

Challenges of the 21st Century: Women's Work-Life Balance in Mexico

Heira Georgina Valdez Bocanegra¹ and Yesenia Ramírez Granados¹

Abstract

In 21st century, in Mexico women face challenges to balance their labor and personal life. The literature mentions that although there are certain actions that contribute to the well-being of women, in general there are still large gender differences. The big burden of family responsibilities influences women's health and professional development, limiting their time, therefore is vital that public policies are implemented focused in labor flexibility to improve their quality of life. This research is qualitative and studied 187 women in the State of Guanajuato in Mexico, from 18 to 54 years old, who are currently working or had worked before, evaluating six dimensions: reward, work-personal life interference, parenting, healthcare, household chores and leisure time. Results revealed that women had challenges to maintain a balance between their labor and personal life, especially those who are working mothers. The lack of labor flexibility combined with social pressure, as well as the persistence of dissatisfaction related to gender roles, discrimination and limited opportunities for professional devolvement makes it complex women's lives in Mexico. Most of the participants stated that they can only achieve work-life balance if they receive assistance from their support network including relatives and superiors at work. The study revealed that even though there are many efforts to achieve gender equity, society still faces big burdens in terms of cultural and social barriers, where the "empowerment of women" has become "modern slavery".

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¹ Department of Administration and Finance, Division of Social and Administrative Sciences. Universidad de Guanajuato, Guanajuato, Mexico.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, work-life balance of women has become a significant and constant challenge, often described as a “double working shift”, a concept that reflects the reality of many women who must divide their time between paid and unpaid work, as they must fulfill both family and domestic responsibilities. This condition not only affects their physical and mental health, but goes beyond that, limiting their personal aspirations and professional development, often because they are trapped in a routine where the needs of others take precedence over their own.

In Mexico, women face multiple barriers to achieve an adequate balance between their work and family roles, social and economic factors such as lack of access to affordable childcare, long working hours, lack of support networks and the persistence of gender stereotypes, increase this problem. Due to the expectations of gender roles imposed by society, women are expected to assume all domestic and work obligations, thus persisting the gender gap in the workplace, leaving them without opportunities to aspire to high management positions.

It should be noted that this research contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, in particular SDG 5: Achieve gender equality, because it seeks to analyze gender inequalities, while promoting actions to empower all women. Target 5.4: *“Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and by promoting shared responsibility in the home and family, as appropriate in each country”*

(Moran, 2024).

In other words, by highlighting the importance of work-life balance for Mexican women, it underscores the need for actions such as public policies that promote female empowerment and the reduction of gender inequalities in all areas. Similarly, objective 5.b: *“Improve the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote women's empowerment”* (Moran, 2024), other measures within the workplace can be the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) to perform remote work, without sacrificing their personal or family time, while they can continue to maintain their work productivity.

Therefore, it is important that countries, governments and companies join efforts to formulate laws and public policies that contribute to improving the lives of women so that they can achieve an adequate work-life balance, considering 5.c *“Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable laws to promote gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls at all levels”*

(Moran, 2024).

Considering the above, the objective of this study is to analyze work-life balance of women in Mexico, particularly in the State of Guanajuato. It should be noted that this will be done from six different approaches: gratification, interference of personal and work time, parenting and partner, healthcare, household chores and leisure. In line with the above, it is essential to generate public policies that improve the quality of life of Mexican women and promote a more inclusive and equitable

environment. This includes fostering gender equality in the workplace, promoting co-responsibility in domestic tasks, and promoting labor flexibility and telecommuting. In conclusion, these actions would not only benefit women but would also contribute to a fairer and more balanced society, where Mexican women can fully enjoy their lives both personally and professionally.

2. Preliminary Notes

2.1 Gratification

The issue of rewards in organizations has been studied over the years from multiple perspectives. According to Días-García et al. (2023), the definition of emotional remuneration arises as a non-monetary gratification tool established to raise the satisfaction and bliss of workers in their professional performance daily (Quintero-Arango and Betancur-Arias, 2018; Gay-Puyal, 2006).

In this context, Lim et al. (2021) point out that several studies have been carried out on the consequences of effort-reward imbalance and work-life balance on the physical and mental health and well-being of workers (Siegrist, 1996; Amstad et al. 2011). Consequently, “high cost/low utility” in the work environment means that, despite significant effort, few rewards are obtained (including financial well-being, promotion opportunities, self-esteem, respect and stable employment), and employees suffer psychological discomfort that has negative effects on their mental and physical health (Siegrist, 2002).

Indeed, the findings of the empirical study by Sriram et al. (2022) conclude that organizational culture has a significant effect on women's work-life balance and their decision to stay with the company in the long term (Hill et al., 2008). Specifically, this study confirmed that appropriate recognition and rewards will encourage workers and increase their desire to stay longer and develop a life and career plan in each company.

In conclusion, the study indicates that, if companies offer flexibility to employees, this favors work-life balance, thus improving their business performance. Offering a better salary, transportation for commuting, equitable treatment, an environment free of gender discrimination, a good boss and promoting job recognition are fundamental strategies to reduce female staff turnover in the organization (Sriram et al., 2022).

2.2 Work-personal life interference

Currently, differences in the use of time between men and women reflect patterns of behavior and responsibilities shaped by social and cultural factors. Indeed, adults devote a large part of their time to the workplace, so that, according to Glympi et al. (2020), the workplace is and can be one of the most important environments that affect the eating habits and the physical, mental and social health of a company's employees (Abood et al. 2003).

In this context, Tauraitė and Aleksandravičienė (2023) state that work-life conflict has an inescapable impact on job satisfaction, personal satisfaction and, ultimately,

on the feeling of happiness. Studies reveal that, in terms of gender, it has been found that men spend relatively more time on their private lives, while women spend more time at work. Despite this, men feel more comfortable with their jobs and women with their personal lives.

In this regard, empirical scientific research findings have revealed certain differences in how men and women spend their time. On the one hand, men tend to spend more time than women on sleeping, satisfying physiological needs (eating, personal hygiene, studying, hobbies and travel). On the other hand, women invest relatively more time in paid activity, household chores, child rearing, and spend limited time on activities focused on themselves (Lydeka and Taurait, 2020).

