Effects of sociocultural patterns and organizational policies on the work-life balance challenges of Mexican women

Efectos de los patrones socioculturales y las políticas organizacionales en los retos del equilibrio entre la vida laboral y personal de las mujeres mexicanas

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ABSTRACT

Working women face barriers in their daily lives that make achieving work-life balance, therefore experiencing consequences in other areas of their lives. This study analyses six dimensions: reward, work-life time interference, couple relationship and parenting, physical and mental health care, household responsibilities, and leisure time. Specifically, to analyse these variables in women's lives, a qualitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional study was conducted, involving 880 women between the ages of 18 and 60 who currently or previously worked in the State of Guanajuato in Mexico. This study concludes that optimal time management can mitigate these challenges; the key lies in sociocultural dynamics, adjustments in government regulations and organizational policies, plus the deconstruction of gender roles assigned to women.

Key Words: Gender roles, Work-Life Balance (WLB), women.
JEL Classification System: M12, M14, M50.

RESUMEN

Las mujeres que trabajan se enfrentan con barreras en su vida diaria que complican tener un equilibrio vida-trabajo, en consecuencia, experimentan repercusiones en otras áreas de su vida. En este estudio se analizan seis dimensiones: gratificación, interferencia de tiempo laboral y personal, pareja y crianza, cuidado de la salud física y mental, responsabilidades del hogar, y tiempo libre. A fin de analizar estas variables en la vida de las mujeres, se realizó un estudio de tipo

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cualitativo, descriptivo, y transversal, donde se estudiaron a 880 mujeres de entre 18 y 60 años que están o han trabajado en el Estado de Guanajuato en México. Se concluye en este estudio que una óptima gestión del tiempo puede atenuar los desafíos, la clave está en las dinámicas socioculturales, ajustes en las regulaciones gubernamentales y las políticas organizacionales, y la deconstrucción de roles de género asignados a las mujeres.

Palabras Clave: Balance vida-trabajo (BVT), mujeres, roles de género.
Códigos de Clasificación JEL: M12, M14, M50.

Introduction

Over time, women have increasingly entered the workforce, which has led to the emergence of new challenges in their daily lives, especially in an environment where sociocultural expectations and gender roles command how women should behave in society.

In the Mexican social context, women tend to bear the greatest burden of responsibility and, consequently, constantly encounter issues that make it difficult for them to maintain a satisfactory lifestyle. Therefore, it is necessary to address these difficulties and encourage society to make positive changes in favour of working women, since many of the problems that affect their daily lives often stem from the sociocultural patterns that continue to prevail in social dynamics.

According to information from the National Survey of Demographic Dynamics (ENADID, 2023), Mexico has a population of 129.5 million people, of whom 51.7% are women. In other words, there are almost 67 million women in the country. It is worth noting that the State of Guanajuato was selected for this study due to its socioeconomic and labour characteristics, which make it a relevant context for analysing women's working conditions.

According to information from the Population and Housing Census (2020), the State of Guanajuato has a population of approximately 6.1 million people. Of the total population, 51.4% are women, or just over 3 million. It should be noted that the National Occupation and Employment Survey (ENOE, 2024) in Guanajuato indicates that only 1.2 million women in Guanajuato are employed. On the other hand, the Population and Housing Census (2020) in Guanajuato indicates that of the total number of women in Guanajuato, there are approximately 81 thousand women aged 12 or older, of which almost 53 thousand are mothers and the state has 36.3% of households with a female head of household.

The above confirms that Guanajuato is a state where women make significant contributions to the economy through their incorporation into both the formal and informal labour markets. It is worth mentioning that in Guanajuato, according to the State Competitiveness Index (2023) of the Mexican Institute

for Competitiveness (IMCO, 2023), 36% of the state's employed population works more than 48 hours a week, ranking it as the state with the worst performance in this indicator that year, therefore work-life balance issues are evident. Meanwhile, the ENOE (2024) of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) revealed that 41.8% of those employed worked 35 to 48 hours a week. Additionally, the contribution of working women to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is significant. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2024) estimated that, on average, the increase in women's economic participation boosted annual per capita (GDP) growth of 0.37 percentage points over the past 20 years, while men contributed less than half of this proportion to annual (GDP) growth.

It is worth mentioning that the OECD (2024) states that, although women's participation in the labour market has increased recently, it is still significantly lower than that of similar countries in the region. Considering this, the OECD (2024) and the IMCO (2025) suggest that the integration of women into the workforce could lead to an increase in (GDP) by 2035 of 3.7% more than projected for that year. This confirms that increasing women's participation in the labour market is crucial to improving the country's economic performance and potential.

It should be noted that there are very few studies in Latin America and Mexico on the topic of work-life balance, and there are not previous studies on this topic in the State of Guanajuato, so this research addresses a specific gap in the existing literature. This research addresses the challenges faced by women in the State of Guanajuato, Mexico, who are or have been active in the labour market from six dimensions, classifying and facilitating the understanding of these challenges. Specifically, the study's objective is to analyse the factors that influence women's work-life balance from six study dimensions: reward, work-life balance, couple relationship and parenting, health care, household responsibilities, and leisure time.

Literature Review

Gender Role Theory

According to Young (2018), gender role theory dictates that these roles are indispensable for developing the way we think and judge our own behaviour and that of those around us; therefore, these act as socially imposed expectations on everyone (Joshi et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2009).

In this context, Stockard and Johnson (1980) and Weitzman (1979) mention that, from early stages, society constantly encourages individuals to adopt behaviours culturally assigned to their sex. For example, in the male category, they are constantly encouraged to use "boys'" toys, while in the female category, they are assigned toys such as dolls or kitchen items, and when they use them, they are applauded and recognized by the adults around them. From then on,

these behaviours are adopted and appear to be naturally occurring. It is at this point that biologically based sex roles are transformed into socially constructed gender roles (Risman & Davis, 2013).

Finally, Kray et al. (2017) confirm that gender roles are the result of an imposed social construction, which in adulthood dictates to the female sex the role of caregivers and to the male sex, assigns the role of the economic provider of the family, pigeonholing them into socially appropriate behaviours for men and women (Eagly and Steffen, 1986; Eagly and Wood, 1999; Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly and Steffen, 1984).

WORK-FAMILY BALANCE THEORY

According to Clark (2000), the work and family spheres, despite being independent, influence each other. To better understand this, they could be visualized as two nations with different languages and ways of acting; that is, the work and family space function and have different mechanisms. However, for some individuals, this change is more abrupt. To counteract this, the individual has the possibility of shaping some aspects of each space so that the changes are less noticeable.

Research by Powell et al. (2009) indicates that in some countries, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, job satisfaction and turnover tend to be higher than in Asian, Latin American, or European countries. This suggests that in countries with individualistic societies, it is common to express job dissatisfaction and change jobs if deemed necessary, while in collectivist societies, employer loyalty is the cultural norm, even when individuals have low levels of job satisfaction (Brough & Kalliath, 2009; Spector et al., 2007).

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that, according to Taylor et al. (2009), organizational climate is a fundamental axis in the balance between work and family life, since, according to their findings, a work climate with informal support favourable to the family, referring to understanding and flexibility, has positive effects on reducing work-family conflict, while formal support favourable to the family, associated with institutional policies or extra benefits, did not show significant effects; this indicates that flexibility and an optimal organizational culture can have greater effects than compensation and benefits policies alone (Brough and Kalliath, 2009).

