
When the doors open: implications of COVID-19 and the work-family interface for women entrepreneurs

Quando as portas se abrem: implicações do COVID-19 e da interface trabalho-família para mulheres empreendedoras

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ABSTRACT

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women, placing them at the waves' center of unpaid work overload. Based on feminist and role theories, this qualitative study examines the motivations and experiences of women who decided to start a business during an overload period of family responsibilities and economic uncertainty caused by COVID-19 and the consequences of this action for the work-family interface. The results obtained that the woman's decision to undertake during the measures of social isolation caused a conflict of roles. Furthermore, it was possible to notice that, although these women make a great effort to balance all functions, the lack of family support and the cohabitation of professional and family tasks within the domestic environment can be perceived as a factor in the aggravation of a family-work conflict. This research enriches the understanding of the COVID 19 pandemic effects on women's work-family balance with entrepreneurial attitudes and behavior.

Keywords: Female entrepreneurship; work-family interface; role theory; feminist theory; COVID-19

RESUMO

A crise causada pela pandemia COVID-19 afetou desproporcionalmente as mulheres, colocando-as no centro das ondas da sobrecarga de trabalho não remunerado. Com base nas teorias feministas e de papéis, este estudo qualitativo examina as motivações e experiências de mulheres que decidiram abrir um negócio durante um período de sobrecarga de responsabilidades familiares e incerteza econômica causada pelo COVID-19 e as consequências dessa ação para a interface trabalho-família. Os resultados obtidos mostraram que a decisão da mulher de empreender durante as medidas de isolamento social gerou conflito de papéis. Além disso, foi possível perceber que, embora essas mulheres façam um grande esforço para equilibrar todas as funções, a falta de apoio familiar e a coabitação das tarefas profissionais e familiares no ambiente doméstico pode ser percebida como fator de agravamento da família. -trabalho conflito. Esta pesquisa enriquece a compreensão dos efeitos da pandemia COVID 19 sobre o equilíbrio entre trabalho e família das mulheres com atitudes e comportamentos empreendedores. **Palavras-chave:** Empreendedorismo feminino; interface trabalho-família; teoria do papel; teoria feminista; COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

There is not a single day that we are not bombarded with news about the negative impacts of COVID-19 on people's health, economy, and mental well-being. The pandemic has put significant pressure on entrepreneurs, the self-employed, and formal workers, with many individuals seeing their livelihoods and amenities threatened (Stephan; Zbierowski & Hansard, 2020; Vendramine, Nobre & Vieira, 2021). Given this, as in every period of crisis, motivated by the increase in unemployment and poverty, entrepreneurship out of necessity has grown as the only viable means for the financial survival of individuals and families (Vasilić, Popović-Pantić & Semenčenko, 2020). This reality is even more evident in women, the most affected by the economic recession caused by COVID-19 and who saw entrepreneurship as the solution to reconcile family demands with income generation (Un Women, 2020).

However, the pandemic was also a time of new opportunities to deal with the crisis (Kuckertz et al. 2020), associated with new forms of work organization (telework), restrictions on the operation of companies, and the confinement of families. In this sense, entrepreneurship by opportunity emerged in the market due to the ability of entrepreneurs to respond more innovatively and proactively to the new needs of society (Liguori & Winkler 2020).

Literature on female entrepreneurship suggests that there are significant differences between female entrepreneurs and mumpreneurs. Part of the theory points to the push or pull factors that motivate the opening of a business (DeMartino & Barbato, 2003; Morris, Miyasaki, Watters, & Coombes, 2006) and the approach of leadership and management styles (Buttner, 2001; Galloway, Kapasi, & Sang, 2015). The other part points to the configuration of social networks (Bogren, Von Friedrichs, Rennemo, & Widding, 2013) and the paths for the growth and development of the business (Brush et al., 2004; Davis & Shaver, 2012). And although women are attracted to engaging in entrepreneurial activities, they nevertheless suffer from specific disadvantages due to their gender (Moult & Anderson, 2005).