In other words, it can be deduced that women carry a double burden due to their family and professional obligations. Specifically, this double burden is manifested in the significant amount of time they dedicate to both obligations, which leads to the conclusion that women dedicate less time to their personal activities due to the interference they experience when trying to reconcile their personal and professional lives.

2.3 Parenting and partner

At the present time, parenting, relationships and career development are interrelated in complex ways. According to Hosokawa and Katsura (2021), work-life balance has an impact on both men and women, but usually, women assume most of the family obligations, particularly after childbirth (Grice et al., 2011). In other words, the work-life dichotomy is perceived as a women's issue only (Chernova, 2012) and often leads to negative consequences: the merging of work and motherhood becomes a very complicated and painful time in women's lives (Belekhova and Ivanovskaya, 2022).

Additionally, Blithe (2023) points out that intensive, home-dedicated motherhood has become entrenched as the ideal of the “good mother” and continues to play a determining role in the formation of women and their careers. Women, even in “more equitable” times, take on the lion's share of care work, including elderly parents and in-laws, children, the household and even pets. In this context, Belekhova and Ivanovskaya (2022) state that the gender paradigm of the “working mother” still prevails, meaning that women are forced to unify steady employment with family commitments and household chores (Antoshchuk and Gewinne, 2020; Tiomkina and Rotkirch, 2002).

Ultimately, the phenomenon of women's “dual employment” translates into the coordination of paid employment with the responsibilities of household chores and childcare (Belekhova and Ivanovskaya, 2022). For author Blithe (2023), working mothers inevitably break the clauses of the ideal of a “good mother” in a culture where parenting is intensive. They may face internal instability around their identities while juggling to achieve a balance between family and work (Buzzanell et al., 2005).

In the world of work, being promoted represents a fundamental goal for the professional development of women and men, but this is conditioned for women, since being a mother can hinder job performance and, therefore, can be an aspect that limits the promotion of women in the work environment. In fact, 63% of women have reported that their Curriculum Vitae is less attractive to employers, compared to those of their colleagues who do not have children (Gallardo, 2021). In a study conducted in Spain, the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT, 2005) revealed that there are no disparities in professional performance between women and men in the same professional grade, but, as one moves up the organizational hierarchy, the female presence decreases considerably (Gallardo, 2021).

Finally, it is pertinent to mention that, historically, society has designated women as the ones responsible for household chores and child rearing. Today, it is widely recognized that both men and women should be involved in household and childcare responsibilities. In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that balancing work and family roles has become more relevant today for both men and women (Hosokawa and Katsura, 2021).

2.4 Healthcare

Comprehensive health care encompasses physical, mental and emotional aspects, and is essential for any individual to be able to fully develop in all areas of his or her life. Gallardo (2021) mentions that the imbalance between private life and work can alter the physical and mental well-being of women, causing depression, anxiety and stress. On the other hand, it can generate frustration and uncertainty, especially for those women who are just starting their professional career (Ysseldyk et al., 2019).

According to Krueger et al. (2023), women disproportionately take on domestic and parental responsibilities, even in cases where they have a long working day. In this sense, they are likely to find it more difficult to organize their schedules in ways that benefit their health (Offer, Shira, and Schneider 2011).

In this context, Aqab et al. (2023) points out that the convergence of work and family obligations, the absence of support, the feeling of guilt for devoting time to exercise instead of children, and complications in their schedules are significant impediments for parents to be physically active, hence, this increases their propensity to suffer from the effects of a sedentary lifestyle, especially in the case of working mothers, due to their assumed duty as a traditional mother (Mailey et al. 2014).

It should be noted that, people with low levels of physical activity are more likely to develop non-communicable diseases, such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer, and thus impairing their quality of life (Guthold et al., 2018).

However, promoting better eating habits, dedicating time to themselves, and engaging in regular exercise helps many women to face the challenges of

motherhood, to focus on themselves, and to find a moment of tranquility during work and family stress (Davis and Dimidjian, 2012). To conclude, it is essential to stress the importance of partners or spouses caring, supporting organizing, and facilitating women to exercise. Indeed, a fair and equitable distribution of parenting responsibilities and household chores is key, as it visibly contributes to improving mothers' sleep, mental health, and physical activity (Limbers et al., 2020).

2.5 Household chores

Today, sharing household chores is a fundamental aspect of modern family life, as it can significantly influence individual well-being and aspirations, yet there are discrepancies on the issue. According to Belekova and Ivanovskaya (2022), gender differences arise when dividing household commitments: women take on most of the household chores and childcare, on the other hand, men provide the economic resource to the family.

In a study conducted in Lithuania, when examining the particularities of women's time use, it was observed that 24.9% of their day is spent on work and 75.1% on personal activities. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, there are considerable variations in time management between genders: women spend more time at home and with the family, compared to men. Specifically, this can be attributed to the prioritization of needs: women tend to place home and childcare (along with work) in first place, while men place them in second place (Lydeka and Taurait, 2020).

As stated above, women's role is primarily recognized as the domestic worker. Such that, even in modern metropolitan families, “there is no decrease in women's traditional domestic expectations due to employment, regardless of job status” (Sunar and Fişek, 2005, p. 16). The disagreements between women's domestic and professional roles clearly reflect this observation (Çoban, 2022).

In conclusion, distributing household chores increases the likelihood of achieving a work-life balance, resulting in women experiencing fewer problems between their gender identity and their professional career. In line with this thinking, the sharing of work at home between spouses has been shown to be a key element for women's work identity and career aspirations (Reverberi et al., 2022).

2.6 Leisure

Leisure time is a valuable resource that people use to disconnect, relax and enjoy activities they are passionate about. However, women often face challenges in finding that time for themselves, according to a study conducted by INESE (2019), women have 1 hour and 37 minutes less per day dedicated to leisure compared to men. In particular, the number of women who report having no leisure time at all is 20% higher than men.