THEORY OF SELF-DETERMINATION

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Ryan and Deci (2020), provides a basis for understanding how motivation and psychological well-being work. They state that people have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and perceived relatedness. The authors also assert that the satisfaction

of these needs directly contributes to intrinsic motivation and mental health (Huang and Zhao, 2025; Janssen et al., 2013).

In relation to the above, Ryan and Deci (2000) propose two types of motivation. The first is extrinsic motivation, defined as the performance of activities by an individual with the goal of achieving a specific result. The second is intrinsic motivation, which refers to the type of motivation that occurs naturally when performing an activity that is satisfying to the individual in and of itself. It is worth mentioning that actions driven by intrinsic motivation are aligned with personal values and choices, resulting in high autonomy, while extrinsic motivation occurs due to external pressure, consequently resulting in low autonomy. This reveals that extrinsic motivation linked to the individual's own values helps to promote commitment and performance in the activities undertaken (Heider, 1958; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand, 1997).

Finally, Ryan and Deci (2000) state that an individual's actions have specific internal reasons and therefore different effects, which in turn can be influenced by external factors such as rewards or social pressure. In short, each type of motivation favours different factors: intrinsic motivation tends to promote well-being and optimal performance, while extrinsic motivation can have positive effects on immediate actions but can have long-term consequences for mental health.

Monetary and Emotional Reward

Regarding monetary reward, salary can be an important motivator for working women. However, using salary as the primary means of motivation can have the opposite effect and be perceived in the long run as a method of controlling employees, rather than fostering natural interest and competence (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Inoue et al., 2023). In this sense, both the monetary and emotional aspects of reward for women must be considered.

According to Inoue et al. (2023), employees experience high levels of work pressure when organizations lack policies to regulate work demands. In this sense, company managers play an important role, as they need to provide appropriate tools and methods to foster the psychological well-being of employees, which will positively influence the work environment and employee performance (Dollard and Bakker, 2010).

On the other hand, Kelly et al. (2024) mentions that granting work autonomy to collaborators has positive effects on the work environment of the organization and at the same time increases the levels of job satisfaction, helping to reduce the levels of burnout in employees (Madathil et al., 2014), all of this part of the emotional reward of the members of the organization.

Work-Life Time Interference

Several factors influence women's ability to achieve work-life balance, one of the most important is family. Family support in childcare and balancing workloads helps women ensure their personal lives do not interfere with their work activities. At the same time, the level of support and flexibility in the organization's work schedules influences women's ability to avoid work-life interference with their personal activities. It should also be noted that women who work full-time are more likely to experience stress and emotional overload compared to men (Frone et al., 1997; Maqsood et al., 2024).

The interference of work activities in women's personal lives has negative effects, as it forces them to put their personal activities on the back burner and prevents them from leading a fulfilling lifestyle. Furthermore, balancing work and personal activities becomes a challenge for those in management positions, and this situation is a frequent reason for leaving senior management positions (Ford and Collinson, 2011; Peterson, 2007; Nyberg et al., 2018).

Couple Relationship and Parenting

Conflicts between work and parenting duties can have significant effects on childrearing, as they affect the parents' relationship with their partners, consequently affecting the family environment and, thus, their children's development (Cooklin et al., 2014). However, it is important to note that, despite the passage of time, childcare remains a responsibility predominantly assigned to mothers (Kotila et al., 2013; Sattler et al., 2024).

Therefore, raising children remains a challenge in the lives of women entering the workforce, even though some organizations do offer tools to balance work and family responsibilities. This is where the flexibility provided by the employer plays an extremely important role, since this factor is what allows them to find a way to balance these two aspects (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Lambert, 1999; Repetti and Wang, 2014).

According to Zhang and Zhao (2024), the balance between these two activities is vital, since the repercussions of not achieving this balance can cause various physical and mental health complications in mothers, which also affect their children (Mikolajczak et al., 2018; Swit and Breen, 2022). In addition, adverse conditions between parenting and work can generate hostile attitudes at home between parents and children, therefore, it is vital to reconcile family life and work activities to maintain a pleasant environment at home and avoid increasing the levels of physical and mental exhaustion of women in their workplace (Roskam et al., 2020; Zhang and Zhao, 2024).

Physical and Mental Health Care

Women's lives often include various aspects that add stress and discomfort throughout their lives. This is a consequence of the accumulation of responsibilities that are often assigned to them. In their constant search to meet these demands, they find themselves in a position where they often neglect various aspects of their lives, including their health care (Behere et al. 2021; Clay, 2003).

As a result of the above, and in accordance with what was mentioned by Cates et al. (2024), the consequences of not addressing mental health can have various repercussions, such as Burnout Syndrome, substance abuse, or suicide, as mentioned by Hert (2020). In addition to this, what was stated by Fischetti et al. (2024) states that active breaks during the workday can help mitigate the negative effects of a sedentary lifestyle, since doing physical activity can help reduce physical discomfort and improve people's mood, this also ends up having a positive impact on the performance of employees (Kar and Hedge, 2021).

However, according to Luo et al., 2022, an important element in the health of female workers is the importance of getting enough sleep, otherwise, this can be a trigger for various mental disorders (Khade et al., 2018). Another relevant aspect, which can particularly affect women, are health problems during pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing, where the father is the fundamental piece in reducing the ravages of these diseases (Luo y Sato, 2021).

Household Responsibilities

According to Ampim et al. (2022), gender roles continue to have effects on women's responsibilities, thus, at home, domestic work is expected to be performed by women. This situation also influences their professional growth, as they are unable to dedicate the same amount of time as men to their paid jobs, leading to their long-term salaries being proportionally lower than those of men. This situation has other repercussions, as it fosters unbalanced power relations between the genders in the social and political spheres (Barker, 2014: 87; Matteazzi and Scherer, 2020).

In modern settings, the distribution of household responsibilities has been linked to gender expectations. In other words, women are expected to handle household chores and caregiving in their homes. Society, on the other hand, expects men to assume a leadership role and provide the family income (Adomako, 2001; Ampim et al., 2022).

Leisure Time

Free time in women's lives is a complex issue, in this sense Jarosz et al. (2023) argue that most working women do not have time for themselves. This is a consequence of the large number of responsibilities attributed to women, such as motherhood, unpaid work at home, and the paid workday that ends

up draining the body and mind of working women. Added to this is the lack of time to rest. Because of this trend in the lives of working women, some of them are choosing to avoid becoming mothers to avoid facing these situations (Jarosz et al., 2023; Raudasoja et al., 2022).

According to Jarosz et al. (2023), the only way mothers can enjoy their free time is by having help offloading their duties, primarily from their family circle. The lack of access to free time causes women multiple ailments that, in addition to personally affecting the worker's life, also end up having consequences for the organization and their immediate work environment (Brown et al., 2001; Jarosz et al., 2023; Miranda, 2017; Viramontes et al., 2020).

Considering the above, the objective of this study is to analyse the perceptions of women in the State of Guanajuato in Mexico, regarding the issue of work-life balance based on their experience.

Methods

This research is qualitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional. The study was conducted within the context of Mexico, specifically in the State of Guanajuato. The study focused on 880 women between the ages of 18 and 60 who are currently working or have worked in this region. It is important to emphasize that this qualitative study, with thematic analysis, complements a previous quantitative study, aiming to conduct a more in-depth and detailed analysis of the topic under study, considering the experiences and perceptions of the participants. In this sense, the findings were so relevant that it was necessary to document in this article the perceptions of the study population.