Several surveys (e.g., Craig & Churchill, 2020; Ekinsmyth, 2014; Khan & Rowlands, 2018; McGowan, Redeker, Cooper & Greenan, 2012) have identified these old and usual female audiences. In addition to financial needs, independence, and achievement, many female entrepreneurs choose to start a new company motivated by the flexibility found in conducting their own business and the imperative family demands.

However, with the protective measures imposed by governments against the evolution of the pandemic, women have successively accumulated more responsibilities in the home, which has drawn attention to the increasingly closer interface of the work-family relationship. Finding time to undertake and manage a new business while increasing family responsibilities and domestic workload has accentuated the fine line of symmetry in this relationship (Carli, 2020; Craig & Churchill, 2020). The result of this, often, is the emergence of conflict of a bidirectional nature, work-family conflict (WFC), and family-work competition (FWC), as defended by Rahman et al. (2020).

It is noteworthy that although the phenomenon of female entrepreneurship has already been investigated from the implications of the family-work relationship, it has not yet been explored, taking into account the new family dynamics created from COVID-19 (Manolova, Brush, Edelman & Elam, 2020). Furthermore, the female entrepreneurship in developing economies is generally under-researched, and this is particularly true in Brazil, that lacks specific research attention during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Marques, Leal, Ferreira & Ratten, 2018; OECD, 2020).

This study adopts, through the lenses of feminist theory and role, a qualitative approach in the investigation of women who decided to undertake a business during the COVID-19 pandemic, proposing to understand the motivations that led them to start a business in a period of crisis and understand the implications of this decision for the work-family interface.

This paper split some sections to provide a coherent portrait of female entrepreneurship in Covid's times. The following section discusses female entrepreneurship, the implications of COVID-19 on entrepreneurship, the work-family interface, and the theoretical bases used in this research. Subsequently, the research methods are presented. Finally, a discussion of the results and final considerations are presented.

LITERATURE REVISION

Implications of COVID-19 for Entrepreneurship

The year 2020 was marked by the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a new situation with uncertain duration, individuals began to see their livelihoods and well-being threatened while dealing with more significant uncertainty when planning their future (He & Harris, 2020; Stephan; Zbierowski & Hanard, 2020). This imbalance in society has promoted an adverse reaction to the crisis due to the economic effects that the pandemic caused (Ratten, 2020). Measures to contain the virus included the closure of various commercial activities and mandatory confinement of populations, which triggered the rupture of the value chain, the weakening of labor mobility, and the drop in the production of goods and services (Kuebart & Stabler, 2020).

The economic devastation caused by the pandemic has required governments to introduce various measures aimed at the financial stabilization of companies to avoid numerous bankruptcies and drive rapid recovery and growth (Kuckertz et al., 2020; Welter et al., 2020). Furthermore, in several countries (such as Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom), actions were created to promote entrepreneurship to mitigate the effect of the crisis (Grancay, 2020; Giones et al., 2020; Razumovskaia et al., 2020). Based on these interventions, Alon, Farrell & Li (2020) argue that this situation can represent an opportunity for individuals to start a new business, mainly if they are motivated to find an alternative income.

It is undeniable that the promotion of entrepreneurship in times of crisis reveals multifaceted benefits, ranging from the creation of occupation for the new entrepreneur to the generation of jobs through company development (Devece, Peris-Ortiz & Rueda-Armengot, 2016; Mühlböck, Warmuth, Holienka & Kittel, 2018).

However, Mühlböck et al. (2018) also argue that a closer look at new entrepreneurs reveals that a significant number of these individuals start their business with a lack of self-confidence in their entrepreneurial skills, acting out of necessity. The poor conditions in which many find themselves can exert pressure factors, forcing people to work for themselves because they do not have access to other opportunities (Parker, 2004).

While periods of economic crisis and unemployment can compel individuals to self-employment, attraction factors drive entrepreneurs to create new businesses as a way to take advantage of market opportunities (Dawson & Henley, 2012). Innovation and recognition of opportunities are more relevant as success factors during periods of recession than during periods of prosperity (Devece et al., 2016).