Within this framework, for women from diverse cultures and socioeconomic contexts, leisure time acquires diverse meanings, influenced by gender roles, family responsibilities, professional success and the search for personal balance, among others. Indeed, according to Hybholt et al. (2022), social expectations to succeed at

work, be a good mother, and stay physically active impose time limits on women's daily lives. Instead of having more free time, women face constant time demands for flexibility and work performance, in addition to having to devote much of their time to care related to their children, parents, or even grandchildren.

Specifically, a study conducted in India revealed that recreational activities among urban middle-class working women strike a subtle balance between personal and social satisfaction. Two new concepts of leisure time emerged from the analysis: “being with myself” and “being stress-free”. In that study, it was observed that working women constantly negotiate a new balance, particularly “work-leisure balance,” between the demands of their professional lives and their own needs for time for themselves (Naganathan et al., 2021).

Point often overlooked, in the current business context, free time is fundamental for women, not only as a means of rest, but also as an opportunity for self-realization and balance in their lives. It is important to propose public policies to help women reconcile their personal lives with their work, which will contribute to improving their quality of life.

Figure 1 below presents a summary of all the sections included in the literature review, which were addressed in previous paragraphs.

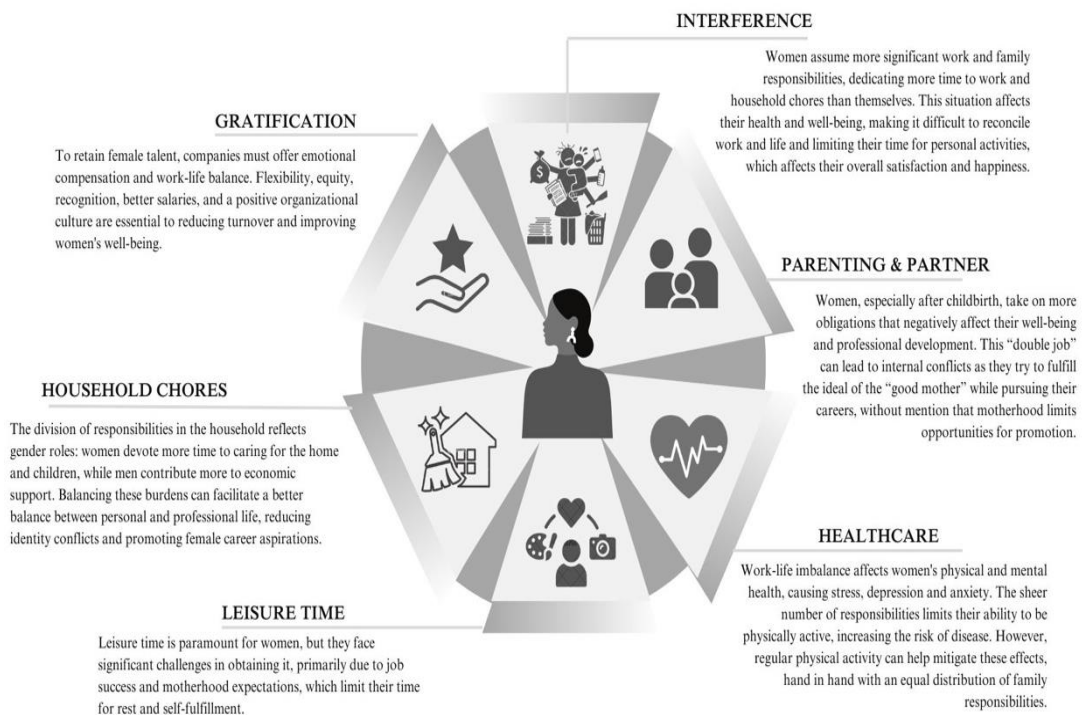


Figure 1: Women’s work life-balance

Source: Own elaboration.

3. Methodology

The main objective of this study is to determine whether women in Mexico experience a balance between their personal and professional lives from their own experiences. A qualitative methodological approach was used, which allowed the collection, classification, segmentation and analysis of the comments expressed by 187 women participants currently living in the State of Guanajuato in Mexico. The participants had to meet the following inclusion criteria: between 18 and 54 years of age and be currently employed or have been employed in the past. The data collection instrument was a survey designed in Microsoft Forms with a Likert-type scale, called “Work-Life Balance”, which was segmented into six dimensions: gratifications, time interference, parenting and partner, healthcare, household chores and leisure, in addition to collecting socioeconomic data.

4. Main Results

This study investigates the work-life balance of Mexican women in the State of Guanajuato, with the objective of understanding the realities and challenges working women face in balancing their work and family responsibilities with their own personal and professional aspirations. A qualitative approach was used, and data were collected through a survey. The main results indicate that women today are more aware that they must prioritize themselves over all the responsibilities of societally imposed roles. Yet, they expressed that inequality still exists in the work and cultural spheres. These findings have important implications for the proposal of strategies and public policies to improve Mexican women's social and working conditions. In the following sections, the main findings of the research will be presented.

4.1 Gratification

On the issue of gratification, the following are the main findings obtained from the analysis of what was expressed by the women who participated in the study.

In the first place, the women indicated that they perceive that the economic remuneration they receive for their professional services is not equitable, compared to their male colleagues who perform similar functions. On the other hand, they appreciate that their work is recognized. These findings coincide with Díaz-García et al. (2023), who consider that, although economic remuneration is an important factor for women, studies show that emotional remuneration, such as recognition of their work, is also significant for their job satisfaction.

This research also concluded that sometimes women are unable to achieve a work-life balance because to survive they need to have more than one job, since their low salaries represent an insufficient income to live with dignity. In addition, part of their budget must be allocated to cover transportation expenses because not all companies offer transportation as part of their employee benefits. This leads to the conclusion that better salaries encourage women not to look for more than one job,

which contributes to their work-life balance. These findings corroborate the findings of Sriram et al. (2022), which reiterate that improved economic conditions, such as a living wage and subsidized transportation, are essential measures for promoting work-life balance in women and for retaining female talent.