Sampling was based on convenience, considering the study's initial stage and the lack of financial resources for the project. Therefore, the researchers selected volunteer participants who were easily accessible, as it is almost impossible to test the entire population. The trigger questions were open-ended, intended to provoke reflection, analysis, and interest in the topic, and to elicit deeper responses than a simple "yes" or "no." In December 2024, a pilot study was conducted with ten women to ensure that the questions were clear, appropriate, and well-formulated, which greatly helped in fine-tuning the final questions for the study.

Data collection took place between January and July 2025 using Google Forms. Working women were asked to share their views on work-life balance based on their own experiences. They were also asked about issues they felt could be changed in their environment to achieve work-life balance. This allowed for multiple perspectives on the topic for a comprehensive understanding.

The participants shared their views voluntarily, fully aware that their contributions would be used for academic research purposes. Participant confidentiality always prevailed, and their autonomy and well-being were protected, as their names were not revealed during the research.

It should be noted that the responses were subsequently analysed and classified into the study dimensions: monetary and emotional reward, work and personal time interference, couple relationship and parenting, physical and mental health care, household responsibilities, and leisure time; this allowed for significant conclusions to be drawn on the topic. The results section below presents the overall analysis of the data.

Results and discussion

Work-Life Balance (General)

The issue of work-life balance is viewed from multiple angles. First, most working women find it very difficult to maintain a balance, as it involves efficiently balancing various factors other than work, such as housework, their social life, physical and mental health care, and childcare, if they have any. All these factors, which have been socially and culturally placed on women, have prevented them from achieving this balance, forcing them to give up some of these aspects of their lives, even limiting their professional development, or instead neglecting their family or their well-being.

While this is the case for many working women, most can perceive progress in the opportunities or facilities that time has provided them to develop in the professional world, yet they continue to perceive them as insufficient. In this context, many working women with children often find themselves in a position where they dedicate most of their time to work, and the little time they have available is spent caring for their children or on household chores. Something similar happens with women who, even if they don't have children, have assigned roles in their homes or are responsible for caring for someone who is ill.

It should also be mentioned that the women participating in the study are aware of the disadvantaged position they find themselves in and, therefore, recognize the need for organizations to improve the conditions of their working hours, which are too long to allow them time to lead a full life. They also emphasize the importance of having a good organization to make the most of their available time, in addition, they believe that a support network is essential to achieving balance.

Considering the above, some of the comments the women participating in the study expressed regarding work-life balance were the following:

> "It is difficult to balance work, home, children, social life, exercise, and mental health."
>
> "Work-life balance for women not only requires work flexibility, but also a cultural shift that promotes shared responsibility in the home. Without an
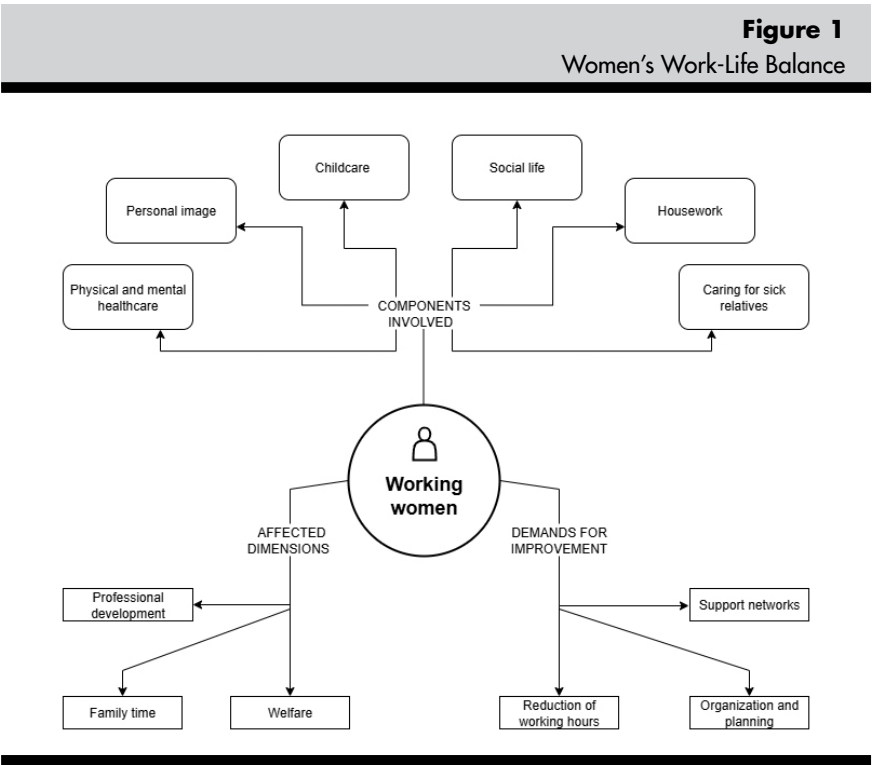
equitable distribution of household chores, existing policies are not sufficient to achieve true balance."

"Women's entry into the labour market has been a significant advance, but it has also created challenges in balancing professional and personal responsibilities."

"I am worried that if I ever want to become a mother, I will have to put my career on hold."

"Achieving work-life balance requires recognizing the factors that hinder it and creating courses to foster women's leadership."

To conclude the topic of work-life balance, Figure 1 summarizes the above.

Figure 1
Women's Work-Life Balance

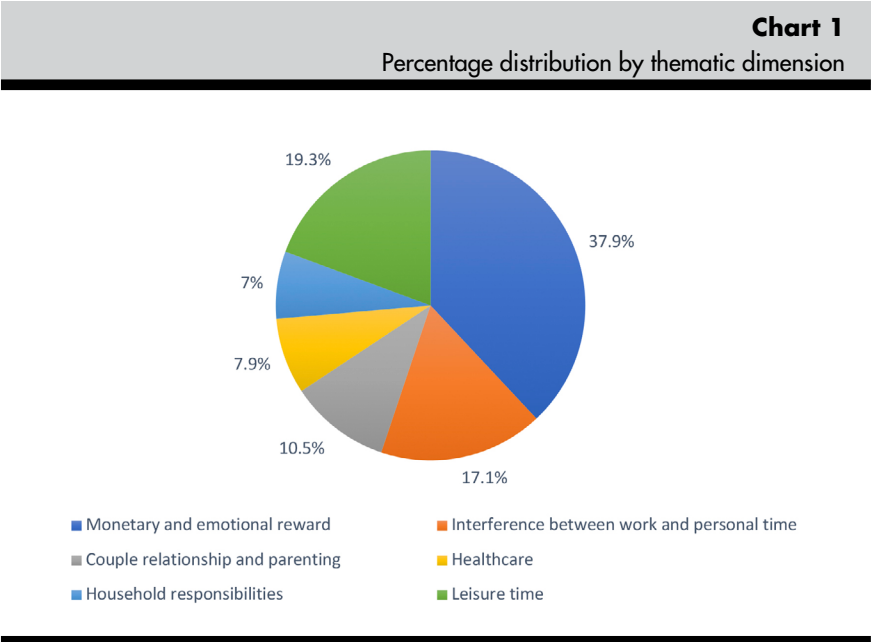Source: Prepared by the authors using data from fieldwork.

FREQUENCY TABLE

The following table presents the frequency distribution of participants' responses, classified according to six thematic dimensions: monetary and emotional reward, work and personal time interference, couple relationship and parenting, physical and mental health care, household responsibilities, and leisure time. This organization demonstrates the relevance of each dimension based on the information provided by the participants, adding reliability and rigor to the analysis.