Although there is a vast literature on this subject, the relationship between entrepreneurship and crisis is still ambiguous due to the existence of positive and negative results found in theoretical and empirical considerations (Meager, 1992; Carrasco, 1999; Thurik et al. 2008). However, the crisis associated with the Covid 19 virus has specificities arising from the protective measures imposed by governments against the evolution of the pandemic and which translated, in many cases, into greater confinement of families in

the domestic space. The closure of schools and social services and the effects of the home office brought with them an increase in the workload of domestic work and family responsibilities, especially for women (Carli, 2020), which necessarily translated into an increasingly closer interface work-family relationship. Therefore, instead of simply examining the political and social conditions created to encourage the opening of new businesses, whether, by necessity or opportunity, this research focuses on women who decided to undertake, amid the unique circumstances and family routines caused by COVID-19, primarily when referring to domestic work (Craig & Churchill, 2020).

Literature on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women entrepreneurs is still scarce and has been limited. Most of the literature highlights the financial loss, the lack of human and financial capital, and the limited support networks that make it challenging to access female entrepreneurs to obtain counseling on crisis management (Jaim, 2021). That said, this research aims to contribute by proposing to understand the motivations that led women to start a business in a pandemic crisis and to understand the implications of this decision for the work-family interface.

Female Entrepreneurship and the Covid Context 19

Several studies (e.g., Abdelsalam, Al-Haddad & Zeqiri, 2020; Bui, Kuan & Chu, 2018; Ekinsmyth, 2011) have focused on connecting gender and entrepreneurship, researching diverse phenomena perspectives. At the base of these studies, implicitly or explicitly, is the feminist theory. This theory is based on feminism, which, however, does not have a singular definition. Its core issues include the struggle for the right to education, voting, respect and equality in the workplace, reproductive rights, and patriarchal oppression (Sharma, 2019). However, by defending feminism as a movement that seeks to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression, Hooks (2000) summarizes the starting point for the conception of feminist theory. And just as there is no consensus on the concept of feminism, there is also no unique understanding of feminist theory. In this sense, feminist theory can be perceived as a family of theories and critical approaches that allow us to understand the complexity

of the theme (Sharma, 2019). Therefore, feminist theory, positioned in this study as a bridge between the constructs of gender and entrepreneurship, adopts Harding's (1987) postulates, which classifies theory into three groups: liberal feminist theory, feminist social theory, and poststructuralist feminist theory.

The first group, to which liberal feminist theory and feminist empiricism belong, defends the view that men and women are essentially similar and that women's secondary status is based on inequality of opportunity and segregation of men (Ahl, 2006; Wolff, 2007). This strand assumes that, although many women want to become entrepreneurs, most of them are discouraged because of gender inequalities that feed negative stereotypes, restrict access to business resources, and generate sexist counseling (Carter & Williams, 2003).

The second category belongs to feminist social theory or radical feminist theory (Harding, 1987). This group argues that women and men are essentially different. In this way, the woman entrepreneur can develop these differences as resources to be used constructively to obtain a competitive advantage (Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2009).

Poststructuralist feminist theory and social constructionist theory form the third group. This category defends how masculinity and femininity are factors to be constructed. In this way, the similarities and differences between male and female entrepreneurs should be observed as socially constructed factors (Ahl, 2006; Butler, 2011).

Female entrepreneurship, in particular, has attracted increasing interest in light of the different variables that motivate women to start their own business and increasingly contribute to the growth and development of the economy on a national and global level (Braches & Elliot, 2017; Tlaiss, 2015).

Until the 1990s, research published in major American newspapers considered that women's conduct of enterprises was limited to small lifestyle businesses or individual firms (Baker, Aldrich & Nina, 1997). The human-centered business model was considered the natural reference for doing business (Yadav & Unni, 2016), and these implications are often reproduced to this day.