The study also found that, in some companies, women are required to spend part of their personal time on tasks that they were unable to complete during their workday. However, immediate bosses generally do not appreciate or recognize the additional effort that women make to accomplish their tasks, nor are they willing to pay overtime, even though this is stipulated by law. These findings coincide in general terms with the study by Lim et al. (2021), in which they point out that the effort-reward imbalance, i.e., when great effort is invested, but few rewards are received, can generate stress. On the other hand, Sriram et al. (2022), define that a good boss is fundamental for job performance and is a determining factor that significantly influences turnover indicators.

Specifically, in the present research, the participating women workers who work in Mexican government institutions reported that they are constantly exposed to harassment at work, and when there is an opportunity for professional growth, hierarchical superiors grant positions through favoritism, nepotism and cronyism, which further complicates the issue of promotions in the case of women and has repercussions on the organizational climate. Along the same lines, the findings of Sriram et al. (2022) affirm that organizational culture has a significant effect on work-life balance; however, when it is unfavorable, women are excluded from promotion opportunities due to discriminatory practices and this situation influences their intention to remain in the organization.

On the other hand, women expressed that it is a great challenge to find a job where they can balance their work responsibilities with their family commitments. Specifically, few jobs offer flexibility for working mothers. In this context, women expressed that it is necessary for their superiors to be flexible with them in terms of leave, since sometimes women must attend to personal commitments. In the case of working mothers, they require greater flexibility because they are a fundamental pillar for the education of their children, and it is important that they accompany them in school events that are part of their integral development. These findings coincide with those of Sriram et al. (2022), who conclude that when companies are flexible in their schedules and work permits, the conditions are favorable for women to fulfill their family and/or personal responsibilities without neglecting their professional development.

In this context, a relevant finding of the research is that in some companies the bosses increase the workload of women workers in retaliation for the fact that they ask for sporadic leaves of absence from work, which constitutes an act of violence. In this sense, it is pertinent to mention that women should not be stigmatized or singled out as uncommitted personnel of the organization in these cases, because often in jobs where they have long working hours, there is interference between their personal and work lives. In contrast, the findings of the study by Sriram et al. (2022) concluded that equitable treatment and good leadership, which translates

into having a good boss, decrease female staff turnover.

Finally, it should be noted that the women who participated in this study indicated that to achieve a work-life balance, it is very important to have a support network. In the case of working mothers, childcare centers are vital in order not to be excluded from the world of work. Similarly, the support of their hierarchical superiors is very important for women to have a better quality of life by balancing their personal commitments with their work responsibilities.

4.2 Work-personal life interference

On the issue of interference, some women expressed a sense of satisfaction with combining home and work responsibilities because they had managed to find a balance between them. It should be noted that this balance can be exhausting, but with good time management and by setting limits, it can be achieved. In contrast, the findings of Tauraitė and Aleksandravičienė (2023) find that unachieved work-life balance impacts job and personal satisfaction. In other words, work-life balance does not necessarily have to be a source of conflict for women, if strategies are adopted that enable them to achieve high levels of satisfaction in both their personal and professional lives.

However, most women agreed that balancing work and personal life is a constant challenge due to cultural and social expectations. They also face an overload of family and work responsibilities and the pressure to fulfill the traditional roles of wife and mother, even if they are professionally successful. On the other hand, female singleness is stigmatized as a ‘failure’, while male singleness is associated with success and freedom. In short, women struggle to reconcile work and personal life, regardless of their marital or family status. The following is a comment from one of the women who participated in the study.

“I feel that it is difficult for women to have a work-life balance, because culturally I am expected to do the chores or hire a domestic worker and supervise her and pay her out of my salary. On the other hand, women who work and are successful think carefully about whether they want to get married, because getting married implies a lot of responsibility and too many problems because of the expectations placed on women. In addition, it also happens that if a woman is not married, she is considered a failure, while a man who remains single all his life is practically a hero [sic]”.

In terms of the gender roles established by society, the women stated that from an early age, they are taught that the role of caregiver must be assumed by them because they are women. This implies compromising their physical and mental well-being, as they are ingrained with the idea of prioritizing the well-being of others over their own. This has a significant impact on the issue of interference in women's work and personal lives, as they spend much of their time looking after the well-being of their loved ones.

In other word, by spending more time on domestic and care work, women experience more significant interference between their work and personal lives than

men. This is due to the mental burden of the role of caregiver, who takes on the responsibility of organizing and managing the household and family, even when they also work outside the home. These findings are consistent with the findings of Glympi et al. (2020), who state that the workspace is one of the most influential places on workers' physical and mental health. In this sense, the mental burden that women take on in the work environment also extends to the domestic and care environment, as they must continue to take on the responsibility of managing the home and family, even at work.

In contrast, men, who generally spend less time on domestic and care work, report greater satisfaction with their jobs. This is partly because social expectations of their role in the household are less demanding, allowing them to devote more time to their personal and professional lives without feeling guilty or pressured. These findings confirm the findings of Lydeka and Taurait (2020), who note that men spend more time than women on activities such as sleeping, satisfying physiological needs, studying, hobbies, and traveling. Such, together with lower social expectations about their role in the household allow them more free time for their personal and professional lives, which contributes to their higher job satisfaction.

These findings highlight the need to deconstruct gender roles and promote a more equal distribution of responsibilities in the home and family. Such would allow women more time for themselves, improve their physical and mental health, and increase their satisfaction in their personal and professional lives. In this regard, Lydeka and Taurait (2020) mention that women spend relatively more time on work, chores, and child-rearing and consequently spend minimal time on themselves. As evidence of the above, the unequal distribution of time and responsibilities, together with higher social expectations about their role in the household, generates a more significant mental and emotional burden for women, which may negatively affect their job satisfaction.

Regarding the time issue, working women expressed concern about the difficulty reconciling their work and family life, and indicated that it is essential to keep to their exact working hours, without overtime, not to lose valuable time with their loved ones. At the same time, they acknowledged that working can be satisfying but emphasized the neglect it creates for their family, especially their children. Since, in many jobs, work schedules often interfere with family quality time, this generates feelings of guilt, i.e., they feel and are singled out by society as 'bad mothers' for prioritizing work over the time they spend with their children. This aspect is also related to the parenting dimension of this research.