Table 1

Frequency distribution of responses according to thematic dimensions

Dimension	f	Fr	%	F
Monetary and emotional reward	334	0.379	37.9	334
Interference between work and personal time	151	0.171	17.1	485
Couple relationship and parenting	93	0.105	10.5	578
Physical and mental health care	70	0.079	7.9	648
Household responsibilities	62	0.070	7	710
Leisure time	170	0.193	19.3	880
TOTALES	880	0.997	99.7	

Note: The table shows how the responses are distributed across six thematic dimensions obtained from the qualitative analysis of the study's open-ended questions.

According to the data in Table 1, it is concluded that for women working in the State of Guanajuato, Mexico, the most important aspect of their jobs is reward, both monetary and emotional; the free time they have to pursue activities of their interest; and they recognize that they constantly face challenges managing the conflict between work and personal time. The above is summarized below in Chart 1.

Chart 1

Percentage distribution by thematic dimension

Note: The graph represents the percentage distribution of participants' responses according to the study dimensions.

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of the thematic subdimensions, derived from the qualitative analysis of the participants' responses, ordered according to the main dimensions of the study. Each subdimension represents a specific aspect within its respective main dimension. The "Monetary and Emotional Gratification" dimension includes subdimensions such as salary increases and benefits, which are among the most significant. It also includes workplace harassment experienced by women, as well as the support they receive to address specific issues such as starting a business outside of their paid employment. Furthermore, it mentions opportunities for professional growth, referring to the possibility of finding employment and receiving training to access better job opportunities.

On the other hand, the "Work-Life Balance Interference" dimension includes sub-dimensions such as time dedicated to personal life, rest, family, work flexibility and remote work, work schedules, and respect for free time, among others, which describe the complexity of reconciling work and personal life. Within this dimension, the most significant sub-dimensions were flexibility and remote work, and the need to reduce working hours due to their interference with personal time.

In other thematic dimensions, such as "Partnership and Parenting," the sub-dimensions of childcare and work leave to attend school events or attend to family emergencies stand out. Meanwhile, in the dimension of "Physical and Mental Health Care," women express greater concern about the sub-dimension of physical health compared to mental health. However, they also believe that organizations should join forces to implement strategies to care for women's overall health.

The "Household Responsibilities" dimension includes subdimensions ranging from family care to the distribution of household chores, the latter being the most important in this dimension. Finally, in the "Free Time" dimension, the most relevant subdimensions were the lack of free time resulting from long hours and labour exploitation, resulting in little or no time for rest and personal care. This table visualizes the relative prevalence of each subdimension and provides clarity to the analysis by offering a more detailed structure of the experiences and challenges reported by the participants.

Table 2

Frequency distribution of responses according to thematic dimensions

Subdimension	f	Fr	%	F
Monetary and emotional reward				
Salary increase	129	0.147	14.659	129
Benefits	39	0.044	4.432	168

Table 2
Frequency distribution of responses according to thematic dimensions

Subdimension	f	Fr	%	F
Wage gap	15	0.017	1.705	183
Machismo	11	0.013	1.250	194
Harassment	8	0.009	0.909	202
Gender disparity	20	0.023	2.273	222
Recognition	29	0.033	3.295	251
Support	41	0.047	4.659	292
Opportunities and professional growth	42	0.048	4.773	334
Interference between work and personal time				
Personal life	23	0.026	2.614	357
Rest time	12	0.014	1.364	369
Academic training	9	0.010	1.023	378
Family time	11	0.013	1.250	389
Flexibility and remote work	47	0.053	5.341	436
Overtime	8	0.009	0.909	444
Reduction of working hours	17	0.019	1.932	461
Working hours	15	0.017	1.705	476
Personal procedures	3	0.003	0.341	479
Respect for free time	6	0.007	0.682	485
Couple relationship and parenting				
Childcare centres	27	0.031	3.068	512
Support network	9	0.010	1.023	521
Couple	13	0.015	1.477	534
Work permits	17	0.019	1.932	551
Gender role	15	0.017	1.705	566
Childcare	12	0.014	1.364	578
Physical and mental health care				
Illnesses and physical ailments	14	0.016	1.591	592
Physical health needs	26	0.030	2.955	618
Mental illnesses	17	0.019	1.932	635
Mental health needs	13	0.015	1.477	648

Subdimension	f	Fr	%	F
Household responsibilities				
Double shift	17	0.019	1.932	665
Distribution of tasks	20	0.023	2.273	685
Family care	15	0.017	1.705	700
Gender role	10	0.011	1.136	710
Leisure time				
Financial resources	4	0.005	0.455	714
Rest time	19	0.022	2.159	733
Personal care	18	0.020	2.045	751
Hobbies	13	0.015	1.477	764
Friendships	3	0.003	0.341	767
Life as a couple	4	0.005	0.455	771
Lack of free time	42	0.048	4.773	813
Support in childcare	12	0.014	1.364	825
Violation of free time / days off	10	0.011	1.136	835
Transfer times	2	0.002	0.227	837
Long hours and labour exploitation	39	0.044	4.432	876
Unpaid overtime	4	0.005	0.455	880
Totals	**880**	**1**	**100**	

Table 2
Frequency distribution of responses according to thematic dimensions

Note: The table shows the frequency distribution of the subdimensions of each thematic dimension of the study, according to the participants' responses.

REWARD (MONETARY OR EMOTIONAL)

Regarding the topic of monetary and emotional reward, specific needs can be identified. On the one hand, regarding monetary gratification, working women expressed the need for better wages, since, although some have access to jobs with work hours that allow them to perform other activities, the compensation in these jobs ends up being insufficient. At the same time, they expressed the urgent need for employers to provide their workers with legal benefits, as well as to adopt policies that help relieve the burden on women who, in addition to working, are mothers.

Regarding emotional gratification, the women participating in the study said that it is essential for them to feel recognized in their workplace and to feel

that they are working in a suitable environment where they are treated with dignity. On the other hand, they mentioned the lack of understanding and emotional support they receive at work. Finally, they highlighted the systematic discrimination that exists in their workplace and the use of machismo in work relationships with men, where a huge disparity in salaries and treatment is evident.

Based on the above context, the following are some comments from the participating women regarding the challenges they face in terms of monetary and emotional reward:

"The job is stable, but the pay is too low for everything I need."

"Part-time work allows me to be home for my children, but the pay is very low."

"Companies should focus more on productivity than on working hours; more time in the office doesn't always mean better productivity."

"My personal experience is that, although there are still challenges, there is greater awareness about the need for work-life balance. However, it is essential to continue working on policies that promote equal pay, equitable parental leave, flexible work options, and access to affordable childcare services."

"Women's work should be valued at home and in their work life."

"Not all bosses are empathetic toward working women."

