and the level of this fear is particularly high in Poland (Kelley et al. 2015). It seems that obtaining experience in a family business might mitigate this fear due to the fact that it allows women to experience their own efficacy and build a stronger conviction that they can control their behaviour and its outcomes in the process of venture creation and management (Meroño-Cerdán/López-Nicolás 2017). In addition, as family business owners and managers are usually focused on long-term goals and on the welfare of the next generations (Matthews/Hechavarria/Schenkel 2012) they may significantly help their young family members engaged in family business operations by providing them with encouragement, resulting in acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary to deal with the challenges faced by entrepreneurs. Recent work on stewardship in family businesses indicates that this is often the case (Le Breton-Miller/Miller 2015). This should potentially reduce the fear of failure in both

men and women, but the latter group experiences greater levels of it and so might benefit more from family business experience. It has been proposed that particularly in countries in which gender roles are more differentiated (and Poland belongs to this category) family businesses may provide learning experiences which can be later utilized by women to establish new ventures (Barrett/Moores 2009).

Another factor that may be responsible for the prevalence of the gender gap is the fact that women face difficulties when they try to acquire financial resources (Brindley 2006). Women who decide to change their careers and turn to self-employment usually have had limited opportunities to accumulate financial capital compared to men as their average salaries tend to be lower. Additionally, female entrepreneurs are often discriminated against by banks. Muravyev, Talavera and Schäfer (2009) conducted a study on more than 14,000 firms operating in different countries. Their findings indicate that more female firm owners had their financing applications rejected or were discouraged from trying to obtain a bank loan than their male counterparts. The study controlled for various factors that may be related to the possibility of obtaining a loan, such as the age of the company, its size and the industry in which it operates. Regardless of these factors, the effect of gender is significant across different cultures. Hertz (2011) describes financial discrimination against women entrepreneurs as prevalent in Europe. She indicates that women are asked more often than men whether they have analysed their business ideas thoroughly and are more often refused financing. Discrimination in obtaining business financing can in part be related to convictions that women may not return to professional activity after a possible maternity leave. It seems that this obstacle could be mitigated by effects of having a family member who owns a company and acquiring early entrepreneurial experience. This proposition is present in the family business literature, which stresses that family members who successfully run their businesses can provide starting capital and/or insurance against business risks (Hundley 2006). Women who face difficulties and often discrimination in acquiring loans from banks may find it easier to acquire the necessary financial resources from family members who are self-employed for several reasons. First of all, in general people more often share their wealth with those who are their relatives. This is considered to be a possible strategy for increasing one's chances of reproductive success (Smith/Kish/Crawford 1987). Moreover, entrepreneurs who are successful may not only have sufficient wealth to share with others but might also be more willing to promote the entrepreneurial lifestyle and encourage family members to start their own businesses by providing financial support. It is therefore plausible that people who have had the opportunity to gain experience under the supervision of a relative who is a business owner will be more successful in obtaining help from that family member. The family business literature indicates that family members are indeed quite often an important source of financing (Aldrich/Cliff

2003; Matthews/Hechavarría/Schenkel 2012). Additionally, successful entrepreneurs may be willing to share their accumulated social capital with those members of their family who decide to establish their own ventures (Arregle et al. 2007). This may decrease the transaction costs of entrepreneurial activities and therefore can be regarded as a factor mitigating financial barriers but also one which allows nascent entrepreneurs to establish the networks of connections necessary to find trusted suppliers and customers with whom to build long-term relationships (Miller/Le Breton-Miller 2005). Previous research has demonstrated that when it comes to obtaining financing women entrepreneurs are more likely to rely on their relatives compared to men because of their underprivileged position when applying for bank loans (Constantinidis/Cornet/Asandei 2006).