From the previous paragraphs, the women who participated in the study agreed that they forget about themselves amid home, work, and parenting responsibilities, leaving aside their happiness. Finding a balance between personal life, family, home, and work is a frequent challenge for women today, as society demands that they perform at their best in all areas, forcing them to constantly divide their attention and time, resulting in them experiencing a high-stress level. It should be noted that this phenomenon also occurs from an early age when they study and work simultaneously.

These findings are consistent with those discovered by Tauraitė and Aleksandravičienė (2023) and Glympi et al. (2020), who agree that work-life balance significantly impacts people's stress and happiness. Indeed, working women spend much of their time at work, significantly altering their physical and mental health. In this context, the conflict between work-life balance and their responsibilities can generate high stress levels and decrease their personal and work satisfaction, negatively impacting their happiness.

In conclusion, women attested to the need for greater empathy in the workplace, recognizing that with the modern world's female empowerment, they experience a double workload, both paid and at home, due to gender role expectations. On the other hand, women recognized that today's digitalized work world allows remote work by optimizing ICT, which represents a range of possibilities that did not previously exist, such as access to remote work opportunities with flexible hours. Finally, this allows them to achieve financial freedom and even reconcile their responsibilities as mothers without sacrificing their professional development, aspects that contribute to improving their quality of life and, ultimately, to achieving their happiness.

4.3 Parenting and partner

In this section, the issue of parenting and the partner is addressed as substantial elements that impact women's work-life balance in Mexico. Firstly, the women participating in the research stated that they face endless complications in balancing their personal and professional lives, especially when the domestic burden falls mainly on them. The findings confirm what Belekova and Ivanovskaya (2022) stated regarding the phenomenon of women's "double employment." In other words, women are forced to take on a double workday since they must dedicate time and effort to both their professional responsibilities, as well as household chores and caring for their families. In fact, this leads to physical and emotional exhaustion, which in turn influences their work performance.

It should be noted that this situation is intensified when the pressure to maintain a paid job while assuming all domestic responsibilities can be overwhelming, especially when there is no co-responsibility in the division of chores. In other words, men refuse to collaborate in household chores, thus perpetuating historically accepted gender roles. Therefore, the lack of support generates additional stress for women, which in some cases ends in the separation of couples.

In contrast, Hosokawa and Katsura (2021), who advocate for co-responsibility in household chores and childcare, observe in the present study that the lack of support from the partner creates a discouraging outlook for women. This situation is intensified by the persistence of traditionalist gender roles, where men resist collaborating on household chores, generating additional stress on women who work and are mothers.

It should also be mentioned that working women agreed that, despite their growing presence in the workplace, they still face an unequal outlook regarding development

opportunities and access to senior management. Currently, because of the sexism present in the workplace, the possibilities for career advancement are limited, perpetuating the traditionalist idea that women must prioritize the home over their professional careers. Having said that, some women stated that they have been discriminated against for being mothers, and this makes it difficult for them to access opportunities for personal and professional development. In this context, below is one of the comments made by one of the participants in the study.

“Although there is much talk about the increasing presence of women in the workforce, most high-ranking positions are still occupied by men, who, even if they have families, do not usually postpone work activities to give priority to their family, something that women continue to think [sic].”

In particular, the situation of working women varies, depending on the age of their children. Generally, their work and personal life are more complex when they are mothers of young children. In this regard, one of the participants expressed the following: *“The time I was married, and while my children were young, I could not continue studying or improve in my job [sic].”* Similarly, Gallardo (2021) states that being a mother can hinder work performance and limit the promotion of women since more than 50% of the working mothers in her study reported that their CVs were less competitive than that of their other colleagues. In particular, the daily life of mothers of young children is affected by the complexity of combining household and work responsibilities.

Similarly, women stated that the burden of caring for family members (children, parents, or sick relatives) often falls on them, even when they have a full-time paid job, which further hinders their career progress. As a result, this forces them to make complex decisions, such as turning down jobs or limiting their working hours, to attend to their family responsibilities. In the same context, Blithe (2023) and Belekova and Ivanovskaya (2022) agree that the burden of family care falls on women. These authors also consider that intensive motherhood and the ideals of a “good mother” hand in hand with a “working mother” continue to shape women’s career paths. This circumstance forces women to make complex decisions, such as turning down jobs or limiting their working hours to reconcile their family and professional responsibilities.

In addition to the above, working women also stated that when they enter the workforce under conditions that do not fit their roles in society and the family, they face challenges that can lead to family disintegration, less presence in their children's lives, and difficulties in self-care. In this regard, one of the participants expressed her position on the matter, which is set out below.

“Women enter the world of work with conditions that were not designed and thought for women and the roles that we play in society and the family, and we accept them, but the result is family disintegration, the little presence that we can have in the lives of our children and self-care[sic].”

In conclusion, women stressed the importance of having safe and suitable places to care for their children, especially those with disabilities, as this would allow them to carry out their work activities with peace of mind. In addition, they concluded

that to balance work and personal life, it is essential to establish support networks among working mothers and their partners. Finally, women identified that the support of their partner is an important factor for the work performance of working mothers, highlighting the importance of sharing domestic responsibilities and childcare.

4.4 Healthcare

An interesting topic of study on work-life balance in women is related to healthcare, including physical and mental health. This perspective is often analyzed in the scientific literature in the case of working women who are mothers.

However, work-life balance is not an issue exclusive to working mothers but also to single women. In fact, in the present study, they revealed that they sometimes experience a double work shift, devoting 18 to 20 hours a day to their paid job to cover their expenses and lead an independent life, which consequently reduces their average sleep to three or four hours and impacts their health and well-being.

Regarding the issue of mental health of working women, below is a comment made by one of the participants in this research, highlighting that the burden placed on women socially and culturally has an impact on their mental health.

“Balancing work and life are even more difficult for women; we still have many burdens at home, and in terms of psychological burden, we deal with illnesses, vaccinations, groceries, housekeeping, tuition, paying services, etc. Many of us provide the main income and have no relief from domestic chores[sic]”.

In addition, women stated that if they add to the extra hours of work the mental and emotional burden of caring for the home, family, and personal responsibilities, and without sufficient support on many occasions, this can lead to depriving them of time for self-care, and therefore they suffer high levels of stress, which affects their mental health.