If we believe that female entrepreneurship is essential for economic and social development, it is necessary to understand its causes and motivations. To become vital, mainly because the

percentage of women involved in entrepreneurship worldwide is significantly lower than that of men (Georgellis & Wall, 2005; Kim, 2007).

In this sense, several studies (e.g., Bosma et al., 2020; De Vita et al., 2014; Palali et al., 2017) corroborate that although it is noticeable that female entrepreneurs represent a significant portion of the economy, women still face more tremendous obstacles in conducting their business than men (Bosma et al., 2020). Gender role expectations, social and business discrimination, differential treatment, and pressure for a balance between family and business are some of the implicit challenges that entrepreneurs need to face in running their business (Brush et al., 2009; Caputo et al., 2017; De Vita et al., 2014; Mehtap et al., 2017; Palali et al., 2017).

Furthermore, many of these women start their businesses through entrepreneurship out of necessity. Paul & Sarma (2013) indicate that female members of families affected by the crisis are more willing to create a new business during a period of economic uncertainty as a means of family financial survival. And although the new entrepreneurs have a support system to manage their family and domestic responsibilities with those of the new company, this routine was challenged by social isolation imposed by the pandemic (Alexandre & Kharabsheh, 2019; Jaim, 2021).

The work-family interface in a pandemic context

The work-family interface is defined here as a connection between the pressures developed for the entrepreneur to act with perfection as a woman and an entrepreneur (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). The analysis of this interface is based on the Role Theory, which examines the formation of social behavior at individual and collective levels (Turner, 2001). Role corresponds to behaviors and attitudes associated with individuals consciously or unconsciously (Mentz, Schoeman & Loock, 2019). The conceptualization of the role at the individual level corresponds to the individual's inclination to feel different when exposed to a situation in disagreement with his usual one; on the other hand, at the collective level, organizations and societies assign distinct roles to specific individuals (Dev & Olsen, 1989). The role of gender in the conception of the WFC

conflict is built on the assumption that family and work are two distinct spheres and, as such, women and men represent natural and unnatural roles (Pedersen, Minnotte, Kiger & Mannon, 2009). The common-sense role of responsibility for women is to be a wife and mother, while the unnatural role would be associated with developing their professional life.

On the other hand, men play their natural role through conquering the labor market, while their unnatural position is related to their responsibilities as husband and father (Barnett & Gareis, 2006). Differentiation of duties is the critical element in role theory. Role conflicts arose as women began to combine their professional lives with their natural roles (Kanter, 2008). Implicit scarcity hypothesis assumptions about work-family dispute are supported by the perception that the individual has limited resources (energy, time, attention) to split beyond demands. This duality leads to a conflict of roles, especially for women (Grünberg & Matei, 2020; Thornthwaite, 2004).

The role theory applied to the analysis of the work-family interface is based, therefore, on two critical perspectives: the work-family conflict and the improvement of the role (Adisa, Aiyenitaju & Adekoya, 2021).

The influence of the synchronization of professional and family roles can be better understood by some of the main propositions (Sehgal & Khandelwal, 2020). The integrated perspective (Brush, 1992) advocates that female entrepreneurs perceive their business as an integrated system connected to their personal life. They see themselves as the core of relational interactions between family, work, and society and fight daily battles to avoid experiencing possible conflicts of incompatibility of responsibilities and roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Rehman & Roomi, 2012).

Work-family conflict can occur in both directions and be initiated due to task incompatibility given the limited amount of human time and energy, as defended by the scarcity hypothesis (Marks, 1977; Shockley et al., 2017; Poggesi et al., 2019). The work-family conflict – WFC occurs when work activities interfere with family responsibilities, while family work conflict – FWC occurs when family assignments interfere with work occupations (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

The effects of the WFC and FCW on individual company-level results can be seen in family performance (Frone et al., 1997), in job stress and personal distress (Schjoedt, 2020; Frone et al., 1992), in satisfaction with life and company (Carlson, Kacmar & Williams, 2000) and dedication and performance at work (Li, Lu & Zhang, 2013; Witt & Carlson, 2006).