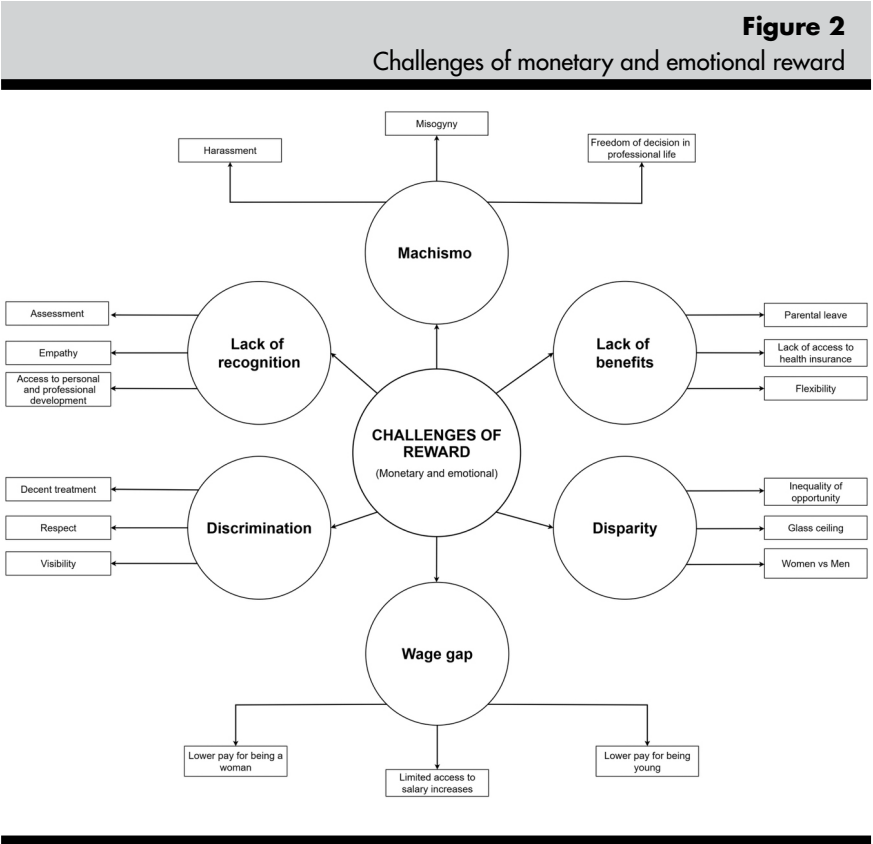"Women have very few opportunities for career advancement, simply for being mothers."

"There is no equal employment opportunity."

"My partner thinks my work is less important because I earn less. In the end, I end up working inside and outside the home while he rests. It's not fair."

"As a woman, I've had to work twice as hard as any man to achieve the same recognition and sacrifice my personal life to achieve success. I'm starting to regret it."

"There's still a lot of machismo. The number of women in my field is considerable. However, for managerial positions, the discrepancy in the gender ratio is noticeable. This is sometimes justified by the time women invest in the home or with their children."

To conclude the topic of monetary and emotional reward, Figure 2 summarizes the points previously discussed.

Figure 2
Challenges of monetary and emotional reward

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from fieldwork.

The afore mentioned coincides with what Inoue et al. (2023) stated, who assert
that emotional reward is vital for women to feel recognized and valued, which
will have positive effects on their performance at work.

However, although Deci and Ryan (1985) consider in their work that salary
as a motivator can have negative long-term results, in the case study of the State
of Guanajuato in Mexico, it can be seen that the women's experiences confirm
that beyond being a motivator, good financial reward is essential to alleviate
pressures on workers and avoid negative effects on their lives and performance.
Finally, it is of utmost importance that organizations take action to address
disparities and discriminatory and sexist attitudes in the workplace.

Work-personal time interference

Regarding time interference in women's lives, it can be seen as a daily issue
that requires attention from organizations, as most report having difficulties
with the time they dedicate to some area of their personal lives due to work-
related issues. In particular, the women participating in the study highlighted

the difficulty of finding time for themselves or for activities they enjoy, as most are forced to dedicate the little free time their jobs leave them to fulfilling other responsibilities in their personal lives. They indicated that their jobs consume their opportunities for self-care, personal relationships, and even completing daily tasks, as they also feel unable to disconnect from their work.

It is also worth mentioning that they consider the possibility of working and studying at the same time and being able to have a balanced life unattainable, adding that the opportunities and facilities offered by companies to make this happen are very limited. Not only does it interfere with these aspects, but it also impacts the time working women can dedicate to their families, limiting it to the point that they feel guilty for not devoting enough attention to their children and family. Based on the above, the women participating in the study shared the following comments about the interference their work causes in their daily lives:

"Sometimes I feel guilty for not having a life outside of work."
"I feel like work hours limit my personal development, but I've learned to prioritize."
"Although I enjoy what I do, I struggle with finding a balance. I wish companies would understand that we're not machines."
"Full-time work hours should be flexible, as it doesn't allow us to do personal errands."
"No job values you enough to lose your personal life and neglect yourself."
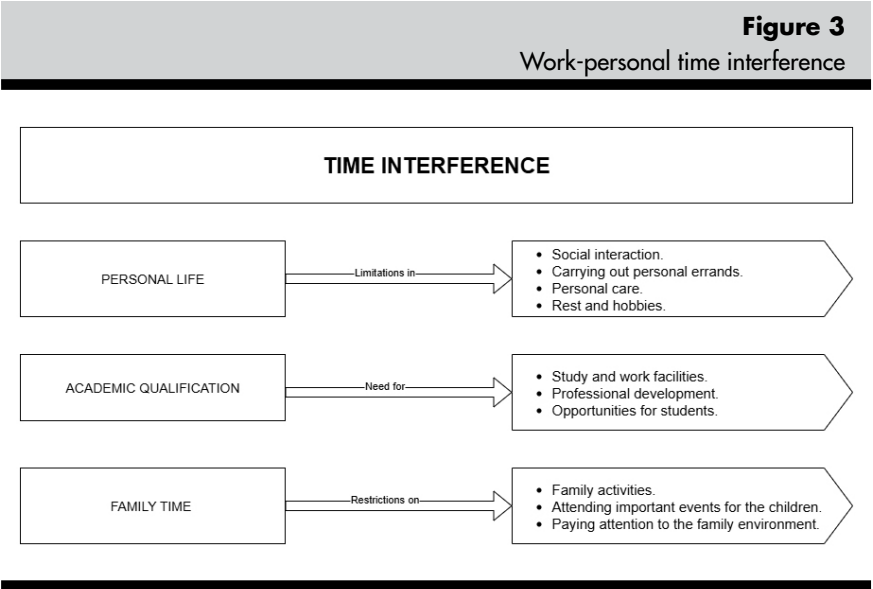"Having my own business gives me some flexibility, but I often feel overwhelmed by not having time for myself."
"Working from home has been a blessing, but sometimes it's difficult to maintain the boundaries between work and personal life."
"Remote work has given me flexibility, but sometimes I feel like I spend too much time in front of the computer."
"My marriage ended because I didn't have time."
"During the time I was married and while my children were young, I couldn't continue studying or improve my job."

To conclude the topic of time interference in women's daily lives, Figure 3 presents a concise summary of the above analysis.

Figure 3
Work-personal time interference

TIME INTERFERENCE

| PERSONAL LIFE | —Limitations in— | • Social interaction.
• Carrying out personal errands.
• Personal care.
• Rest and hobbies. |

| ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION | —Need for— | • Study and work facilities.
• Professional development.
• Opportunities for students. |

| FAMILY TIME | —Restrictions on— | • Family activities.
• Attending important events for the children.
• Paying attention to the family environment. |

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from fieldwork.

Contrasting this with the findings of Ford and Collinson (2011), Peterson (2007), and Nyberg et al. (2018), the constant interference of work responsibilities with women's personal life activities, and vice versa, has various consequences. These include not being able to manage their personal lives as they prefer and constantly being forced to give up activities they want to pursue to fulfil their work schedules, even preventing women from holding onto managerial positions.