The next important cause of the gender gap is related to the prevalence of stereotypes. These are an important factor as they have a profound effect on how people perceive themselves and build their self-concepts and on the actions that they perform as a consequence (Cross/Madson 1997; Wojciszke 2010). In accordance with the stereotypes shared by most societies, entrepreneurship is still a masculine domain (Thébaud 2015). This conviction may result in women experiencing a stereotype threat, which usually has the effect of inferior performance by those who belong to a negatively stereotyped social category (Steele 1997). Research findings about the effect of a stereotype threat on entrepreneurial intentions among men and women indicate that the phenomenon may result in a decrease in the level of women's intentions to become self-employed (Gupta/Turban/Bhawe 2008). However, this effect takes place only when the entrepreneurial career is presented in masculine terms and diminishes when it is presented in a gender-neutral way. Such stereotypes may restrain women from participating in certain kinds of activities and limit their possible choices of profession (Brannon 2004). Even though experience gained by women in a family business can have little effect on the general prevalence of stereotypes in a society, it can affect women's individual behaviours and decisions. On the one hand, family businesses tend to be more long-term oriented, more focused on preserving the family's wealth, and to value mediating skills and sensitivity in conflict resolution (Miller/Le Breton-Miller 2005). As all these characteristics are often associated with women, some authors claim that family businesses may promote women's access to the world of business and that stereotype-based barriers resulting in women being less likely to take management positions may be less important in family businesses (Meroño-Cerdán/López-Nicolás 2017). On the other hand, young women who experience their own efficacy in performing the activities necessary to operate a venture have an opportunity to develop a less masculine image of entrepreneurs. They might benefit from their involvement in the family business because of the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills, including in industries that are typically dominated by men (Wang 2010). The results ob-

tained in a recent survey about the role of women in family businesses conducted in multiple countries lead to the conclusion that the characteristics of successful family businesses contribute to establishing an environment that facilitates the development of women leaders (EY 2015).

The above arguments lead to the conclusion that family business experience may be a means of unleashing women's entrepreneurial potential. If this is the case, such experience might moderate the relationship between gender and people's willingness to follow an entrepreneurial career. Little is currently known, however, regarding the way in which such experiences affect women and men in European efficiency-based economies like Poland, so this article aims to fill this gap in the literature, at least partially. Based on the above discussion, the following three hypotheses have been developed:

- H1. Young people with family business experience assess the probability of starting their own businesses in the future as higher than people without family business experience do.*
- H2. Among people without family business experience, young men assess the probability of starting their own businesses in the future as higher than women do.*
- H3. Among people with family business experience, young men and women do not differ in their assessments of the probability of their starting their own businesses in the future.*

Note that this study is meant to be exploratory and seeks to test in which cases the relationship between gender and entrepreneurial intentions is stronger. According to the classic distinction between moderating and mediating variables introduced by Baron and Kenny (1986), a moderator is a variable that influences the strength or direction of the relationship between a predictor and a criterion variable. The proposed hypotheses assume that family business experience can have a moderating effect on the relationship between gender and people's declarations about their probability of pursuing an entrepreneurial career (i.e. family business experience might help reduce differences between men and women). The next section presents the procedure employed to test this relationship and the results obtained.

#### **4. Methods and results**

The results presented in this article have been obtained from a wider survey study on entrepreneurial intentions among Polish students conducted on a group of undergraduate students in the business faculty of a Polish university. This group of people are particularly important in research on entrepreneurship as

pursuing an entrepreneurial career is a viable option for them (Krueger/Reilly/Carsrud 2000).

The survey questionnaire was distributed to the study participants in university classrooms. They were informed that their participation in the study was not obligatory and they were free to decide whether to take part. They were told that if they decided to participate their answers would be kept confidential. They were informed about the aim and importance of the study. They were also reminded about the necessity of completing the questionnaire carefully and reading the questions before answering. They were all given printed questionnaires and were asked not to sign them so that the data would be anonymous. In terms of personal data, they were only asked to provide their age and gender. A total of 374 questionnaires were distributed. For further analysis, only those questionnaires in which the items necessary for the purpose of the present study received responses are included in the analysis. Finally, the responses from 334 participants were analysed (89.3% of the questionnaires distributed). Among these participants, 220 were women (65.68%) and 114 were men. The participants' average age was 21.48 with a standard deviation of 1.19.