Through these perspectives, Molina (2020) argues that companies created by entrepreneurs who experience various conflicts, whether FCW or WFC and that the family acts demotivating, have a greater chance of bankruptcy and organizational failure.

Also, the expansionist hypothesis (Barnett & Baruch, 1985) argues that combining business and family roles has beneficial effects on physical and psychological well-being, which triggers increased opportunities for success for women entrepreneurs (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). Work-family theory defends (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) that business development plays an essential role in family-work balance, which happens when the resources are generated in the family domain are applied in the company.

Furthermore, family support in a woman's entrepreneurial decision can provide encouragement, understanding, attention, favorable consideration, and problem-solving assistance to provide emotional and instrumental support to encourage business development and success (Eddleston & Powell, 2012). The pandemic brought a context in which it is essential to understand the implications of COVID-19 on the natural and unnatural roles occupied by women who decided to undertake in a pandemic context of confinement (Adisa, Aiyenitaju & Adekoya, 2021). Therefore, this study seeks to understand the impact of this decision on the work-family interface.

METHODOLOGY

The study takes a qualitative approach in investigating five women who decided to open their own business during the crisis caused by COVID-19. In Ritchie's (2003) and Vieira and Rivera (2012) understanding, the qualitative approach facilitates the description and presentation of a phenomenon experienced by the participants. This fact enables a greater understanding of the problems, as per-

ceived by the people who share them. It is necessary to understand how women entrepreneurs decided the paths to open the business during a period of economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic and the implications for the work-family interface as the female entrepreneurship initiative involves several motivations (Craig & Churchill, 2020; Ekinsmyth, 2014; Khan & Rowlands, 2018). It is noteworthy that the women selected in the sample made a conscious choice to achieve healthy growth in their business, even in such adverse circumstances.

Furthermore, this study is classified as exploratory-descriptive research (Prodanov & Freitas, 2013), carried out through a study of multiple cases. The multiple case study method (Yin, 2015) can, on the one hand, provide detail of each issue of the experiences lived by women entrepreneurs and, on the other hand, detect common patterns, but also variety in the diverse backgrounds reported.

Data collection and analysis

Case selection adopted some criteria: companies formally opened during a pandemic; different size segments so that it was possible to understand if there are similarities between work-family relationships and the various strategies used by these entrepreneurs to balance the conflicting demands of this relationship. Based on these criteria and through a snowball method, i.e., through networking and references, five female entrepreneurs were selected and interviewed.

Qualitative data are collected through semi-structured and in-depth interviews, recorded in digital audio, and conducted through the Zoom tool, with an average duration of one and a half hours. A pre-test interview was carried out to discard after adjustments in the order of the questions in the script. A new entrepreneur was interviewed instead to avoid bias and bias in the information collected.

The preview interview guide list was established by reviewing the literature (Bosma et al., 2020; Eddleston & Powell, 2012; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Molina, 2020; Rehman & Roomi, 2012; Sehgal & Khandelwal, 2020). Included a topic discussion about the pandemic impact on the decision to become an entrepreneur, the role of gender in running a new business, the social part of the family,

the challenges to balance the conflicting demands of the working relationship -family.

The content analysis included the interpretation of interview transcripts based on multiple readings of each report to capture a holistic image of the stories of the new entrepreneurs. Furthermore, there was an analysis of the key themes that emerged from each transcript. Combining internal and cross-analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), the interviews were analyzed as part of a larger whole so that each transcript was compared with the others and with the whole using the help of the NVivo software.

The constant refinement of definitions and interpretations of concepts was linked to specific words and lines in the transcriptions. The results were then exposed and compared with the existing literature.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of this study will be presented here in four sections. First, the profile of the company created during the pandemic is examined, and then the shape of the new entrepreneur. These environmental characteristics may be helpful to understand their effects on respondents' responses better. After analyses and characterize the pandemic impact on the entrepreneurial decision, the interviewees provided understanding of the impact of gender on the enterprise and the role of this new businesswoman in the balance of the work-family relationship.