Indeed, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the findings of the present study agree with Gallardo (2021), who mentions that the imbalance between personal and work life can alter the physical and mental well-being of women, causing anxiety, depression, and stress. In this sense, the lack of support in family responsibilities, coupled with long working hours, intensifies this imbalance, causing an increase in women's stress levels. It is essential to highlight that this situation affects not only women who already have a consolidated family but also those who are in the early stages of their professional careers.

Similarly, women expressed that the stress they suffer is intensified by the constant putting of other people's needs before their own, including work issues. Consequently, this situation generates a feeling of lack of time, postponement of tasks, and frustration, even affecting their sleep quality. In the study carried out by Aqab et al. (2023), it was pointed out that women, when trying to fulfill their "traditionalist mother role," increase their propensity to suffer the effects of a sedentary lifestyle, which results in non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer, among others.

On the other hand, women agreed that many jobs encourage a sedentary lifestyle and that when they get home, they also do not find time to exercise due to household and family responsibilities. In particular, working women claim that their physical and mental well-being would benefit if their work areas implemented active breaks and physical exercise programs within their workday. Limbers et al. (2020) found in their study that mothers who participated in physical exercise programs within their workday experienced a significant improvement in their mood, energy levels, and sleep quality. Therefore, women should exercise regularly to face the challenges of motherhood more easily.

Finally, women stated that organizational culture is one of the bases for them to achieve a work-life balance since boundaries are established between work and personal life, which helps them not feel overwhelmed, and thus they can have time for themselves, thus taking care of their physical and mental health.

4.5 Household chores

In general, women agreed that many jobs encourage a sedentary lifestyle and that when they get home, they do not find time to exercise. Household chores are an issue that is correlated with the issue of work-life balance. In this sense, the women participating in this research stated that they feel a double workload when reconciling their work responsibilities with domestic tasks and family care. Specifically, lack of time and insufficient income are factors that aggravate this situation, hindering the well-being and progress of women in other aspects of their lives.

At the same time, these findings align with Lydeka and Taurait (2020), who mention that the double workload experienced by women is mainly due to the prioritization of needs. Women, in general, tend to put caring for the home, children, and work first. Furthermore, lack of time limits their ability to reconcile their different roles, while insufficient income may restrict their access to support services, such as childcare or domestic support.

Likewise, the women participating in the present study stated that they must face high levels of demand due to the cultural paradigms and stereotypes that force them to assume full responsibility for the home, a role where their priority must be to take care of their home and their children, in addition to having the social and family pressure to excel at work. In this context, Çoban (2022) studies agree that, regardless of the work pressure that women experience, this does not diminish the expectations placed on them concerning their role as domestic workers. In other words, women must juggle to reconcile their work and personal lives. Consequently, Reverberi et al. (2022) mention that when spouses participate in household chores, they encourage women to continue their professional aspirations.

In conclusion, women expressed that to achieve a balance between work and personal life, it is essential to involve their partner and children in household chores. Delegating responsibilities among household members allows them to reduce the burden of double work that comes with having a paid job and taking care of the house at the same time.

4.6 Leisure

The issue of free time for women is complex, as in the daily routine of working women, there is very little free time, especially for those who are mothers. Despite this, women want to have time for themselves. In this context, women expressed that good time management allows them to handle multiple tasks. It should be noted that it is crucial to establish priorities to optimize time and effort, thus successfully managing a more significant number of activities.

However, the women participating in this research agreed that balancing work and personal life is a constant challenge due to their long working hours to cover their expenses and excessive work demands, which limit their time for individual and family activities. Indeed, work and motherhood demand, as pointed out by Hybholt et al. (2022), limit the time available to women. This limitation, coupled with long hours and excessive work demands, as expressed by the participants in this study carried out in the context of Mexico, creates a constant challenge to reconcile personal and family life. Thus, women are forced to navigate between multiple responsibilities without enough time to dedicate to themselves.

In Mexico, socially and culturally, the responsibility for household and childcare falls mainly on women due to gender roles, even when both parents work, which increases the burden and makes work-life balance even more difficult. Indeed, although some companies offer flexible hours or additional benefits, these measures do not always compensate for the extra burden, as working mothers must begin their “second shift” of unpaid domestic work upon arriving home, thus reducing their available personal time. These findings confirm studies by INESE (2019), who claim that women have no free time at all compared to men, who have 20% more free time in their daily lives.

Considering what was mentioned in previous paragraphs, below are some of the most significant comments expressed by the women who participated in this research.

“Most women who have children and work have almost no free time to do personal and individual things, and the couple should share the responsibility, not leave it solely to the woman [sic]”.

“There is talk that work allows you to exercise and/or have personal time, but 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 go to your second unpaid job, so personal time is considerably reduced [sic].”

Women expressed the need for more opportunities and time to do more personal activities, that is, to have time for themselves. They recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic and the reflection that personal well-being has positive and significant effects on job performance prompted them to seek a better balance between their responsibilities. Specifically, a study conducted in India by Naganathan et al. (2021) revealed that working women constantly negotiate a new balance, particularly the “work-leisure balance,” between the demands of their professional life and their needs for time for themselves. This search for balance is similar to what was

expressed by women in this present study conducted in the context of Mexico, as they recognized the importance of their personal well-being and how it influences their job performance.

In this regard, one of the participants in the study on the teaching profession stressed the importance of women having balance in all spheres of their lives, because only in this way are they able to offer the best of themselves to others, and this effectively influences their work performance. Below is the teacher's comment.

“During the pandemic and thanks to a conference, I realized that the best teacher is not the one who does the most but feels good in all areas of his life. From then on, I changed my concern to do more in my job and give myself hours [sic].”

Additionally, in this research, other women emphasized the importance of facilitating work-life balance as a tool to empower them, this allows them to make decisions that benefit their personal and professional development and give them greater autonomy and control over their time. In this regard, the following paragraph quotes the comment of one of the participating women.

“It is imperative to facilitate conciliation since women can have more control over their time, which will give them greater autonomy and empowerment, allowing them to make decisions that benefit their personal and professional development [sic].”