Therefore, and in line with what the women mentioned in this study, it is important for companies to provide opportunities for women to balance work and personal time and prevent them from developing negative feelings about themselves for not fulfilling what society expects: caring for and nurturing their children as their only priority.

COUPLE RELATIONSHIP AND PARENTING

Regarding couple and parenting dynamics, it is pertinent to emphasize that these are conditioned by women's work contexts. Thus, there is a need for safe and accessible childcare centres for the children of working mothers who lack the support of others to care for their children, especially in cases where their children have some type of disability. At the same time, in cases where their children are cared for by someone else during their workday or attend school, the women interviewed expressed that they lack support to obtain permission to go out and attend to unforeseen events related to their children, or

to attend some of their school events, which are important for the children's overall development.

Regarding the structure of the couple relationship specifically, this study highlights the imposition by the partner that the woman works or leaves work whenever he or she so orders, which prevents women from making their own decisions regarding work. Meanwhile, women who do not face this difficulty emphasize the importance of their partner's involvement in childrearing, just as they consider the support of someone else around them, such as another family member, to be essential. In other words, having a support network is vital for working mothers.

Finally, regarding the topic of childrearing, women in Mexico are culturally pre-assigned the care and attention of children, which not only carries a moral burden but also implies limiting, postponing, or forgoing their professional development and career advancement, since women are socially required to prioritize raising their children over their academic training or career advancement. Considering the above, some of the statements from the women participating in the study help us understand the dynamics of couples and parenting:

> "That there be more daycare centres for single women who don't have IMSS".
> "That our city had safe and equipped places to receive our children with disabilities where they could have decent support while the mothers carried out other activities"].
> "The company isn't interested in, or concerned about, working mothers. When they give permission to go out, it's very inconvenient because they ask you to leave everything in order and then tell you about the permissions, even without considering that you take your office work home".
> "Understanding in unexpected situations regarding our children".
> "I quit my job because I didn't have anyone to leave my son with. My husband prefers that I dedicate myself to him for now, but I miss working and having my own income".
> "Husbands want you to support the family financially, but they don't want to help with the housework, and you're under pressure to have everything right at home and at work".
> "My husband's support has been very important in allowing me to grow professionally without feeling so overwhelmed."
> "My husband prefers that I work so I can pay and free up expenses."
> "Personally, I have great support from my managers to fulfil my roles as a professional and a mother. However, there are jobs where that support isn't available, and therefore, you must sacrifice some of those roles."
> "It's very difficult to be a mother and a worker without support networks. Work doesn't stop, but neither do the needs of my children. Sometimes I feel like I have two equally demanding days."
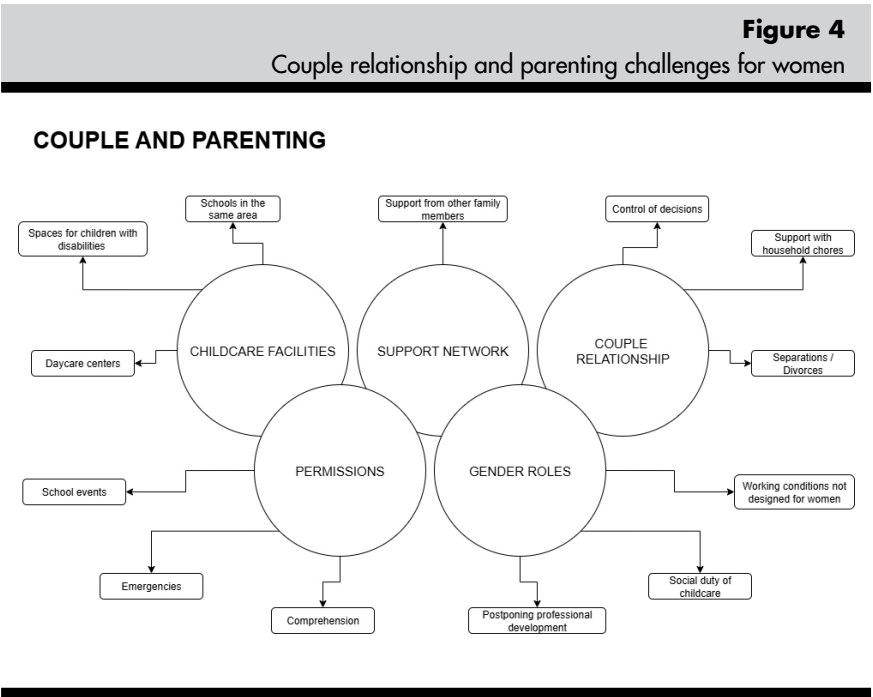
"Having a partner who shares responsibilities makes all the difference. It
shouldn't be a luxury."

"Sometimes I feel like having children limits me professionally."

"It's incredibly important to raise awareness about this issue, because strengthen-
ing the family is the foundation for rebuilding the social fabric. Women enter
the workforce under conditions not designed or thought out for women, nor
for the roles we play in society and the family, and we accept them, but the
result is family disintegration, the limited presence we have in our children's
lives and in self-care."

"I stopped working to take care of my father, who is sick. My husband prefers
that I stay home, but I feel frustrated for not having my own income."

To conclude this section, Figure 4 summarizes the elements discussed regarding
the relationship and parenting challenges faced by working women.

Figure 4
Couple relationship and parenting challenges for women

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from fieldwork.

In line with the above, the ideas of Kotila et al. (2013) and Sattler et al. (2024)
align with the experiences reported by the women participating in this research.
Although the dynamics have evolved over time, the responsibility for raising
children continues to fall almost entirely on women. Therefore, it is vital to
have a support network, which is most effective if it comes from the immedi-
ate family.

On the other hand, although authors Zhang and Zhao (2024) refer to the health consequences and analyse the effects on job performance that a lack of balance between parenting and work responsibilities can entail, their study does not place any specific emphasis on how this affects their professional development and training. In contrast, in this study, women from the State of Guanajuato in Mexico, reported that when they start a family and have children, their professional development may be postponed or cancelled, and their career growth truncated, because they must dedicate a significant portion of their efforts to caring for and raising their children.

HEALTH CARE (PHYSICAL AND MENTAL)

Regarding health care, in the context of the State of Guanajuato in Mexico, there is a clear lack of training regarding physical health care, not only among working women but primarily among companies, which must provide their employees with tools for self-care and, above all, foster the conditions for these tools to be used in the workplace. For example, physical activity, workload reduction, and access to time off for medical appointments. In the case of women suffering from gynaecological conditions, it is essential that employers consider their access to sick leave.

A similar situation occurs with mental health, which is often not adequately addressed, in part due to the lack of a culture of mental health care in Mexico, both due to cultural barriers and the stigma associated with seeking help in this area. Furthermore, there is limited access to mental health services, both in the healthcare sector and in companies, and for individuals. In other words, companies don't always offer access to psychological therapy, and it's often difficult for workers to allocate financial resources for it, especially when they are single mothers who must cover the costs of their children. This aspect is completely neglected, and the consequences often affect their mental well-being, negatively impacting their personal lives and their work performance.