In one of the survey questions, the participants were asked to indicate whether they were involved in working in a business owned by a family member. It was specified that the question pertained to either a parent, a grandmother, a grandfather, a sibling, a cousin, an aunt or an uncle who is an owner or a co-owner of a business (owning at least 5% of the shares) and operates it. The family business literature has not developed an unambiguous definition of a family business (Chua/Chrisman/Sharma 1999; Carsrud 2006; Carsrud/Brännback 2012). The definitions that have been proposed most often include elements relating to family members owning and managing a venture. Both these elements were included in the relevant questionnaire item. 255 participants (76.35%) indicated that they did not have experience of working in a business owned by a family member and 79 participants indicated that they did. Among those with this experience there were 40 women and 39 men, whereas among those without the experience there were 180 women and 75 men.

The participants were also asked to indicate the probability that they would start their own firm within one year, within five years and at any point in the future. Three separate scales were used, ranging from 0% to 100% with 10% intervals. The mean results obtained from the entire sample are presented in Table 1.

The Cronbach's alpha for the participants' three assessments of their probabilities of starting their own ventures at these three different points in the future reached the high level of 0.89. Therefore, a single measure of the assessed probability of them starting their own business in the future was calculated for each participant by averaging the three scores obtained from each participant (referred to later in the article as the '*Average assessed probability of starting a*

*business in the future*<sup>3</sup>). This measure was used in the subsequent statistical analysis to test the research hypotheses. The mean results obtained from the different groups of participants are presented in Table 2. The results of the statistical analysis conducted are described in the next paragraphs.

**Table 1: Summary statistics – mean assessed probabilities of starting one’s own venture in the future in the entire sample**

	All participants (n=334)	Male participants (n=114)	Female participants (n=220)
Assessed probability of starting a business within 1 year (%)	31.90	38.78	28.25
Assessed probability of starting a business within 5 years (%)	53.30	59.12	50.27
Assessed probability of starting a business at any point in the future ('ever') (%)	69.76	74.04	67.55
Average assessed probability of starting a business in the future (%)	52.00	57.56	49.10

**Table 2: Average assessed probability of starting one’s own venture obtained for different groups of participants**

	All participants		Male participants		Female participants	
	Participants with family business experience (n=79)	Participants without family business experience (n=255)	Men with family business experience (n=39)	Men without family business experience (n=75)	Women with family business experience (n=40)	Women without family business experience (n=180)
Average assessed probability of starting a business in the future	66.07	47.90	73.25	48.98	58.89	46.81

Several significant results are revealed by a 2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) with gender and experience of working in a family-member-owned business entered as independent variables and the average assessed probability of starting one’s own business in the future as dependent variable.

The main effect of working in a business owned by a family member is significant. It is consistent with previous research and shows that people who have worked in a business owned by a family member evaluate their probability of starting their own venture as higher ( $M=66.07$ ,  $SE=2.40$ ) than those who have not had such experience do ( $M=47.90$ ,  $SE=1.50$ ),  $F(1, 334)=41.00$ ,  $p<0.001$ .

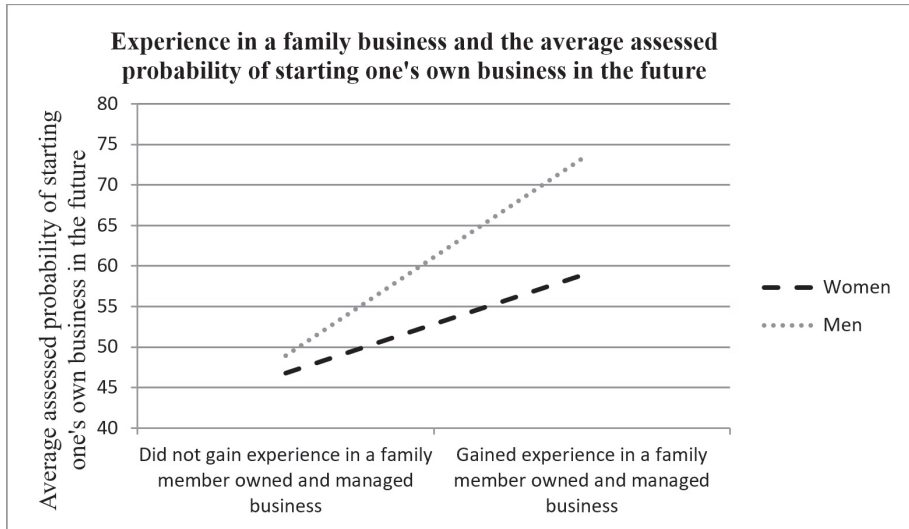
Therefore, H1 is supported, demonstrating that family business experience is positively related to the assessed probability of choosing an entrepreneurial career in the future. Even though this result was expected it should not be perceived as trivial as sometimes a family business background might increase a tendency to deliberately avoid this career path (Zellweger/Sieger/Halter 2011).