Considering the findings of this research, it is pertinent to highlight that women who currently have paid jobs in Mexico experience significant challenges in balancing their personal lives and work activities. Their schedule becomes complicated, and they have little time to dedicate time to enjoying a hobby, which includes practicing sports, participating in cultural activities, reading a book or learning a new language to cultivate their mind, taking cooking classes, or spending time with their loved ones, among others. Their time is so limited that sometimes, they do not have time to take care of their self-image.

What is mentioned in the previous paragraph is like what is described by Naganathan et al. (2021), where they say that a study carried out in India revealed that two new concepts of free time emerged: “being with myself” and “being stress-free.” In other words, women need time for recreational activities, and thus, achieve a work-life balance. Ultimately, one strategy to cultivate their mental health is to dedicate part of their free time to practicing relaxation activities, such as meditation. In conclusion, it is essential that women must become aware of their time and learn to manage it, to successfully balance their personal and professional lives.

5. Conclusion

This section addresses the main conclusions obtained in the present study, which was carried out to analyze the issue of women's work-life balance in the context of Mexico. Table 1 below describes the recommendations proposed for each dimension of the study. It should be noted that these suggestions constitute improvement policies and concrete actions that can be implemented by governments, companies, and women in their specific environments.

Table 1: Strategies for work-life balance

Conclusion	Recommendation
Reward	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The study revealed that women receive lower financial remuneration than their male colleagues when performing similar tasks. • Women in the 21st century value recognition for their work furthermore financial compensation. • Women earn low wages and are forced to work more than one job, consequently affecting their well-being and productivity. It is essential to mention that some women must spend part of their daily budget on transportation costs. • Some women in Mexico who work in the public sector reported experiencing workplace harassment and discrimination in promotion opportunities. • Women say there is a lack of flexible working conditions, making it challenging to find jobs that offer flexible hours and support a healthy work-life balance. • Women revealed that they may be subject to retaliation by increasing their workload when requesting sporadic leave for family matters. • Women need support networks to achieve work-life balance. As well as support and understanding from their immediate boss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To combat the wage gap, both private and public sector companies should implement salary transparency measures, publishing their salary structures internally, broken down by gender and position. • Promote an organizational culture that values and recognizes the work performed by women, both through economic and non-economic incentives (awards, honorable mentions, and/or professional development opportunities). • Currently, the minimum wage in Mexico is MXN 248.93, while in the free trade zone on the northern border, it is MXN 374.89. Both public and private companies should preferably offer a higher wage than the minimum to allow women to live off a single job and/or provide subsidies for public transportation or company transportation to reduce the costs associated with work-related travel. • Strengthen laws and mechanisms to prevent, address, and punish workplace harassment and gender discrimination in the workplace. Implement professional promotion policies based on merit and capabilities, free of gender bias, favoritism, or cronyism. • Promote flexible working policies that allow women to adapt their work schedule to their family needs, such as flexible hours, a home office, childcare in companies, parental leave, and care services for the elderly and/or dependents. • Implement awareness-raising campaigns to promote respect for women's labor rights and recognize the importance of family obligations. • Promote support programs for access to childcare services, support groups, and work-life balance workshops. Likewise, promote a culture of inclusive leadership that respects the needs of working women.

Work-personal life interference	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The study revealed that women constantly face pressure to meet cultural and social expectations about their caregiving role, even if they are professionally successful. This leads women to spend more time on domestic and care work, which generates more significant interference in their personal lives and affects their physical and mental health. • Women recognized that there is an unequal distribution of time and responsibilities in the home and family compared to their partners, thus limiting women's free time for their own care and well-being. • Working hours often interfere with quality family time, which can lead to feelings of guilt in women. It is necessary to recognize the double work shift that women experience and provide them with the support needed to reconcile their personal and professional lives. This includes measures such as implementing work-life balance policies, creating childcare centers, and possibly working remotely with flexible hours, which can help women better balance their responsibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create awareness campaigns on eliminating gender roles imposed by society. Companies should recognize and value domestic and care work, both in economic and social terms, that is, immediate bosses should recognize that women tend to take on double responsibilities (work and family). In addition, programs that promote mental health care should be developed, offering advice and resources for stress management and physical and emotional well-being. • Create campaigns on co-responsibility in domestic and care tasks, encouraging men and women to share these responsibilities equally so that both parties have time for themselves. • Implement work methods that allow for remote performance of job functions using ICT, thus promoting flexible hours, which gives women the autonomy to organize their workday based on their family and personal needs. By being flexible, barriers that hinder women's participation in the workplace are eliminated. Similarly, companies could invest in childcare infrastructure or provide accessible, high-quality childcare services close to the workplace or community.
Parenting and partner	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women expressed feeling in a constant dilemma when balancing their personal and professional lives due to the domestic burden that mainly falls on them. In the long run, this double shift generates physical and emotional wear and tear that, in turn, influences their work performance. • Working women agreed that when their partners do not participate in household responsibilities, it increases stress levels and can sometimes lead to divorce. • Working women suffer discrimination in the workplace due to traditional gender roles, limiting their opportunities for development and access to senior management positions. This is due to persistent sexism and the stigma that women who are mothers must sacrifice their professional careers for their families. • Motherhood can hinder women's work performance, as they must prioritize family situations, where they are forced to turn down jobs, limit their work hours, or, in extreme cases, give up their professional careers. • Current working conditions do not fit with women's roles in society and the family, which can lead to family disintegration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As already mentioned, promoting co-responsibility in domestic and care tasks between men and women allows for better management of responsibilities. This, in turn, causes women to have time to take care of their physical and mental health just as they focus on their professional development. • Provide advice to couples and promote programs and workshops that encourage assertive communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and the equitable distribution of responsibilities in the home and with children, strengthening couples' relationships. • Implement measures to promote equal opportunities in the workplace, such as zero tolerance for gender discrimination in senior management positions, implementing non-discrimination policies for maternity, and promoting a culture of work-life balance. • Implement policies that offer support to working mothers, including flexible work schedule options, parental leave during the first years of their children's lives, and/or access to affordable childcare services. In addition, reintegration and job training programs should be promoted for