That said, some of the participating women had the following to say about taking care of their physical and mental health in the face of their workload:

> "I study and work at the same time. There are days when I don't eat well or sleep. No one thinks about the mental health of those of us who are trying to get by like this."
> "Permission for medical appointments."
> "It's said that if work allows you to exercise and/or have personal time, this is doubly difficult for working mothers. Perhaps the work schedule, in theory, allows it because you can get home at a good time, but when you get there, you start your second, unpaid job, so your personal time is considerably reduced."
> "Since we were little, we were taught to think about the well-being of others above our own, and there's nothing more wrong with that."
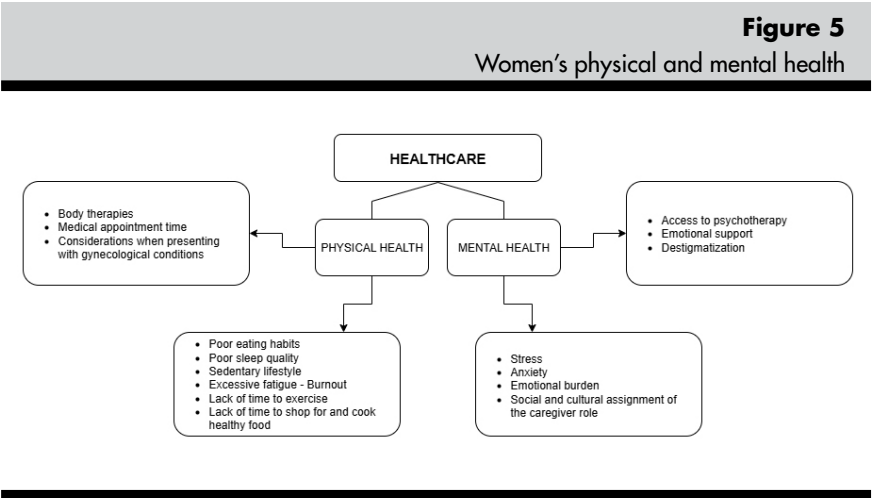
"Sometimes I feel like my work takes up too much of my energy, and I have little time to cook or exercise."

"The mental burden still falls heavily on us. Even though I have support, I'm the one who organizes everything: school, doctors, shopping, food."

"The mental burden of planning everything is very heavy, even though I have physical support."

"I think the thing I have the least time for is emotional self-care; it's usually the aspect that's most out of my control."

In conclusion, Figure 5 clearly summarizes the most relevant aspects of the physical and mental health of the women participating in the study.

Figure 5
Women's physical and mental health

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from fieldwork.

As previously stated, the physical and mental health of working women is constantly compromised, as they are subjected to high levels of stress, causing various illnesses that deteriorate their health in the long term. This affects not only their performance at work but also their continued employment. Hert (2020) also points out that the consequences of poor health management put working women at high risk of facing unfortunate situations, including mental health issues such as suicide and addiction.

Another relevant aspect to consider is that women face specific conditions, such as those mentioned by Luo y Sato (2021) and Luo et al., (2022) on pregnancy health, however, do not consider gynaecological diseases suffered by countless women and which pose a challenge in their work environment. The findings of this research in the Mexican context conclude that these types of conditions are often minimized or ignored by organizations or senior management.

HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

Regarding household responsibilities, different aspects are also observed, such as household chores, such as cleaning, cooking, washing, ironing, grocery shopping, among others. When these activities fall on the shoulders of a working woman, they can feel like a second workday, resulting in an excess of activities to attend to, which adds to fatigue and stress. Therefore, it is essential to distribute household chores so that women have the support of their partners and children in carrying out these tasks. Although socially assigned to women, for the sake of equity, they should be shared among the people who benefit from them.

Similarly, it is necessary to relieve women of the responsibility of caring for sick family members. As mentioned above, due to socially imposed gender roles, women are always expected to be the ones responsible for their care, reaffirming how these impositions constantly hinder the personal development of women who wish to dedicate their time to professional training.

Considering the above, below are some of the comments provided by the women participating in the study regarding the circumstances they face regarding household responsibilities:

> "I've observed that it's harder for women to work and be at home because it's as if they have double work."
> "Involve the family in household chores, delegate certain activities."
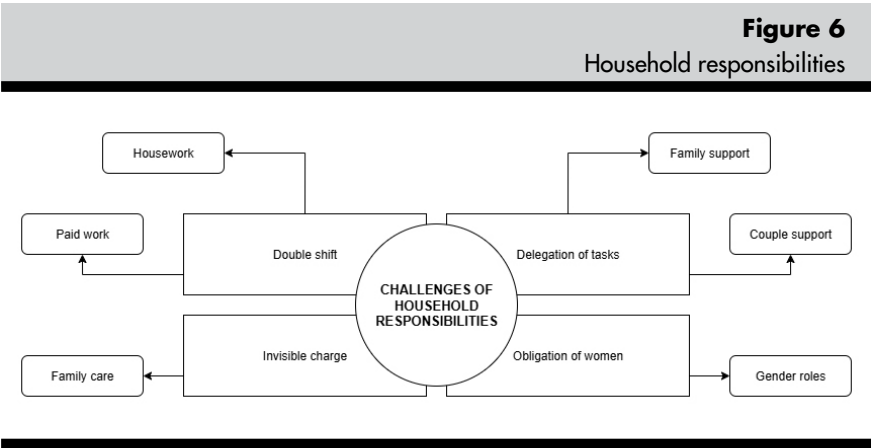> "Institutional support is key, but there's still an invisible burden at home."
> "Even though I'm young, I already feel the burden of family care."
> "Caring for sick family members almost always falls on women, regardless of whether they have jobs outside the home or not."
> "I feel that it's difficult for women to balance their lives and work because culturally they're expected to do household chores or hire a domestic worker to supervise and pay them out of their own pocket. On the other hand, women who work and are successful think carefully about whether they want to get married, because getting married entails a lot of responsibility and too many problems due to the expectations placed on women. On the other hand, it also happens that if a woman isn't married, she's considered a failure, while a man who remains single is practically a hero his entire life." [sic]
> "I would like to see the role expectations at home changed because in my family, being a woman means being a good servant, a good daughter, a good partner, and a mother." [sic]

To conclude this section dedicated to the challenges of household responsibilities that women face in parallel with the workplace, Figure 6 illustrates the above.

Figure 6
Household responsibilities

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from fieldwork.

In line with what is addressed in the present study, Ampim et al. (2022) also mention in their work that gender roles continue to determine who is responsible for household chores, with the task being, in most cases, socially and culturally assigned to women mothers. The situation becomes even more complicated when these mothers are immersed in the labour market, as they must work a paid workday and then continue with an unpaid one, which involves great physical and mental exhaustion.

Adomako's (2001) argument aligns with the demands expressed by the working women in this study regarding household chores. Indeed, equitably distributing tasks with the rest of the household is essential to prevent the workload from falling solely on women, allowing them to have the opportunity to take time after their paid workday to rest or engage in recreational activities.

Leisure Time

When it comes to the free time available to working women, it is evident how they often forget that they deserve to dedicate time to themselves, whether it be to enjoy time with their family, pursue their favourite activities, or dedicate their free time to something they find interesting. Indeed, this is because culturally and socially, women are responsible for multiple tasks, such as childcare and household responsibilities, and the same pressure that places on "empowered women" to maintain jobs in which they consider themselves successful.

In contrast, this situation occurs less frequently in the case of men, as they have other concerns in accordance with the gender roles established by Mexican society. It is worth noting that it is alarming that women who do not have children frequently experience pressure from their families to resolve all kinds of situations, as they believe that since they are single or childless, they have nothing else to do or where to spend the resources they receive from their paid jobs.