Company profile

The companies in this study are located in Brazil and are composed of individual employers and businesswomen. Most of these businesses (3 out of 5) are on a residential basis and operate in the fashion segment. This information confirms the results published by the National Survey by Continuous Household Sample - PNAD (2020), which show that women who decide to be an entrepreneur on their own, usually start their business at home and often opt for activities related to the segment food or cooking. Table 1 illustrates the sectors and business size of the institutions.

Table 1 Profile of companies

<i>Opening of business</i>	<i>Type of business</i>	<i>Home office</i>	<i>Society</i>	<i>No. of Employees</i>
June/2020	Retail/fashion	Yes	No	1
April/2020	Retail/fashion	Yes	No	1
June/2020	Food	No	Yes	4
May/2020	Woodwork	Yes	No	7
March/2020	Confection and Retail/fashion	No	No	3

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021)

Profile of businesswomen

Pseudonyms had been used to protect the interviewee's anonymity, a brief profile of the new female entrepreneurs was drawn, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Profile of female entrepreneurs

<i>Businesswoman</i>	<i>Instruction level</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Dependents</i>	<i>Entrepreneurial history</i>	<i>Full-time entrepreneur</i>	<i>The only source of family income</i>
A	Graduated	Married	Yes	No	Yes	No
B	Master	Married	Yes	No	No	No
C	Specialty	Single	No	No	No	No
D	Graduated	Married	Yes	No	Yes	No
E	Graduated	Divorced	No	No	Yes	Yes

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021)

All entrepreneurs achieved high levels of education, as all of them have an undergraduate degree and two have a postgraduate degree. This characteristic is in line with the characterization carried out by Cowling & Taylor (2001), who found that the general level of education of women entrepreneurs is significantly higher than that of women in other occupations.

Furthermore, the businesswomen in this study are characterized by being young women, with an average age of 36 years old, and entrepreneurs for the first time. The description of study participants is similar to the national profile of female entrepreneurs in many respects. According to data from the Global entrepreneurship monitor - GEM (2018) and the National Survey by a continuous sample of households - PNAD (2020), Brazil is the seventh country with the highest proportion of women among the initial entrepreneurs, and they tend to have a higher level of education and aged between 30 to 45 years.

Entrepreneurship and COVID-19

The pandemic created challenges for women's professional growth. The crisis generated by COVID-19 has made gender inequalities even more evident, with women being the most affected by the increase in unemployment, poverty, and the overload of unpaid work (Un Women, 2020). In this sense, entrepreneurship by necessity emerged as the only viable means for economic survival (Vasilić, Popović-Pantić & Semenčenko, 2020). These statements corroborate the results found in this research by identifying that, as reported below, all respondents were motivated to undertake due to unemployment or reduced wages caused by the crisis associated with the pandemic, as described by Vasilić, Popović-Pantić & Semenčenko (2020). In these circumstances, women entrepreneurs saw their opportunity cost reduced and made the decision to move forward:

The pandemic brought me unemployment. And in a period of need, I saw the opportunity to practice my dream of becoming an entrepreneur. (Businesswoman E).

I always dreamed of opening my own business, but the fear of investing and losing everything postponed that moment. The pandemic brought me unemployment, and I decided to bet on this dream, but every day I

charge myself to do everything in the best way, and I managed to prosper with my company. (Businesswoman B)

Several types of research show the crucial role that training and qualification programs play in female entrepreneurship, providing more excellent knowledge, self-confidence, and, often, a support network (Anthias & Mehta, 2003). Along these lines, Markman & Baron (2003) argue that female entrepreneurs who seek training before starting a new business have a greater chance of success.