In order to test H2 and H3, the interaction effect of two independent variables needs to be analysed. A significant two-way interaction between gender and previous experience is in fact found,  $F(1, 334)=4.62$ ,  $p<0.05$ . Further analysis of simple effects with Bonferroni adjustment reveals results that are somewhat surprising. There is no significant difference between men who have not worked in a business owned by a family member ( $M=48.98$ ,  $SE=2.53$ ) and women who also have not had such experience ( $M=46.81$ ,  $SE=1.63$ ),  $p=0.47$ . This means that these two groups of participants do not differ in their assessed probability of starting their own businesses in the future. Therefore, H2 is not supported. Even though an entrepreneurial career is often presented in masculine terms and the gender gap in Poland is substantial (Kelley et al. 2015), young women without experience obtained in a business managed by a family member do not assess their probability of becoming an entrepreneur as lower than their male colleagues do.

It should be added that a main effect of gender is obtained. In the entire sample men declare a higher probability of starting their own ventures in the future ( $M=57.56$ ,  $SE=2.12$ ) than women do ( $M=49.10$ ,  $SE=1.88$ ),  $F(1, 334)=8.48$ ,  $p<0.005$  but these answers are obtained from people with family business experience, who are responsible for this result. There is a significant difference between men and women who have worked in a business owned and managed by a family member. Men with such experience assess the probability that they will start their own business as higher ( $M=73.25$ ,  $SE=3.42$ ) than women with such experience do ( $M=58.89$ ,  $SE=3.38$ ),  $p<0.005$ . Therefore, H3 is not supported as it was expected that no differences would be found between men and women who have been involved in a family business. The implications of this somewhat unexpected finding are thoroughly analysed in the discussion section of this article. The results obtained from this study are presented in Figure 1.

It is fair to state that statistically significant differences are found both between men with family business experience and men without such experience as well as between women with a family business background and those without it. Each of these comparisons reveal a higher assessed probability of starting their own ventures among people who have had family business experience. It would seem, however, that being involved in family business operations has a stronger effect on young men than women in terms of unleashing their entrepreneurial potential. This assumption based on the study's findings needs further exploration and will be discussed in the last section of this article.

**Figure 1: Experience in a family business and the average assessed probability of starting one's own business in the future among men and women**



## 5. Discussion and implications

The results obtained indicate that experience of working in a family business has a different relationship to men's and women's assessed probabilities of starting a venture in the future. Women who have helped in a family-owned business assess their probability of starting their own business as higher than women without such experience do but it does not influence them as much as it influences men. This means that at least some of the factors that can be expected to have the potential to affect the entrepreneurial decisions of people who gain experience when working in a family business may have a smaller impact on women than men. The previous review of the entrepreneurship literature suggested that family business involvement might have positive results for women as it enables them to develop entrepreneurial skills and attitudes, gives them easier access to managerial positions and provides an opportunity to even enter industries and sectors that are dominated by men (Bjursell/Bäckvall 2011; EY 2015; Meroño-Cerdán/López-Nicolás 2017). The literature indicates that early experiences in the specific family business context, in which continuity and win-win relationships are often valued (Miller/Le Breton-Miller 2007), might foster entrepreneurial career choices equally for men and women. However, the present study has found no support for this assertion. In fact, it is among the group of participants without family business experience that women's assessments are equal to those made by men, while for men and women who have had such experience there is a significant difference. This unexpected and at the same time

somewhat pessimistic finding requires further discussion and it seems that an indirect explanation can be found in the literature on female succession.