Workdays often play a very important role in this regard. Although some women, with excellent time management skills, manage to adjust their activities and schedules, excessively long workdays or failure to comply with work schedules, including extra and unpredictable activities, constitute a barrier to women's ability to organize themselves and could free up time for other activities of interest.

The following comments were provided by the women participating in the study, providing a deeper insight into the challenges they face in relation to their free time:

"The problem is that if you don't have children, they think you don't need free time. But we all need to rest."

> "We often forget about ourselves because we have to take care of the house, work, our profession, and our children, and the enjoyment of ourselves as human beings is forgotten."
>
> "The commute from home to work, loss of time due to traffic."
>
> "Unfortunately, I spend more time at work than with my family. Despite having flexible hours at my job, I must cover the hours by law and even stay longer due to emergencies that arise at work. Although these hours are paid, the time I dedicate doesn't make up for the time lost with my daughter."
>
> "I wish I had more time for myself."
>
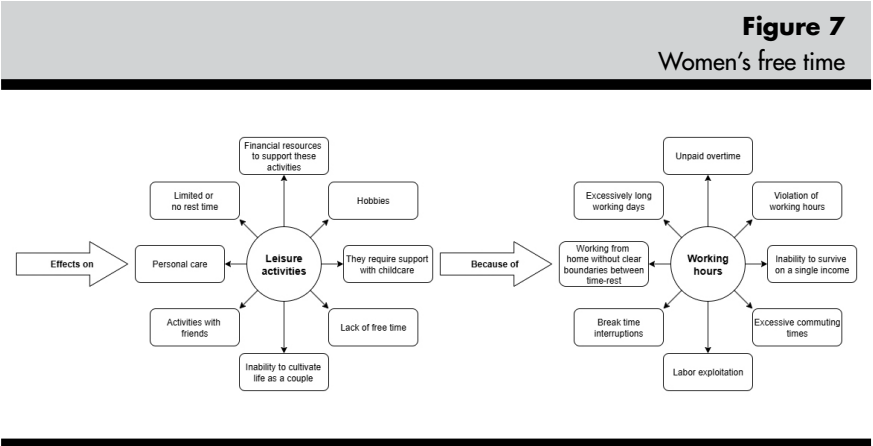> "I wish I could spend more time with my family."
>
> "I don't have free time."
>
> "Low wages in the state encourage working multiple jobs, and consequently, there isn't much free time."
>
> "I work from home, but that doesn't mean I have freedom. On the contrary, I often end up working more because there are no clear boundaries between work and rest."
>
> "Respecting work hours."

Finally, Figure 7 summarizes a comprehensive overview of the above discussion regarding the free time of women in the workforce.

Figure 7
Women's free time

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from fieldwork.

Returning to what was previously mentioned and in line with what Jarosz et al. (2023) mentioned, most working women do not have free time to dedicate to rest and/or leisure activities. This is a consequence of the multiple responsibilities traditionally attributed to women's roles. Added to this is the lack of adequate policies in organizations for women who are mothers. Sometimes, even if women have a good time management system, violations of rest schedules, unexpected overtime, and the assignment of tasks outside of working hours prevent women from balancing their time.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the authors consider the difficulty of balancing work and free time in family settings. However, this situation is something that working women constantly face even when they are not mothers or married, since the burden of tasks assigned to them is based on sexist thinking, resulting in consequences for their work-life balance, even when they have not yet started a family.

Conclusions

In conclusion, gender stereotypes and roles are a determining factor in the daily challenges faced by working women. First, regarding monetary and emotional fulfilment, it was found that financial compensation is inadequate. This deficiency is exacerbated by the gender pay gap, and the lack of benefits further hinders women's professional development. Furthermore, sexism and discrimination against women in the workplace, along with a lack of recognition for their achievements, leads to a lack of motivation and negatively impacts their job performance.

Second, the blurring of work and personal time is quite common in the lives of working women, affecting their personal lives and the time they can spend with their families. In addition, women's academic development is significantly affected; the lack of time and flexible opportunities prevents them from

advancing professionally. Another factor that determines how women balance their work and personal lives is the dynamics of relationships and parenting they face when starting a family and holding paid employment.

This is because gender roles imposed on women dictate that they are the ones who assume motherhood and raise children. Therefore, when a woman enters the workforce, it is essential that she has a family support network, and that her partner actively contributes to his role as a father. It is also important that organizations adapt policies for working mothers, offering facilities for obtaining leave to attend to family emergencies and access to childcare.

Another relevant aspect in the lives of working women is healthcare. To begin with, regarding physical health, most women suffer from excessive fatigue, have poor sleep and eating habits, and lack sufficient time to address these issues. Therefore, it is important that organizations offer opportunities for women to take time off for medical appointments, take active breaks during their workday, and consider gynaecological conditions.

At the same time, mental health is of utmost importance, since, in trying to balance their personal and professional lives, they constantly experience stress and anxiety, predisposing them to mental disorders or illnesses. Therefore, it is vital that organizations also facilitate access to therapy and emotional support. Equally important is developing strategies to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health in the workplace.

Similarly, household responsibilities are a challenge for women, as these tasks represent a second, unpaid shift, and in some cases, an unrecognized one. Considering this, the equitable delegation of tasks among family members and the constant support of one's partner are fundamental.

Finally, women's free time and personal activities, such as self-care, socialization, and rest, are constantly affected by the implications of work schedules, such as unpaid overtime, interruption of rest periods, excessive commutes, lack of work flexibility, and the labour exploitation that many organizations still practice today.

Ultimately, all these factors tend to directly affect the work-life balance of women. Therefore, it is crucial that both the government and businesses work together to propose and implement new public policies that contribute to improving the quality of life for women in Mexico. In addition, it is vital to address current deficiencies in workplace dynamics for working women, along with promoting organizational and planning habits in their lifestyles, as this will determine the professional development of future generations of women in the workforce.

Finally, the following section presents some theoretical and practical implications of the study, its limitations, and future lines of research.

Theoretical implications of the study:

- It contributes to the generation of scientific knowledge in the field of work-life balance research in Latin America, and particularly in Mexico, given that very few studies have been conducted on this topic to date.
- It opens new lines of research considering the six dimensions of the study.
- It generates academic debate by encouraging reflection on the topic of women's work-life balance in Mexico.
- It may open new lines of research for future studies on the topic of work-life balance applied to various industries in Mexico.

Practical implications of the study:

- It is essential that businesses, government, and universities work together to propose new public policies applicable to work environments, with the goal of enabling women to remain part of the workforce without neglecting their personal lives.
- This study contributes to raising awareness of the daily routines of working women and highlighting the challenges they face.
- It would be important to disseminate the results through a popular science article to share them with the society.

Limitations

- The findings are limited to the State of Guanajuato in Mexico.
- There was no budget to conduct the research, both for fieldwork and for the acquisition of software for analysis.
- The women participants were approached electronically, such as work email, telephone, and Google Forms. It was difficult to approach them in person due to both budgetary constraints and the current situation of organized crime in the State of Guanajuato, Mexico.
- It was difficult to recruit the women participants for the study, as some of those invited decided not to participate.
- The findings are limited to the self-perception of the study participants, so the findings cannot be generalized to all working women in Mexico.

Future lines of research:

- Replicate the same study in other Latin American countries and other states of Mexico.
- Conduct the study in different industries in Mexico.
- Expand the study variables to allow for a deeper analysis of work-life balance.
- Conduct more in-depth research focused on a single dimension to further explore that specific variable.

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