While the country was at a standstill due to the containment measures, I took advantage of this moment to train myself, organize and invest in opening my business. I created everything calmly, studying. During the lockdown period, I scheduled myself to be ready when the market came back. (Businesswoman D)

The impact of gender on the enterprise

Although women are attracted to entrepreneurship, they nevertheless suffer from specific disadvantages due to their gender (Moult & Anderson, 2005). And this is more evident when the woman decides to undertake in a market regarded as male, as reported:

The first difficulty I had in creating the company was accepted for being a predominantly male segment. I was the only woman taking the training course, and I noticed the disbelief of the other participants about my work. The second difficulty was imposing my authority on my employees (mostly made up of men). (Businesswoman D)

And this is not an isolated account. Some entrepreneurs, realizing that many business challenges were related to their gender, decided to use their feminine attributes and values as a competitive differential that strengthens organizational growth. These ideas are defended in studies investigating female entrepreneurship through the lens of feminist social theory when arguing the business benefits perceived through female traits. (Huq, Tan & Venugopal, 2020).

Women are usually more attentive to trends, and this impacts the diversity of the business. (Businesswoman B)

Being a woman is being a differential in this field so dominated by men. (Businesswoman D)

The work-family relationship in a Covid context 19

It stands out from the interviewees' statements that they had to deal with mixed feelings in creating the new venture. Fear of failure and the consequent loss of investment, the search for perfectionism, and time management between dedication to the company and family care emerged as the most significant difficulties faced by entrepreneurs.

The difficulty in balancing all entrepreneurial activities with family responsibilities (Moult & Anderson, 2005) or in managing the professional and personal sphere is expressed, for example, in the following statement by the interviewees:

My family members do not understand my dedication and call me crazy to work so hard and not always be available to them. (Businesswoman A)

My boyfriend says he's proud of my commitment, but he also says I don't have time for him anymore. (Businesswoman C)

Difficulty managing work-family relationships and the weight and responsibility of caring for the family is felt particularly in cases where there are children and in a pandemic context, with confinement and closure of schools, as can be seen in the lines below,

People support and encourage my dedication to the new business, but at the same time, they expect me to be fully dedicated to family and home responsibilities. Closing schools certainly places even more obligations on women having to take care of everything at the same time. (Businesswoman A)

but also because all women who have dependents have chosen to develop their business in the home office model.

Recognizing the social context of female entrepreneurship development narratives and how women are often influenced by prevailing cultural norms and discourses, having a support network and family and social encouragement can become a powerful mo-

tivation for the dedication of entrepreneur (Down & Warren, 2008; Haynes, 2004; Kutanis & Bayraktaroglu, 2003).

In this context, the theme emerged during the interviews that, due to entrepreneurship having emerged from a need, the vast majority of these women, despite having developed their professional careers, did not necessarily have the business knowledge they needed. Which sometimes made it difficult for them to know if they were making the right decisions.

Thus, some of these entrepreneurs were looking for business mentors, often family members, to support them during the process. Still, the entrepreneurs were rarely in the same sector, making it difficult to access the specific advice they needed.

However, this support in the closest family is not as evident in the interviewees' reports:

I often feel unmotivated by the lack of family support. My family doesn't encourage entrepreneurship; they think it's too risky and uncertain. Plus, they don't trust my potential and say I can't do it. (Businesswoman E)

I feel my partner is not proud of my business today, but he will have it when he grows up. (Businesswoman A)

My boyfriend says he's proud of my dedication, but he also says I don't have time for him anymore. (Businesswoman C)

The effects of this lack of family support can be seen as the beginning of a family-work conflict (FWC). The consequences of this friction can be seen, for example, through the entrepreneur's retraction when discussing issues related to the company with her relatives.

I don't talk a lot about the company with my family. I'm well resolved, and sometimes it's better not to mix things up. (Businesswoman B)

I superficially talk to family members, I realize that my partner doesn't have the patience and interest in delving into the business details. He thinks that I should speak of other things at home because I'm already working so hard. (Businesswoman D)

Resenting lack of support and openness to dialogue, the women interviewed perceive this as natural and like their partner's gender. In addition, they expose that many family members see their dedication to the company as a supplement to income or a hobby, which ends up undermining their self-confidence.