	<p>mothers who have paused their careers, ensuring that motherhood does not hinder their professional development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a policy that encourages communication and mutual support between women and their families, promoting equality in domestic responsibilities. In addition, companies should encourage women to adopt flexible hours and remote work options so that they can better balance their work and family roles, thus reducing the risk of family disintegration.
Healthcare	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working women, whether mothers or single, face a work overload that affects their physical and mental health. Long hours and lack of support prevent them from taking care of themselves, causing stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep problems. • Constantly putting the needs of others before their own affects women's health while generating frustration due to the procrastination of their time. This situation is intensified by the cultural pressure that forces them to fulfill roles, relegating their well-being to the background. • The sedentary lifestyle encouraged by many jobs, along with home and family responsibilities, makes it difficult for women to maintain regular physical activity. This increases their risk of developing non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies should be aware of women's mental health through policies regulating work hours, promoting healthy work environments, and creating support programs that include access to mental health services, counseling, and wellness programs • Design campaigns and disseminate through workshops the importance of self-care for women, providing them with tools to manage their time, delegate responsibilities, and establish healthy boundaries. Likewise, courses on self-care, stress management, and mindfulness techniques should be introduced in work environments to strengthen women's ability to handle multiple responsibilities. • Develop health policies in companies that respond to women's specific needs, such as including active breaks and/or exercise schedules during the workday and investing in gym areas or physical activity classes. In addition, prevention and treatment programs for non-communicable diseases and mental health should be implemented to benefit working women's physical and mental well-being.
Household chores	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women experience a double burden because they tend to put caring for the home, their partner and children, and work first. In other words, their unpaid work is where women invest most of their time and economic resources. • Cultural paradigms and stereotypes impose on women the obligation to be responsible for all household tasks, in addition to excelling at their jobs, which increases social and family pressure. Encourage male participation in household chores through active/present fatherhood programs. Companies should recognize women's unpaid work and develop mechanisms to compensate for it, such as subsidies or tax credits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage male participation in household chores through active/present fatherhood programs. Companies should recognize women's unpaid work and develop mechanisms to compensate for it, such as subsidies or tax credits. • Develop educational programs that address and challenge gender stereotypes from an early age and national awareness campaigns that promote gender equality in all spheres of life.

Leisure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working women, especially mothers, have limited free time for personal activities due to work and motherhood demands, creating a constant challenge to balance their personal and professional lives. • Lack of free time negatively affects the physical and mental health of working women, preventing them from participating in recreational and self-care activities. • Facilitating work-life balance empowers women, allowing them to make decisions that benefit their personal and professional development and gives them greater autonomy and control over their time. • Women recognize that their well-being significantly influences their work performance, highlighting the need for balance in all spheres of their lives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish policies allowing flexible work schedules and/or reduced hours. Extend the length and improve the conditions of maternity and paternity leave, allowing both parents to share childcare and easing the burden on mothers. • Incorporate health and wellness programs in companies that include access to mental health services, exercise schedules during the workday, and spaces for recreational activities. In addition, subsidies for participation in cultural and sports activities outside of work hours should be offered. • Promoting an organizational culture that values and respects the personal time of employees, especially women, avoiding work overload and the “always available” attitude. Creating quality seals or certifications for companies that demonstrate a real commitment to work-life balance and gender equality. • Establishing support networks and mentoring programs between women leaders and employees, promoting professional and personal development, and facilitating the exchange of experiences and counseling.

Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, as analyzed in Table 1, society has much to achieve to support women in reconciling their personal and work lives. According to Belén-Saldívar (2023), in her article on women and ISR collection, the Center for Economic and Budgetary Research in Mexico indicated that “*The gap between ISR collection for individuals and salaried workers between men and women is 1.7% of the GDP. This gap is due, in part, to the lack of equal opportunities for women to enter the formal labor market*”.

In other words, regardless of the increase in female participation in the labor market, their care burdens do not decrease, but their available time does decrease because the burdens of unpaid work fall mainly on them, which results in limited job opportunities. According to data from the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO, 2023), women contribute 2.6 times more economic value than men for their unpaid work, this by those mentioned above is the utmost evidence that women in modern times continue to be affected by the double burden of responsibilities and that the role of caregivers of the home and family falls on them.

Finally, it can be concluded that Mexican society expects women to be synonymous with perfection. They think that they come into the world with instructions included on what to do and how to act in the face of life's adversities. In contrast, socially and culturally, men are allowed to fail. To conclude, it is pertinent to highlight that even in today's environments characterized by globalization and dynamism, where gender equality is sought, achieving true equality still represents a great challenge, since many times "female empowerment" is actually "modern slavery of women."

5.1 Future research lines

As for future lines of research, it would be interesting to replicate this study in other States of Mexico to analyze whether they coincide with the findings found in this research, which focuses on the study of the State of Guanajuato. On the other hand, it would be relevant for the research to be replicated in other countries to compare the cultural differences in terms of the gender perspective which are similar or contrasting with what was found in Mexico. Finally, given that this study is cross-sectional, it is suggested that a longitudinal study be implemented in the future, to oversee an analysis in 5, 10, 15, and 20 years.

Below are some recommendations for future research, considering what was analyzed in this research:

- Conduct a comparative study to determine whether single women without children can balance their work-life balance better than working women with children.
- If economic resources influence the fact that women can reconcile their work and professional life because their economy allows them to have the necessary support to delegate their role as caregivers that is socially assigned to them.
- Conduct research into the influence of digitalization and remote work on the work-life balance of Mexican women, analyzing how these technologies can improve or intensify gender inequalities.

5.2 Limitations

This study focuses on the context of Mexico, so the findings represent a specific perspective that may not be directly applicable to other countries. Mexico's cultural, economic, and social particularities influence the results and their interpretation. Among other limitations, the difficulty in reaching women and motivating them to participate in the survey stands out, which may have influenced the diversity and representativeness of the data collected. In addition, the limited time available to conduct the study limited the possibility of conducting more in-depth and exhaustive research on the topic.

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