Wang (2010), for example, indicates that daughters are often less likely than sons to be considered as successors in family businesses and that there is evidence that this phenomenon occurs even if they are better educated. It has been discovered that often they do not even consider themselves as possible successors unless a critical incident occurs (e.g. becoming unemployed or a founder's illness) (Overbeke/Bilimoria/Perelli 2013). The fact that a person is not considered as a successor often results in a lack of involvement in the operations of the family business. For example, in Martin's (2001) study of family businesses in the United Kingdom it was found that daughters are sometimes actively discouraged from taking part in the process of running a family business. Jimenez (2009) also found that they usually do not expect to become successors and are to a certain extent invisible to their fathers. The present study has focused on comparing young men and women who have been engaged in family-business related activities and therefore it should not be considered to be a mere confirmation of these findings. It is, however, important to notice that some authors highlight an inferior position of women by indicating that, for example, in comparison to sons, daughters involved in family businesses are in disadvantaged positions when it comes to receiving appropriate preparation in terms of formal education and learning about the specific field in which their family business operates (Curimbaba 2002).

The present paper seems to fit into the stream of research on family businesses that does not lead to particularly positive conclusions. The fact that daughters are often invisible as successors to fathers (Jimenez 2009) results not only in their having smaller chances of becoming family business leaders but also in a reduced transmission of the knowledge which is important to run and operate a business (Overbeke/Bilimoria/Somers 2015). This may in turn result in less willingness to start their own ventures. To further situate this paper in the family business literature, the division of research on women's involvement in family businesses into three different generations proposed by Campapiano et al. (2017) can be utilized. The second and the third generations, even though they differ in their approaches, are characterized by an optimistic view of women being involved in family businesses and the positive outcomes that it brings, while the first generation places the emphasis on the barriers and difficulties they encounter in family businesses. It seems that the findings presented in the present paper are more congruent with this older stream of research and indicate that much still needs to be done before a more positive perspective can be considered prevalent. Hollander and Bukowitz (1990) state in their seminal paper that family businesses can potentially become either a very beneficial environment for women's development or strongly oppose cultural changes. The results obtained in the present study indicate that the quality of family business experience

should be considered in future studies to verify when each of these two effects is more likely to apply.

This paper has contributed to the existing body of knowledge by presenting results that add to understanding of the gender gap in entrepreneurship in the specific family business context. The results obtained indicate that encouraging assertions and research findings about the way in which women's entrepreneurial potential benefits from their involvement in family business operations should be approached with caution. In addition, the sample analysed consists of young people in Poland – an efficiency-driven Eastern European economy where most start-up activity is among young people (Kelley et al. 2015). The paper therefore contributes by presenting results from a region which has been somewhat under-represented in the entrepreneurship literature. The strength of the Polish economy has increased in recent decades (Sharma 2017) and if this trend is to continue the entrepreneurial potential of both men and women needs to be developed and utilized. As the results obtained here indicate that a reduction in the gender gap in entrepreneurship is rather unlikely to be achieved by increasing the mere involvement of women in activities necessary to run a family business, the paper can also be considered a call for action by educators and role models who own and run family businesses. The latter group are the people who have the power to shape the quality of younger family members' involvement in their business activities. To a certain degree, their decisions may affect the extent to which the involvement of young women in entrepreneurial activities will remain one of society's wasted resources (Le Breton-Miller/Miller/Steier 2004).

## 6. Limitations of the study and avenues for future research

The present study has several limitations that need to be mentioned. First of all, it should be considered exploratory as it seeks to test the moderating role of involvement in family business in the relationship between gender and young people's assessed probability of their starting their own ventures in the future. Even though the results obtained can be considered important and noteworthy for the reasons mentioned above, a further investigation is necessary in order to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms responsible for this paper's findings. In further studies, both the mediators and other moderators of the relationships discovered should be tested. This paper's literature review would seem to suggest that differences in the feedback and encouragement received by women and men who are involved in family businesses might serve as mediators, whereas the quality and length of participants' involvement in the operations of family businesses might be important moderators. There is a need for further qualitative and quantitative studies in future research. In addition, the results presented were obtained from only one group of stakeholders – young people with or without previous family business experience. It will be important to investigate the perspectives of other stakeholders, in particular those who are in charge of family busi-

nesses. This will increase the reliability of both the findings and their implications. Addressing these shortcomings by conducting further research may be a meaningful step that will lead to further theoretical advances and facilitate the identification of activities performed in the specific family business context which can be aimed at reducing the currently wide gender gap in entrepreneurship in Poland.

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