Although some of our interviewees had no dependents and were able to get help with household responsibilities, all entrepreneurs expressed pride in combining their work with family and social activities, especially when they adopted the home office style to be closer to their children. Entrepreneurial flexibility, for these women, often means working earlier, before the children wake up or later after everyone has gone to bed (DeMartino & Barbato, 2003).

It is also evident from the interviewees' statements that none of them needed to withdraw money from the company's finances to pay for family expenses. The new entrepreneurs were quite organized in this matter, and some of them stated that they were using the profit obtained as reinvestment to expand and improve the business. The financial literacy of female entrepreneurs enables women to become confident decision-makers of their personal, domestic, and business finances and contributes to better entrepreneurial development (Njaramba, Chigeza & Whitehouse, 2015; OECD, 2005).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The pandemic and public measures to prevent its spread lead to a disproportionate increase in female unemployment compared to male unemployment (Un Women, 2020). And if the crisis generated by the pandemic evidenced, even more, the gender inequalities present in the labor market, the pandemic, as this study points out, also had its effects in the domain of female entrepreneurship.

This study examined the impact of the COVID-19 blockade on women's entrepreneurial decision-making and its implications on the work-family interface supported by feminist and role theories. Considering that the pandemic significantly changed the way people live and work, an attempt was made to understand the motivation of women to undertake business during a period of crisis and family overload. The research showed that entrepreneurship, out of necessity, emerged as a unique alternative to combine professional

and economic development with the expansion of responsibilities at home for the group of women interviewed. Most businesswomen dreamed of entrepreneurship, but unemployment and the financial consequences caused by COVID-19, on the one hand, and the need to combine family responsibility with the need to generate income, on the other, accelerated the creation of the company.

It was also possible to evidence that women had a greater workload during confinement compared to the 19 pre-Covid periods. Even so, entrepreneurs seek to devote equal time to family and business, corroborating previous findings in the literature (Ek-insmyth, 2014) and assuming this more extraordinary dedication as something natural and inevitable.

However, the increase in COVID-19 protection measures has led to frustration and difficulties in finding a balance of time (Savage, 2020). The growing demand for greater involvement of women in domestic work is in line with the idea of role theory that illustrates a set of expectations related to identity (eg, family care and housework) as measured by their substantiality and consistency (Richards & Hemphill, 2017).

The desire for family balance also influences the stigma that new entrepreneurs face. As they strive to spend more time with their children, entrepreneurs work on their businesses while dependents are in someone else's care or after they go to sleep. The woman was not confined to an office during all business hours gives the false impression to people around her that her business is just a hobby (Khan & Rowlands, 2018).

Furthermore, entrepreneurs also find it difficult not always to support their partner and family, and these issues create more significant barriers for them to ask for help with the responsibilities of the company and the house. And although they constantly feel tired and overloaded, at the end of the day, most women interviewed feel fulfilled because they are facing the pandemic obstacles with their families with the development of a business they always dreamed of, which provides even more evidence of paper improvement (Barnett & Gareis, 2006).

This study shows that the pandemic constituted an opportunity to move forward with a desire to create a business on the part

of women. The research also indicates a pandemic and domestic confinement context due to the various barriers imposed naturally or artificially on women. It requires a particularly great effort from them to be able to reconcile the work-family relationship, which explains the difficulty of entrepreneurship female develops in the same dynamics as male, especially if we observe the expected role of each gender in this relationship (Vasilić, Popović-Pantić & Semenčenko, 2020).

Limitation and lines of future research

The results were based on an exploratory study, limiting any claims about the generalizability of our findings. Therefore, it would be helpful to extend this work through a quantitative survey to test the scope of our results. In particular, it would be important to understand more broadly whether the impact of a pandemic and domestic confinement affect the decision to undertake and whether the work-family relationship is transversal or whether it affects different individual and/or family profiles in a different way, as per for example, women with different qualifications or belonging to different social strata, or women with children and no children.

Another relevant line of research is the study of the survival rate of companies created by women during the pandemic, compared to companies created in an everyday context.

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